

THEATRICALS OF MODERNITY:  
INCIDENTAL, IMPROMPTU, AND  
EVERYDAY PERFORMANCE IN  
EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY  
MANHATTAN

by  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that, catalysed by technological and architectural developments, as well as by altering moral codes of conduct, by the early twentieth century, Manhattan had become a nexus of spectacle, its culturally distinct districts and numerous heterotopic spaces providing quasi stage-sets for impromptu and everyday performance.

The theatre extended its embrace across the modern metropolis and conceptual stages could be found almost anywhere and everywhere: the subway, the elevated railway, fire-escapes, roof-gardens, shop windows and skyscrapers. These unofficial stages took their place alongside the busy lives of city dwellers. Using examples from literature, as well as elements of magazine culture, cinema, theatre, visual art, photography and music, this interdisciplinary thesis demonstrates the ways in which everyday theatre came to be played out day-to-day in the districts of Greenwich Village, Harlem and the Lower East Side. I explore how performative language and themes infiltrated mass culture, as literary and artistic representations of the city intermingled reality with the theatrical, often providing a smoke-screen for harsher truths.

I incorporate works from a cross-section of writers including Djuna Barnes, Floyd Dell, Nella Larsen, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Langston Hughes, Mike Gold and Anzia Yezierska, as well as artists such as John Sloan, Aaron Douglas and Jerome Myers.

*For my lovely Mum.*

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## PROLOGUE

But from the heights, what a different picture! Then the magic of the city begins to operate; that missing soul of New York shyly peeps forth in the nocturnal transfiguration. Not, however, in Broadway, with its thousand lies and lights, not in the opera-houses, theatres, restaurants, or roof-gardens, but on some perch of vantage from which the scene in all its mysterious beauty may be studied. You see a cluster of lights on the West Side Circle, a ladder of fire the pivot. Farther down, theatreland dazzles with its tongues of flame.<sup>1</sup>

*When following Broadway, at the intersection with Seventh Avenue one arrives at Times Square, the gateway to Midtown. This is the nexus where the urbane commercial centre collides with the city's theatrical district. By the early twentieth century, Midtown and Times Square, sometimes nicknamed 'The Crossroads of the World', were ablaze with lights illuminating the titles of shows being hosted by its seventy-six theatres. Electric lighting beamed from countless windows or radiated from neon signs and lamps, adorning the routes of major intersecting streets and avenues. The dramatic architectural vista produced a dynamic outdoor stage-set, independent of the theatres, while the diversely hued lighting became a cogent determiner of mood and ambiance.*

Midtown played host to an abundance of performance and entertainment within its popular theatrical venues throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but as New York critic James Huneker proposes in *New Cosmopolis* (1915), the spectacle of Manhattan extended beyond that which appeared on the physical stages of Broadway. Huneker uses theatrical language in referring to the city as a 'scene' and his perspective on the vista 'from the heights' places him in the theoretical upper circle, observing the drama of Midtown below. Against a dramatic backdrop of burgeoning technologies and

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<sup>1</sup> James Huneker, *New Cosmopolis: A Book of Images* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 92.

infrastructure including newly installed electric street-lighting, ever-climbing skyscrapers, and an efficient inter-community transport network, by the early twentieth century the city was a spectacular vision of modernity.

This thesis contends that with the onset of innovation and changing social mores which arose in counterpart to the advent of modernity, a widespread fervour for viewing and engaging with the city's transmogrifying vista emerged. Simultaneously the escalating metropolis provided new ephemeral platforms and spaces which staged everyday theatrical moments, generating widespread opportunities for incidental and impromptu performance. Amy Koritz observes the ways in which modernity altered the urban experience, noting that 'the fast pace of technology-assisted transportation and communication, and the rhythms of urban sounds and sights profoundly affected the forms and venues of culture'.<sup>2</sup> Conceptual stages and auditoriums came to include heterotopic spaces such as the subway, the elevated railway, windows, fire-escapes, rooftops, scaffolding, shop-fronts, parks, river piers and streets. Mario Maffi observes that the spectacular extended 'well beyond the appointed places of leisure and entertainment (Broadway, the Bowery, Coney Island). Elevated railroads, skyscrapers, billboards, bridges, electric illumination gave the new metropolis a special theatricality that was further enhanced by the large bodies of people constantly moving along the grid of its streets'.<sup>3</sup> As the phantasmagorical cityscape of previously unimaginable dimensions ascended, inspiring a wave of transcendental and futuristic thought, theatricality radiated from its Midtown epicentre, extending its reach across Manhattan's distinct locales. This thesis examines the proposition that in Manhattan, as the seemingly unreal metropolis materialized and the zeitgeist for amusement and escapism prevailed, boundaries between

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<sup>2</sup> Amy Koritz, *Culture Makers: Urban Performance and Literature in the 1920s* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Mario Maffi, *Gateway to the Promised Land: Ethnic Cultures in New York's Lower East Side* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), p. 240.

the real and the theatrical, the tangible and the make-believe, blurred amid a tide of political, technological, architectural and social change. I propose that in view of the city-wide hunger for spectacle, with Midtown as its backdrop, Manhattan itself became akin to a lavish theatrical stage-set; its electrical lights spotlighted the activities of its inhabitants, while its shop-window displays staged dioramas, as mannequins imitated *tableaux vivants*. This was an era when everyday theatre, performance and spectacle pervaded the city and the lives of its inhabitants.

Midtown was the face of New York, transmitted for global consumption for a public which devoured the sensationalized, futuristic vista. By 1910, ‘lights blazed most brightly around the major hotels, theaters, and squares’, imbuing the night with a synthetic capacity for eternal day, whilst enhancing the architecture of modernity and the theatricality of the streets as an outdoor stage.<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch attests that lighting effects instated in the streets – such as the installation of reflectors which gathered and directed light – were often borrowed from stage-lighting techniques, accentuating a reciprocity between the streets and the theatre.<sup>5</sup> Electric lighting was declared to be ‘as good as a policeman’ and the city streets were deemed safer to traverse at night, thus resulting in a phenomenon referred to by William Chapman Sharpe as the ‘colonization of the night’, which was characterized by an intensified city-wide appetite for night-time entertainment.<sup>6</sup> The witheringly ‘intense gleam’ of the city lights also became a spectacle in themselves, creating features and landmarks from previously unremarkable architecture.<sup>7</sup> Richard Dennis states that electric lighting and illuminated

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<sup>4</sup> William Sharpe, ‘New York, Night, and Cultural Mythmaking: The Nocturne in Photography, 1900-1925’, *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, 2.3 (1988), 2-21 (p. 5).

<sup>5</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (California: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 197-198.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 133; William Chapman Sharpe, *New York Nocturne: The City After Dark in Literature, Painting, and Photography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Maxim Gorky, ‘Boredom’, *The Independent*, 8 August 1907, p. 310.

advertising drew attention to buildings including theatres and cinemas as well as embellishing the otherwise plain aesthetic of Times Square, thus initiating ‘a new form of architecture’.<sup>8</sup> Sharpe adds that ‘in the electric era, the ancient contest between light and dark was recast into an all-encompassing spectacle, a billboard-studded dreamscape where art and life, power, technology, and commerce, blended into a profit-orientated performance’.<sup>9</sup> Lighting worked in synergy with already existent architecture, as well as new innovative constructions to enhance the visual drama of the urban scenery.

Schivelbusch acknowledges the stage-like appeal of electrically lit shop-windows which were, by the 1920s, enhanced by theatrical effects: ‘the illuminated window as stage, the street as theatre and the passers-by as audience—this is the scene of big-city night life’.<sup>10</sup>

Dennis concurs that ‘electric light not only enhanced theatrical ‘shows’; often it *was* the show. [...] the street became a stage-show in its own right: visiting the ‘Great White Way’ [...] could be as entertaining as visiting a Broadway show [...] the surrounding darkness equivalent to the walls and ceiling bounding a lit interior or stage set’.<sup>11</sup>

Electrical illumination transcended its own functionality to become a defining New York spectacle, transforming the previously untamed nocturnal city into an ‘interior out of doors’.<sup>12</sup> While Midtown had been set aglow by the 1920s, surrounding districts including Greenwich Village, Harlem and the Lower East Side remained in comparative shadow, though as this study demonstrates, each district was imbued with its own unique theatricality.<sup>13</sup>

The haphazard nature of the city’s urban topography in transition, with its jutting towers interspersed with low-rise edifices, emphasized a juxtaposition between the chaotic rise of modernity and the city’s orderly grid system. The dramatic collision of old

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<sup>8</sup> Dennis, p. 134.

<sup>9</sup> Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Schivelbusch, p. 148.

<sup>11</sup> Dennis, p. 135.

<sup>12</sup> Schivelbusch, p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 19.

and new architecture and infrastructure bestowed the city with additional strata, adding a palimpsestic quality to the aesthetic and enabling an interaction with both the past and the present, as well as providing a window to the future. Peter Brooker observes that New York ‘met the end of the century with a surge of development in which the dramatic leaps and bounds of new boroughs, buildings and bridges was soon to be joined by the most famous declaration of modernity: the transition from horizontal to upward vertical movement [...] you hadn’t seen the future until you had seen a skyscraper’.<sup>14</sup> Huneker exemplifies the cityscape of modernity as firing the collective imagination, provoking futuristic thinking and scientific speculation. Huneker evokes H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895) and predicts ‘a time when reading shall have vanished, and with it the other arts, huge gramophones will furnish the public its news and bring to the parlour the muse of the mud gutter—and literature—and the moving pictures will be so extraordinary that all the world will be a film’.<sup>15</sup> Huneker’s notion of the world as filmic combines the fervour for entertainment with developments in technology, correspondingly interpreting the entire human perception of futuristic modernity as a form of cinematic entertainment. It is amid this climate of open-minded thinking that the powers of imagination, illusion and myth became a common facet of everyday discourse and mass culture, and as I argue, enabled aspects of pretence and theatricality to mingle with reality.

The transitory space of the city’s urban environment prompted new modes of behaviour and language through which to express and relate to modernity. In ‘Behind the Singer Tower’ (1912), Willa Cather remarks on the acceleration of the Midtown skyline and imbues the city with a sense of gangling adolescence:

The city itself, as we looked back at it, seemed enveloped in a tragic self-consciousness. Those incredible towers of stone and steel seemed, in the mist, to

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Brooker, *New York Fictions: Modernity, Postmodernism, the New Modern* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> Huneker, p. 96.

be grouped confusedly together, as if they were left after a forest is cut away. [...] It was an irregular parallelogram pressed between two hemispheres, and, like any other solid squeezed in a vise, it shot upward.<sup>16</sup>

By applying a forlorn personification to the Midtown towers, Cather demonstrates how literary and artistic representations add a greater complexity of layers, perspectives and vocabulary in relating to the changing urban topography. Maxwell Bodenheim similarly captured the architectural mood in his poem 'Fifth Avenue' (1920), observing how '[t]he houses shoulder each other | In a forced and passionless communion | Their harassed angles rise | Like a violent picture-puzzle | Hiding a story that only ruins could reveal'.<sup>17</sup> Bodenheim evokes a stolid atmosphere as he envisages the towers as possessing a cumbersome clumsiness obligating them in an embrace, as well as implying the masking of hidden stories behind skyscraper walls. Sharpe states that '[t]he boldness of the city's lines, its soaring heights and uninhibited theatricality, marked it as a place apart, operating on a scale that eclipsed its European predecessors'.<sup>18</sup> Using the city in modernity as a template, through a wide variety of resources this thesis scrutinizes various layers of the city, from its streets and buildings to its population and outside visitors, and re-imagines them in the form of conceptual stages, performers and spectators. By exploring the interactions of three idiosyncratic locales and tracking the corresponding themes of everyday theatre and impromptu performance, I add new dimensions to the picture of early twentieth-century Manhattan. Aided by the infrastructure of modernity, I traverse the theoretical Manhattan map via subway and elevated railway, demonstrating the ways in which technological developments created new opportunities and platforms for viewing the theatrical vista.

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<sup>16</sup> Willa Cather, *Willa Cather Collected Short Fiction, 1892-1912*, ed. by Virginia Faulkner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965; repr. 1970), p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Maxwell Bodenheim, 'Fifth Avenue' in *New Poetry: Fall 1920* (New York: Knopf, 1920), p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 6.

Arising from the close proximity of inherently diverse lives in the densely-inhabited city emerged the frequent occurrence of watching and being watched. The city played host to numerous types of performance, both official and unofficial, intentional and unintentional, real and conceptual. The Manhattan resident could have become a simultaneous performer of, and spectator to the everyday theatricality of the city, as well as an attentive audience to the physically evolving landscape. During the 1920s, as is often cited of the young in particular (a generation unknowingly caught between two world wars), the overwhelming spirit of the age appears to have been shaped by a desire for escapism or the resolved intention to actively *forget*. This notorious inclination towards frivolity has often been interpreted as a reaction in staunch rebellion against the strict rules of conduct imposed in the preceding era. Accompanied by the city-wide zeal for entertainment in any form came altering moral codes which Rebecca Zurier notes as ‘new modes of behavior that challenged the Victorian codes of decorum, which had deemed it unacceptable to gape at store windows or look at strangers on the street’. An unabashed eagerness for looking and observing hailed what Zurier has termed as a new ‘culture of looking’ in early twentieth-century New York.<sup>19</sup> Building on Zurier’s notion of the ‘culture of looking’, this thesis explores beyond the penchant for looking and extends the structural metaphor of the theatre to envisage the city in terms of stage, performance and audience. The ‘culture of looking’ combined with the architectural and electrical splendour of early twentieth-century Manhattan to transform the city into a quasi-stage-set complete with multi-coloured lighting, dramatic scenery and a rotating cast of perpetual performers and audience members.

The notion of interpreting ‘everyday life’ through a theatrical lens and using ‘performance’ as a term that encompasses a broad spectrum of activities and practices –

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<sup>19</sup> Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 3-4.

from rituals to the performing arts – is not new. When asked to define theatre, the influential twentieth-century theatre composer John Cage responded that ‘theatre is something which engages both the eye and the ear [...]. The reason I want to make my definition of theatre that simple is so one could view everyday life itself as theatre’.<sup>20</sup> Beginning in the late twentieth century, the discipline of ‘performance studies’ has been shaped significantly by the academic discourses of theatre director and performance theorist Richard Schechner, and cultural anthropologist Victor Turner. Schechner notes that the ‘performance studies scholar examines texts, architecture, visual arts, or any other item or artifact of art or culture not in themselves, but as players in ongoing relationships, that is, “as” performances’.<sup>21</sup> On the broad span of disciplines encompassed by performance studies, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that ‘[s]uch confounding categories has not only widened the range of what can count as an artmaking practice, but also gives rise to performance art that is expressly not theatre’.<sup>22</sup> Performance studies has therefore helped in broadening the scope of what is considered to be ‘performance’, moving to embrace performance in a multitude of settings, including in everyday life.

In addition to developing the field of performance studies, Schechner was also instrumental in establishing the Department of Performance Studies at New York University in 1980, the world’s first university department dedicated to inquiry into wide-ranging concepts associated with performance. Schechner’s work explores the diverse and disputed implications of the term ‘performance’, as he notes that ‘performance can take place anywhere, under a wide variety of circumstances, and in the service of an incredibly diverse panoply of objectives’.<sup>23</sup> He argues that:

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<sup>20</sup> John Cage, Michael Kirby, and Richard Schechner, ‘An Interview with John Cage’, *The Tulane Drama Review*, 10.2 (1965), 50-72 (p. 50).

<sup>21</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 16-19, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Performance Studies’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. by Henry Bial (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 43-57 (p. 43).

<sup>23</sup> Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. xi, ix.

[p]erformance must be construed as a 'broad spectrum' or 'continuum' of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media, and the internet. [...] The underlying notion is that any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a performance.<sup>24</sup>

Acknowledging the impact of performance studies, this thesis builds on the notion that examples of everyday scenes, vistas and characters 'framed' and 'presented' in literature and art, can be studied as performance.

In establishing performance studies as a broad field of research, Schechner provides a unified title for numerous ideas which had begun to emerge earlier, including the investigations of sociologist Erving Goffman, whose seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) interprets everyday social interactions as performative.

Goffman notes that:

ordinary social intercourse is itself put together as a scene is put together, by the exchange of dramatically inflated actions, counteractions, and terminating replies. Scripts even in the hands of unpracticed players can come to life because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing. All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify.

In envisioning everyday life as a series of performance-like acts, moreover Goffman acknowledges that while most situations in life cannot be planned or rehearsed, 'the incapacity of the ordinary individual to formulate in advance the movements of his eyes and body does not mean that he will not express himself through these devices in a way

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<sup>24</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 2.

that is dramatized and pre-formed in his repertoire of actions. In short, we all act better than we know how'.<sup>25</sup> Goffman's theory suggests that though everyday life is a series of unplanned events, through experience and learned behavior, people perform in everyday life using repetitive actions, words and expressions. Schechner refers to this concept as 'restored behavior' or 'twice-behaved behavior', noting that '[a]ll behavior is "twice-behaved," made up of new combinations of previously enacted doing'.<sup>26</sup> Schechner credits Goffman with shaping his own vision of performance, prompting him to infer that 'performances in the broad sense of that word were coexistent with the human condition. [...] What Goffman meant was that people were always involved in role-playing, in constructing and staging their multiple identities. [...] What Turner added was that these performances often took the form of rituals and social dramas'.<sup>27</sup> Informed by performance theory, as well as Goffman's concept of everyday social interactions as theatre, this thesis explores the ways in which early twentieth-century Manhattan came to be envisioned as theatrical and performative, from its architecture to its population.

In *The Anthropology of Performance* (1986), moreover, acknowledging the rôle of performance in everyday life, Turner defines his concept of 'social drama' as 'an eruption from the level surface of ongoing social life [...]. It is propelled by passions, compelled by violations, overmastering at times any rational considerations'.<sup>28</sup> As 'units of aharmonic process, arising in conflict situations', Turner perceives the 'social drama' as taking place in four stages of breach, crisis, redressive action, reintegration or schism, and so, applying Turner's theory, this process is responsible for social, religious and political changes, both large and small, throughout history.<sup>29</sup> Schechner adds that while

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<sup>25</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1959), pp. 72-74.

<sup>26</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 220.

<sup>27</sup> Schechner, *Performance Theory*, pp. ix-x.

<sup>28</sup> Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), p. 90.

<sup>29</sup> Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 37-41.

‘social dramas’ are taking place, ‘[t]he politician, activist, lawyer, or terrorist all use techniques of performance – staging, ways of addressing various audiences, setting, etc. – to present, demonstrate, protest, or support specific social actions – actions designed to maintain, modify, or overturn the existing social order’. Schechner, nevertheless remains critical of Turner’s theory of ‘social drama’, noting that ‘[t]he theory reduces and flattens out events’. In performance studies, what constitutes ‘performance’ is therefore open to interpretation, and as Schechner observes ‘anything and everything can be studied “as” performance’.<sup>30</sup> Taking inspiration from the ‘broad spectrum’ approach to ‘performance’, as delineated by performance theorists, this thesis applies inclusive notions of ‘performance’, incorporating numerous literary, artistic and real life examples of performances enacted in everyday life in early twentieth-century Manhattan.

By applying terminology – such as *incidental performance* or *impromptu performance* to designate instances of unplanned spectacle, *everyday theatricality* to suggest recurring theatrical scenes, as well as *incidental stages* or *conceptual stages* to refer to spaces which lent themselves as heterotopic performance platforms – I investigate how distinct phenomena such as people-watching, voyeurism, slumming, walking tours, passing, identity, acculturation, costume, mythmaking and make-believe, contributed to the theatrical milieu of the city. I also expose how everyday theatricality shaped modes of expression in interdisciplinary art-forms, for example, exploring artistic works in terms of composition, capturing of theatrical moments, as well as pinpointing uses of performative language and themes in literary texts. While acknowledging the division between representations portrayed in art and literature, and the actualities of Manhattan experienced during this era, my claim is that, as the urban city loomed, and entertainments lured new audiences, a vocabulary of spectacle and theatre emerged,

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<sup>30</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, pp. 76, 1.

which was absorbed into mass culture and manifested as a motif in multiple art-forms. This thesis makes claims on the basis that, though not an exacting mirror to reality, artistic and literary representations were informed by wider cultural influences.

While my chosen terminology is specific to this thesis, the concepts discussed are grounded in a wider theoretical framework. My notion of *incidental* or *impromptu performance*, for example, is related to Schechner's theory of 'eruptions' in urban settings:

[a]n accident happens, or is caused to happen (as in guerrilla theater); a crowd gathers to see what's going on. [...] The shape of this kind of street event – a heated center with involved spectators fading into a cool rim where people come, peer in, and move on – is like that of some medieval street theater. [...] I call such events 'eruptions' [...]. An eruption is like a theatrical performance because it is not the accident itself that gathers and keeps an audience. They are held by the reconstruction or reenactment of the event.

Schechner envisions 'eruptions' as a form of "natural" theater', arising from accidents and incidents which occur in the urban landscape, and which draw a crowd, either to watch and discuss as events unfold, or to share collective commentary, 'reconstructing' the scene during the aftermath of an event.<sup>31</sup> In situating 'eruptions' as part of the contemporary urban scene, Schechner recognizes the potential for performance-like acts to occur unexpectedly, thus placing the onus of what constitutes a 'performance' on its drawing of an engaged audience, rather than necessarily the performers' intention to perform. In using the terms *incidental* and *impromptu performance*, I therefore refer to performance which is, at least ostensibly, unplanned from the perspective of the performer, or performative from the perspective of the spectator. It is characterized by a break from the routine of everyday life. Contrary to Schechner's theory of 'eruptions', an

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<sup>31</sup> Schechner, *Performance Theory*, pp. 176-177.

*incidental* or *impromptu performance* may not draw a crowd, but will appear to be performative to at least one observer, without the performer necessarily being aware of their audience. In referring to *incidental* and *conceptual stages*, moreover, I evoke adaptable urban spaces and frames (such as windows, rooftops, streets and fire-escapes) which had the potential to lend themselves as platforms for performances from everyday life. Schechner suggests that ‘any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a performance’, and I therefore present *incidental* and *conceptual stages* as a ‘frame’ for everyday life.<sup>32</sup> The word ‘incidental’ conveys the unplanned and often transitory nature of these spaces as stages, while ‘conceptual’ highlights the spaces as stage-like in theory, though not physically intended as a stage.

In using the term *everyday theatricality*, I refer to the everyday life and everyday routines, scenes and vistas of the city. As opposed to *incidental* and *impromptu performance*, which implies a distinctive ‘event’ or ‘scene’; a break from the norm taking place amongst the rhythmic disorder of the city; *everyday theatricality* may appear to be nothing out of the ordinary, but to the observer of the vast scenes from everyday life, can be interpreted as theatre. As Marvin Carlson observes:

The recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behavior raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as ‘performance,’ or at least all activity carried out with a consciousness of itself. The difference between doing and performing, according to this way of thinking would seem to be not in the frame of theatre versus real life but in an attitude – we may do actions unthinkingly, but when we think about them, this introduces a consciousness that gives them the quality of performance.

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<sup>32</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 2.

This thesis incorporates elements of ‘conscious’ performance, as suggested by Carlson, but also recognizes the potential for performance to be unconscious, particularly if an observer views an action as performative or theatrical. Directly addressing the question of ‘performance for whom?’, Carlson adds that, ‘[p]erformance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self’.<sup>33</sup> This thesis places emphasis on the audiences’ (including writers and artists) interpretation of Manhattan and its populace as performative, and their intention to find it so, rather than solely the self-aware ‘performance’ of the performer. Schechner notes that there are ‘varying degrees of self-consciousness and consciousness of the others with whom and for whom people play. The more self-conscious a person is, the more one constructs behavior for those watching and/or listening, the more such behavior is “performing.”’ I interpret the performer as anyone with an audience, whether or not they are aware of their audience. I therefore align my thesis with Schechner’s view that ‘everyday life is performance [...] there is hardly any human activity that is not a performance for someone somewhere’. Similarly, I demonstrate how vistas, architecture, everyday routines, and multisensory encounters can be interpreted ‘as’ performance. Schechner outlines the difference between what ‘is’ performance, and interpreting something ‘as’ performance, noting that ‘[c]ertain events are performances and other events less so. There are limits to what “is” performance. But just about anything can be studied “as” performance’.<sup>34</sup> Using examples of *incidental* and *impromptu performance*, as well as *everyday theatricality*, this thesis demonstrates how particular observed events and spectacles in early twentieth-century Manhattan, came to be viewed ‘as’ performance by artists and writers.

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<sup>33</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, pp. 171, 40, 38.

Terminology such as ‘performativity’ and ‘theatricality’ are widely contested and elusive terms in the performance studies discipline. ‘Performative’ is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘[r]elating to or of the nature of dramatic or artistic performance’, while as Schechner observes, the words ‘performativity’ and ‘performative’ can be ‘used loosely to indicate something that is “like a performance” without actually being a performance in the orthodox or formal sense’.<sup>35</sup> Henry Bial notes that ‘[p]erformativity is a term layered with multiple meanings. On one level, it is a variation on theatricality: something which is “performative” is similar – in form, in intent, in effect – to a theatrical performance’.<sup>36</sup> This thesis predominantly uses ‘performativity’ in the sense of something being ‘performance-like’, by referring to examples which are reflective of theatrical performance, though are not necessarily performance in the traditional sense. Meanwhile, ‘theatricality’ is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘[t]he quality of relating to acting or the theatre’, although Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis note that while ‘it obviously derives its meanings from the word theatre, *theatricality* can be abstracted from the term theatre itself and then applied to any and all aspects of human life’.<sup>37</sup> On the prevalence of ‘theatrical’ language in everyday life, and in academia, Carlson observes that:

[w]ith performance as a kind of critical wedge, the metaphor for theatricality has moved out of the arts into almost every aspect of modern attempts to understand our condition and activities, into every branch of human sciences – sociology, anthropology, ethnography, psychology, linguistics. And as performativity and

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Definition of performative in English’, Oxford Dictionaries, <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/performative>> [accessed 4 March 2018]; Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 123.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Bial, ‘Performativity’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. by Henry Bial (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 145-147 (p. 145).

<sup>37</sup> ‘Definition of theatricality in English’, Oxford Dictionaries, <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/theatricality>> [accessed 4 March 2018]; Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis, ‘Theatricality: An Introduction’, in *Theatricality*, ed. by Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-40 (p. 1).

theatricality have been developed in these fields, both as metaphors and as analytic tools, theorists and practitioners of performance art have in turn become aware of these developments and found new sources of stimulation, inspiration, and insight for their own creative work and the theoretical understanding of it.<sup>38</sup>

As Carlson and many other critics attest, terminologies relating to the theatre, including ‘performance’, ‘performativity’ and ‘theatricality’, have become detached from the performance space of the theatre itself, and are now incorporated seamlessly into the language applied to everyday life. In this thesis ‘theatricality’ is used in a more metaphorical sense to imply a place or scene reflective of the theatre, perhaps in appearance, ambiance, or layout. Thus, both ‘performativity’ and ‘theatricality’ can be used as broad and inclusive terms, and I use them as such throughout this thesis.

Likewise, this thesis demonstrates how language and themes deriving from the theatre were borrowed and assimilated into ‘mass culture’ to interpret everyday life in the modern metropolis during the early twentieth century.

Although this thesis does not fully subscribe to a single literary theory, method of reading or critique, in order to assist in my interdisciplinary exploration of literature, culture and the arts, I draw from numerous existing ideas including post-theory, post-critique, and surface reading. I thereby situate my thesis within the current theoretical ‘turn’ which has seen a movement away from the once pertinent, but now considered outdated and esoteric insights of ‘high’ theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, as well as the semiotics, hermeneutics, poststructuralism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis of the 1970s and 1980s, towards a reading of what is evident on the surface of the text.<sup>39</sup> Numerous recent critics of critique have decried the tendency

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<sup>38</sup> Carlson, *Performance*, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, ‘Introduction’, in *Critique and Postcritique*, ed. by Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2017), pp. 1-30 (p. 2); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 2, 5; Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. viii-ix; Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, ‘Surface Reading: An Introduction’, *Representations*, 108.1 (2009), 1-21 (pp. 1-2).

towards delving into the hidden depths of a text and uncovering the veiled meanings and hitherto undisclosed intentions of the author. Critics such as Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus identify the prevalence of Marxism and psychoanalysis in the 1970s and 1980s as enabling a cross-departmental application of ‘symptomatic reading’, which ‘took meaning to be hidden, repressed, deep, and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter’.<sup>40</sup> In the ‘symptomatic reading’ method, the critic is therefore placed in a position of authority over the everyday reader, wielding a key to the unknown. Likewise, Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski observe an often ‘diagnostic’ quality to critique, involving ‘an *expert* (doctor, scientist, technician) who is engaged in the *scrutiny* of an object in order to decode certain *defects* or flaws that are not readily or automatically apparent to a nonspecialist perspective’.<sup>41</sup> Thus, through ‘symptomatic reading’ and ‘diagnosis’, the expert critic overtly affirms the necessity of their own occupation.

The notion of the critic’s rôle in reading and deciphering ‘deep’ meanings, has nevertheless, been challenged in recent years by a move towards ‘surface reading’ and ‘thin description’.<sup>42</sup> ‘Surface’ is defined by Best and Marcus as ‘what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding; what, in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth. A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*’. Best and Marcus therefore present an alternative approach which refocuses attention on observing and comparing patterns which are ‘truthful, obvious, and clearly revealed’ on the surface of the text, thus relinquishing authority from the critic and returning power to the author, the reader and the text itself.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Heather Love has outlined the virtues of ‘thin description’, described as ‘an unadorned, first-order account

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<sup>40</sup> Best and Marcus, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Anker and Felski, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Best and Marcus, p. 1; Heather Love, ‘Close Reading and Thin Description’, *Public Culture*, 25.3 (2013), 401-434 (p. 401).

<sup>43</sup> Best and Marcus, pp. 9, 4.

of behavior, one that could be recorded just as well by a camera as by a human agent', as opposed to 'thick description' championed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz in the 1970s, who perceived that '[m]an is an animal suspended in webs of significance he has himself spun'.<sup>44</sup> Love is critical of the 'thick description' approach adopted by literary critics, which 'added many layers of human significance including attributions of intention, emotion, cognition, and depth, as well as cultural context and display', calling for a move towards more 'empirical methods' which consider 'forms of analysis that describe patterns of behavior and visible activity but that do not traffic in speculation about interiority, meaning, or depth', adding that 'thin description offers a model for close reading after the decline of the linguistic turn'.<sup>45</sup> In promoting the advantages of 'surface reading' and 'thin description' respectively, Best, Marcus and Love therefore return attention to what is visible and empirical in a text, rather than what is latent, hidden or in need of exposition. Much of my critique of sources within this thesis, including of literature, art, photography, music, and film, aligns with explorations of patterns on the surface, although this is not ubiquitous, as while theatrical and performative language is frequently situated within the texts discussed, theatre and performance are sometimes inferable rather than overtly stated. While my observations and deductions often lie close to the surface of the text, I ascribe a gradient approach to 'surface' and 'depth', between which I naturally shift during the thesis in an attempt not to flatten all texts under one method of reading. In reference to reading archival sources, historian Ann Laura Stoler outlines the need to 'explore the grain with care and read along it first', rather than making fast deductions based on prior knowledge or assumptions.<sup>46</sup> This thesis aims to

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<sup>44</sup> Love, pp. 403, 401; Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3-33 (p. 5).

<sup>45</sup> Love, pp. 403-404.

<sup>46</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 50.

read and interpret texts and art with a sensitivity to the themes which are naturally imparted.

I also use an explorative and exuberant tone, drawn in part from my aim for the reading experience to be engaging and accessible, and in part to distance my thesis from the tone of ‘suspicion and skepticism’ often marked in critique, and to move towards the current mode of ‘post-critique’, which establishes a ‘broad interest in exploring new models and practices of reading that are less beholden to suspicion and skepticism, more willing to avow the creative, innovative, world-making aspects of literature and criticism’.<sup>47</sup> Best and Marcus remark on a lack of trust in the text among critics, who frequently construe the absence of a particular theme, description or narrative, for example gender or sexuality, as highly indicative and worthy of examination, meanwhile portraying what is actually present in the text as representative of something hidden or repressed.<sup>48</sup> Anker and Felski also note that ‘the suspicious critic is convinced that texts lead us astray’, while ‘[t]he concern is that a pervasive mood of suspicion, ennui, or irony, in this regard, can easily become debilitating, both intellectually and politically’.<sup>49</sup> In response to the tone of suspicion and lack of trust in what is present within the text, Marcus advocates a method of ‘just reading’, which pays close and careful attention to the text itself, in order to ‘account more fully for what texts present on their surface but critics have failed to notice [...]. Just reading accounts for what is in the text without construing presence as absence or affirmation as negation’. Acknowledging the subjectivity of critique, and the impossibility of erasing all symptomatic elements of interpretation to construct a definitive reading, Marcus adds moreover, that ‘just reading recognizes that interpretation is inevitable: even when attending to the givens of a text,

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<sup>47</sup> Anker and Felski, p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Best and Marcus, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Anker and Felski, p. 21, 20.

we are always only – or just – constructing a reading’.<sup>50</sup> While not seeking to entirely dismiss ‘symptomatic’ reading, in using an energetic and exuberant tone, and placing the text at the centre of analysis, this thesis seeks to move away from ‘suspicious’ readings prevalent in some modes of critique. In response to criticism that intellectual thought remains largely confined within academic institutions, or as Anker and Felski note, ‘sequestered in the ivory tower’, as well as subsequent calls for ‘stronger links between intellectual life and the nonacademic world’, I use an academic but broadly engaging and penetrable style and tone, so as to enable greater accessibility to the thoughts and ideas presented within this thesis.<sup>51</sup>

This thesis also flouts notions of literary hierarchy and literary canon in resisting the temptation to raise or pedestal particular texts and sources above others. By collapsing some of the boundaries which have often come to define and inform the study of certain texts and genres, categorized as ‘high’ or ‘low’, I approach each source with equal care and attention, and from a fresh perspective uninfluenced by status, prior knowledge or repute; as Stoler recommends, exploring ‘the grain with care’.<sup>52</sup> On the disintegration of hierarchy and conventions of academic ‘worth’ in literary studies, Terry Eagleton observes that ‘[i]ntellectual matters are no longer an ivory-tower affair, but belong to the world of media and shopping malls, bedrooms and brothels’.<sup>53</sup> Best and Marcus also note that ‘[a]s scholars formed in the era of interdisciplinarity, we take for granted that the texts we read and interpret include canonical and non-canonical literary works. We also feel licensed to study objects other than literary ones’.<sup>54</sup> The hierarchy of ‘high’, ‘middle’ and ‘low’ in the canon which long shaped literary studies, and which Lise Jaillant regards as ‘a historically constructed entity, shaped by institutions such as university departments

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<sup>50</sup> Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 75.

<sup>51</sup> Anker and Felski, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Stoler, p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> Eagleton, *After Theory*, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Best and Marcus, p. 1.

and trade publishers', is therefore crumbling as the tide of interdisciplinary studies brings greater inclusivity.<sup>55</sup> Thus, while recognising the disparities across the range of sources covered within this thesis, I compare each interdisciplinary source from varying angles, while treating each example with equal value, and remaining uninfluenced by hierarchies which deem some sources as having greater intellectual value than others.

Drawing examples from a range of disciplines including visual art, literature, magazine publications, cartography, music, photography and cinema, this thesis takes an exploratory approach, using manifold accounts and representations to traverse distinct districts of the city and trace comparative theatrical and performative themes. My range of examples allow a vantage-point across multiple disciplines, genres, narratives and forms. For instance, in the first chapter, I examine extracts from John Sloan's diaries (not intended for publication), contrasted with Djuna Barnes's highly stylized magazine journalism, while in the second chapter I incorporate novels by Nella Larsen and Jessie Redmon Fauset, as well as poetry by Langston Hughes, moving finally in the last chapter to exploring the short stories and novels of Anzia Yeziarska alongside the fictionalized memoirs of Michael Gold. As a mosaic of references collated from multiple different sources, this thesis demonstrates the prevalence of recurring scenes and motifs across a range of varied fields and genres, and shows how they are comparable in spite of their differences. In addressing and incorporating a wide-ranging selection of examples, I build a rich and multifaceted picture of everyday theatricality in early twentieth-century New York. As a complex entity, the city has been repeatedly approached through a tapestry of interwoven perspectives and my work particularly takes inspiration from Carrie Tirado Bramen's *The Uses of Variety* (2000), which employs numerous interdisciplinary resources to evoke the Gilded Age and trace the rising celebration of variety, as well as

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<sup>55</sup> Lise Jaillant, *Modernism, Middlebrow and the Literary Canon: The Modern Library Series, 1917-1955* (Oxford; New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 7.

William Chapman Sharpe's *New York Nocturne* (2008), which draws examples from a cross-section of literature, art and photography, spanning a century from the 1850s in order to explore the spectacle of the city at night.

Echoing the pursuit of wandering and observing the urban scene, throughout this thesis I use a lyrical and multisensory tone. The virtue of this explorative tone is that it emulates, and therefore emphasises the fleeting nature of the scenes I wish to draw attention to in my exemplars. The writing style is mimetic in drawing from the multisensory content of the thesis in order to situate the reader among the sights, sounds, smells, and vibrant milieu evoked in the interdisciplinary sources discussed. While seeking to avoid sensationalism, the chosen style also reflects the form and narrative of the popular late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary genre referred to by Braman as the 'intra-urban walking tour', a mode of writing which abstractly guides curious readers through the city's distinctive locales and interprets them as spectacle. Though I am aware that walking tour literature proliferated sensationalized accounts and boosterism surrounding the districts it explored, and I acknowledge and aim to avoid this within my chapters, the tone I have adopted is beneficial in enabling me to capture the essence of the ephemeral city and its locales, without embarking on the impossible task of conveying every detail. I take inspiration from Peter Brooker's *Bohemia in London: The Social Scene of Early Modernism* (2007), which captures the fleeting nature of scenes and sites in a broad sweep of the modern city. Using maps and literary sources, Brooker reconstructs the contextual sites and scenes – often flattened in comparable narratives – which surrounded key modernist literary figures. Brooker cites Virginia Woolf, who noted that 'scene making is my natural way of marking the past', as inspiration for his method of reconstructing London's bohemia in scene-like glimpses and investigating

‘how they are composed and what they mean’.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, each chapter in this thesis opens with a scene-setting passage, emulating a walking tour guide by introducing the location and evoking the milieu, as well as orientating readers by positioning them at street level. Meanwhile, in each chapter I refer to a different contemporaneous tourists’ map, each of which is selected for its dynamic, multi-dimensional representation of the city, rather than its use as an accurate navigational tool. By including maps, scene-setting descriptions and quotations, I capture insights into the broad portrayal of each district, evoking atmosphere. Having set the scene for each chapter, I continue by adding nuance to depictions of each district and dispelling myths where necessary.

In observing scenes from everyday life, walking tour literature was connected to a wider trend of beholding city sights as spectacle. Relying on burgeoning mass culture and the city-wide proclivity for amusement, the walking-tour unearthed ‘picturesque’ spectacles for profit, in a phenomenon Bramen describes as the ‘professionalization of spectatorship’ which allowed the city explorer to delegate the actual looking to an ‘urban connoisseur’.<sup>57</sup> In *The Immigrant Scene*, across an array of photographic, artistic and literary exemplars, Sabine Haenni also marks the common usage of the ‘scene’ as a motif, borrowed from the theatre to indicate a fragmentary glimpse into aspects of city life. Haenni notes that the recurring usage of the ‘scene’ in language and imagery representing the city, reflected the ephemeral nature of modernity and provided a bite-sized method of interpreting the modern metropolis so that ‘turn-of-the century urbanity itself had become understandable as a collection of “scenes”’.<sup>58</sup> This thesis addresses the notion of ‘scenes’ as a thread woven throughout, pinpointing scene-like snapshots of city life as portrayed

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<sup>56</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past’, in *Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (London: Hogarth Press, 1985; repr. London: Random House, 2002), pp. 78-161 (p. 145); Peter Brooker, *Bohemia in London: The Social Scene in Early Modernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. ix.

<sup>57</sup> Bramen, ‘The Urban Picturesque and the Spectacle of Americanization’, *American Quarterly*, 52.3 (2000), 444-477 (p. 456).

<sup>58</sup> Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 10.

widely, for example, by Ashcan School artists and captured by the prolific journalistic photographer Jessie Tarbox Beals.

The walking tour tradition can also be traced back to practices which arose in nineteenth-century Paris. Bramen notes the intra-urban walking tour as a step beyond the earlier archetypal figure of the *flâneur* who traversed and observed the streets of Paris for personal enjoyment.<sup>59</sup> In his 1863 essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, Parisian poet and essayist Charles Baudelaire portrayed the *flâneur*, observing that ‘[t]he crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite’. Immersed within the crowd, the *flâneur* was able to observe his surroundings covertly: ‘[t]he spectator is a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito’.<sup>60</sup> Drawing extensively from Baudelaire, the German-Jewish philosopher and essayist Walter Benjamin further explored the rôle of the *flâneur* in his essays and particularly in his *Arcades Project*, an uncompleted collection of writings (composed between 1927 and 1940) on the cultural significance of Paris’s covered arcades – *les passages* – in the nineteenth century. Benjamin observes the concealed intentions of the *flâneur* as, once immersed in the crowd and camouflaged as a consumer, he becomes spectator to the transforming vista: ‘[t]he crowd is the veil through which the familiar city beckons to the flâneur as phantasmagoria – now a landscape, now a room. [...] In the flâneur, the intelligentsia sets foot in the marketplace – ostensibly to look around, but in truth to find a buyer’. Benjamin interprets the city from the perspective of the *flâneur* as a theatrical space, as ‘to the flâneur, his city is – even if, like

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<sup>59</sup> Carrie Tirado Bramen, *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americanism and the Quest for National Distinctiveness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 159.

<sup>60</sup> Charles Baudelaire, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. by Jonathan Mayne (Paris: Le Figaro, 1863; repr. London: Phaidon Press, 1995), pp. 1-41 (p. 9).

Baudelaire, he happened to be born there – no longer native ground. It represents for him a theatrical display, an arena'.<sup>61</sup> To Benjamin, the arcade provided a space of observation on the threshold between 'a street and an intérieur'.<sup>62</sup> Bramen observes, moreover, that '[m]odernity's scribe was the journalist who Walter Benjamin referred to as the descendent of the mid-century *flâneur*. But unlike this earlier figure, who wandered the Paris arcades satisfying his appetite for urban observation as an end in itself, the late-nineteenth-century journalists were far more concerned with pleasing their readers with extraordinary spectacles amidst the "picturesque decay" of the urban ghetto'.<sup>63</sup> The pursuit of wandering and observing the everyday city, though more commercialized in journalistic and walking tour accounts, therefore followed in the footsteps of the *flâneur*.

The tour begins in the jumbled streets of 'bohemian' Greenwich Village, then takes the 'A' subway train north to 'exotic' Harlem, and finally, catches the 'D' train south to the 'immigrant' Lower East Side. The chosen districts for exploration each hold a unique character and reputation, as well as different social-demographic compositions, allowing my examination to cross boundaries of race, culture, and class. In its thematic structure, this thesis does not approach history chronologically, but predominantly focusses on early twentieth-century exemplars while demonstrating contextual awareness of the previous century where appropriate. Though fluid in tone, each chapter has a parallel framework which allows a consistency in form and the development of themes discussed. While engaging with the works of a wide-ranging selection of contemporaneous artists and writers, each chapter has a specific focus on three to four individuals, each of whom made significant contributions in shaping the literary and artistic landscapes of the districts examined. I also consider the dichotomy between

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<sup>61</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. ix, 10, 347.

<sup>62</sup> Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 46-134 (p. 68).

<sup>63</sup> Bramen, *The Uses of Variety*, p. 169.

accounts by insiders and outsiders to each district, largely relying on residents' depictions in formulating my main claims, while turning to outsiders as a theoretical audience. As spectators to their surroundings, I investigate the contrasting intentions of insiders and outsiders in observing the city and its residents. Applying the structural metaphor of the theatre, the chapters are organized by sections which systematically address representations of the city as a stage, the inhabitants as performers, and outsiders as an audience.

Greenwich Village is the starting point and specific focus of the first chapter, entitled 'Make Believe Land'. Writers and artists came to fruition in the Village from the early twentieth century and as enabled by cheaper rents, the district became reputed as the 'bohemian' quarter. With its European atmosphere, copious cafés, restaurants, venues and meeting places, as well as prolific literary and artistic output, the area has become known as the New York equivalent of the Parisian 'Left Bank'.<sup>64</sup> Numerous now celebrated individuals including Marcel Duchamp, Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell and Edna St. Vincent Millay, among many others, first made their names in this free-thinking district, and my focus in this chapter will evaluate the work of writer and artist Djuna Barnes (1892-1982), writer, editor and literary critic Floyd Dell (1887-1969), as well as painter and etcher John Sloan (1871-1951). Using examples predominantly drawn from the artistic and literary contributions of these three individuals, I demonstrate the ways in which Greenwich Village – with its reputation as a constructed 'mythic bohemia', its residents' penchant for make-believe, performance and avant-garde costume design, as well as its touristic audience of intrigued outsiders – became synonymous with

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<sup>64</sup> Allen Churchill, *The Improper Bohemians: A Re-creation of Greenwich Village in its Heyday* (London: Cassell, 1961), p. 21.

theatricality.<sup>65</sup> The district accommodated many little theatre groups including the distinguished Provincetown Players which nurtured the talents of numerous writers and artists, providing a launchpad for their careers, while also solidifying the future of home-grown American drama.<sup>66</sup> With its theatrical atmosphere and artistic wealth, Greenwich Village and its inhabitants increasingly became the target of outsider attention, as curious, often wealthy visitors, commonly referred to as ‘slummers’, arrived in the district on nightly escapades to sample the scene and patronize the renowned establishments. Ultimately, as I attest, the Village began to embody the theatre, as the streets and venues became akin to a stage-set, and residents began to perform acts of bohemianism for the constant stream of touristic audience members.

In the second chapter, ‘A Taxi Trip to the Exotic’ – examining the problematic exoticization imposed by white outsiders – we travel further uptown to Harlem, where the beginning of the ‘Great Migration’ of African Americans from the rural south to northern cities had, by the 1910s, introduced many new residents to the district. Harlem quickly became renowned for its nightlife, as the sounds of jazz and dance emanated from speakeasies and cabarets, and imbued the neighbouring streets with a performative ambiance. Simultaneously the district saw a literary upsurge as the Harlem Renaissance movement sought to empower African Americans and cultivate what Alain Locke referred to in 1925 as the ‘new negro’.<sup>67</sup> Primarily drawing on examples by Harlem insiders, including writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance – which also attempted to integrate African American writing and art into the wider canon – this chapter explores

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<sup>65</sup> Stephen Rogers, ‘Bruno’s Bohemia: “Greenwich Village” (1915); “Bruno’s Chap Books” (1915-16); “Bruno’s Weekly” (1915-16); “Bruno’s” (1917); “Bruno’s Bohemia” (1916); “Bruno’s Review” (1919); “Bruno’s Review of Two Worlds” (1920-2)’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. by Peter Brooker and others, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009-2013), II: *North America, 1894-1960*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (2012), pp. 445-464 (p. 461).

<sup>66</sup> Cheryl Black, *The Women of Provincetown, 1915-1922* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> Alain Locke, ‘The New Negro’, in *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. by Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925; repr. New York: Touchstone, 1997), pp. 3-19.

how incidental stages, impromptu performance and everyday theatricality shaped the Harlem scene during the early twentieth century. Shane Vogel's *The Scene of the Harlem Cabaret* (2009) is valuable in exploring the racial and sexual politics of the Harlem nightclub, focussing on racial divisions placed between performers and audiences, as well as the way in which the cabaret scene interacted with seemingly disconnected Harlem Renaissance writers and artists. Vogel labels the nightclub as a 'contested space', where the ideals of the 'new negro' commonly clashed with the upsurge of a 'negro vogue'.<sup>68</sup> The predominant focus of this chapter addresses the work of writer and librarian Nella Larsen (1891-1964), writer, editor and essayist Jessie Redmon Fauset (1882-1961), poet and writer Langston Hughes (1902-1967), and painter, illustrator and muralist Aaron Douglas (1899-1979).

In contrast to the blithe play-acting and frivolity on display in Greenwich Village, as I elucidate, the everyday theatricality which permeated Harlem often arose through necessity or obligation due to widespread racial prejudice. Predominantly through representations in literature, I also investigate the act of 'passing' – when an individual from one particular ethnic group transcends the boundaries of race and assumes an alternative racial identity – and without diminishing the often-necessitated reasoning behind this act, I evaluate the impact of passing as a form of concealed performance. I also ascertain the influence of stereotyping and sensationalized assumptions of Harlem held by visiting 'slummers', and the ways in which racialized performances in Harlem's popular venues sustained the night-time economy, as well as proliferating myths of the exotic. 'Slumming' is the leisure activity pursued usually by wealthier members of the population who visit the poorer areas recreationally and for the purpose of entertainment and spectacle. Elizabeth Wilson reports that many Harlem residents became disillusioned

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<sup>68</sup> Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 4.

with the night-time scene, as ‘whites went to Harlem in search of an erotic utopia of sexual thrills, and black women and men often had little option but to provide them with what they wanted’.<sup>69</sup> Chad Heap’s *Slumming* (2010) is also invaluable as rather than simply problematizing the issue, Heap engages with the effects of slumming in diversifying cross-racial and sexual interactions, thereby altering the wider cultural scene. By reflecting on Harlem as akin to a large outdoor theatre, I build a picture of how themes and phenomena including incidental or impromptu street theatre, performances of selfhood and assuming new identities, as well as inquisitive visiting audiences, contributed to the everyday theatricality which emerges in literary and artistic depictions.

The final chapter, ‘A Tenement Canyon’, focuses on the immigrant Lower East Side, a pivotal subject for numerous artists, walking tour guides and urban tourists. The invoked sense of the Lower East Side as represented in literature and art is characterized by a series of scenes which lend themselves to the notions of everyday theatricality and incidental stages: washing-lines strung between tenements, streets lined with push-cart sellers, residents peering from windows and overhanging fire-escapes, and children playing in the streets. With an ever-changing cast of characters from disparate cultural backgrounds, the streets provided a setting for transient moments of theatre, and as I demonstrate, served as a constant source of spectacle for Lower East Side residents and outside visitors alike. The people and places of the Lower East Side were commonly ascribed by outsiders with a sensationalized vocabulary used in guides and walking tours, which branded them as ‘picturesque’ ‘charming’ and ‘quaint’. As Bramen attests, the “‘urban picturesque’ provided another way of representing the metropolis, one that transformed the everyday marvels of modernity into a “‘whole wondrous spectacle’”.<sup>70</sup> Like Greenwich Village and Harlem, the Lower East Side attracted an itinerant audience

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<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (California: University of California Press, 1991), p. 81.

<sup>70</sup> Bramen, *The Uses of Variety*, p. 157.

of often wealthy outside slummers and ‘rubbernecker’, some of whom traversed the streets to witness evidence of poverty, some who gawped from the shelter of a passing tour-bus, and others who accessed the scene remotely through literature and photographs.

While acknowledging the perspectives of numerous visitors to the district, including William Dean Howells, Jacob Riis, and James Huneker, this chapter is largely orientated around representations by insiders or one-time residents of the district. On the literature written by immigrant and blue-collar workers of the twentieth century, Michael Denning’s *The Cultural Front* (1997) provides an informative narrative on what he refers to as the ‘ghetto pastoral’. He defines this genre as ‘tales of growing up in Little Italy, the Lower East Side, Bronzeville, and Chinatown, written by plebeian men and women of these ethnic working-class neighborhoods’. Denning situates this type of literature in juxtaposition to the ‘muckraking’ outsider accounts of writers such as Upton Sinclair and Stephen Crane, noting that ‘unlike the turn-of-the-century “naturalism” to which they [ghetto pastorals] were often assimilated, they were not explorations of how the other half lives. Rather, they were tales of how *our* half lives’.<sup>71</sup> My key focus is on ‘ghetto pastoral’ style accounts by novelist Anzia Yezierska (c. 1883-1970), novelist and columnist Michael ‘Mike’ Gold (1894-1967), and artists John R. Grabach (1886-1981) and Jerome Myers (1867-1940), each of whom either grew up or spent considerable time on the Lower East Side. As Manhattan’s most prominent immigrant district where newly arrived migrants could often find lodgings and work, I also engage with the possibilities of cross-cultural exchange, interaction and observation which arose from multiple communities inhabiting the same buildings and navigating the same streets. Similarly, this chapter addresses issues of acculturation and identity as represented in literature, suggesting that the necessity for many new migrants to shed their former selves and

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<sup>71</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998), p. 230.

assume new names, costumes and employment, could be viewed as analogous with acting or performing a new rôle. With its cyclical succession of migrant communities, crowded tenements and bustling streets, as well as imported entertainments performed in venues catering for Jewish or Italian audiences, this chapter demonstrates the Lower East Side's propensity for the theatrical, as well as considering outsider curiosity in viewing the district as a spectacle.

While identifying and evaluating elements of performance and spectacle in Greenwich Village, Harlem and the Lower East Side, I acknowledge, nevertheless that the performance on display in each district was not all of the same texture. The social structure of the city was strongly underpinned by race and class hierarchies, thus resulting in differing power dynamics in each district. In Harlem, for example, the types of performance I discuss, such as passing and nightclub performance, often occurred as a result of exploitation, stereotyping, and racial discrimination. In her study of early twentieth-century New York night clubs, for example, Elizabeth Clement notes that 'the interracial clubs in Harlem after World War I recognized the profits of catering to middle-class whites, and manipulated their floor plans in ways that supported the racial hierarchy of the city', concluding that 'Harlem's interracial clubs merely echoed and reinforced the current power relations in the community – relations which were inherently classed and raced, which degraded black men and women, which posited white supremacy as normal'.<sup>72</sup> Between the New York City race riot of 1900 and the gradual but limited acquisition of political influence and representation among Harlem's African American community by the late 1920s, the uneven nature of New York's power relations infiltrated every domain.<sup>73</sup> On the Lower East Side, populated by working-class migrant

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<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Clement, 'From Sociability to Spectacle: Interracial Sexuality and the Ideological Uses of Space in the City 1900-1930', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 6.2 (2005), 24-43 (p. 41).

<sup>73</sup> Martha Hodes, 'Knowledge and Indifference in the New York City Race Riot of 1900: an argument in search of a story', *Rethinking History*, 15.1 (2011), 61-89 (p. 61); H. Viscount Nelson, 'Politics and Politicians', in *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. by Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, 2 vols (New York: Routledge, 2004), II, pp. 977-984 (p. 979).

communities, comparable issues of race and class pervaded. Christopher Mele describes the prejudiced views which were widespread among middle- and upper-class outsiders during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, noting that ‘[a]t the center of New York immigrant and working-class society, the Lower East Side loomed as a dreadful netherworld, a place to be feared and reviled, inhabited by peculiar, if not dangerous, “Others” whose immoral behavior needed to be controlled or, at best, reformed’. As unfavourable representations of the district abounded, class divisions grew, and as Mele observes, ‘[b]ourgeois representations of working-class immigrants and the spaces they inhabited were both a reaction to the growing economic and cultural divisions between social classes and a means to legitimize political and economic processes that fuelled the exploitative conditions within the Lower East Side ghetto’.<sup>74</sup> Taking into account the class and race divisions which segregated New York both socially and geographically, as well as the resulting exploitation existent in Harlem and on the Lower East Side, the types of ‘performance’ in evidence within these districts were driven by differing underlying motivations, often influenced by prejudice.

Meanwhile, although the general populace of Greenwich Village was mixed in terms of class, culture, and ethnic background, many of the writers, artists and bohemians referred to in this thesis were decidedly middle class. Gerald McFarland recognizes that ‘[t]hese artists and writers – a group that included magazine illustrators and journalists as well as novelists, short story writers, painters, and sculptors – were, [...] educated, well traveled, and middle class or higher in status. [...] the Village artists and writers, especially the younger ones, found themselves more fascinated than repelled by their working-class neighbors’ behavior. Where reformers saw debauchery, the artists saw

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<sup>74</sup> Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 32.

potential for a story or a picture'.<sup>75</sup> The types of performance visible in Greenwich Village, Harlem and the Lower East Side, as well as the motivations behind the performances, were therefore multi-layered as a result of the different social issues at stake.

By observing early twentieth-century Manhattan through the metaphor of the theatre, as exemplified through a diverse selection of interdisciplinary sources, this thesis demonstrates how the language of theatricality and themes of performance came to characterize three otherwise socially and culturally distinct districts of the city. Through traversing and mapping the city as depicted in insider and outsider accounts, I explore both the overt theatricality of modernity and the city's everyday public spectacles, in tandem with more private scenes spied through windows, as well as hidden performances of passing and acculturation. In considering themes of the theatre as traced through neighbourhoods of the modern city, I view Manhattan from a new perspective: acknowledging the backdrop of enhanced viewing platforms which arose with modernity, while simultaneously envisaging the ways in which the city's less architecturally advanced localities were encompassed as part of the spectacle, each evolving a unique and characteristic performativity. Ultimately, I contend that the desire for entertainment, changing social mores and escalating metropolitan landscape influenced the breaking down of walls between the street and the theatre, generating an intermingling of reality and pretence in the everyday city.

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<sup>75</sup> Gerald W. McFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village: A New York City Neighborhood 1898-1918* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), p. 169.

ACT I. GREENWICH VILLAGE, 'MAKE BELIEVE LAND': DJUNA BARNES, FLOYD DELL AND  
JOHN SLOAN

Greenwich Village has recollections like ears filled with muted music and hopes like sightless eyes straining to catch a glimpse of the beatific vision.<sup>1</sup>

But what of the spirit of Greenwich? The truth is that first and foremost Greenwich is the home of romance. It is a sort of Make Believe Land which has never grown up, and which will never learn to be modern and prosaic.<sup>2</sup>

*Our journey begins in early twentieth-century Greenwich Village 'bohemia'. Our key tour guides for this chapter are writer and artist Djuna Barnes, writer, editor and literary critic Floyd Dell, and painter and etcher John Sloan. As can be seen on Robert Edwards's 'almost accurate' hand drawn map [Fig. 1.1.] which appeared in a July, 1925 edition of 'The Quill', the Village is an annexe anomalous from the linear structure of Manhattan. Bisected by the Sixth Avenue Elevated Railway, the Village had developed, by the early twentieth century, into a distinct enclave, or so the bohemian Villagers would have us think. The settlement began as a seventeenth-century village and, as a result, the formation of many of its streets contrast vastly when compared to Manhattan's meticulous grid system. The organic evolution of the Greenwich Village layout contributed intrinsically to the underlying European milieu, and its tradition for café culture only emphasized its distinctly continental ambiance.*

In Greenwich Village of the early twentieth century, with its community of artists, writers, career bohemians, and visiting audience of 'slummers', everyday theatricality and make-believe abounded. The key individuals discussed in this chapter – Djuna Barnes,

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<sup>1</sup> Djuna Barnes, 'Greenwich Village As It Is', in *Djuna Barnes's New York*, ed. by Alyce Barry (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1989; repr. London: Virago, 1990), pp. 223-232 (p. 225).

<sup>2</sup> Anna Alice Chapin, *Greenwich Village* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1917), p. 63.

Floyd Dell and John Sloan – were part of a much larger group of *dramatis personae*: writers, painters, activists, actors and publishers, who each played a role in contributing to the spectacular urban landscape of Greenwich Village. Midtown provided the backdrop, while the Village functioned as the stage-set for this miscellaneous cast of characters. Scan your eye down the cast list of notable Villagers and visitors and you will see: avant-garde French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), defining American playwright Eugene O’Neill (1888-1953), ‘mother of modern dance’ Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), multi-talented British artist, writer and designer Mina Loy (1882-1966), publisher and ‘Barnum of bohemia’ Guido Bruno (1884-1942), acclaimed American poet Edna St Vincent Millay (1892-1950), as well as prolific photojournalist Jessie Tarbox Beals (1870-1942). Drawing from the diverse and interdisciplinary pool of Village associates, I build a picture of how the everyday theatricality of the Village appears when focussed through the artistic and literary lens of its myriad characters.

Drawing from work by Barnes, Dell and Sloan, this chapter also addresses the tension between the natural eccentricity of some Village ‘characters’ and the curated performances enacted by other villagers. I also examine how, aided by technology, the landscape of Greenwich Village as ‘place’ provided the set or scenery for impromptu or sometimes cultivated performance, with Manhattan’s lavish backdrop itself a player within the spectacle. Taking inspiration from Richard Schechner’s view that ‘just about anything can be studied “as” performance’, using the metaphor of the theatre, this chapter interprets the physical structure of Greenwich Village, not only as a stage-set on which the performance of everyday life was enacted, but also as a key part in the performance. Schechner notes that ‘[e]ven non-performance – sitting in a chair, crossing the street, sleeping – can be made into a performance by framing these ordinary actions “as performance.” If I look at what happens on the street, or at the rolling ocean, and see

these “as performance,” then in that circumstance they are such’.<sup>3</sup> I therefore interpret the audience as being anyone (such as artists, writers and oneself) who infers or frames an action, event or scene *as* performative, thus responding to Marvin Carlson’s notion that ‘[p]erformance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance’.<sup>4</sup> The chapter is divided into three sections and the first, ‘Setting the Scene’, looks at the physical space of Greenwich Village as a conceptual stage-set, locating its features, platforms and topography (windows, streets, elevated railway, rooftops, fire escapes), and exploring how key writers and artists interacted with the space, whilst capturing and enfolding its theatrical milieu within their work. The second section, ‘Characters, Costumes and Make-Believe’, explores some of the more idiosyncratic inhabitants of the Village set, delving into the themes of play-acting, masquerade and costuming. Finally, in ‘An Audience to the Spectacle’, I consider the city-wide lust for impromptu entertainment and spectacle of many forms, as well as the emergence of ‘slummers’ as an itinerant audience to the Village and its ‘characters’.

With its comparatively haphazard layout reflecting its reputation for eccentricity, its high proportion of nineteenth-century brownstone buildings and its proximity to New York’s cosmopolitan amenities, the Village had draw-factors for bohemianism in plentiful supply. Allen Churchill regards the Village as a ‘glorious maze of narrow streets—laid out over old footpaths— [...] lined by small houses, usually red brick, some pleasantly spruce, some wildly decrepit, all bearing the cosy, slightly raffish look of the Left Bank in Paris’.<sup>5</sup> Edwards’s map [Fig. 1.1.] accentuates the Village’s jumbled and distinctive streets and the hand-drawn quality adds a child-like aspect which echoes the playfulness of Village pursuits. Edwards, an editor of *The Quill* (a little magazine for Villagers which appealed to the artistic and literary spirit of the Village), records the

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<sup>3</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, pp. 38, 167.

<sup>4</sup> Carlson, *Performance*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Churchill, p. 21.

location of notable establishments including tea rooms, venues, speakeasies and shops: ‘Romany Marie’s’ and ‘Pirate’s Den’ on Christopher Street, the ‘Mad Hatter’ on West Fourth Street, the Provincetown Playhouse on MacDougal Street, as well as pinpointing ‘Edna Millay’s House’ on the corner of Morton and Bedford Street. The map provides little additional information for outsiders as to the nature of the establishments identified, but names such as ‘Unicorn’, ‘Kopper Kettle’, ‘Bamboo Forest’ and ‘Vagabondia’ undoubtedly incited curiosity.<sup>6</sup> Barnes wrote in her article ‘Greenwich Village As It Is’, first published in *Pearson’s Magazine* in October, 1916, that ‘on every corner you can see a new type; but strange to say, no Americans are to be discovered anywhere. New York is the meeting place of the peoples, the only city where you can hardly find a typical American’.<sup>7</sup> The concept of Greenwich Village as consciously disconnected from the main metropolis, here extends to imply New York as an entire city disassociated from the rest of America and its people.

As the story goes, in 1917, the Village informally disconnected from New York (and indeed from the rest of society) in a characteristic theatrical display, as it was declared ‘The Free and Independent Republic of Washington Square’. The ringleader in this secession was Gertrude Drick, a poet and artist studying with Sloan, and who referred to herself as ‘Woe’. Other conspirators who took part included Sloan himself, Marcel Duchamp, who had risen to fame for his controversial *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), as well as Charles Ellis, actor, painter and husband of Norma Millay, sister to Edna Millay. Upon discovering the door to the Washington Square Arch unlatched, the group proceeded to climb to the top. Once they had surmounted the famous arch, they ensued with the kindling of a fire, release of balloons, shooting of pretend firearms and other such fanfare. Most significant, however, was their announcement of ‘The

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Edwards, ‘Greenwich Village To Day’, *The Quill: A Magazine of Greenwich Village*, July 1925, 17.1, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Barnes, ‘Greenwich Village’, in *Barnes’s New York*, p. 226.

Declaration of the Independence of the Greenwich Village Republic' [Fig. 1.2.]. This document, allegedly written by Duchamp and signed by all conspirators, proclaimed in farcical formality that Greenwich Village was indeed a 'liberated community', independent from the United States.<sup>8</sup> Sloan immortalized the event in his etching *Arch Conspirators* (1917) [Fig. 1.3.], which depicts the group on the roof, with balloons and a picnic, and the city below. Sloan later recounted, '[w]e had hot water bottles to sit on, sandwiches, and thermos bottles of coffee. There was a spiral iron stairway, then a big chamber eighteen feet high, the width of the Arch, then a stairway to a trap door. When we left, we fastened colored balloons to the parapet. They stayed about a week. One of my bohemian incidents, one of the very few'.<sup>9</sup> Sloan's disclosure of this being one of the few occasions when he participated in a 'bohemian' experience exemplifies his ambivalent attitude towards bohemianism and his elected disassociation from self-professed Village bohemians. It is, nevertheless, dramatic demonstrations of this sort which earned the Village its reputation for eccentricity and theatricality. Here the famous New York monument became a conceptual stage for this iconic 'bohemian' moment.

Many commentators have regarded these apparently spontaneous displays as calculated spectacles, subsequently recorded and propagandized with the intention of further propelling Village intrigue. In his 1926 account *Love in Greenwich Village*, Dell remarks, for example, that the Village 'has become a byword, which has been loved and feared and laughed at by millions of Americans who have never seen it – and which some clever folk have declared never existed at all outside the realm of fancy'.<sup>10</sup> Sloan, nevertheless, chronicles the events of the mock secession with a convincing tone of impulsive fun: 'Gertrude S. Drick, poet, was a wild little creature. I had found that the

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<sup>8</sup> Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village, the American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), pp. 2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Morse, *John Sloan's Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings, Lithographs, and Posters* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 209.

<sup>10</sup> Floyd Dell, *Love in Greenwich Village* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), p. 17.

bronze door of the Arch was open. She said we must have a picnic'.<sup>11</sup> Even if not a publicity stunt, the Washington Square declaration would have an impact on the notoriety of the village for years to come. As I demonstrate, much of the self-mythologizing which took place, had a dramatic element to it and was often woven into the literature and rhetoric of the district. While the publicity centred on the Village drew in crowds – inducing a more lucrative economy, and promoting the work of local artists – there was also a backlash from veteran Villagers who felt that the integrity of the area had been compromised.

The Village bohemians interacted, socialized and collaborated on the urban stage-set. Together they transcended Manhattan's locales, overlapped tenure in popular venues, hosted notable guests, and took their lodgings within close quarters. Sloan painted a portrait of Dell, Barnes mentioned Dell in her articles and both Barnes and Dell wrote plays for the Village's little theatre group, the Provincetown Players. Notable Provincetown playwright Susan Glaspell immortalized the group in her play *The People* (1917), which lovingly satirized popular Village characters including Dell and Sloan.<sup>12</sup> They existed in the same spaces and places, patronized the same establishments including bookshops, cafés, parks and taverns. As McFarland points out, however, often omitted from history were the non-bohemian Villagers from a diverse array of ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds, who were interspersed across the district. For example, between 1890 and the 1910s, 'Italian immigrants arrived by the thousands and crowded into the five- and six-story tenement buildings'.<sup>13</sup> Though largely focussed on the Village's curious assortment of shops and venues, Edwards's map [Fig. 1.1.] also signposts the diverse communities occupying the district: Washington Square North is labelled as home to

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<sup>11</sup> Morse, p. 209.

<sup>12</sup> Brenda Murphy, *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> McFarland, pp. xi, 2.

‘Aristocrats’, Leroy Street and the surrounding area as the enclave of ‘Artists’, a block between West Third and Bleeker Street as ‘Italia’ and a smaller adjacent area as ‘China’, while the block between Waverley Place and Greenwich Avenue is designated ‘Erin’, signifying an Irish community.<sup>14</sup> There was a bustling interplay between the different groups, both as individual observers and spectators of each other, and as participants in the unique blend of cultures. While many residents of the Village had working-class and mixed cultural roots, the large majority of artists and writers in the district came from middle-class backgrounds and had been drawn to the bohemian lifestyle.<sup>15</sup> It is through the writers and artists of the district that the everyday theatricality and impromptu performance of the era are most extensively captured, though they often neglect to acknowledge Villagers from outside their own circles.

Although the Village saw numerous famous figures of the future pass through its Washington Square archway, they were by no means a coherent group. Instead, the artistic influx came in waves, beginning most notably from the late nineteenth century, through the turn-of-the-century, the twenties, and up to the fifties’ beat generation, and – to a reduced extent – beyond. Those who stayed in Greenwich Village throughout frequently resented the activities of the upcoming generation, flagging them as imposters and counterfeits. After dinner at ‘Maries’ on Twenty-First Street on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1908, Sloan refers to the other clientele as “‘vulgars,” “bohemiamarxists” many of them’, a crowd with which he would ironically later become well acquainted.<sup>16</sup> When interviewed by Louis Baurly on ‘The Message of Bohemia’ (1911), Sloan viewed bohemianism as a state of mind available to anyone, defining the bohemian as a ‘free man’ who takes a different viewpoint and chooses a different lifestyle from the average, summing up the

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<sup>14</sup> Edwards, ‘Greenwich Village To Day’, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> McFarland, p. 169.

<sup>16</sup> John Sloan, ‘John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913’ (unpublished), transcribed and annotated by Judith O’Toole in consultation with Helen Farr Sloan, ed. by Jeanette Toohey (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, c. 1998), p. 218.

message of bohemia as: '[l]et there be real life; let there be real liberty'.<sup>17</sup> For Sloan, bohemia is not something visible to the naked eye, but a philosophy which could be subscribed to by anyone. The popularity of 'slumming', however, encouraged sightseers to look for the physical signs of bohemia, as 'successive generations of such pleasure seekers set their sights [...] on the tearooms of "free-loving" bohemian artists and radicals'.<sup>18</sup> As a result of the 'slumming' audiences and tourism, Dell writes of the appearance of the masquerading 'professional "Villager," playing his antics in public for pay or profit'.<sup>19</sup> By the 1920s, some Villagers began to see the district as a business opportunity, though their performance of 'bohemianism' was met with derision from earlier Village settlers who regarded themselves as the genuine article.

#### I. SETTING THE SCENE: 'AN ARCHITECTURE CONCEIVED IN A CHILD'S DREAM'

In this section I consider the scenery of Greenwich Village and how the streets and buildings not only provided the conceptual stage for a host of characters to interact, but also became a part of the urban performance. New York seemed – to many villagers including Mina Loy – to be a giant playground and upon her arrival into the harbour in 1916, Loy wrote that she was captivated by its 'architecture conceived in a child's dream' and its 'glittering clamor of myriad windows set like colored diamonds'.<sup>20</sup> While the glittering towers of Midtown New York rose like a giant adventure playground, the Village enclave, as advertised in newspapers and little magazines, with its multitude of themed establishments and eccentric characters traversing the streets, became, in many

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<sup>17</sup> Louis Baury, 'The Message of Bohemia', *The Bookman*, November 1911, pp. 256-266 (pp. 263-265).

<sup>18</sup> Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> Dell, *Love*, p. 300.

<sup>20</sup> New Haven, Yale University Library, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS Carolyn Burke Collection on Mina Loy and Lee Miller, Alda's Beauty, box 1; cited in Andrea Barnet, *All-Night Party: The Women of Bohemian Greenwich Village and Harlem, 1913-1930* (North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2004), p. 28.

people's expectations a fantasy land or amusement park. Venues including Pirate's Den, a Pirate themed speakeasy where mock duels were held, and the Mad Hatter's Tea Room, set up as a Lewis Carroll inspired tea party, made Greenwich Village a sort of living museum. The Village became an extension of the spectacles and amusements available at Coney Island, whetting the appetite for performance, as the theme of façade and mythmaking prevailed in both destinations. Critic George Chauncey remarks that '[t]he Village's incorporation into the city in the 1920s had turned it into another Coney Island, a cheap amusement center and playground for rich uptown slummers and poorer youths from the boroughs alike'.<sup>21</sup> The period brownstone buildings of Greenwich Village and Harlem, juxtaposed with the towering loom of the brightly lit skyscrapers, abruptly delineated the strata of old and new, creating spectacle.

The varied histories of New York's landscape when cross-sectioned reveal a complex urban morphology where relics of past eras haphazardly intermingle with the ultra-modern in an exhibition of architectural precocity. Rem Koolhaas captures the surreal, dreamlike influences of modern New York architecture, describing Manhattan as 'the 20<sup>th</sup> century's Rosetta Stone' and asserting that 'each block is covered with several layers of phantom architecture in the form of past occupancies, aborted projects and popular fantasies that provide alternative images to the New York that exists'.<sup>22</sup> These invisible 'alternate New Yorks' also link to the notion of a mythical city, while the make-believe of Greenwich Village's bohemian population formulated an 'other' New York conjured in writing and literature of the early twentieth century. These stage-like, dream-like phenomena transcended the boundaries of Midtown's theatrical district and the

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<sup>21</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p. 233.

<sup>22</sup> Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994), p. 9.

Coney Island peninsular and entered the city's locales, both architecturally and atmospherically.

The dramatic urban scenery and everyday theatricality of the city echoed in the works of many Greenwich Village artists and writers. In *Bruno's Weekly* on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1915, Greenwich Village publishing tycoon Guido Bruno promoted Barnes's forthcoming collection of 'rhythms and drawings'. As Barnes's publisher he described *The Book of Repulsive Women* as 'a chant which could be sung by those who are in the daily procession through the streets and highways of our metropolis but which could also be sung by those who are on balconies and house-tops viewing the eternal show of daily life'.<sup>23</sup> Bruno portrays the city as comprising of an infinite number of conceptual stages and impromptu auditoriums in the form of buildings, transport and infrastructure. From the elevated railway lines, to the roofs of skyscrapers, raised platforms became the very fabric of the urban landscape, escalating like an amphitheatre to the drama of the city. Just about anywhere had the potential to lend itself as a stage or auditorium at any moment. Bruno's reference to those viewing from 'balconies and house-tops' also echoes the balcony scenes prevalent in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century art, including Édouard Manet's *The Balcony* (1868), Gustave Caillebotte's *A Balcony* (1880), as well as American Impressionist Louis Ritman's *Girl on Balcony* (1916-17). New York artists and writers began applying similar perspectives to the city of the New World within their portrayals of spectatorship. Views from windows, fire escapes, rooftops and elevated trains provided the nearest to balcony surveying New York could offer.

Through Barnes's self-styled characterization, evident in both her outward appearance and projected persona conveyed through her writing, she situated herself as a key performer on the urban stage. With Greenwich Village as her stage-set, Barnes was the hero of her own journalism, performing stunts for her enraptured audiences and

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<sup>23</sup> Guido Bruno, 'Books and Magazines of the Week', *Bruno's Weekly*, 30 October 1915, p. 161.

confessing to her own trepidation in enacting them. Barnes's unique style of journalism incorporated sharp wit and humorous incidents, as well as addressing pertinent political and social issues of the era. Kate Ridinger Smorul states that '[i]n her sharp and emotive interpretations of performers, audiences, and such performance events as a puppet show and a boxing match, Barnes tackles the complex issues of morality and gender, exploring the significance of [...] the politics of gendered spectatorship'.<sup>24</sup> In both her journalism and poetry, Barnes also encapsulates the esotericism of Greenwich Village bohemia, and its secretive spirit, recording peculiar and curious scenes with the knowing tone of an insider. In 1912 Barnes's family dispersed and with her mother and siblings, she left her rural upstate New York family home for bustling Manhattan, where she enrolled as an art student at the Pratt Institute for around six months.<sup>25</sup> It wasn't until 1915, at the age of twenty-three, that Barnes left her mother's dwellings and moved to Greenwich Village.<sup>26</sup> During her time in the Village, Barnes wrote newspaper and magazine articles as a means of supporting herself, as well as poetry including *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915) and short stories such as 'Smoke' (1910). Barnes also visited and chronicled some of New York's most underprivileged areas, and Justin D. Edwards states that she must be 'read as an explorer, an urban traveler, who enters environments unknown to most of her peers', placing her in the company of a body of contemporary writers who 'explored the "frontiers of civilization"'.<sup>27</sup> Douglas Messerli also comments that 'the City of New York is perceived by Barnes as an enormous landscape of theatre, of circuses, operas, street performances, carneys, hawkers, con-men, clowns, and just a few saints'.<sup>28</sup> Through this

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<sup>24</sup> Kate Ridinger Smorul, 'Of Marionettes, Boxers, and Suffragettes: Djuna Barnes's Performative Journalism', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 39.1 (2015), 55-71 (p. 55).

<sup>25</sup> Mary Lynn Broe, 'Introduction', in *Silence and Power: A Re-Evaluation of Djuna Barnes*, ed. by Mary Lynn Broe (Carbondale; Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 3-26 (p. 4).

<sup>26</sup> Susan Edmunds, *Grotesque Relations: Modernist Domestic Fiction and the U.S. Welfare State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Justin D. Edwards, *Exotic Journeys: Exploring the Erotics of U.S. Travel Literature, 1840-1930* (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 2001), p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> Douglas Messerli, 'Foreword', in *Barnes's New York*, ed. by Barry, pp. 11-12 (p. 12).

lens, Barnes discovers and interprets the city as she sees it, or rather as she would like it to be viewed; a facet particularly evident in her earlier work including *The Book of Repulsive Women* and her New York journalism produced during her time in Greenwich Village.

Through her article series published in 1916 with the suggested intention of revealing the 'truth' about Greenwich Village, Barnes's traversal and observations of New York reveal some of the most telling insights into the everyday theatre of Village life. Alex Goody states that 'Barnes's New York journalism explores spectacularity in many forms, whether it is the Hippodrome Circus, a Prize-Fight, the bustling immigrant communities of Brooklyn or Manhattan itself as a spectacle seen from a boat trip around the Island'.<sup>29</sup> In 'Greenwich Village As It Is', Barnes implies that her intention is to 'dispel some of the false notions', but while her stated purpose is to dismiss rumours about the mysteries which enveloped the Village, much of her writing intentionally emphasizes secrecy and heightens sensationalism.<sup>30</sup> Goody notes Barnes's 'double positioning' on Greenwich Village, as both a 'journalistic commentator on (mass)culture who brings her irony to bear on it, but also a compatriot of bohemian radicals and author of avant-garde stories and plays'.<sup>31</sup> Diane Warren traces themes throughout Barnes's articles which 'challenge the tendency to sensationalise and exoticise the Bohemians', but she also acknowledges the irony and duplicity of Barnes's intent which Goody regards as revealing a calculated negotiation of the mass market among Greenwich Village bohemians.<sup>32</sup> Barnes alludes to Greenwich Village, for example, as a 'beatific vision', promoting and confirming expectations of the spectacular, meanwhile imbuing the district

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<sup>29</sup> Alex Goody, 'Spectacle, Technology and Performing Bodies: Djuna Barnes at Coney Island', *Modernist Cultures*, 7.2 (2012), 205-230 (p. 206).

<sup>30</sup> Barnes, 'Greenwich Village', in *Barnes's New York*, p. 230.

<sup>31</sup> Goody, *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 91.

<sup>32</sup> Diane Warren, *Djuna Barnes's Consuming Fictions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 37; Goody, *Modernist Articulations*, p. 91.

with a mystical ambiance and implying a religious experience.<sup>33</sup> Barnes subverts her role as an honest reporter and adds fuel to the flames of the readers' imagined Village spectacle. As the article's original publication in the British owned *Pearson's Magazine* suggests, moreover, the reach of the Greenwich Village myth was not only localized, but had extended its grip across the Atlantic and into Europe.

Barnes gives accounts of numerous Greenwich Village institutions and establishments, setting the scene and providing an insight for Village outsiders. During her early years as a journalist, Barnes pseudonymously published some articles and closet dramas under the moniker of Lydia Steptoe and was also a member of the renowned Provincetown Players, who performed three of her plays *Three From the Earth* (1919), *Kurzy of the Sea* (1920) and *An Irish Triangle* (1921), which Douglas Messerli claims to have been experimental, and 'unquestionably some of the most curious works of American drama'.<sup>34</sup> Barnes's theatrical background can be seen to inform her writing as she transfers her playwriting techniques into urban observation. Drawing together Barnes's disparate writings, Deborah Parsons also observes 'Barnes's keen eye for the theatricality of modernity and the performances of everyday life'.<sup>35</sup> In 'Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians', for example, published in the *New York Morning Sunday Telegraph Magazine* on 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1916, Barnes presents what she infers as a typical night-time scene in the notorious 'Hell Hole' or Golden Swan on West Fourth Street and Sixth Avenue:

A slit in the door, a face staring into your face, the dirty back room with its paper cutouts of ladies in abbreviated undergarments, the men at the tables, the close atmosphere, the sordid faces, the unclean jokes; straggling in of colored women

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<sup>33</sup> Barnes, 'Greenwich Village', in *Barnes's New York*, p. 225.

<sup>34</sup> Messerli, 'Introduction', in *At the Roots of the Stars: The Short Plays*, by Djuna Barnes (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1995), pp. 7-12 (p. 7).

<sup>35</sup> Deborah Parsons, *Djuna Barnes* (Plymouth: Northcote House Press, 2003), p. 10.

and men, a colored sweetheart [...] —compliments from him, first embarrassment from her, then preening to end in a mincing exit. The deadening down, down, into a gray, drunken slumber, the still, dead beer; the heavy air, the inert bodies— daylight.<sup>36</sup>

Barnes's observations only serve to intensify the growing renown of the Village as a bohemian spectacle by the late 1910s. The Golden Swan was a Village saloon with a notoriously seedy backroom nicknamed 'The Hell Hole' and it became an infamous drinking den where many of Greenwich Village's artists and intellectuals would muse and conspire long into the night. Here bohemians crossed paths with gangsters (including the infamous Hudson Dusters, active until 1920), as well as ordinary blue-collar workers who also shared the Village.<sup>37</sup> Barnes reports on the night-time escapades with a sense of inertia, as if perpetually compelled to view the same scene performed each night. The scene described is distilled to précis only the bare-bones of the hackneyed routine of 'him' and 'her'. Barnes's sparse description of these actions read as stage directions, complete with entrances and exits, which dictate the course of events on the urban stage, culminating in 'daylight', or lights up.

Sloan also depicted this notorious establishment in his etching *Hell Hole* (1917) [Fig. 1.4.], while artist Charles Demuth also portrays Hell Hole's characters in his watercolour *Golden Swan* (1919). Mariea Caudill Dennison remarks that Sloan's etching 'overflows with lively Greenwich Village types' and according to Sloan's notes for his Dartmouth College showcase, playwright Eugene O'Neill, who was a regular at the Hell Hole, is depicted at the table in the top right hand corner.<sup>38</sup> Emphasizing the theatricality

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<sup>36</sup> Barnes, 'Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians', in *Barnes's New York*, pp. 233-245 (p. 243).

<sup>37</sup> McFarland, p. 179; Alfred Pommer and Eleanor Winters, *Exploring the Original West Village* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), p. 115.

<sup>38</sup> Mariea Caudill Dennison, 'Sloan's Saloon Etchings', *Print Quarterly*, 22.3 (2005), 302-307 (p. 306); John Sloan, *John Sloan's Paintings and Prints* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Exhibition, 1946), p. 56; cited in Morse, p. 212.

and fervour for amusement as indicated by both Barnes's and Sloan's depictions, McFarland implies the establishment as a site of intrigue and spectacle as 'the neighborhood's artists approached the Hell Hole scene with undisguised interest'.<sup>39</sup> Demolished in 1928 (now the sight of the Golden Swan Garden), Hell Hole was a fabled communal space, a meeting place of numerous notable Greenwich Village 'characters' and a set for everyday and impromptu theatricality to unfold.<sup>40</sup>

An instance of the city's architectural landscape itself accommodating a planned performance of theatre is recorded in the *New York Times* as having taken place in a quiet cul-de-sac off Tenth Street in Greenwich Village on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1918. Patchin Place, well known as home to many notable writers including Theodore Dreiser, e.e. cummings, Louise Bryant and John Reed, as well as Barnes during the 1940s, was transformed into an open air theatre for a production of William Butler Yeats's *The King's Threshold* (1904), starring and produced by Irish actor Dudley Digges. The *New York Times* reports that the performance – organized by the Federated Neighborhood Association with proceeds donated to the Goodhue Home Fund of the Evening Post – took place from midnight and estimates an audience of around three hundred: 'the intimacy of the little theatre superseded by the even more intimate atmosphere of the back yard'.<sup>41</sup> A photograph by Jessie Tarbox Beals [Fig. 1.5.] captures the occasion and displays the set-up: a raised stage interspersed by tall trees is positioned against a brick wall, the visible windows and fire-escapes of a neighbouring building confirming the location, as makeshift curtains are strung up across the street and numerous performers crowd the platform, some in regal costume and Carl Anthony (who played the eponymous king)

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<sup>39</sup> McFarland, pp. 179, 181.

<sup>40</sup> Robert M. Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 118.

<sup>41</sup> 'Theatre Set in Back Yard', *New York Times Article Archive*, (1 July 1918)

<<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9902E1DA173EE433A25752C0A9619C946996D6CF>> [accessed 20 March 2017].

adorned in a crown, while the seated audience gazes upwards.<sup>42</sup> The *New York Times* also notes that additional audience members included residents of Patchin Place, who took the opportunity to ‘peep over fences or hang from third-story windows’, thus accentuating the effect of the street as a theatre, as windows transformed into overhanging boxes.<sup>43</sup>

Andrew Field attests that though not yet a resident of Patchin Place, Barnes had been present in the audience that night.<sup>44</sup> A nearby home provided the intimate space for an orchestra pit, as ‘strains of the overture came from an orchestra stationed in a convenient and hospitable kitchen’.<sup>45</sup> Field also attests that the ‘play’s director had requested the Interborough Train Company to run its elevated trains as slowly as possible during the hour of the play’s performance in order not to drown out the speeches’.<sup>46</sup> The street and city surroundings lent themselves to theatre for the evening, and as the *New York Times* concluded, the ‘stage setting was an adroit combination of the arts of the scene painter and of nature’.<sup>47</sup> The Greenwich Village architecture therefore worked in collaboration with the play in creating atmosphere and providing scenery. The prevalence of the city streets in accommodating everyday outdoor entertainment is also accentuated in Polish-born Jewish-American artist Theresa Bernstein’s (1890-2002) etching *Open Air Show* (1913) [Fig. 1.6.], depicting a seated audience positioned in front of a cinema screen with an apartment block backdrop (at the time of production, Bernstein had recently moved to New York).<sup>48</sup> In her essay exploring spectatorship and the act of looking among Ashcan School painters, moreover, Deborah Fairman notes that Bernstein’s ‘etching is as

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<sup>42</sup> Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, MS Photographs of Jessie Tarbox Beals, 1896-1941, PC 60, series II: Professional Life, box 3, fol. 66, item 17.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Theatre Set in Back Yard’.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Field, *Djuna, the Formidable Miss Barnes* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1983), p. 231.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Theatre Set in Back Yard’.

<sup>46</sup> Field, *Formidable Miss Barnes*, p. 231.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Theatre Set in Back Yard’.

<sup>48</sup> Patricia M. Burnham, ‘Theresa Bernstein’, *Women’s Art Journal*, 9.2 (1988-1989), 22-27 (p. 22).

interested in the audience as in the movie', and akin to many contemporaneous representations, the audience or crowd become the artists' predominant subject.<sup>49</sup>

Greenwich Village's landscape, characters and atmosphere came to emulate the theatre, as while the stationary buildings could be viewed as a series of podiums and balconies, and the sidewalks and open spaces a prime location for theatre, the ever-burgeoning transport infrastructure of the early twentieth century provided a shifting platform from which to view ephemeral vistas of the city. Through differing mediums both Barnes and Sloan observed and represented the theatre-like physical space of the city. Interpreting the changing Greenwich Village scene and Midtown backdrop as a dynamic spectacle, Sloan's 1922 painting *The City from Greenwich Village* [Fig. 1.7.] is depicted from the vantage point of his studio window overlooking Sixth Avenue. It demonstrates a theatrical vista in the city's juxtaposed scenic variety and as Christine Stansell observes, '[p]eering down with Sloan from his apartment perch, the eye rests at the bottom of the picture and then travels up the dark curve of the El across the intimate jumble of the village to arrive, at the top, at a glimmering island of Wall Street towers, emanating an uncannily lovely pinkish-golden light'.<sup>50</sup> The painting demonstrates the dramatic contrast between building heights and ages when comparing the soaring city glowing in the distance, with the older more traditional Village in the foreground. The chiaroscuro of the shadowy Village and distant brightness further distinguishes it from downtown New York. Although dim lights are visible in the Greenwich Village foreground, there is a clear division between the brightness radiating from the spiralling heights of the distantly shimmering Woolworth Building and the Village eclipsed in the wake of the skyscrapers beyond. The snaking path of the elevated railway serves as a

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<sup>49</sup> Deborah Fairman, 'The Landscape of Display: The Ashcan School, Spectacle, and the Staging of Everyday Life', *Prospects*, 18 (1993), 205-235 (p. 212).

<sup>50</sup> Christine Stansell, review of John Loughery, *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel* (1995), *New Republic*, 213.21 (1995), 45-49 (p. 49).

further reminder of looming modernity with the traversal of networks connecting and centralizing the city. In an extract from Sloan's monograph on art technique, *The Gist of Art* (1939), he articulates, with a trace of nostalgia, the coexistence of old and new within the scene:

The distant lights of the great office buildings downtown are seen in the gathering darkness. The triangular loft building on the right had contained my studio for three years before. [...] The spot on which the spectator stands is now an imaginary point since all the buildings as far as the turn of the elevated have been removed, and Sixth Avenue has been extended straight down to the business district. The picture makes a record of the beauty of the older city which is giving way to the chopped-out towers of the modern New York.<sup>51</sup>

Sloan emphasizes the incessant change in scenery which characterized Manhattan during the early twentieth century, accentuating the unreal landscape of modernity as spectacle. Rowland Elzea also acknowledges Sloan's increasing disillusionment with the fast-changing city and the upsurge in the nightclub scene, although Sloan embraced architectural development, remarking in *Esquire* (1936) that '[t]he fun of being a New York painter [...] is that landmarks are torn down so rapidly that your canvases become historical records almost before the paint on them is dry'.<sup>52</sup> The jagged silhouettes of the towers obscure the view, as the phantom spectator occupies now non-existent buildings, themes drawing upon the transience of urban topography. Sloan's poised city 'spectator' surveying the urban scene from a windowed vantage point projects the notion of Manhattan's landscape as entertainment; a theatre with constant scene changes, providing Sloan with the challenge of an ever-ephemeral backdrop to capture on his canvas.

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<sup>51</sup> Sloan, *John Sloan on Drawing and Painting: Gist of Art*, ed. by Helen Farr Sloan (New York: American Artists Group, 1939; repr. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1977), p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> Rowland Elzea, *Sloan's Oil Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné, Part 2* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991), p. 257; Sloan, 'The World from the Village', *Esquire*, June 1936, pp. 106-107.

As a celebrated artist of the early twentieth century Sloan was an avid spectator to his surroundings, his recurrent muse being the people and places of Greenwich Village and wider Manhattan. Heather Campbell Coyle and Joyce K. Schiller observe that Sloan was highly influenced by the bustling street activity of Chelsea and Greenwich Village, as ‘[t]he passersby and their activities – walking to the theaters, window-shopping, and, above all else, watching one another – would become the subject of Sloan’s drawings, prints, and paintings in the first decade of his life in New York’.<sup>53</sup> Robert W. Snyder concurs that ‘[t]he greatest theater in New York has always been the theater of the streets, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century’.<sup>54</sup> Having been born roughly two decades before Dell and Barnes, and moving to New York in 1904, Sloan began as part of the earlier generation of artists who settled, although he continued to paint voraciously throughout the 1910s and 20s, and was producing work up until his death in 1951. Sloan was part of what has become known as the Ashcan School, which included contemporaries William Glackens, Everett Shinn, George Luks, Robert Henri, and George Bellows. Painters from the Ashcan and American realist schools frequently depicted a city where, resembling the balconies of a theatre, varying heights and perspectives were a key feature. Rebecca Zurier has summarized the preeminent subjects of Ashcan artists as ‘[c]ommerce, the city’s diverse population, changing mores, and above all *looking*’.<sup>55</sup> Sloan’s etchings and paintings follow the archetypal Ashcan principals of realism in capturing the vibrancy of the city in daily scenes from New York life. Sloan portrayed the variety of the city, the bustling and the mundane activities of its people from Greenwich Village to the Lower East Side, bars and restaurants to theatres

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<sup>53</sup> Joyce K. Schiller and Heather Campbell Coyle, ‘John Sloan’s Urban Encounters’, in *John Sloan’s New York*, ed. by Joyce K. Schiller and Heather Campbell Coyle (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, Delaware Art Museum, 2007), pp. 22-82 (p. 35).

<sup>54</sup> Robert W. Snyder ‘City in Transition’, in *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York*, ed. by Rebecca Zurier, Robert W. Snyder and Virginia M. Mecklenburg (Washington D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1995), pp. 29-59 (p. 29).

<sup>55</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, p. 4.

and picture houses, gazing out of windows to shopping in the market place. Fairman remarks that Sloan's 'oeuvre dramatizes the city as a landscape of display' while Michael Lobel describes his style as 'candid urban realism, with its focus on human anecdote'.<sup>56</sup> Just as Barnes in her journalism propelled the notion of Greenwich Village and its eccentric characters as mysterious spectacle, Sloan's paintings along with his written records reveal him to be an attentive observer of other people, and a spectator to the everyday theatricality of the city.

A recurring motif in Sloan's work is the fleeting image of the elevated railway. Returning to Sloan's *The City from Greenwich Village*, the 'el' depicted here is the Sixth Avenue Line, constructed in the 1870s and demolished in 1939. Again he portrays the el at Greenwich Village in his 1928 painting *Sixth Avenue Elevated at Third Street* [Fig. 1.8.], which shows the dark shadows cast onto the street by the raised track. Beneath, groups of young women in long coats and cloche hats disperse in evening light, while above two lit el carriages pass each other at the bend. The painting captures the dynamic energy of this moment, as the el trains hurtle towards their termini, and women, free to safely traverse the city at night, make their way to their destinations. After being initially derided, the el quickly became a pivotal image central to New York art and writing of the era, and nothing could better accentuate the frank reality of modernity than the thundering el. The intersecting route of the Greenwich Village elevated is clearly delineated on Edward's map [Fig. 1.1.], as it travels via West Third Street to Sixth Avenue, heading North and racing past Jefferson Market, then clattering on up to Fifty-Ninth Street, just South of Central Park. Douglas Tallack notes the corresponding interest in rapid transit as a subject by artists of the Ashcan and Impressionist schools, comparing paintings of the el by Sloan, including *Six O'Clock, Winter* (1912), with Childe Hassam's *The El, New York*

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<sup>56</sup> Fairman, p. 221; Michael Lobel, *John Sloan: Drawing on Illustration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 2.

(1894). He observes that ‘Hassam succeeds, as Sloan does, in getting alongside the elevated and conveying something of the tempo and immediacy of what Cecelia Tichi so aptly terms the “rapid transit moment”’.<sup>57</sup> As with technology and infrastructure including the electric light bulb, the el and the subway allowed greater access across the city, but they could also be divisive. In Janet Flanner’s *The Cubical City* (1926), she describes the shadow of the el as Delia and Paul stroll through the streets of Greenwich Village: ‘the trestle of the Elevated straddling Sixth which it hung over like a coffin’.<sup>58</sup> Snyder and Zurier comment on the dark overshadowing track depicted in Everett Shinn’s *Under the Elevated*, as ‘a dark horizontal bar across the top of the picture, pressing down on the wagons and people beneath [...]. In all likelihood they are working-class people living in the shadows of the elevated train that makes their neighborhood a less than desirable place to live’.<sup>59</sup> In its beginnings, the el was plagued by lawsuits from property owners opposed to ‘the noise, the dirty trains and the elevated structure itself, which cut out some people’s views and turned their houses into views from the El’.<sup>60</sup> While the el introduced an efficient way to travel and a greater level of geographical unity by centralizing the city, it also accentuated divisions in wealth.

For some riders of the el, however, the ever-changing vista and urgent movement of the carriages provided a new form of entertainment. Irving Lewis Allen notes that ‘especially at certain corners, [the el] gave a little thrill, like a very tame ride at Coney Island; the “S” curve at Coenties Slip was famous’.<sup>61</sup> The positioning of the el gave a unique moving vantage point over the city, providing the traveller with fleeting new

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<sup>57</sup> Douglas Tallack, *New York Sights: Visualizing Old and New New York* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2005), p. 73.

<sup>58</sup> Janet Flanner, *The Cubical City* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1926; repr. Carbondale; Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 101.

<sup>59</sup> Robert W. Snyder and Rebecca Zurier, ‘Picturing the City’, in *Metropolitan Lives*, ed. by Zurier, Snyder and Mecklenburg, pp. 85-190 (p. 95).

<sup>60</sup> Tallack, p. 70.

<sup>61</sup> Irving Lewis Allen, *The City in Slang: New York Life and Popular Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 92.

perspectives deviating from the average street view. Parsons notes that the el ‘presented a new level of urban visibility, between that of the street and the skyscraper’.<sup>62</sup> The track ran at upper-floor window level to many residential and office blocks, allowing the el user an ephemeral glimpse into the lives of others. Ashcan painter Edward Hopper creates a similar effect in *Night Windows* (1928) [Fig. 1.9.], placing the viewer at the level of the elevated railway, which although unseen, provides a passing voyeuristic glance into the brightly lit windows of a townhouse bedroom, in which the partially obscured occupant parades in her chemise. The chiaroscuro of the three windows illuminated against the night sky create the effect of a natural triptych. As widespread electricity enabled the ‘colonization of the night’, in a 1928 article on the paintings of Charles Burchfield, Hopper observes that scenes where ‘the interior and exterior of a building [are] seen simultaneously’ were a ‘common visual sensation’.<sup>63</sup> Hopper captures this ‘sensation’ himself in a number of his paintings, using contrasts in light and shadow to illuminate an altogether private scene. In facilitating brief insights through passing windows, from the late nineteenth century, the el became a new platform, a conceptual auditorium for viewing impromptu and everyday theatrical moments.

In Barnes’s ‘Seen from the “L”’ from *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915), she describes the bohemian vision of the central nude figure as she nonchalantly combs her hair, framed by her mosaic window facing the street, unfettered and oblivious to the voyeuristic gaze of her passing audience as they observe from an elevated railway carriage. Melissa Jane Hardie notes that ‘Barnes’s text orients us to the bodies of her women by orienting us to the poems as observers’.<sup>64</sup> Although difficult to locate

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<sup>62</sup> Parsons, *Djuna Barnes*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>63</sup> Edward Hopper, ‘Charles Burchfield: American’, *The Arts*, July 1928, pp. 5-12 (p. 6); cited in Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Melissa Jane Hardie, ‘Repulsive Modernism: Djuna Barnes’ “The Book of Repulsive Women”’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 29.1 (2005), 118-132 (p. 128).

precisely, the el route referenced is most likely to be the Sixth Avenue line, which was close to Barnes's address at 86, Greenwich Avenue, where she lived in 1915.<sup>65</sup>

So she stands—nude—stretching dully  
Two amber combs loll through her hair  
A vague molested carpet pitches  
Down the dusty length of stair.  
She does not see, she does not care  
It's always there.

[...]

Still her clothing is less risky  
Than her body in its prime,  
They are chain-stitched and so is she  
Chain-stitched to her soul for time.  
Ravelling grandly into vice  
Dropping crooked into rhyme.  
Slipping through the stitch of virtue,  
Into crime.<sup>66</sup>

Barnes's poem could be just as aptly entitled *scene* from the "L", as it captures and immortalizes a transitory glimpse of a central female figure and her surroundings. Parsons remarks that 'the poem constructs an imaginary character for the opaque image glimpsed in an ephemeral moment'.<sup>67</sup> Sarah Parker adds that a 'sense of the brevity of this moment is produced by the short final line of each stanza, and the rhyming couplet which

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<sup>65</sup> Andrew Field, *Djuna: The Life and Times of Djuna Barnes* (New York: Putnam Publishing Group, 1983), p. 60.

<sup>66</sup> Barnes, *The Book of Repulsive Women: 8 Rhythms and 5 Drawings* (New York: Guido Bruno, November 1915; repr. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1994), pp. 23-24.

<sup>67</sup> Parsons, *Djuna Barnes*, p. 17.

concludes it, replicating the sense of rushing onwards through various urban scenes'.<sup>68</sup> For the framed figure with '[t]he frail mosaic on her window | Facing starkly toward the street', the window is her stage and the 'journalist-voyeur' her audience.<sup>69</sup> The line '[s]he does not see, she does not care | It's always there' epitomizes the attitude of the woman portrayed, as she is unmindful of her itinerant audience passing on the el and indifferent to their stare because, like her dusty carpet, '[i]t's always there'.<sup>70</sup> The nude figure makes no attempt to conceal herself and is neither reluctant nor forthcoming in her performance, and thus her overriding apathy eradicates all coyness. Informed by the connotations of degradation elicited by the shadow of the el and the subsequent devaluation of surrounding buildings, there is an undercurrent of darkness and isolation which envelops the poem's ether.

Language which encapsulates her 'dull' stretching, the combs 'lolling' through her hair, her 'vague molested carpet' as well as the 'dustiness' of the stair, all point to a state of emotional paralysis. Her worn, cheaply made, easily unpicked 'chain-stitched' clothing, emblematic of her 'soul', the very essence of her being, begins to unravel 'into vice'. The oxymoronic nature of the woman's malevolent yet glamorized moral demise is insinuated as every stitch is undone: '[s]lipping through the stitch of virtue, | Into crime'. The perceived criminality and ultimately fated undoing of this once virtuous woman is further accentuated by the meretricious nature of her lips which 'bloom vivid and repulsive | As the truth'.<sup>71</sup> The brutal candour inferred here from the mere passing glances of el commuters objectifies the body in the window so that by end, the 'woman-turning-vase' has *become* an object, and '[e]ven vases in the making | Are uncouth'.<sup>72</sup> The poem

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<sup>68</sup> Sarah Parker, 'Urban Economies and the Dead-Woman Muse in the Poetry of Amy Levy and Djuna Barnes', in *Economies of Desire at the Victorian Fin De Siècle: Libidinal Lives*, ed. by Jane Ford, Kim Edwards Keates, and Patricia Pulham (New York; London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 83-106 (p. 92).

<sup>69</sup> Barnes, *Repulsive Women*, pp. 23-24; Hardie, p. 128.

<sup>70</sup> Barnes, *Repulsive Women*, p. 23.

<sup>71</sup> Barnes, *Repulsive Women*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>72</sup> Hardie, p. 128; Barnes, *Repulsive Women*, pp. 23-24.

conveys a scene of urban depravity and decay which Barnes brands as ‘repulsive’, while the figure’s metamorphosis into a still unrefined vase echoes the Keatsian ekphrasis in ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ (1820). The metaphorical unraveling of the woman, as is reflected in her fraying garments and fading possessions, is further accentuated in the vase’s potential to smash and fracture into disintegration. In her monograph exploring the female *flâneur*, or *flâneuse* in literature, Parsons notes that Barnes often ‘portrays the woman in the squalid city wasteland as a victim’.<sup>73</sup> The el passengers and the personified carriages exhibit voyeuristic tendencies, as well as the spirit and earnest curiosity of the *flâneur*, and in this instance the two motives are inseparable. As Hardie observes, ‘Barnes makes use of the “L” as the locomotive site of spectatorship, the place where the city is observed by the *flâneur*’.<sup>74</sup> The coincidental audience are at this moment both *flâneurs* and incidental *voyeurs*, unexpectedly encroaching upon a private moment. With the elevated railway’s traversal of the city came a different kind of *flâneur*, deviating from the urban street wanderer but consistent with the ‘culture of looking’.<sup>75</sup> The el became a travelling auditorium from which the modernized city observer could view the changing scenery and everyday theatre of the city like a stage show.

As well as being *flâneurs*, *voyeurs* and general spectators, there is also an implication from Barnes that the el passengers were there to pass judgment. For Barnes, within the rattling elevated carriages there is an impromptu jury preparing to give their verdict on the ‘repulsiveness’ of the defendant. In the previous century, nevertheless, William Dean Howells’s Mr. and Mrs. March in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), are implied more clearly as impartial observers, enthralled by the theatrical spectacle of the city as viewed from the el. Glancing back in time to the earlier days of the elevated

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<sup>73</sup> Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 178.

<sup>74</sup> Hardie, p. 129.

<sup>75</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, p. 3.

railway, Howells's novel establishes the el – then a relatively new and expanding infrastructure – as a platform for spectatorship and a mode of theatre, setting a precedent from the late nineteenth century. In a frequently cited passage, Mrs. March confesses her 'infatuation' with the mode of transport, observing that at night there was a 'fleeting intimacy you formed with people in second and third floor interiors'.<sup>76</sup> These transitory insights into the lives of others, as later affirmed by Barnes and Hopper, amount to a series of unrelated reality plays. The couple are late nineteenth-century Greenwich Village dwellers, and although this signifies a different demographic and milieu from the early twentieth-century Village, during their journey, an assortment of haphazard vistas display and juxtapose the variety of lives closely compacted, yet detached. Mr. March accordingly remarks upon the parallel with theatrics:

it was better than the theatre, of which it reminded him, to see those people through their windows: a family party of work-folk at a late tea, some of the men in their shirt-sleeves; a woman sewing by a lamp; a mother laying her child in its cradle; a man with his head fallen on his hands upon a table; a girl and her lover leaning over the window-sill together. What suggestion! what drama! what infinite interest!<sup>77</sup>

An insatiable human interest in the lives of other people is displayed by the March's captivation with the fragmented succession of coinciding scenes paraded before them. These observations made as early as 1890 help to inform interpretations of later writers and artists addressing similar themes, including Barnes and Sloan, by establishing a timeframe for the arrival of moving spectatorial vantage-points and the advent of opportunities to actively 'look' at private scenes. Critic Miles Orvell comments on the 'pervasive growth of the spectatorial habit' during this era, as displayed through Mr. and

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<sup>76</sup> William Dean Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1890; repr. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1889), p. 95.

<sup>77</sup> Howells, p. 95.

Mrs. March's voyeuristic thrills generated by travelling on the elevated railway and gaining momentary glimpses through the windows and into the passing lives of New Yorkers.<sup>78</sup> Allen comments that '[f]or fleeting instances, they identified with the touching domestic tableaux they saw in the lighted second and third story windows and compared the whole panorama to a theatrical experience'.<sup>79</sup> The sense of detached isolation between the viewers on the el and the cast of each ephemeral play is deemed by Orvell to be part of the theatrical appeal. He suggests that while a few decades earlier, the New Yorker 'had sought connection with his fellow New Yorker', by the time Howells was penning this novel the mood of the populace had shifted, clearly illustrated as 'March delights in the more distanced quality of representation; it is like the theater, only better'.<sup>80</sup> Howells's suggested paradigms of the contrasting activities taking place range from mundane work-folk having tea, menial sewing, and maternal responsibilities to the more sensationalized scenes of silent anguish and suggested illicit liaison. All everyday theatrical moments, however remain prematurely curtailed and imprecise. Although the glimpses are fleeting, a regular commuter may well have begun to recognize the characters on their journey and, having viewed snapshots of their lives in regular installments at particular times, constructed their own imagined narrative to complete the quasi-dramas. Betsy Klimasmith adds that '[t]he elevated train, like [Jacob] Riis's photographs, opens the tenement to the urban gaze, allowing Basil March access to the drama and suggestion of domestic scenes'.<sup>81</sup> The theatrical overtones of viewing with 'infinite interest' the nightly unfolding drama of other people's lives corresponds with the

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<sup>78</sup> Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 36.

<sup>79</sup> Allen, *The City in Slang*, p. 35.

<sup>80</sup> Orvell, p. 36.

<sup>81</sup> Betsy Klimasmith, *At Home in the City: Urban Domesticity in American Literature and Culture, 1850-1930* (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 2005), p. 93.

precedent of watching and being watched which was set during the turn-of-the-century and became widespread by the early twentieth century.<sup>82</sup>

The city's rooftops performed as transforming heterotopic spaces and adaptable conceptual stages for viewing and enacting impromptu and everyday performance. Michel Foucault defined heterotopia in a 1967 lecture, stating that '[p]laces of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality', further describing heterotopology as a 'simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live'.<sup>83</sup> Though located in reality, the Manhattan rooftop acted as a space apart; an open and adaptable space, and an escape from the confines of often cramped apartment living. Historian Nick Yablon cites a 1913 article in Gustav Stickley's *The Craftsman*, which acknowledges the need for more outside space in New York, and estimates there to be 'approximately nine thousand three hundred and fifty-nine acres of unused space' on the roofs of buildings, however, as Yablon counters, by designating rooftops as 'unused space', the article neglects to acknowledge the area as a functional and ever transforming communal zone.<sup>84</sup> The rooftop acted as a space of flux, 'a blank slate that could be freely adapted to multiple activities, both sociable and solitary, public and private'.<sup>85</sup> As a space on the threshold of the city, but enclosed between the domestic setting of the apartment interior and the frantic rush of the streets below, the rooftop functioned as a quasi-liminal space.

The theory of liminality was shaped by ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep's 1908 study exploring the rites of passage 'which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age' in many cultures, while acknowledging the existence of a

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<sup>82</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p. 24).

<sup>84</sup> 'New York's Wasted Acreage: Thousands of Unused Roofs Which Might be Converted into Playgrounds and Breathing Spaces for the People', *Craftsman*, July 1913, p. 386; Nick Yablon, 'John Sloan and "the Roof Life of the Metropolis"', *American Art*, 25.2 (2011), 14-17 (p. 14).

<sup>85</sup> Yablon, 'Roof Life', p. 15.

‘threshold’ or ‘transitional stage’ between two stages, referred to as the ‘liminal’ phase.<sup>86</sup> Building on Van Gennep’s theory, anthropologist Victor Turner also made a considerable contribution to the concept of liminality as a ‘betwixt and between’ phase, which as Bjorn Thomassen notes ‘opens up space for possible uses of the concept far beyond that which Turner himself had suggested. Speaking very broadly, liminality is applicable to both space and time’.<sup>87</sup> ‘Liminal’ is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as deriving from the Latin *limen* meaning threshold, ‘relating to a transitional or initial stage’, or ‘on a boundary or threshold’.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, Richard Schechner defines the limen as ‘a threshold or sill, a thin strip neither inside nor outside a building or room linking one space to another’, and observes that ‘[a]n empty theatre space is liminal, open to all kinds of possibilities: a space that by means of performing could become anywhere’.<sup>89</sup> While acknowledging Van Gennep’s use of ‘liminal’ in anthropology, I use the term here in the broader sense by referring to rooftops as spaces on the threshold between indoors and outdoors; the street and the apartment; public and private. Recognizing the significance of divisions and thresholds between city spaces, and the transformative qualities of Manhattan’s rooftops, this adaptable open space came to reflect a transient stage-set, providing inspiration for numerous artists and writers.

Spanning Sloan’s career, many of his works feature conceptual stages such as rooftops, fire escapes and windows as a frame for the activities depicted. His recurring rooftop scenes display the range of activities and everyday theatricality taking place, from

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<sup>86</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London; Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 21; Victor Turner, ‘Variations on a Theme of Liminality’, in *Secular Ritual*, ed. by Sally Falk Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (Assen; Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), pp. 36-53 (p. 36).

<sup>87</sup> Victor W. Turner, ‘Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*’, in *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society* (Seattle; Washington: American Ethnological Society, 1964), pp. 4-21; Bjorn Thomassen, ‘The Uses and Meanings of Liminality’, *International Political Anthropology*, 2.1 (2009), 7-27 (p. 16).

<sup>88</sup> *Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus*, ed. by Maurice Waite, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 603.

<sup>89</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, pp. 66-67.

the mundane tasks of drying hair or hanging washing, to sunbathing or raising pigeons, the rooftop was a rare open space where apartment dwellers could break free from their constricted city lives.<sup>90</sup> Schiller and Coyle observe that, strongly influenced by his surrounding views, Sloan's development of rooftops and skylines as subjects largely began after his move to Greenwich Village. Sloan took inspiration from scenes viewed from the windows and rooftops of his various apartments and studios, including West Twenty-Third Street between Tenderloin and Chelsea from 1904, until he moved to Perry Street, Greenwich Village in 1912 and relocated his studio to Sixth Avenue.<sup>91</sup> In *Red Kimono on the Roof* (1912) [Fig. 1.10.], which depicts a woman hanging her washing, a backdrop of chimneys and building façades signify the rooftop scene, while the woman's choice of attire, a vibrant red gown, hints at bohemianism and symbolizes Sloan's arrival in Greenwich Village. Schiller and Coyle pointedly observe that as '[a] resident of the Village, she has wrapped herself in a bright red kimono – a decorative and exotic choice – rather than typical street clothing'.<sup>92</sup> In viewing and depicting a scene performed atop a conceptual rooftop stage – a woman strikingly costumed for the mundane task of hanging washing – Sloan demonstrates the variety and availability of everyday theatricality and impromptu spectacle in the Village. Though intended as a private record, Sloan's meticulous diaries are peppered with anecdotes, everyday observations, impromptu theatrical scenes and vignettes from city life. Sloan often uses theatrical language to evoke the performative city scene as viewed from windows and on rooftops. In his entry dated 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1906, for example, he observes a simple scene as '[a]cross the roofs two girls in their night robes clean their few breakfast dishes at 12 o'clock noon. [...] [They] are very full of humor of life'.<sup>93</sup> The simplicity and human interest of this scene is part of

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<sup>90</sup> Elliot Bostwick Davis and others, 'Early-Twentieth-Century Realism', in *MFA Highlights: American Painting* (Boston: Museum of Fine Art, 2003), pp. 165-175 (p.170).

<sup>91</sup> Schiller and Coyle, 'John Sloan's Urban Encounters', pp. 38, 33, 59; McFarland, p. 179.

<sup>92</sup> Schiller and Coyle, 'John Sloan's Urban Encounters', p. 60.

<sup>93</sup> Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', p. 68.

its appeal, and although not all ideas could translate into works of art, it was from comparable everyday vistas that Sloan took his inspiration. As the city became more densely packed with buildings, and electricity began to illuminate windows and streets more brightly, greater possibilities for watching and being watched became available. The boundaries between the public and the private increasingly dissolved, and more opportunities for viewing everyday theatricality became available, as high volumes of people lived their lives in close proximity.

Rooftops, fire-escapes, stoops and streets acted as extensions of the home for many New Yorkers, and in the overbearing heat of summer, much coveted outside spaces were the only source of relief from sweltering apartment living. On 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1906, Sloan writes that '[i]t seems really too hot to do anything in the way of painting, tho' there is lots to be seen: sleeping people on squares and wharfs and fire escapes'.<sup>94</sup> Sloan depicts similar scenes in his etching from the same year *Roofs, Summer Night* (1906) [Fig. 1.11.], in which he portrays the sleeping bodies of assorted men, women and children, strewn in haphazard arrangement, some partially undressed or simply covered by a sheet. Yablon remarks on the scene, noting that 'mothers, fathers, and children of numerous families are strewn across the tar, their lack of privacy emphasized by the voyeuristic gaze of the man on the right'.<sup>95</sup> Schiller and Coyle also note that Sloan's etchings display a 'mixture of public and private, spying and showing, [...] most notably, perhaps, in the man – wide awake on the rooftop – who watches the sleeping women around him'.<sup>96</sup> The heat is palpable, and far into the distance mirroring scenes can be viewed on the rooftops of each block. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 1910, Sloan observes comparable scenes, as 'people throng the streets seeking to get relief from the heat. Back of us many people sleep on the iron fire escapes'. While on 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1911, Sloan saw 'hundreds of

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<sup>94</sup> Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', p. 82.

<sup>95</sup> Yablon, 'Roof Life', p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> Schiller and Coyle, 'John Sloan's Urban Encounters', p. 36.

men and some women sleeping out on the grass in Madison Square. The heat was terrible'.<sup>97</sup> He depicts a similar scene in his etching *Woman and Child on the Roof* (1914) [Fig. 1.12.], as both are illustrated lying under a makeshift washing line sunshade, amidst a landscape adorned by chimney stacks. Sloan's second wife, Helen Farr Sloan later commented on the piece noting that '[t]he heat of summer in New York drives the folks at home to the roofs of the tenements, where extemporized shelters make spots that are comparatively cool'.<sup>98</sup> In the height of summer, any available outside space became a much needed extension of the home, as people attempted to relocate their lives outdoors. As Sloan exemplifies, outdoor living also created more everyday theatrical scenes for spectatorship, as normally private activities took place in public.

Sloan's diaries frequently detail observations made from rooftops as he uses these spaces to view the magnitude of rain clouds, gain perspectives on the Hudson, inventory the changing topography of the city, and attend shows at Hammerstein's Victoria Roof Garden, an outdoor venue atop the theatre. Yablon designates the rooftop as a 'heterotopia', a space with multiple practical and conceptual functions, from a hair drying facility, to an area for contemplation. Foucault notes that '[t]he heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another'.<sup>99</sup> Like a stage, the rooftop could transform both its physical appearance and purpose, and Yablon regards it as 'both garden, laundry room, recreational space, beach, nursery, and bedroom'. Yablon also compares the roof with the consumerism of the streets and observes that 'as roof dwellers they appear to find refuge from commercialism, from distinctions of class,

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<sup>97</sup> Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', pp. 117, 329.

<sup>98</sup> Morse, p. 192.

<sup>99</sup> Foucault, p. 25.

gender, and ethnicity, and from bourgeois notions of propriety'.<sup>100</sup> Many of Sloan's works immortalize incidents unfolding on rooftops, and his etching *Stealing the Wash* (1921) [Fig. 1.13.] depicts a shifty figure on the roof clasping a bundle of sheets and garments (the clock tower of Greenwich Village's Sixth Avenue Jefferson Market building is identifiable in the background). Sloan originally viewed the incident from his studio window:

I watched this fellow pick out all the work things from the line. Then he hid behind a chimney and tried on all the woollen socks he had stolen [...] I felt in the position of God Almighty – saw the crime and didn't do anything, as God wouldn't. [...] A few minutes later I saw the discovery of the theft. A stout Italian woman saw these gashes in her line like missing teeth. Then she started to gesticulate, went and got four other women, and told her story.<sup>101</sup>

For Sloan, rooftops and streets acted as stage-sets for perpetual impromptu performance from which he could draw inspiration. There was always an event of everyday theatricality to be watched and Sloan's good friend Mary Fanton Roberts quotes him as having described the rooftop scene as '[w]ork, play, love, sorrow, vanity, the schoolgirl, the old mother, the thief, the truant, the harlot. I see them all down there without disguise. These wonderful roofs of New York bring to me all of humanity'.<sup>102</sup> Here Sloan articulates his appetite for real drama displayed before him in a rooftop vista. From his vantage point over the ephemeral scene, though raw and 'without disguise', the broad spectrum of characters and range of emotions epitomized the rooftop as stage and the window as auditorium. As the city climbed upwards, buildings became denser and outside space more compromised, so people maximized on alfresco opportunities,

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<sup>100</sup> Yablon, 'Roof Life', pp. 15-17.

<sup>101</sup> Morse, p. 229.

<sup>102</sup> Mary Fanton Roberts, 'John Sloan: His Art and Its Inspirations', *Touchstone*, February 1919, p. 362.

especially in the heat, and Sloan immortalized these outdoor activities in his paintings, etchings and diaries.

It is widely accepted that the genesis of Sloan's prolific diary writing came as a recommendation of catharsis from the doctor, as a method of relieving Sloan's anxiety regarding his wife Dolly's alcoholism.<sup>103</sup> Alexis L. Boylan, nevertheless, notes a lack of evidence behind this reasoning, and while acknowledging extant sources recording both Dolly and John Sloan's tendency to drink 'too much', Boylan provides an alternative account recognizing Helen Farr Sloan's influence on the legacy of her husband and the memory of his previous wife.<sup>104</sup> Sloan's diaries record many thoughts and ideas, events and scenes from the day, people with whom he interacts, venues he visits, as well as regularly praising Dolly's accomplishments. Zurier cites artist and illustrator Harry Furniss who remarked that '[t]he artist [should] imagine and keep in mind that, even when portraying current events, he has, to all intents and purposes, a theatrical scene before him [and should]... give due prominence to the actors on life's stage'.<sup>105</sup> The germination of ideas for many of Sloan's now famous works can be linked to specific insights, everyday theatrical scenes or impromptu performative moments recorded in his diaries. For example, on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1907, Sloan records that he '[w]alked up to [the Ashcan painter Robert] Henri's studio. On the way saw a humorous sight of interest. A window, low second story, bleached blond hair dresser bleaching the hair of a client. A small interested crowd about'.<sup>106</sup> The scene and the crowd which had gathered were the basis for one of Sloan's best known and most studied works, *Hairdresser's Window* (1907) [Fig. 1.14.]. Zurier suggests, the angle and level of the vantage point as indicating the likelihood of the scene as viewed from the el, and as with the figure in Barnes's 'Seen

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<sup>103</sup> John Loughery, *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), p. 95.

<sup>104</sup> Alexis L. Boylan, 'The Curious Case of the Two Mrs. Sloans', *Women's Art Journal*, 33.1 (2012), 25-31 (pp. 27, 29).

<sup>105</sup> Harry Furniss, *How to Draw in Pen and Ink: The Art of Illustration* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1914), p. 55; cited in Zurier, *Picturing the City*, p. 198.

<sup>106</sup> Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', p. 68.

from the “L”, the women in the window are either unaware or no longer concerned at being watched, evoking Barnes’s line: ‘[s]he does not see, she does not care | It’s always there’.<sup>107</sup> The locality of the scene is pinpointed by Lobel, who reveals a connection between the ‘Madam Malcomb’ emblazoned to the left of the window, a pun on her occupation, and a real ‘Madame Malcolm’ who advertised her salon on Sixth Avenue, Greenwich Village in a 1901 edition of *The Smart Set*. This discovery is significant too as Greenwich Village’s Sixth Avenue el likely connects the viewed figures in *Hairdresser’s Window* with the spectated woman in ‘Seen from the “L”’. On the painting’s scenery, Lobel also notes ‘the building as presenting a totally flat façade, almost like a stage set, with the three figures in the window directly behind it and the sidewalk viewers in front’.<sup>108</sup> Sloan’s eternalised depiction of an ephemeral moment overtly captures the theatricality of the scene in terms of composition: the storefront as conceptual stage-set, the hair-dresser and client as performers, the fascinated passers-by amassed as an audience, while the painting’s countless viewers also take their place in the theoretical auditorium.

Sloan also had a self-confessed proclivity for watching through windows as scenes unfolded, an activity better facilitated by the introduction of electric light. As William Chapman Sharpe attests, ‘brightly lit interiors of apartments and offices became visible to people passing in the streets or on elevated trains’.<sup>109</sup> Allen observes that ‘[t]he window allows limited views from the private to the public world and, to the extent that householders wish to display their way of life and level of consumption, a view from the street into their homes’.<sup>110</sup> Windows provided skeleton key access to transient moments in the lives of others, without the gaze necessarily being returned. Schiller and Coyle

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<sup>107</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, p. 1; Barnes, *Repulsive Women*, p. 23.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Lobel, ‘John Sloan: Figuring the Painter in the Crowd’, *The Art Bulletin*, 93.3 (2011), 345-368 (pp. 345-346).

<sup>109</sup> Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 5.

<sup>110</sup> Allen, *The City in Slang*, p. 35.

remark on the motifs of watching and hiding in Sloan's work: '[d]evices for looking – windows, glasses, display cases – or for covering up – hats, veils, the blinders on a horse'.<sup>111</sup> In his diary entry from 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1911, Sloan discloses: 'I am in the habit of watching every bit of human life I can see about my windows, but I do it so that I am not observed at it. I "peep" thro' real interest, not being observed myself. I feel that it is no insult to the people you are watching to do so unseen, but that to do it openly and with great expression of amusement is an evidence of real vulgarity'.<sup>112</sup> Sloan's viewpoint tests Zurier's notion of new moral codes by the early twentieth century which made 'looking' a culturally acceptable activity and resulted in a 'culture of looking in which both art and artists participated'.<sup>113</sup> As evidenced by his art and diaries, Sloan was a fervent participant in this 'culture', though was vigilant not to be seen, perhaps a facet of his generational principles. Laurel Weintraub notes that Sloan was an 'idiosyncratic and self-conscious observer who invested much of his work with a critique of spectatorship itself'.<sup>114</sup> Janice Coco adds that Sloan 'felt that it was an artist's privilege to observe the life around him, as long as one was discreet'.<sup>115</sup> The regularity with which Sloan frames his art with windows – scenes spied through windows or people gazing from windows – reinforces his fascination with the private lives taking place within otherwise hidden spaces of the city.

In one of his most notable etchings, *Night Windows* (1910) [Fig. 1.15.], Sloan depicts a dark exterior setting. The silhouetted chimneys and fire-escapes of a New York tenement district set the scene, as a male shadowy figure perched atop the roof watches while a young woman, partially undressed and oblivious to the onlooker's gaze, arranges

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<sup>111</sup> Schiller and Coyle, 'John Sloan's Urban Encounters', p. 36.

<sup>112</sup> Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', p. 327.

<sup>113</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>114</sup> Laurel Weintraub, 'Women as Urban Spectators in John Sloan's Early Work', *American Art*, 15.2 (2001), 72-83 (p. 72).

<sup>115</sup> Janice Coco, 'Re-viewing John Sloan's Images of Women', *Oxford Art Journal*, 21.2 (1998), 81-97 (p. 82).

her hair at the window. The man's wife, meanwhile, similarly disrobed, is downstairs hanging her washing on a pulley clothesline across the street, whilst a child can be seen screaming in the background. As indicated in Sloan's diary entry from 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1910, the etching was originally conceived as a tongue-in-cheek Christmas gift to be sent to friends.<sup>116</sup> Coco theorizes that 'Sloan illuminates the women in the windows and casts the darkened spectator in shadow, thus portraying his own, real life viewing patterns'.<sup>117</sup> Sloan commented on the piece for his retrospective exhibition at Dartmouth College (1946), remarking that 'a commonplace or even vulgar incident may produce a work of art', indicating the scene's basis as a real event.<sup>118</sup> Here Sloan's penchant for watching informs the etching, evoking a sense of theatre and casting the city's darkened profile as stage-set, the scantily clad woman as unwitting performer, and the voyeuristic onlooker as audience from the vantage point of an elevated gallery.

Sloan's ongoing spectatorship of the everyday theatricality of surrounding windows over time allowed him to follow the stories of those he regularly viewed like a stage play. Whilst always maintaining a distance, Sloan's diaries periodically detail the plots and developments in the lives of his neighbours. For example, in an entry dated 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1911, Sloan watches a 'suffering woman' in the room opposite and ponders whether the man who usually comes home in the evenings has left her. Sloan is an audience to the unknown woman's grief and he watches as she weeps, nursing her sadness with alcohol. He then reports on an alarming development as, '[f]inally about 7:30 she shut the window which seemed strange. [...] I wondered if she turned on the gas to die! None of my business?'<sup>119</sup> Here Sloan raises an important moral dilemma associated with his penchant for looking – that of whether to remain the passive unseen

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<sup>116</sup> Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', p. 205.

<sup>117</sup> Coco, 'Images of Women', p. 82.

<sup>118</sup> Sloan, *Paintings and Prints*, p. 43; cited in Morse, p. 176.

<sup>119</sup> Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', p. 358.

spectator in all circumstances. Coco regards Sloan's complex perception and nervousness of women 'as potentially threatening to his manhood and his career' and thus, his recurring use of windows represented through his diaries and art 'construct boundaries between himself and a feared other' and 'demarcate the limits between the public and private life'.<sup>120</sup> In spite of witnessing a potentially distressing scene, Sloan maintains detachment in his rôle as spectator, declining to transcend the windowed boundary of public display into private reality. The following day, 25<sup>th</sup> September, Sloan watches as the man returns to pack his suitcases, 'sorting his from hers', then promptly leaves. Later the same day, '[s]he came to the window dishevelled and drunk (the cause of his anger, I suppose) then threw herself on the bed'. By 26<sup>th</sup> September, Sloan records, nevertheless that the 'couple opposite seem to have patched up differences and are happy over a can of dark brew of some sort'.<sup>121</sup> Viewing the neighbourhood through windows in serialized intervals can be interpreted as social observation, but the pastime is also a form of entertainment; the watcher/s passive and unseen and the performer/s active. Sloan's removal from the scene and unwillingness to become immersed entrenches his position as an unseen audience. By sustaining the 'fourth wall' between performers and audience, even in extreme circumstances, Sloan is able to interpret his surroundings as spectacle. Katherine Manthorne argues that Sloan was influenced from a young age by early cinema, enabling him to develop a 'moving-picture eye' visible in his work.<sup>122</sup> Sloan's diaries also reveal an artful cinematic quality as they glide between a series of scenes, vignettes, anecdotes and snapshots. This is viewership with higher stakes, however, as the stories on show are real.

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<sup>120</sup> Coco, 'Images of Women', p. 81.

<sup>121</sup> Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', pp. 358-359.

<sup>122</sup> Katherine Manthorne, 'John Sloan's Moving-Picture Eye', *American Art*, 18.2 (2004), 80-95 (p. 80).

Scenes recorded in Sloan's diaries demonstrate how closely compacted city living allowed New Yorkers immediate viewership of the lives of others, without any direct involvement. In one incident of calculated voyeurism, Sloan reported in his diary entry on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1912, that 'some of the Italian helpers about the building where my studio is located have, to gratify a salacious appetite, bored several holes in my studio "walls," wooden partitions covered with sheet iron, to see the artist and his model! Oh, thrilling'. Upon making his discovery, Sloan promptly covered the walls with an arras to inhibit any further gazing. In guarding his models against an objectifying outside male gaze, Sloan demonstrates his distaste for engineered voyeurism, thus distancing him from the male figure portrayed in *Night Windows* [Fig. 1.15.]. In a separate incident in the oppressive heat of summer, nevertheless, Sloan watches an impromptu performance as a couple opposite are in 'extreme déshabillé' and finally disrobe altogether in an attempt to cool down. What is different about this episode is that here Sloan has associate viewers: Robert Henri and his wife Marjorie Organ (illustrator and caricaturist), and William Carman Roberts (poet, editor and New York University professor) and his wife Mary Fanton Roberts (journalist and editor). In this instance Sloan additionally perceives his friends' reactions to the scene being viewed, creating multiple layers and directions of gaze: '[i]t was interesting to watch Mrs. H as she looked at the man (finally naked) and tittered. Mrs. R., who should do better, merely imitated "Margery"'<sup>123</sup> Sloan's close observation, particularly of the female members of the group as they watch the scene unfold corresponds with Weintraub's view that 'one of the most telling features of his work is his depiction of women in the act of looking', reflective of the altering social codes and the 'emergence of female spectatorship as an essential aspect of the unfolding modernity'.<sup>124</sup> As part of an audience including females, Sloan also has license to

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<sup>123</sup> Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', pp. 435, 327.

<sup>124</sup> Weintraub, p. 72.

contradict his view on the vulgarity of being ‘seen’, noting that the entire scene unfolded ‘with the full knowledge of the people observed’.<sup>125</sup> Reflective of Barnes’s ‘Seen from the “L”’, the mindfulness of the exposed couple to the presence of an audience demonstrates a blasé or perhaps exhibitionistic attitude to knowingly being watched; close city living and constant observation rendering them inert to the outside gaze.

Innumerable examples of Sloan’s work feature windows, or are based on ideas which originated as vignettes viewed from windows. On 21<sup>st</sup> April, 1912, Sloan writes, ‘I saw a girl looking out of window in rooming house opposite and tried to paint her from memory’. This was just prior to Sloan’s move to his Sixth Avenue, Greenwich Village studio on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1912, and was likely viewed from his window at East Twenty-Second Street near Gramercy Park where the Sloans took an apartment on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1911.<sup>126</sup> Coco also notes the convenience of Sloan’s West Twenty-Third street studio as a vantage point which ‘furnished intimate views of tenement life’ and perceives Sloan’s use of windows as a prism through which he could ‘examine the female as an object of fascination’.<sup>127</sup> The painting Sloan produced was *A Window on the Street* (1912) [Fig. 1.16.], depicting the woman’s wistful and distant gaze, framed by an open window in a red brick tenement. With her patterned dress loosely off the shoulder, her black hair swept back, the red-brown cushion on which she rests her elbows perched precariously on the sill, and a single rose placed in a vase beside her, Sloan gestures towards bohemianism. The net curtains of the rooming house are untidily pushed aside, and behind can be seen a single armchair and a metal bedframe. In her assumed stance, slightly leaning out of the open window, the woman lingers in the middle territory between the public and the private. Though she has not fully transcended the boundary

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<sup>125</sup> Sloan, ‘John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913’, p. 327.

<sup>126</sup> Sloan, ‘John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913’, pp. 431, 304, 434.

<sup>127</sup> Janice Coco, *John Sloan’s Women: A Psychoanalysis of Vision* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 57, 91.

into the public, she openly allows herself to see and be seen, emphasizing the acceptability of looking.<sup>128</sup> By opening the window and resting, the woman herself is captivated by the everyday theatricality of the street scene, while the presence of a cushion for comfort symbolizes her commitment to watching. The pensive emotion in her gaze demonstrates a possible motive of escapism.

The close proximity of life in Manhattan allowed for the habitual watching of others, and thus emerged a city-wide preoccupation with envisaging the private concerns of other people. Allen deems that ‘New Yorkers of all social classes almost traditionally watch one another through windows and form impressions of how others live’ and attests that the stance assumed by the woman in Sloan’s painting was traditionally practiced in tenement quarters, such as the working class Italian districts of Greenwich Village, as a type of surveillance and safe-guarding.<sup>129</sup> Jane Jacobs would, in 1961, refer to this type of unofficial policing as ‘eyes upon the street’.<sup>130</sup> An illustration by Sloan entitled *In Her Place* [Fig. 1.17.] also appeared as the front cover design for *Harper’s Weekly* in 1913.<sup>131</sup> Although similar in theme, the vision depicted is less romanticized and more haphazard than *A Window on the Street*. The woman’s stance appears weary rather than wistful as she gazes downwards and rests her elbows on a white pillow. A functional milk bottle and potted plant replace the artful rose in a vase, and a more cluttered background is visible. Sloan’s use of detail in capturing the disorderly environment in his illustration, as opposed to the clearer background of *A Window on the Street*, can be attributed to a deliberately more romanticized bohemian scene in the painting, while the level of intricacy is also informed by his chosen medium, the use of fine pencil producing cleaner lines than oil on canvas. John Fagg compares Sloan’s recurrent use of clutter to similar

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<sup>128</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>129</sup> Allen, *The City in Slang*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>130</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961; repr. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 45.

<sup>131</sup> ‘In her Place’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 4 October, 1913, front cover.

representations in realist and naturalist literature, observing that, ‘clutter facilitates the depiction of a plenitude of minor detail to produce what Roland Barthes termed reality effects, information surplus to the narrative that affirms the author’s commitment to the task of transcribing the real’.<sup>132</sup> The audience and likely positioning of *In Her Place* also differs, as its publication on a magazine cover makes it more prone to being submerged amid homely clutter, reflective of the image’s setting, whereas in painting form, *A Window on the Street* is destined for starker gallery spaces, also emulating the emptier backdrop. In each image, the window acts both as a barrier demarking the private from the public, but also a two-way portal through which an alternative space could be joined without being physically entered. In *A Window on the Street*, the woman with her cushion and her rose appears to be highly arranged and particularly placed, indicating a self-awareness due to the interplay between the public and the private as the window becomes her lookout, but also her stage.

Sloan was also a keen walker and urban wanderer, an everyday metropolitan *flâneur*, extolling the medical benefits of such exercise, as well as enjoying the numerous spectatorship opportunities that it provided.<sup>133</sup> Molly Hutton attests that after relocating from Philadelphia to New York, Sloan actively spent time ‘getting to know the city and transforming himself into a New Yorker. For this purpose, Sloan turned to the streets themselves, walking the city, writing about his rambles in his diary, and producing memorable images of the city’s streets, parks, and people’.<sup>134</sup> His diaries document the extent to which he took inspiration from everyday theatricality and impromptu scenes viewed during his regular city explorations. On 16<sup>th</sup> September, 1908, for example, Sloan walks down MacDougall Street and Sullivan Street in Greenwich Village which he notes

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<sup>132</sup> John Fagg, ‘Chamber Pots and Gibson Girls: Clutter and Matter in John Sloan’s Graphic Art’, *American Art*, 29.3 (2015), 28-57 (p. 32).

<sup>133</sup> Sloan, ‘John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913’, p. 311.

<sup>134</sup> Molly Hutton, ‘Walking in the City at the Turn of the Century: John Sloan’s Pedestrian Aesthetics’, in *John Sloan’s New York*, ed. by Schiller and Coyle, pp. 82-116 (p. 83).

as mostly inhabited by Italians; ‘such throngs of children! In the streets, doorways and windows’.<sup>135</sup> In addition to the windowed views portrayed by Sloan, as Schiller and Coyle have elucidated, his paintings are equally placed from the perspective of the pedestrian on the street as ‘Sloan places the viewer at street level’.<sup>136</sup> In his etchings *The Show Case* (1905) and *The Jewelry Store Window* (1906), Sloan places the viewer amongst his depicted shoppers, as part of the action. Deborah Fairman observes that from the late nineteenth century, ‘new large windows [...] framed and theatricalized commodities, a reflection of retailer’s attempts to heighten and glamorize desire’, and correspondingly in *Picture Shop Window* (1907) [Fig. 1.18.], Sloan depicts a mainly female night-time crowd gathered on the sidewalk about an electrically lit store window, enthusiastically examining the artworks on display.<sup>137</sup> Through the vantage-point at sidewalk level, Sloan engages and tantalizes the viewer, who though ‘part of the strolling crowd’ is unable to glimpse the paintings which are the subject of the crowd’s admiration.<sup>138</sup> Sloan’s image is self-reflective in acknowledging art as a commodity, but is also representative of the new prospects in night-time amusement made possible by the single electric light visible in the window. Weintraub observes that ‘Sloan has reinterpreted the art gallery in popular terms, so that connoisseurs are recast as consumers’, while the painting’s later less commoditized art gallery setting (the painting was gifted to Newark Museum in 1925) externally emulates the painting’s scene in terms of art display and gathered spectators, but transports the viewership of paintings to a gallery environment.<sup>139</sup> Hutton also remarks on the way in which Sloan entices the viewer to assume a rôle in the action, observing of *The Carmine Street Theater* (1912) that ‘the viewer is allowed to conveniently inhabit the persona of the disapproving nun [...]’. It is

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<sup>135</sup> Sloan, ‘John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913’, p. 315.

<sup>136</sup> Schiller and Coyle, ‘John Sloan’s Urban Encounters’, p. 23.

<sup>137</sup> Fairman, p. 207.

<sup>138</sup> Schiller and Coyle, ‘John Sloan’s Urban Encounters’, p. 38.

<sup>139</sup> Weintraub, p. 81.

as if we are pedestrians ourselves, moving past slowly and becoming engaged in the scene'.<sup>140</sup> By casting the external viewer within the pedestrian scene, Sloan envelopes his audience within the everyday drama, facilitating an immersive experience.

Sloan's diaries reveal how his own individual penchant for wandering and looking manifested in the art he produced. Hutton notes that '[w]orks such as *The Carmine Street Theater* not only reveal the importance of Sloan's ambulatory predilection to his art-making but serve as well to illustrate the artist's mastery of a particular form of painting that productively addressed his personal need to continually locate himself within the urban fabric of New York'.<sup>141</sup> In his diaries he records small acts of everyday and impromptu performance as inspiration, from girls dancing around an electric light, to young boys playing 'pile-on leap frog' under the lights of Madison Square while the little girls looked on.<sup>142</sup> Sloan's paintings are comparable to Barnes's poetic and journalistic spectatorship as each alter their perspective in relation to height and angle, as well as location of the scenes they evoke. Both place the reader or viewer respectively as a contemporary of the figures portrayed, whether it be located in the street, elevated carriage, subway car, roof terrace or fire escape. As Schiller and Coyle observe, 'the city becomes a backdrop for a human encounter, an encounter that is specifically urban [...]'. Sloan's art is made up of people, the streets and parks they frequent, and the glances they exchange'.<sup>143</sup> While Sloan presents the theatre of the everyday from an honest human perspective – the little scenes and vistas of the city – both Sloan and Barnes fluctuate between depicting individual characters in the 'daily procession through the streets' and the 'sweeping vista' mirroring 'the eternal show of daily life'.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Hutton, p. 83.

<sup>141</sup> Hutton, p. 83.

<sup>142</sup> Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', pp. 427, 344.

<sup>143</sup> Schiller and Coyle, 'John Sloan's Urban Encounters', p. 23.

<sup>144</sup> Bruno, 'Books and Magazines', p. 161.

The urban landscape and backdrop of the modern Manhattan skyline contrasted with the foreground of old Greenwich Village brownstones, while the arrival of technological enhancement including the el and the subway, provided more places for viewing and being viewed. This was the stage-set on which the Greenwich Villagers performed their daily tasks, socialized and interacted. Situated as a spectator to the city, Sloan is often ascribed by critics including Coco as having a personal predilection or voyeuristic obsession with watching the city and its populace, but situated within the context of a cultural trend which saw Manhattan's inhabitants seeking everyday theatricality, Sloan's spectatorship appears consistent with a wider penchant for observing the city, in his case with an artistic eye. Likewise, through her journalism and poetry Barnes also acknowledges the vogue for viewing Greenwich Village as spectacle, while also signalling the traversal of platforms, such as the el, as enhancing viewership opportunities. In the next section I examine some of the characters and pastimes of the Village, as portrayed predominantly through Barnes, Sloan and Dell.

## II. COSTUMES AND MAKE-BELIEVE: 'THE HAPPY PLAYGROUND OF ARTISTS AND WRITERS'

From the turn-of-the-century, artists, writers, thinkers, eccentrics and radicals began to settle in Greenwich Village and took up residence in the little garrets and old tenement buildings. Floyd Dell points to the existence of multiple artistic Village communities through time, stating that: 'I have listened to Sinclair Lewis, and Paul Turner, and Edna Kenton, and Vachel Lindsay, telling of those early days – the days of the "real" Village, as they proudly say. But that Greenwich Village is nevertheless only the dark quasi-prehistoric background to the Village whose story I am about to relate'.<sup>145</sup> In *Love in Greenwich Village*, Dell guides the reader through the district using a series of semi-

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<sup>145</sup> Dell, *Love*, p. 16.

fictionalized memories and encounters, evoking the stories, spirit and playfulness of his own generation of Village ‘characters’ which he regards as the ‘real’ Village. As I demonstrate, nevertheless, much of Greenwich Village’s bohemian reputation was reliant on performance and pretence, and as historian Christine Stansell notes, a ‘penchant for mythmaking’ surfaces in many accounts of the Village by bohemian residents, reflecting the district’s association with make-believe and self-mythologization.<sup>146</sup> In a 1911 interview with Louis Baur, moreover, the artist and illustrator James Montgomery Flagg is highly critical of bohemians and quotes the key message of bohemia as ‘let’s pretend’. He regards bohemians as enacting a form of everyday performance, noting that ‘every movement and action is a pose, and consequently a form of falsity’.<sup>147</sup> Baur’s interviews present many conflicting viewpoints on bohemia, but there is consensus to an element of sham and performance enacted by the Village’s bohemian residents. Stansell adds that the ‘bohemians were terrific self-dramatizers and self-aggrandizers, adept at creating themselves a cast of fascinating characters’.<sup>148</sup> Although by no means all residents partook, it is the self-mythologization by some Villagers, as well as make-believe, play-acting, performing and costuming, which I explore in this section. I also investigate the various stages and venues of Greenwich Village where performance took place, as well as the often self-styled ‘characters’ of the district.

As an editor of the socialist magazine *The Masses*, as well as playwright and director for the Liberal Club and Provincetown Players, Dell was a central figure among Greenwich Village’s early twentieth-century artistic contingent. Dell relocated from Chicago to New York in 1913 where he established himself as a writer and editor, and his arrival in the Village coincided with the early stages of a rise in artistic activity. Critic G.

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<sup>146</sup> Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>147</sup> Baur, ‘The Message of Bohemia’, p. 262.

<sup>148</sup> Stansell, *American Moderns*, p. 3.

Thomas Tanselle notes that upon arrival in the Village, like assuming a new rôle for a new phase in his life, ‘Dell no longer wore a black stock or carried a walking stick as he had in Chicago but wore instead a blue flannel shirt’ which he deemed suitable for a socialist editor.<sup>149</sup> In adjusting his personal appearance from aesthete to proletarian, Dell exemplifies the prevalence of costume in dressing a particular identity among notable Greenwich Villagers, and the subsequent associations with everyday performance. In his influential monograph *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Dick Hebdige decodes the significance of distinctive styles and unique aesthetics in relation to post-war British youth cultures such as punk. He defines subculture as ‘a form of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to this ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style’, also noting that style could carry ““secret” meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination’.<sup>150</sup> Likewise, by assuming a ‘blue flannel shirt’ for his new rôle, Dell’s costume is both code for his occupation and a symbol of alignment with socialism and rebellion against capitalism. John E. Hart remarks that Dell ‘was about to witness not just another year in history, but the birth of a new Village’.<sup>151</sup> Many subsequent records of Greenwich Village during the 1910s, however, have been highly shaped by the Villagers’ own mythmaking and as Stansell observes, historical accounts often present the upsurge of artistic creativity as unavoidable or providential.<sup>152</sup>

In his opening to *Love in Greenwich Village* entitled ‘Proem: The Rise of Greenwich Village’, (first published as part of a two part essay in the October and November 1925 issues of *The Century Magazine*) Dell credits the teacher and feminist Henrietta Rodman (under the pseudonym Egeria) with having laid the groundwork for the

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<sup>149</sup> G. Thomas Tanselle, ‘Realist or Dreamer: Letters of Sherwood Anderson and Floyd Dell’, *The Modern Language Review*, 58.4 (1963), 532-537 (p. 533).

<sup>150</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 1979), p. 133, 18.

<sup>151</sup> John E. Hart, *Floyd Dell* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971), p. 45.

<sup>152</sup> Stansell, *American Moderns*, p. 2.

Village as he knew it; '[s]he invented Greenwich Village [...] the Greenwich Village of which all the world knows was founded by a school teacher in all earnestness!'<sup>153</sup> Dell proposes the concept of the Village as having been 'invented' or 'founded' by Rodman at a particular moment in 1913, although the influx of artists was, in reality, gradual and by no means instant. Maxwell Bodenheim, for example, dubbed 'King of Greenwich Village Bohemians', did not arrive in the Village until 1916 (other honorary 'Kings' included journalist Hutchins Hapgood, and poet and critic Sadakichi Hartmann), while Edna St Vincent Millay, who Dell admired greatly, arrived in 1917 after graduating from Vassar College.<sup>154</sup> Through his articles and status as a community stalwart, Dell was a prolific exponent of mythology surrounding the Village, and sought fervently to preserve what he saw as its fading 'authenticity' and local characters. Dell documents both the rise, and, what he perceives, by 1926, (by which time many notable Villagers had emigrated to Paris's *Rive Gauche*) to have been the fall of Greenwich Village: '[f]or it has fallen, like Troy, like Babylon'.<sup>155</sup> Like Barnes's journalism, Dell's accounts fuel the fables surrounding the Village and in likening it to ancient and biblical cities, Dell overtly mythologizes and dramatizes the district. Nina Miller interprets 'the sense that the physical space of bohemia was evaporating under pressure from the tourists on the one hand and the immigrant descendants on the other led to the tendency in Village sketches to figure bohemia as a dreamspace, the romantic/psychological underside of bourgeois urban reality'. She adds that *Love in Greenwich Village* is addressed equally to 'insiders, voyeurs, and the new generation of Villagers'.<sup>156</sup> In propelling Village mythicism and projecting the image of Greenwich Village as fading, Dell, apparently inadvertently but

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<sup>153</sup> Hart, *Floyd Dell*, p. 117; Dell, *Love*, pp. 18-20.

<sup>154</sup> Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill*, p. 159; Nancy Milford, *Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 143.

<sup>155</sup> Dell, *Love*, p. 17.

<sup>156</sup> Nina Miller, *Making Love Modern: The Intimate Public Worlds of New York's Literary Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 20.

perhaps intentionally, promotes the district to an audience of outside ‘voyeurs’ eager to sample the ethereal Village and its ‘characters’ while they lasted.

Dell’s writing, including his one act play *The Angel Intrudes* (1917), also frequently explores themes of everyday performance and masquerade as a normal facet of Greenwich Village life. Throughout Dell’s account of ‘his’ Greenwich Village in *Love in Greenwich Village*, he also places emphasis on ‘play’ and ‘childishness’ as central to what he refers to as the Village’s ‘happy playground of artists and writers’. Richard Schechner defines play as ‘a mood, an activity, a spontaneous eruption. Sometimes it is rule-bound, sometimes very free. It is pervasive. Everyone plays and most people also enjoy watching others play – either formally in dramas, sports, on television, films; or casually, at parties, while working, on the street, on playgrounds’. He also notes that ‘play taken seriously’ proliferated from the turn of the twentieth century, as ‘[p]lay returned as a category of creative thought and action. [...] In the visual arts, playing with ordinary reality – inventing new ways to look at things – led to cubism and then abstract expressionism. Various avant-gardes disrupted, parodied, and playfully subverted official culture. Play is intrinsically part of performing because it embodies the “as if,” the make-believe’. The preoccupation with childhood and play-acting also echoes the Village bohemians’ fixation with psychoanalysis, and as Schechner observes, ‘[n]otions of the unconscious in psychology and literature [...] are examples of play taken seriously’.<sup>157</sup> In order to cater to the appetite for ‘play and mere childlike fun’ in the Village, a number of themed establishments promoted performance, costume and play-acting as a matter of course.<sup>158</sup>

One such venue where many visitors indulged in playful escapism was the Mad Hatter’s Tea Room on West Fourth Street [marked on Fig. 1.1]. Taking its inspiration

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<sup>157</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 89.

<sup>158</sup> Dell, *Love*, pp. 22, 33.

from Lewis Carroll's Mad Hatter's Tea Party in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), the tea room existed as an homage to the imaginary world. Greenwich Village writer Anna Alice Chapin remarked on the establishment in 1917:

The entrance alone is a monument to the make-believe capabilities of the Village. Scrawled on the stone wall beside the steps that lead down to the little basement tea room, is an inscription in chalk. It looks like anything but English. But if you held a looking-glass up to it you would find that it is "Down the Rabbit Hole" written backward! [...] The people around you seem only pleasantly mad, not dangerously so. There is a girl with an enchanting scrap of a monkey; there is a youth with a manuscript and a pile of cigarette butts. The great thing here is that they are taking their little play and their little stage with a heavenly seriousness, all of them. You expect somebody to produce a set of flamingos at any moment and start a game of croquet among the tiny tables.<sup>159</sup>

At the Mad Hatter's Tea Room and other such establishments, eccentricity, performance and play-acting were not only accepted but actively encouraged. The Village assumed the role of an urban stage where individual performances of the bizarre could be incorporated into the everyday landscape of the district. Venues like the Mad Hatter acted as vehicles through which the fantastical could be realized and as Chapin acknowledges, there was a mutual unspoken understanding of the rules, being that of 'taking their little play and their little stage with a heavenly seriousness'. Chapin's reference to the tea room as a 'little stage' also accentuates the performativity and everyday theatricality which was promoted and accommodated within the Village, as this 'pleasantly mad' contingent were endowed with the opportunity to make-believe *en masse*.

By replicating a slice of Wonderland in the Village, the proprietor not only prompts imaginative visitors to pretend that they had fallen into a children's storybook,

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<sup>159</sup> Chapin, pp. 233-234.

but also invites comparisons between Greenwich Village and Wonderland. Many visitors to the Village went with the expectation (perhaps in some cases fulfilled), that arriving would be like falling from the real world into a fantasy world. While Chapin equates the Villagers' lucid imaginative powers with childhood innocence, like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* there is also scope for interpreting reports of Greenwich Village in its heyday through a shadier, more hallucinatory lens. Chapin's description of the absurd tea room patrons also emulate the assortment of anthropomorphic characters portrayed in Wonderland. As the area became increasingly popular with urban tourists, or 'slummers', venues like the Mad Hatter were lucrative, but dwindled in popularity among those who considered themselves 'real' Greenwich Village bohemians. As Dell recollects, 'they left these restaurants as fast as they were invaded by the uptown crowds'.<sup>160</sup> Chad Heap reports that Greenwich Village 'offered a spectacle at once strange enough to excite slummers and sufficiently familiar to seem harmless. By early 1917, one Manhattan high-society journal announced that it was now "considered monstrously amusing to dine 'down town' and then 'do' the rounds" in Washington Square'.<sup>161</sup> Visiting slummers acted as an itinerant audience, searching for night-time entertainment and George Chauncey notes that north west of Washington Square, 'Sheridan Square became known for the outlandish theatricality of its establishments'.<sup>162</sup> Hart notes, nevertheless, that 'Bohemian villages have always had posers and fakes, but for some it was a true way of life'.<sup>163</sup> Beginning with the Greenwich Village bohemians, make-believe, playacting and everyday theatricality pervaded the district, however, when what began as a pastime for escapism was compromised by spectacle-seeking slummers, the bohemians took their fun elsewhere.

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<sup>160</sup> Dell, *Love*, p. 297.

<sup>161</sup> Heap, p. 57.

<sup>162</sup> Chauncey, p. 233.

<sup>163</sup> John E. Hart, 'Floyd Dell: Intellectual Vagabond', *Western Humanities Review*, 16.1 (1962), 67-75 (p. 70).

The nightclub ‘Pirate’s Den’ on Christopher Street was owned by the self-styled buccaneering landlord Don Dickerman, a piracy enthusiast and entrepreneur, who routinely dressed in pirate attire and owned a string of themed tea rooms and speakeasies across the Village. N.C. Wyeth, whose paintings included pirates as a recurring subject, described Dickerman in 1926 as ‘a pirate, 6’6” in great coat, cocked hat, heavily belted, bristling with flintlock pistols and a cutlass at his side’.<sup>164</sup> Photographer Jessie Tarbox Beals immortalized him and his establishments in her photograph series which captured Greenwich Village’s notable venues and characters, many of which were later sold as postcards, emphasizing the touristic opportunities of bohemianism and play-acting. In one portrait by Beals [Fig. 1.19.] Dickerman is depicted in full pirate regalia, complete with tricorne hat, hooped earrings, striped shirt and a lethal looking sword, while his stance and gaze directed at the camera suggest defiance. Beals’s photograph exemplifies Dickerman’s dedication to embodying and performing his assumed character, emphasizing the penchant for theatricality which infiltrated the Village as well as the resultant commercial opportunities.

Pirate’s Den was itself a type a theatre, a place where individuals could leave their day-to-day lives at the door and masquerade as swashbuckling pirates for an evening. Awaiting them was a pirate-ship stage complete with a cast of plundering sea-farers ready to imbibe rum and delight in escapism. Chapin comments on the diversions unfolding at Pirate’s Den and sheds further light on the Villagers’ desire to pretend:

All make-believe, you see, only we hate to admit it! The different thing about Greenwich is that there they do admit it, quite a number of them. [...] You know children can make believe, *know* that it is make believe, yet enjoy it all the more

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<sup>164</sup> Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 254; N.C. Wyeth, *The Wyeths: The Letters of N. C. Wyeth, 1901-1945*, ed. by Betsy James Wyeth (Boston: Gambit, 1971), p. 717.

for that. So can the Villagers. Hence, places like—let us say, as an example “The Pirate’s Den”. [...] It is a very real pirate’s den, lighted only by candles. A coffin casts a shadow, and there is a regulation “Jolly Roger,” a black flag ornamented with skull and crossbones. Grim? Surely, but even a healthy-minded child will play at gruesome and ghoulish games once in a while [...]. The pirate who serves you (incidentally he writes poetry and helps to edit a magazine among other things) apologises for the lack of a Stevensonian parrot.<sup>165</sup>

Recreating scenes from both *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, as well as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1883), enabled Villagers to enter the realms of children’s literary fantasy. The ‘make-believe’ establishments to which Chapin alludes are more than just an elaborately constructed façade or stage-set. Chapin infers a childlike motivation behind the costumes and assumed identities. She implies that there is also a genuine delight in the innocence of the pretend, the only strand of truth linking them to reality being that ‘they do admit it’. Similarly, Schechner acknowledges that ‘[i]n “make-believe” performances, the distinction between what’s real and what’s pretended is kept clear. Children playing “doctor” or “dress-up” know that they are pretending’.<sup>166</sup> Chapin confirms that many Village dwellers were very much consumed with the consciously childlike escapism of play-acting and pretending. In 1949 Dutch historian Johan Huizinga referred to play as ‘a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious,” but at the same time absorbing to the player intensely and utterly’.<sup>167</sup> Despite being mindful of the phoney nature of their actions, great importance was also placed on upholding the performance. Although the Villagers readily admit their folly, Chapin later reminds us that ‘if you giggle, as every child knows, you spoil the game’.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Chapin, pp. 230-232.

<sup>166</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 43.

<sup>167</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949; repr. London: Routledge, 2002), p. 13.

<sup>168</sup> Chapin, p. 235.

In acknowledging the ‘pretending, play-acting spirit as a perfectly natural – no, as an inevitable – part of life’ among Bohemians, Greenwich Village’s landscapes and venues are interpreted as a series of stages for make-believe and theatricality.

In his etching *Bandits Cave* (1920) [Fig. 1.20.], Sloan depicts a comparable establishment to Dickerman’s chain of venues and details the scene as ‘[u]ptown thrill seekers during the period of Prohibition are about to venture into a basement ‘tea room’ in Bohemia’.<sup>169</sup> Sloan depicts a number of smartly dressed ‘uptown’ women clustered about the steps, as two gentlemen beckon them down and into the basement where ‘Bandits Cave’ is located. The implication in Sloan’s reference to ‘uptown thrill seekers’ furthers the notion that by the early 1920s, these sorts of make-believe establishments had lost their appeal to Villagers and were reserved for the nightly populace of ‘slummers’. Caroline F. Ware acknowledges the existence of “‘pseudo” tea rooms, where “poets” recited their verses by candlelight and the gullible or curious absorbed “art””.<sup>170</sup> While the childlike pursuit of escapism through playacting among ‘original’ bohemian Villagers was displaced to alternative venues, the popularity of such entertainment among ‘slummers’ brought new players and performers to the district’s urban stage.

With its established penchant for make-believe and the popularity of masquerade and fancy-dress, came the desire, for some, to match inner eccentricities in outward appearance. Reports of unusually attired residents commonly surface in fictional and non-fictional accounts of the Village, and descriptions and photographic evidence survive pertaining to the unconventional and in many cases peculiar ensembles donned. Bizarre fashions were for some a physical embodiment of their bohemian and avant-garde persuasions and for others just a temporary or frivolous foray at a party or masquerade. Among the ‘original’ Villagers, many were inclined towards the avant-garde and one

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<sup>169</sup> Sloan, *Paintings and Prints*, p. 60; cited in Morse, pp. 220-221.

<sup>170</sup> Caroline F. Ware, *Greenwich Village, 1920-1930: A Comment on American Civilization in the Post-War Years* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1963), p. 95.

such conspicuous figure was the German-born Dada artist and poet Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, or simply ‘the Baroness’ who lived in New York between 1913 and 1923.<sup>171</sup> The Baroness routinely utilized her body as a frame for her art, transferring her unique fashion ensembles directly onto the everyday streets of the metropolis, as the city became her gallery, and passers-by her viewers. As described by Margaret Anderson (who co-edited *The Little Review* with Jane Heap), the Baroness wore ‘high white spats with a band of decorative furniture braid around the top. Hanging from her bust were two tea-balls from which the nickel had worn away. On her head was a black velvet tam o’ shanter with a feather and several spoons – long ice-cream-soda spoons’.<sup>172</sup> Though frequently misunderstood during her lifetime, the Baroness is now widely regarded as a Dada pioneer. As early as 1922, Heap recognized her as ‘the first American Dada. [...] When she is dada she is the only one living anywhere who dresses dada, loves dada, lives dada’.<sup>173</sup> By physically embodying her unique art, the Baroness was inseparable from her artistic product as she incorporated Dada into her everyday life, and became a recognizable performer in the Greenwich Village spectacle.

Positioning Dada as a rebellion against established norms, capitalism, the horrors of war, the authorities, and the bourgeois, Linda Lappin notes of the Baroness that ‘[t]he bizarre costumes which were the hallmark of her notoriety in Greenwich Village are viewed today as an early form of performance art, enlivened by astringent wit and inscribed with feminist and anticapitalist ideology’.<sup>174</sup> Dadaism stood as a challenge to the order of society, authority, and tradition, and as Hannah Nailor remarks, existed to ‘shatter previous notions of truth and meaning without attempting to create any truth or

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<sup>171</sup> Alex Goody, ‘Cyborgs, Women, and New York Dada’, *The Space Between: Literature and Culture, 1915-1945*, 3.1 (2007), 79-100 (p. 92).

<sup>172</sup> Margaret Anderson, *My Thirty Years War* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), p. 178; Amelia Jones, *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>173</sup> Jane Heap, ‘Dada’, *Little Review*, Spring 1922, p. 46; Jones, *Irrational Modernism*, p. 5.

<sup>174</sup> Linda Lappin, ‘Dada Queen in the Bad Boys’ Club: Baroness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven’, *Southwest Review*, 89.2-3 (2004), 307-319 (p. 308).

meaning to take their place'.<sup>175</sup> On Dada ideology, Naomi Joy Barker adds that '[t]he Dadaists indulged in iconoclasm, nihilism, and subversion of social norms, challenged rationality with irrationality, order with disorder and tradition with a feverish embracing of new ideas, all in reaction to bourgeois society and anything that represented it, especially academic art that favoured outdated Romantic notions'.<sup>176</sup> Dadaism unfettered artists from the constraints of accepted norms and truths, thus enabling 'performers to use their bodies in a form beyond typical artistic expression [...] ultimately, transcending social constructions of the body'.<sup>177</sup> By physically wearing her art, the Baroness bridged the divide between art and artist, relocating the gallery space and presenting herself as part of the show.

Though there are many conflicting philosophies surrounding the beginnings of Dada, the term is generally accepted to have originated in Zurich in neutral Switzerland during World War One. The founding of the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 by writer, artist and performer Hugo Ball and poet and performer Emmy Hennings provided a platform for artistic and performative exploration, and marked the early stirrings of Dada amongst artists and writers including Tristan Tzara, Richard Huelsenbeck, Marcel Janco, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Jean/Hans Arp.<sup>178</sup> The ideals and attitudes which became collectively identified as 'Dada' were incubated in response to World War One, although as Barker states, '[t]he events of the First World War simply provided the point of focus that became the catalyst in establishing Dada as a movement, drawing together the trends in artistic thought already in existence all over Europe and beyond'.<sup>179</sup> It remains debatable as to whether New York Dada was influenced by the European movement or vice versa, or

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<sup>175</sup> Hannah Nailor, 'Anti-Body: The Body and the Evolution of Dadaism as Performance Art', *Groundings*, 8 (2015), 102-116 (p. 102).

<sup>176</sup> Naomi Joy Barker, 'Parody and Provocation: "Parade" and the Dada Psyche', *RidIM/RCMI Newsletter*, 21.1 (1996), 29-35 (p. 29).

<sup>177</sup> Nailor, p. 102.

<sup>178</sup> Debbie Lewer, 'Dada's Genesis: Zurich', in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. by David Hopkins (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), pp. 21-38 (p. 21).

<sup>179</sup> Barker, p. 29.

whether they emerged separately as ‘simultaneous inventions’ in response to a zeitgeist.<sup>180</sup> David Hopkins notes that ‘much later historiography of Dada [...] largely accepted that the dada spirit in New York had paralleled or even preceded that in Zurich’.<sup>181</sup> Artist Hans Richter (who was associated with Zurich Dada) acknowledged in 1965, for example, that ‘[w]e in Zurich remained unaware until 1917 or 1918 of a development which was taking place, quite independently, in New York. Its origins were different, but its participants were playing essentially the same anti-art tune as we were’.<sup>182</sup> Artists most commonly associated with New York Dada include Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Man Ray, although as Paul B. Franklin observes, the history of Dadaism is largely concerned with male artists and writers, as ‘[i]n this gendered narrative, men’s experiences – whether in the trenches or in the art studio – have taken precedence over those of women’.<sup>183</sup> Lappin states nevertheless that female supporters such as Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, Peggy Guggenheim, Clara Tice, Suzanne Duchamp, Berenice Abbot, and the Baroness, ‘largely promoted, performed, financed, and documented’ Dadaism in New York and Paris.<sup>184</sup> The term ‘Dada’ (French for ‘wooden horse’), therefore came to be applied to a collective set of ideals (which challenged war, the bourgeois, art, order, and convention), and the artists who responded to these ideals by disrupting accepted customs and rules.

The Baroness, hailed as the ‘mother of dada’, was a friend and long-term correspondent of Barnes, who helped in editing her autobiography, which she continued

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<sup>180</sup> Stephen C. Foster, review of Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada: 1915-23* (1994), *Art Journal*, 54.2 (1995), 93-97 (p. 93).

<sup>181</sup> David Hopkins, ‘New York Dada: From End to Beginning’, in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. by Hopkins, pp. 70-89 (p. 73).

<sup>182</sup> Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p. 81.

<sup>183</sup> Paul B. Franklin, ‘Beatrice Wood, Her Dada... and Her Mama’, in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, ed. by Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1998), pp. 104-142 (p. 105).

<sup>184</sup> Lappin, pp. 307-308.

to redraft after the death of the Baroness in 1927.<sup>185</sup> Poetry by the Baroness is an experience more visual than literary, while her body was a living canvas for ‘corporeal art’ and her shifting surroundings acted as a gallery space.<sup>186</sup> Irene Gammel and John Wrighton attest that her apartment was cluttered with ‘art objects’, most of which she had harvested directly from the streets of New York. As a model of avant-garde fashion, select items from this randomly assorted collection of objects would often be suspended from her body, a feature Gammel and Wrighton describe as ‘body poetics’.<sup>187</sup> Gammel notes, furthermore, that ‘like no other artist, the Baroness ultimately consumed herself in and through her art. The performance of herself as the Baroness, as both persona and real woman, left no screen for protection’.<sup>188</sup> In an undated letter to Barnes, the Baroness describes an assemblage she donned on a visit to the French Embassy in Germany in an unsuccessful attempt at gaining a travel visa to go to Paris:

I went to the consulate with a large-wide sugarcoated birthday cake upon my head with fifty flaming candles lit – I felt just so spunky and affluent [*sic*]! In my ear I wore sugar plumes or matchboxes – I forget wich [*sic*]. Also I had put on several stamps as beauty spots on my emerald-painted cheeks and my eyelashes were made of gilded porcupine quills – rustling coquettishly – at the consul – with several ropes of dried figs dangling around my neck to give him a suck once and again – to entrance him. I should have liked to wear gaudy colored rubber boots up to my hips with a ballet skirt of genuine gold paper white [*sic*] lace paper covering it (to match the cake) – but I couldn’t afford that! I guess that inconsistency in my costume is to blame for my failure to please the officials?<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada and Everyday Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>186</sup> Lappin, p. 308.

<sup>187</sup> Irene Gammel and John Wrighton, “‘Arabesque Grotesque’: Toward a Theory of Dada Ecopoetics”, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 20.4 (2013), 1-22 (pp. 1, 4).

<sup>188</sup> Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, p. 15.

<sup>189</sup> Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Baroness Elsa: The Autobiography of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, ed. by Paul Hjartarson and Douglas O. Spettigue (Ottawa: Oberon, 1992), p. 20.

The Baroness takes palpable pleasure in the zaniness of her attire and pleads earnest remorse that she could have done more to impress the embassy workers. She was a one-woman street theatre sensation, bestriding an unclear boundary between the comically bizarre and the artistically serious. Juxtaposed beside the conventional embassy environment (or any environment for that matter), the Baroness transformed herself into a Dada artwork and spectacle for public viewership. Nailor observes that ‘rather than experiencing Dadaism from an objective or subjective standpoint, the Baroness *lived* Dadaism: she wore refuse on her body, walked the streets as a constant performance, and lived her life as an abject Dadaist carnival’.<sup>190</sup> Eliza Jane Reilly also praises the Baroness as an early exponent of ‘body and performance art’, noting, nevertheless, that during her lifetime she was ‘dismissed by many as a pathetic madwoman’.<sup>191</sup> For many years, the Baroness’s unique body of art baffled observers.

In a draft of her autobiography, edited by Barnes, the Baroness begins by establishing herself, nevertheless, as a self-aware ‘character’ of the Village, ‘[w]earing the lip of a burnished coal scuttle for a helmet strapped to her head [...] Christmas tree balls of yellow and red for ear rings, a tea strainer about her neck [...] and over the precision of her breasts a single length of black lace, she would walk the city’.<sup>192</sup> The Baroness cut a striking performative figure, although French artist Georges Hugnet noted her ambivalence to her audience, as ‘like an empress from another planet, her head ornamented with sardine tins, indifferent to the legitimate curiosity of passers-by, the baroness promenaded down the avenues like a wild apparition, liberated from all

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<sup>190</sup> Nailor, p. 106.

<sup>191</sup> Eliza Jane Reilly, ‘Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven’, *Women’s Art Journal*, 18.1 (1997), 26-33 (p. 26).

<sup>192</sup> College Park, University of Maryland Libraries, MS Elsa Von Freytag Loringhoven Papers, Autobiography, series 1, box 1, fol. 1.

constraint'.<sup>193</sup> By collecting and reassigning a function to Manhattan's detritus, she began to physically wear the city. She symbolically became a part of the urban landscape and though she attracted attention, her sartorial choices could also be viewed as a type of camouflage as she deconstructed and reassembled the landscapes and conventions which surrounded her. Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo also trace the urban soundscape which resonates in the Baroness's writing, stating that 'delirious and ragged in its edges and atonal rhythms, the poetry echoes the noise of the metropolis itself'.<sup>194</sup> Alex Goody describes the Baroness as having 'embodied Dada in her performative presence', adding that she 'not only challenged the norms of femininity with her outrageous dress, but flouted the norms of art and literature, even the boundaries of avant-garde practice'.<sup>195</sup> In her daring visual expressions of eccentricity, the Baroness represented the Village avant-garde in the extreme. Even mundane activities like walking her dogs became a piece of theatre worthy of attention, as Manhattan became her stage.

As performative characters projected everyday theatre onto the Greenwich Village streets, The Provincetown Players, a little theatre group which began in 1915 under the leadership of George Cram Cook nurtured talented playwrights and actors, as well as set and costume designers. Named after the seaside town where the group was founded on a break to Cape Cod, Cook's ambition according to Dell was to 'prove that there was more drama in America than was dreamed of on Broadway'.<sup>196</sup> Many of those who had written shows or designed sets and costumes also doubled as performers, and at the opening of Alfred Kreymborg's *Lima Beans* (1916), 'Mina [Loy] held back her first

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<sup>193</sup> Georges Hugnet, 'The Dada Spirit in Painting', trans. by Ralph Manheim, in *Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Robert Motherwell (Paris: Cahiers d'Art, 1932-34; repr. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 123-197 (p. 186); Jones, *Irrational Modernism*, p. 5.

<sup>194</sup> Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo, *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven*, ed. by Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2011), p. 1.

<sup>195</sup> Goody, 'Cyborgs', pp. 83, 93.

<sup>196</sup> Dell, *Love*, p. 31.

line to give the set time to take effect'. The set was designed by artistic duo William and Marguerite Zorach: 'blacks and whites [...] with spots of color supplied by some bowls and ornaments', while Loy designed her own costume: 'a *décolleté* creation [...] served to fascinate the beholders'.<sup>197</sup> Marianne Moore 'who noted what other women wore with great interest' gave a breakdown of Loy's attire: 'gold slippers, a green taffeta dress, a black Florentine mosaic brooch, long gold earrings, and some beautiful English rings'.<sup>198</sup> While the Provincetown Players provided a creative space for 'actual' theatre to be produced and performed in the Village, theatricality transcended theatre walls into the everyday milieu.

For Loy, costume was equally important on stage as it was off and she produced numerous coloured sketches depicting her own fashion designs. Cheryl Black notes that Loy 'designed her own futurist fashions (lampshades for hats, small appliances for earrings) and had come to New York expressly to publish her couture in *Vogue* and other magazines'.<sup>199</sup> As Carolyn Burke adds, '[s]he wrote free verse, designed lampshades, [and] made her own street and stage clothes'.<sup>200</sup> As a designer of both stage costumes and street fashions, Loy did not modify or tone-down her avant-garde designs and drawings for real life use outside the theatre. Each idea was a piece of art to be admired, whether by an audience in a theatre or as spectacle by passers-by in the street. As the London Fashion and Textile Museum's '1920s Jazz Age: Fashion and Photographs' exhibition (2016) suggests, '[w]omen's fashion – which had begun to reflect a more active lifestyle before the war – became a bellwether of the social and cultural changes'.<sup>201</sup> In Loy's

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<sup>197</sup> Alfred Kreymborg, *Troubadour: An Autobiography* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925), pp. 309-310.

<sup>198</sup> Victoria Bazin, *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), p. 99; Marianne Moore, *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, ed. by Bonnie Costello (New York: Knopf, 1997), p. 140.

<sup>199</sup> Black, p. 124.

<sup>200</sup> Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>201</sup> *1920s Jazz Age: Fashion and Photographs* [Exhibition] (London: Fashion and Textile Museum, September 2016 - January 2017; Bath: American Museum in Britain, March - October 2017).

unpublished papers, a rough sketch of ‘women’s fashions’ [Fig. 1.21.] depicts an array of ideas: a short red and white striped dress with cut-out middle, a short blue dress with exposed sides, as well as a long, swathed, toga style garment with blue fanned shoulder pieces resembling wings.<sup>202</sup> For a time she also collaborated with Peggy Guggenheim on a lampshade business featuring Loy’s own unusual creations.<sup>203</sup> Her quirky sense of style informed her ideas; from lamp designs to unique inventions, each held its own intricacy and individuality. Some of Loy’s designs combined fashion with practical use, for example, she made detailed drawings for a bracelet which also doubled as an ink blotter for office workers.<sup>204</sup> A 1918 photo by notable surrealist photographer Man Ray features Loy, head upturned, proudly displaying a large thermometer as an earring, a further example of optimized jewellery.<sup>205</sup> Loy’s designs spanned the theatrical and avant-garde with an innovative twist.

Everyday performance and theatricality pervaded the conceptual stages of Greenwich Village as its streets were traversed by an abundance of ‘characters’. Some Villagers including the pirate-obsessed Don Dickerman and cigarette shop proprietor Ella Breistein, took up whole new personae, while others such as restaurateur and café owner Marie Marchand simply exaggerated existent attributes. As Heap observes, in the 1910s, ‘at least some Villagers chose to exaggerate their racial identities – or even created new ones’. In spite of not actually being Russian, Breistein assumed the persona of ‘Sonia, the Russian ‘Cigarette Girl’, while Marchand, accentuating her mother’s side of her Romanian-Jewish parentage, took on the identity of ‘Romany Marie’. Emphasizing the performative nature of her assumed character, Heap reports that Marchand ‘exchanged the Yiddish of her childhood for a heavier accent and large hoop earrings, [...] employing

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<sup>202</sup> New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS Mina Loy Papers, Drawings, fol. 184.

<sup>203</sup> Barnet, p. 54.

<sup>204</sup> MS Mina Loy Papers, Inventions, series II, box 7, fol. 186.

<sup>205</sup> Susan E. Dunn, ‘Fashion Victims: Mina Loy’s Travesties’, *Stanford Humanities Review*, 7.1 (1999) <<https://web.stanford.edu/group/SHR/7-1/html/dunn.html>> [accessed 22 March 2017].

“colorful trappings, fortune telling, and Gypsy music” to enhance the popularity of her Village tearoom’.<sup>206</sup> Beals’s photographs of Marchand in her tea room [Fig. 1.22.] reveal her dressing of the space in a rustic style, decorated with homely clutter; pots, statues and hung with herbs which set the scene as Marchand, herself in loose, flowing attire awaits visitors perched on a low stool, surrounded by cushions. Patricia Stuelke observes that Beals’s photographic postcards of Greenwich Village bohemia frequently depicted ‘women playfully performing and experimenting with their own self-objectification, identifying with and masquerading as commodities’, and as in the case of Marchand, by performing a character (or accentuating part of her identity), and creating a stage-set space to match, she markets herself and her venue to visitors as an immersive theatrical experience.<sup>207</sup> Sloan also captured the interior of one of Romany Marie’s establishments in his etching *Romany Marye in Christopher Street* (1922) [Fig. 1.23.]. The etching depicts a dark, shadowy tearoom with large open fire, and people huddled about densely packed tables. In the foreground, Sloan depicts himself with his wife, Dolly, and Marie. He later noted that ‘[a]ll Greenwich Villagers know Romany Marye, who has acted the part of hostess, philosopher, and friend in her series of quiet little restaurants for the past thirty-five years. The etching shows her chatting in her deep comfortable voice to Dolly and myself’.<sup>208</sup> In alluding to Romany Marie as having ‘acted the part’, Sloan appears to acknowledge an element of performance in her persona. While for some, such as the Baroness, dressing up and assuming different identities was a part of the theatre and artistry of everyday life, for others, such as Dickerman, Marchand and Breistein, the staging of a new self could also have commercial benefits.

Masquerade was also a popular pastime among Greenwich Village residents and the wider populace alike, as costumes previously reserved for the theatre emerged onto

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<sup>206</sup> Heap, p. 185.

<sup>207</sup> Patricia Stuelke, ‘The Queer Optimism of Jessie Tarbox Beals’ Greenwich Village Postcards’, *Photography and Culture*, 7.3 (2014), 285-302 (p. 286).

<sup>208</sup> Sloan, *Paintings and Prints*, p. 101; cited in Morse p. 309.

the streets and into venues and parties from the late nineteenth century. Michael Lobel notes that long term friends and artistic associates Sloan and Robert Henri had first met at a costume party in 1892.<sup>209</sup> On 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1910, Sloan attended a costume party hosted by his friends William Carman Roberts and Mary Fanton Roberts. In his diary entry for the same day, Sloan provides a rundown of costumes, ‘Dolly got from Mrs. R. a peasant costume. [...] I put on the old fashioned togs that Wilson had loaned me, made a fine false nose and was a great success. [...] Henri [Robert Henri] was funny, so was Glack [William Glackens] as an Irishman. Mrs. Glack [Edith Dimock] very good in a real 1808 dress. Mrs. Shinn [Florence Scovel Shinn] in an old rig, also fine’. Sloan comments on the success of the party and the enjoyment of seeing his friends and contemporaries abandon their everyday clothes and don costumes and personae. Meanwhile, in his diary entry for 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1912, Sloan reveals that he and his wife Dolly had donned fancy dress to the annual ball of Branch One (the socialist party group of which Dolly was secretary): ‘Dolly pretty in German peasant dress. I in false eyes and nose, not so pretty’.<sup>210</sup> Sloan’s foray into the world of costume was, as Helen Farr Sloan commented in 1965, only occasional; in everyday life Sloan ‘believed in dressing neatly and properly. He thought it was affected to wear Bohemian dress, or to pretend to dress like a day laborer’.<sup>211</sup> Sloan’s disapproval of ‘affected’ Bohemian costume accentuates the recognized prominence of pretense, performance, costume and sham among some quarters of the Village, while Sloan preferred to capture the genuine everyday theatricality of the urban scene.

Costume parties had nevertheless become a frequent fixture. When *The Blind Man*, a short-lived Dada magazine, hosted its 1917 ‘Blind Man’s Ball’, the advert

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<sup>209</sup> Lobel, *Drawing on Illustration*, p. 54.

<sup>210</sup> Sloan, ‘John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913’, pp. 32, 432.

<sup>211</sup> John Sloan and Helen Farr Sloan, *John Sloan’s New York Scene: From the Diaries, Notes, and Correspondence, 1906-1913*, ed. by Bruce St. John (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965), p. 399.

described a ‘new-fashioned hop, skip, and jump’ at Webster Hall on Eleventh Street, and stipulated ‘Romantic rags’, warning ‘[t]here is a difference between a tuxedo and a Turk and guests not in costume must sit in bought-and-paid-for boxes’. Boxes were ‘\$10’, whereas for costumed arrivals, tickets were only ‘\$1.50’ advanced or ‘\$2’ on the door. The advert states that ‘[t]he dance will not end till the dawn. The Blind Man must see the sun’.<sup>212</sup> Roger L. Conover emphasizes that one incentive of masquerade was that ‘[t]he costumes required for admission made it possible for anyone who wishes to revel out of character or gender to do so undercover’.<sup>213</sup> As for the Blind Man’s Ball, Andrea Barnet reports that ‘Clara Tice came as a steam radiator, a friend as a hard boiled egg. [Marcel] Duchamp dressed in drag [his alter ego known as Rrose Sélavy], Mina [Loy] came as a cross between a Pierrot and a lampshade’.<sup>214</sup> In transforming the everyday item of a lampshade – likely her own design – into costume, Loy’s body doubles as advertising space, evoking entrepreneurial flair and foretelling her Parisian lampshade shop open between 1926 and 1928.<sup>215</sup> A report by James A. Seaman, moreover, from a 1917 Liberal Club Ball states that women donned ‘filmy transparent things through which one could see easily’, while for men ‘Egyptian costumes are very popular’.<sup>216</sup> Among her photojournalistic scenes, Beals captures an array of costume party attire: a ball at Webster Hall (c. 1916-1920) [Fig. 1.24.] featured a merry group of costumed individuals including a harlequin, a doll, a marching band musician, and the Mad Hatter, as well as multiple costumes from around the world.<sup>217</sup> Beals also portrays an insightful vista of a Webster

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<sup>212</sup> ‘The Blind Man’s Ball’, *The Blind Man*, ed. by Marcel Duchamp and Henri-Pierre Roché, May 1917, p. 2.

<sup>213</sup> Roger L. Conover, ‘Introduction’, in *Mina Loy: The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996; repr. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1997), pp. xi-xx (p. xi).

<sup>214</sup> Barnet, p. 38.

<sup>215</sup> Burke, *Becoming Modern*, pp. 365-366.

<sup>216</sup> New York, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, MS Committee of Fourteen Papers, James A. Seaman (J.A.S.), Report of the Investigator, Liberal Club Ball, Webster Hall, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1917, fol. ‘Special Inspections’, box 31; MS Committee of Fourteen Papers, ‘The Greenwich Village Dances at Webster Hall’, 1917, fol. ‘Reports on Cabarets’, box 31; cited in Heap, p. 65.

<sup>217</sup> MS Photographs of Jessie Tarbox Beals, 1896-1941, PC 60, series II: Professional Life, box 3, fol. 66, items 15 and 16.

Hall ball (c. 1915) [Fig. 1.25.], and as dancers parade across the floor, costumed performers line the stage in front of a large jazz band, while partygoers in a range of attire line the auditorium and peer from ornate balconies. Contemporary accounts, as well as Beals's photographic journal elucidate how the prevalence of costume and masquerade corresponded with the Village's penchant for escapism through pretence, performance, and mythmaking, thus enabling performance and theatrical attire to further infiltrate everyday life.

The reputation of the Village as a nucleus of liberal thinking and behaviour attracted many different groups, as well as visiting outsiders who came to view the spectacle. Heap comments on the homosexual community in the Village, noting that 'Bohemia's exhibition of free love extended to displays of same-sex desire and affection, providing yet another attraction for curious interlopers'.<sup>218</sup> Chauncey views the Village as 'a liminal space where visitors were encouraged to disregard some of the social injunctions that normally constrained their behaviour, where they could observe and vicariously experience behavior that in other settings – particularly their own neighborhoods – they might consider objectionable enough to suppress'.<sup>219</sup> Chauncey cites Seaman's sensationalized account of the attire of homosexual men in the Village (c. 1917), observing that many 'wear expensive gowns, employ rouge [,] use wigs [,] and in short make up an appearance which looks for everything like a young lady'. Chauncey also quotes Seaman's response to the homosexual presence at the 'Saraband of Apes Dance' at Webster Hall in 1917, noting 'the usual crowd of homosexualists some dressed in female attire, others in more or less oriental costumes', while, following the 1918 Greenwich Village Carnival, he remarks on 'the usual crowd who go expecting to find

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<sup>218</sup> Heap, p. 65.

<sup>219</sup> Chauncey, p. 236.

this type [homosexuals] there'.<sup>220</sup> Accounts from the time often homogenize homosexuals in sweeping stereotypes, and in doing this, costume plays a role in overtly identifying 'types' under the category of 'homosexual', an otherwise ostensibly concealed aspect of human nature. Chauncey attests that 'the presence of flamboyant gay men' at events was so appealing to attendees that organizers sometimes incorporated them into the 'pageants they staged'.<sup>221</sup> For example at the Liberal Club's Golden Ball of Isis in February, 1917, Horace Mann was featured as the slave infatuated with Isis, the added irony lying in Mann's widely acknowledged homosexuality.<sup>222</sup> Though contemporaneous reports frequently use derogatory language and resort to stereotypes in alluding to the homosexual contingent of Greenwich Village, it is also clear that the possibility of encountering 'others' held an innate fascination for many, thereby proliferating notions of the Village as a site of spectacle and everyday theatricality.

Costume, masquerade and performance also play an important rôle in the first story of Dell's *Love in Greenwich Village* collection, entitled 'The Kitten and the Masterpiece', first published in *The Century Magazine* in February 1924.<sup>223</sup> Paul Sherwood, a dedicated novelist finally saves enough money, carefully budgeted, to move to the Village and become a full-time writer. His weekly income being just 'nine dollars and sixty-one cents', Paul instigates a work schedule, and is wary of being drawn into unplanned expenses or Village amusements. Having worked 'steadily from June to November', and being 'six dollars and thirty cents ahead in his finances', Paul plans an evening of entertainment in reward, and finding no George Bernard Shaw play on that evening, he goes in search of diversion. Like a scene change, Dell cuts to the following

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<sup>220</sup> MS Committee of Fourteen Papers, James A. Seaman (J.A.S.), Report of the Investigator, fol. 'Greenwich Village Affairs', box 31; fol. Report on the Saraband of Apes Dance, Webster Hall, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1917, box 31; fol. Report on the Greenwich Village Carnival, Webster Hall, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1917, box 31; cited in Chauncey, pp. 236, 431.

<sup>221</sup> Chauncey, p. 236.

<sup>222</sup> MS Committee of Fourteen Papers, James A. Seaman (J.A.S.), Report of Investigation, The Liberal Club Ball, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1917, box 31; cited in Chauncey pp. 236-237.

<sup>223</sup> Hart, *Floyd Dell*, p. 117.

noon as Paul ‘tramped through the snowy streets of Greenwich Village in a gaudy turban and an overcoat which did not conceal the fact that his legs were bare. Underneath the overcoat was a florid masquerade costume patched up for him out of scraps of colored cloth by a girl he had never seen before last night’. After collecting his only suit of clothes from the unknown girl’s studio, ‘[s]he was too sleepy to notice that he still had on his masquerade costume under his overcoat’, Paul ‘walked home, in his bare legs, with his clothes over his arms’. Having fallen victim to the lures of the Greenwich Village masquerade party, Paul gets home to find that all the money carefully saved for the following week has been spent except for twenty cents. Guiltily, Paul recalls that the girl had fashioned ‘an artistic costume without any pockets, [and] he had wondered what to do with his money; and she had given him a safety-pin with which to pin his bills inside the folds of his robe. “You can keep your loose change in your turban,” she had said’. Paul reflects on the masquerade ball as each hour becoming ‘more drab, more dull, more pathetic in its rowdy efforts at gayety’, and how he had paid for a ticket, punch ingredients, flapjacks, coffee and a taxi with a girl who ‘had redeemed the occasion for him’.<sup>224</sup> In this instance, Paul is unable to evade the influence of Village pastimes and the penchant for theatricality among its residents, as he is inadvertently drawn into the frivolous pursuits of costume and masquerade, ultimately neglecting the security of his meticulous weekly budget.

Similarly, Dell’s one act comic play *The Angel Intrudes* features the lures of the Village and masquerade. First performed by The Provincetown Players in 1917, the opening scene features a guardian angel ‘with shining garments and great white wings’, who has just arrived in Washington Square from heaven, startling a nearby ‘sleepy policeman’. The policeman, assuming he is a drunken Village reveller, cites an old anti-mask law from 1845 and retorts; ‘[d]on’t you know it’s agen [*sic*] the law of New York to

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<sup>224</sup> Dell, *Love*, pp. 54-55.

parade the streets in a masquerade costume?’ Upon which, informing the policeman that he is in Greenwich Village on business as the guardian angel of Jimmy Pendleton, the stunned policeman watches as ‘it spreads its wings and soars to the top of Washington Arch. Pausing there a moment, it soars again in the air, and is seen wafting its way over the neighbouring housetops to the northeast’.<sup>225</sup> Upon arriving at Jimmy’s studio in Washington Square Mews, the angel intrudes on a meeting between Pendleton and his lover Annabelle (a New York acting debut by Edna St Vincent Millay).<sup>226</sup> The angel and Annabelle quickly fall in love, and the angel decides he’d prefer to stay on earth: ‘[t]he fact is, I know nothing but hymns. And I’m tired of them. That was one reason why I left heaven. And this robe. . . . (*He descends to the floor, viewing his garment with disapproval.*) Have you an extra suit of clothes you could lend me?’ Jimmy hands the angel his ‘new costume’, so he can masquerade as an ordinary Villager: ‘[t]hough I have become a man, I do not without some regret put on the dull garb of mortality’.<sup>227</sup> Through the comic tone of *The Angel Intrudes*, Dell explores issues of identity and masquerade, as an angel, tired of the monotony of heaven, falls for the temptations of love in Greenwich Village. Dell inverts the notion of masquerade, as after first being mistaken as a costumed partygoer, the angel dons his real costume; that of the everyday man, ultimately dressing to correspond with his self-identity and desire to be human.

On the subject of costume and self-identity, Anne Hollander astutely observes that ‘[c]lothes do seem to be like costumes, ways of dressing selves in roles for a show, and sometimes they are. [...] Clothes cannot be altogether dramatic *or* theatrical because people are not always acting or performing, even though they are always appearing. It is the inner theater that is costumed by the choice in clothes, and this is not always under

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<sup>225</sup> Dell, ‘The Angel Intrudes’, in *King Arthur’s Socks and Other Village Plays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), pp. 45-46.

<sup>226</sup> Robert Károly Sarlós, *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), p. 84.

<sup>227</sup> Dell, ‘The Angel Intrudes’, in *King Arthur’s Socks*, pp. 54, 58.

conscious management'.<sup>228</sup> Barnes, nevertheless, stringently managed her image. She maintained an intentional aura of mystery surrounding the realities of her life and her persona, projecting a fictionalized 'character' for public consumption, while enveloping her true 'self' in secrecy and masquerade. As reported by Daniela Caselli, in a letter to St James Press, Barnes stated 'I never make personal statements about myself or others ... much to the annoyance of the thesis writer, and so on'.<sup>229</sup> Barnes deterred reporters and biographers, who, particularly in her later life made requests for information, and James B Scott, who published the first monograph of critical study on Barnes's work in 1976, received direct feedback from Barnes herself. Scott later wrote of his difficulties in meeting her high standards as '[b]ack and forth the manuscript went through the mails, ricocheting off the folding card table – work table in Patchin Place and into my hands for another look, another attempt to describe her writings without “reading into” them'. On failing to meet her exacting demands, Barnes wrote to Scott's publishers and tried to have the publication stopped; '[s]he did not want anyone writing her “biography” and that was that. She knew, of course, that I had written a book of criticism with all biographical details rigidly suppressed'.<sup>230</sup> Through her journalism and other published works, Barnes carefully curated her own persona, alluding to biographical details, but ultimately relinquishing little about her true self. It was the outline of her projected character, of which Barnes was in control, that she did not want marred by biographers.

Portraits of Barnes in the 1910s and 1920s capture her uniquely fashioned, but distinguished attire. She had a honed style, costuming herself frequently in headwear: a trilby, a gleaming turban, a cloche hat, a beret, a cape, as well as a low crown top hat worn at a jaunty angle. Caselli envisions Barnes's 'figure, impressively clad in a black

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<sup>228</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 451.

<sup>229</sup> Daniela Caselli, *Improper Modernism: Djuna Barnes's Bewildering Corpus* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>230</sup> James B. Scott, 'Reminiscences', in *Silence and Power*, ed. by Broe (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1991), p. 342.

cape, [which] keeps gliding down Parisian rues and New York alleys alike'.<sup>231</sup> Her image is most frequently captured from the side profile, emphasizing her angular but delicate features. Barnes's apparel is equally singular; in a portrait in Paris (c. 1920-21) [Fig. 1.26.], she wears a polka-dot ascot style tie, white stud earrings and a downwards pointing cloche hat concealing all but a small glimpse of hair. Photographed by her onetime roommate, notable photographer Berenice Abbot (c. 1925-6) [Fig. 1.27.], Barnes dons a white shirt with collar up, tweed jacket, large overcoat swathed about her shoulders, and a draped turban. In one of the few portraits (c. 1920s) [Fig. 1.28.] where Barnes appears hatless, she poses with her black shirt undone at the top, a white dress scarf about her neck, and her cropped hair swept back androgynously. On the reverse side of the photograph the enigmatic inscription reads: 'I can operate in the dark – bodies are phosphorescent'.<sup>232</sup> Here Barnes's playful and self-conscious esotericism prompts fruitless attempts to decode her hidden meaning, but this is intentional.

Her appearance in portraits is heavily stylized and typically in opposition to convention, both in terms of eccentricity and in frequently subverting gendered dress codes. Justin D. Edwards remarks on Barnes's appropriation of a male persona in embodying the character of 'Reginald Delancy' in her initially unattributed illustrated essay 'You can Tango – A Little – At Arcadia Dance Hall' (1913). Edwards notes that Barnes exhibits how 'genders can be performed and acted out, just as her use of the masculine form of urban travel narrative illustrates the performativity of language, enabling Barnes to textually create various identities through her textual production'.<sup>233</sup> Accentuating the theme of pretence under the guise of Delancey, which Barnes attests 'really isn't his name', the gentleman dons a 'quiet, Balkan cravat and a harmless-looking

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<sup>231</sup> Caselli, "Elementary, my dear Djuna": Unreadable Simplicity in Barnes's "Creatures in an Alphabet", *Critical Survey*, 13.3 (2001), 89-112 (p. 89).

<sup>232</sup> College Park, University of Maryland Libraries, MS Djuna Barnes Papers, series 7, box 2, fol. 1, item 1.90; box 2, fol. 1, item 1.48.

<sup>233</sup> Justin D. Edwards, "Why Go Abroad?" Djuna Barnes and the Urban Travel Narrative', *Journal of Urban History*, 29.1 (2002), 6-24 (p. 11).

suit [...] armed only with a silver-handled stick’, an ensemble resembling Barnes’s own urbane attire in numerous portraits.<sup>234</sup> Edwards adds that ‘Barnes not only focused on questions of identity posed by class or racial difference, but she also inquired into gendered subject positions by cross-dressing to enter various gendered spaces in appropriate disguises’.<sup>235</sup> Barnes performed and proliferated multiple versions of ‘herself’, transcending gender boundaries through her writing and public image, thereby deflecting attention from real biographical detail.

By formulating a distinctive look, Barnes embraces an artistic persona, but also detaches her underlying selfhood from the image. On Barnes’s most distinguishing item of clothing, a notorious black opera cape, originally owned by Peggy Guggenheim, critic Lucy Le-Guilcher considers that it signified ‘the need to cover up; to hide what is beneath and erase any individuality, enabling both Barnes and her work to avoid – or dodge – categorisation’.<sup>236</sup> Caselli also notes the black cape as ‘the sign of textual mystery displaced onto the author’.<sup>237</sup> Margot Norris notes that ‘descriptions of Barnes in many modern memoirs consistently stress body parts and accoutrements that fetishize her (remarkable legs, sharply tilted nose, black cape, cloches, turbans, veils, canes, make-up of outlandish blue, purple, and green) and thereby symptomize some cut, some gap, some violation, some insufficiency that left her persona fragmented and incomplete’.<sup>238</sup> Barnes’s own cryptic clues and attempts to deter the probing attention of reporters only served to propel her mythic shroud and seemingly fragmented persona. Her endless

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<sup>234</sup> Djuna Barnes, ‘You Can Tango – A Little – At Arcadia Dance Hall’, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 29 June 1913, p. 22.

<sup>235</sup> Edwards, “‘Why Go Abroad?’”, p. 7.

<sup>236</sup> Astrid M. Fellner, “‘body for body’: The Repulsive and Eroticized Bodies of Djuna Barnes”, in *The Embodiment of American Culture*, ed. by Heinz Tschachler, Maureen Devine and Michael Draxlbauer (New Brunswick; London: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, 2003), pp. 141-154 (p. 141); Lucy Le-Guilcher, ‘A Fashionable Pair: Djuna Barnes and Muriel Spark’, *Women: A Cultural Review*, 18.3 (2007), 354-357 (p. 354).

<sup>237</sup> Caselli, “‘Elementary, my dear Djuna’”, p. 89.

<sup>238</sup> Margot Norris, ‘Doing Djuna Justice: The Challenges of the Barnes Biography’, *Studies in the Novel*, 28.4 (1996), 581-589 (p. 582).

contradictions make her true character difficult to capture, but this was knowingly her objective.

In an interview for *Pearson's Magazine* (1919), Bruno attempts to capture the 'real Djuna', although contradictions inherent in Barnes's projected persona are difficult to overcome. Bruno questions Barnes on being 'so dreadfully morbid' to which she responds: '[i]s not everything morbid? I mean the life of people stripped of their masks. Where are the relieving features?' In her reference to unmasking and exposing morbidity, Barnes presents herself as a realist; holding a mirror to the harsher but authentic truth. Barnes's claim of realism is nevertheless short-lived, as the notion is contradicted within the article itself. The image supplied to accompany the article is a 'self portrait' [Fig. 1.29.] by Barnes in her own recognisable black and white inked style. Bruno's disclaimer, however, exposes her depiction as inaccurate, compelling him to produce his own portrait of her:

You have never met Djuna. The picture reproduced on this page is a self-portrait. She insists that it looks like her real self. I think it contemptibly bad. Not a shadow of likeness. There isn't a bit of that slovenly doggedness in the real Djuna.

Red cheeks. Auburn hair. Gray eyes, ever sparkling with delight and mischief. Fantastic earrings in her ears, picturesquely dressed, ever ready to live and to be merry: that's the real Djuna as she walks down Fifth Avenue, or sips her black coffee, a cigarette in hand, in the Cafe Lafayette.

Her morbidity is not a pose. It is as sincere as she is herself.<sup>239</sup>

Presenting multiple juxtaposing portraits of Barnes within the same article – an interview where she contrarily defends her morbidity, a self portrait which Bruno attests does not

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<sup>239</sup> Guido Bruno, 'Fleurs Du Mal à la Mode de New York – An Interview with Djuna Barnes by Guido Bruno', *Pearson's Magazine*, December 1919, pp. 387-388.

capture her, and Bruno's own written portrayal – serves to further emphasize the incongruities in Barnes's reflected character. Bruno's rebuttal of Barnes's self-portrait seems to be aesthetic, although he also attests to the 'real Djuna's' absence of 'slovenly doggedness' which he must interpret as apparent in her picture.

Though Barnes's self-portrait is vague in terms of likeness, the real crux here is that the image is perhaps a manifestation of her essential sense of self, a notion which Bruno dismisses. As Caselli observes, '[p]aradoxically, for Bruno her authentic self is the one produced by his words rather than her pen, refusing Barnes the space to make an artistic intervention'.<sup>240</sup> Bruno's accompanying description which depicts Barnes as 'picturesquely dressed' with '[f]antastic earrings' certainly adds vibrancy, dimension and colour to the overall portrait, but it does not bring authenticity. The use of the term 'picturesque' is significant too, as Carrie Tirado Bramen has shown that it came into frequent use during this era, transforming the everyday marvels of modernity into a 'whole wondrous spectacle'.<sup>241</sup> This seems to be the fundamental intention of the piece; to present Barnes as a spectacular but contradictory facet of modernity. The tone of the article is contrived and there is an overriding sense of questionable sincerity. Caselli interprets the article as an early manifestation of a wider critical issue: 'when Barnes speaks she cannot be believed'.<sup>242</sup> In reality though, the issue here is that neither Barnes nor Bruno can be believed. Rather than unmasking Barnes, they further mask her. By ostensibly decrypting her character, in reality Bruno simply adds layers to the mystery. The three diverging portraits are presented as clues, but when pieced together they reveal little. Bruno concludes the article by teasing; '[s]he is only one of many: a new school sprung up during the years of the war. Followers of the decadents of France and of

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<sup>240</sup> Caselli, *Improper Modernism*, p. 8.

<sup>241</sup> Bramen, 'The Urban Picturesque', p. 445.

<sup>242</sup> Caselli, *Improper Modernism*, p. 7.

England's famous 1890s, in vigorous, ambitious America'.<sup>243</sup> Collaboratively Barnes and Bruno weave a web of intrigue, tantalizing the magazine's readers, in order to sell books and market Greenwich Village bohemia to outsiders, whilst keeping the allusive 'real Djuna' concealed. Edwards observes, moreover, Barnes's performative ability in shifting persona for her articles, acknowledging that 'she recognizes the performative nature of identity through a direct challenge to the stable boundaries of the self, whereby the traveller can adopt various gendered guises amid the drama of the city'.<sup>244</sup> While Barnes's 'self' is difficult to isolate through her writing, papers, interviews and portraits, she simultaneously projects a series of characters evidencing the fluidity and performativity of her identity, while demonstrating the pervasiveness of everyday theatricality in Greenwich Village.

From eccentrically attired writers and artists to consciously bohemian café and shop proprietors, Greenwich Village provided the conceptual stage for a distinctive cast of characters to indulge in make-believe, and for impromptu performance and everyday theatricality to take place. While many Village establishments catered for play-acting, costume also became an enabler for escapism, as well as helping to shape individual identities. With its unique scenery and idiosyncratic residents, whether genuinely bohemian or not, it is unsurprising that Greenwich Village of the early twentieth century began to draw a fascinated audience, constituting the final feature of my theatrical analogy.

### III. AN AUDIENCE TO THE SPECTACLE: 'SEEING NEW YORK'

Sloan's etching *Seeing New York* for his 1917 [Fig. 1.30.] New Year's card gently satirizes the popularity of sight-seeing tour busses which guided visitors through less

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<sup>243</sup> Bruno, 'Fleurs', p. 388.

<sup>244</sup> Edwards, "'Why Go Abroad?'" , p. 11.

wealthy areas of the city. He depicts live poultry in the back of a cart and records in his diary on 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1909 that they were ‘cackling and gazing at the city’ and later described the piece as ‘out-of-towners going down to be koshered’.<sup>245</sup> Allen notes that ‘Sloan makes a visual pun on the rubberneck bus and its load of gawking rubbernecker’.<sup>246</sup> Combined with the marketing of the Village by some bohemian residents, as a spectacle to be seen and experienced, as well as the willingness of visiting slummers to view and consume the district, there was an evident demand for impromptu entertainment and everyday theatre. Many incidents in Sloan’s diaries affirm Richard Schechner’s theory of ‘eruptions’ which he regards as “‘natural” theater’ in urban settings; when ‘[a]n accident happens [...] a crowd gathers to see what’s going on’.<sup>247</sup> Many passers-by were a ready and eager audience to any spectacle, and Sloan’s diaries cite endless incidents of street entertainment, including fires, fights and accidents, as having drawn a crowd. For instance, on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1906, he writes: ‘[s]aw a bill poster at work on his ladder with a gaping crowd. Brilliant, tragic dramatic color of bills and sunlight - a very interesting thing’. Later, on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1908, Sloan reports a tussle between his neighbour Mr. Kruse, a shopkeeper, and a young boy who had been playing on the steps. Sloan reports that the boy was on the pavement and ‘a curious crowd had gathered ‘round him to whom he was bellowing his grievances. [...] An old gentleman in the crowd wanted to fight if I was willing, but as it depended upon my hitting the boy and as the crowd was entirely on his side against Mr. K. and myself, I declined. [...] A crowd is an amazingly hard thing to explain one’s case to’. Meanwhile on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1908, Sloan records that he ‘[s]aw the flashes and the reports of a pistol, 6th Ave. and 28th St. A man had shot another. The crowd was terrific in 10 seconds’.<sup>248</sup> It was the infinite

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<sup>245</sup> Sloan, ‘John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913’, p. 356; John Sloan, *John Sloan* (New York: American Artists Group, 1945); cited in Morse, p. 214.

<sup>246</sup> Allen, *The City in Slang*, p. 83.

<sup>247</sup> Schechner, *Performance Theory*, p. 176.

<sup>248</sup> ‘John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913’, pp. 31, 226, 280.

variety of the city and its people which created countless spectatorship opportunities and drew Sloan, along with many others, quickly into crowds as witnesses to impromptu everyday dramas. On crowds in public spaces, Schechner notes, moreover that ‘in the case of an argument or, at a much slower pace, the construction of a building watched by sidewalk superintendents, it is the unfolding of an event which can be measured against a predictable script [...] that gathers and holds people. Totally unmanageable occurrences – a falling wall, sudden gunfire – scatters people; only after the wall has fallen or when the shooting stops does the crowd gather to make the theater’.<sup>249</sup> As a prolific watcher of the metropolis, it was these everyday incidents from which Sloan drew inspiration taken directly from real city sights, while simultaneously he watched the watchers, recording when crowds amassed to take in the spectacle. Though some made special expeditions to areas such as Greenwich Village, Harlem and the Lower East Side to find new and enticing spectatorship opportunities, there was everyday theatre all around for those who cared to see it.

Barnes catered for a spectacle-seeking public in her New York proto-‘gonzo’ journalism, sustaining her own self-mythologized commercial persona for the benefit of her audience of readers. Although the term ‘gonzo journalism’ did not come into use until the 1970s with the work of Hunter S. Thompson, the dramatic and sensationalized style of writing in newspapers, namely ‘new journalism’ (a term coined in 1880s Britain, and popularized by Tom Wolfe in the 1970s), arose during the late nineteenth century.<sup>250</sup> ‘Gonzo journalism’ places the first-person writer as the central protagonist to the piece, and in a candid, lively and embellished style, they present their perspective. As an early practitioner of this style of journalism, Barnes would seemingly undergo anything as a

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<sup>249</sup> Schechner, *Performance Theory*, p. 177.

<sup>250</sup> Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, ed. by Edward Warren Johnson (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 161, 172; Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), pp. 36-37.

stunt for her articles, often in overt displays of her own daring. In writing, Barnes is her own self-styled character, relaying her sensational experiences in vivid detail, and as Alex Goody remarks, ‘Barnes produced herself as a spectacle in her stunt-journalism articles’.<sup>251</sup> Rebecca Loncraine also observes that ‘[s]tunt journalism reveals the extent to which women journalists who wanted to work outside the women’s pages found that they had to use their bodies, performance and their own experiences as a means of getting a story’.<sup>252</sup> Performance became a key element of Barnes’s journalistic exploits, as not only did she engage her readership as an audience to her feats of bravery, but she often reports her stunts as having attracted a crowd of passing spectators.

In her 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1914 article entitled ‘My Adventures Being Rescued’ for the *New York World Magazine*, Barnes gains first-hand experience of the courageousness of the fire service. As she ascends to the rooftops on Sixty-Eighth street, Barnes becomes part of the urban spectacle for the benefit of an impromptu audience, as well as the delight of her readers. She narrates the tribulations of her visit to the Sixty-Seventh Street School for Recruits, whereupon simulating her entrapment in a burning building, she is repeatedly ‘rescued’ by various different methods. This vertigo-inducing stunt, intended for the pleasure of the *New York World Magazine* readers, also garnered attention from nearby spectators which Barnes alludes to as ‘the free-amusement-loving public’. She describes the ‘formidable yet kindly faces’ of the recruits stating that ‘these were my stage settings and surroundings’. The use of theatrical terminology is apt as Barnes describes how the scene unfolded and the audience gathered:

I reached across the crimson sill and swung against the sky some hundred feet or so above the city pavement.

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<sup>251</sup> Alex Goody, ‘Spectacle, Technology and Performing Bodies’, p. 207.

<sup>252</sup> Rebecca Loncraine, ‘Voix-de-Ville: Djuna Barnes’s Stunt Journalism, Harry Houdini and the Birth of Cinema’, *Women: A Cultural Review*, 19.2 (2008), 156-171 (p. 158).

Out on the other side of the wall the world had stopped to look on. An auto slowed down. A flock of school children and a couple of “white wings” all stood with heads upturned skyward. A man with a screaming white apron tied about a conscienceless girth, who had been cutting perishable merchandise, grinned in the glare of the light shining and dancing upon his cleaver. A drowsy expectancy lay along Sixty-Eighth Street and touched the spectators with a sort of awesome wonder.

I was a ‘movie,’ flashing transient pictures upon a receptive sky.<sup>253</sup>

Barnes’s rescue before a crowd of passing onlookers highlights New Yorkers’ desire for entertainment and spectacle by the early twentieth century, which, coupled with what Rebecca Zurier terms as a new ‘culture of looking’, coincided with the availability of impromptu and everyday theatricality, as the modern city accommodated numerous conceptual and incidental stages.<sup>254</sup> Photographs are used to depict the scene, including one of Barnes tentatively standing atop the roof of a building in a long black coat, her arms outstretched [Fig. 1.31.], and a second which sees her dangling from a rope with the city below [Fig. 1.32.].<sup>255</sup> Goody notes that the photographs ‘emphasise the display and objectification of her embodied self’, while Loncraine states that ‘[h]er body is put on display as protagonist, subject and illustration’.<sup>256</sup> In articulating the performative spectacle of her body, commoditized for a sensation-seeking journalistic audience, Barnes is aligned with the objectified figure, a ‘woman-turning-vase’, depicted in ‘Seen From the “L”’, as in lieu of a window frame, the page is her stage.<sup>257</sup>

According to Barnes’s account, moreover, it does not take long for a crowd to amass, peering from windows and flocking on the street to exploit the amusing diversion.

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<sup>253</sup> Barnes, ‘My Adventures Being Rescued’, in *Barnes’s New York*, pp. 185-189 (pp. 186-188).

<sup>254</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, p. 3.

<sup>255</sup> MS Djuna Barnes Papers, series 7, box 1, items 1.34-1.35.

<sup>256</sup> Goody, ‘Spectacle, Technology and Performing Bodies’, pp. 207-208; Loncraine, p. 158.

<sup>257</sup> Hardie, p. 128.

Barnes relays the tale of an apparent sea of eyes, unashamedly watching the theatrical spectacle from ‘every window’. The emphatic concentration of eyes from her spectators also serves to raise the tension, and finally, as cars slow, children stop and ‘white wings’ (street cleaners), neglect their duties, Barnes swings out across the pavement. The upturned faces lining the street watch in amazement as the sight ‘touched the spectators with a sort of awesome wonder’. This type of spectacle reserved for movies or the circus has here extended out into the street, as Barnes’s trapeze-act stuns onlookers. The focus here on the reactions of spectators is a telling evocation of the era’s entertainment zeitgeist. Barnes’s comparison of herself to ‘a “movie,” flashing transient pictures upon a receptive sky’, implies the cinematic vista she projected in the eyes of viewers at that moment.<sup>258</sup> Goody also states that ‘[t]his reference to cinema locates Barnes’s stunt journalism fully within the media forms of Modern America’, while Loncraine notes that ‘Barnes is, like the film actor, reliant on the mechanisms of the camera and editor for her representation’.<sup>259</sup> By actualizing a movie scene, Barnes accentuates the theatricality and unreality of the city, as its buildings and streets form the stage and auditorium for her performative feats.

With the increasing fame of Greenwich Village which was intensified by sensationalized accounts from Villagers and the tantalizing web of mysticism surrounding the district, came a constant stream of upper- and middle-class ‘slummers’ and urban tourists looking to have their expectations of bohemia fulfilled during their visit. The rise in slumming gave some Villagers a new occupation as they entertained visitors and performed as bohemian stereotypes for passing onlookers. George Chauncey states that ‘[v]illagers complained that their less scrupulous compatriots had begun to cater to the tourist trade, decking themselves out in the costumes visitors expected of bohemians,

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<sup>258</sup> Barnes, ‘My Adventures’, in *Barnes’s New York*, pp. 186-188.

<sup>259</sup> Goody, ‘Spectacle, Technology and Performing Bodies’, p. 207; Loncraine, p. 169.

selling their verse and etchings to the unsophisticated, and offering tours of a fabricated “Bohemia” to the gullible’.<sup>260</sup> With the heightened curiosity from outsiders, came the arrival of what Dell terms as the ‘professional “Villager”’: pretenders and caricatures who performed their role of bohemians for the entertainment of visiting slummers’.<sup>261</sup> Many Villagers found that popularity had led to a change in atmosphere and an invasion of privacy, and Gorham Munson estimates that for Dell the ‘real’ bohemian era had ended by 1924. In the earlier ‘Prefatory Note’ to *King Arthur’s Socks and Other Village Plays* (1922), Dell comments that the plays are ‘souvenirs of an intellectual play-time which, being dead, deserves some not-too-solemn memorial’.<sup>262</sup> Nina Miller adds that ‘Dell’s history of the true Village presents itself as capturing and crystallizing the (always-already) disappearing bohemia and as codifying its values’.<sup>263</sup> While for some Village bohemians the era continued longer, there was certainly a view that after World War One, the Village and ‘the culture it represented appeared to have become more commercialized’.<sup>264</sup> Of the new Villager, Dell speculates that ‘perhaps they had a healthy insensitiveness to all this uglification and pretense’.<sup>265</sup> Caroline F. Ware also makes reference to an upsurge in the Village’s cohort of ‘pseudo-bohemians’ by the 1930s.<sup>266</sup> As the Village became popular with tourists, characters which Dell labels as ‘professional Villager[s]’ emerged; profiteers characteristically dressed to emulate humble bohemian writers, artists or eccentrics.<sup>267</sup> Commercialization for some led to a general predisposition towards upholding the pretence, not only for the appreciation of the visiting audience, but also seemingly for the benefit of each other.

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<sup>260</sup> Chauncey, p. 233.

<sup>261</sup> Dell, *Love*, p. 300.

<sup>262</sup> Gorham Munson, *The Awakening of the Twenties: A Memoir-History of a Literary Period* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), p. 77; Dell, *King Arthur’s Socks*, p. 7.

<sup>263</sup> Miller, p. 20.

<sup>264</sup> Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, ‘Greenwich Village’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. by Brooker and Thacker, pp. 439-445 (p. 443).

<sup>265</sup> Dell, *Love*, p. 320.

<sup>266</sup> Ware, pp. 237, 252.

<sup>267</sup> Dell, *Love*, p. 297.

In a diary entry from 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1906, Sloan reports that his friend, painter Eugene Ullman, when particularly short of money had been hired to stand in store windows, ‘acting as a tramp drawing crude pictures’.<sup>268</sup> This demonstrates that as early as 1906 there was a conscious drive towards commercializing the bohemian ‘character’, in this instance intended to accumulate an audience of potential consumers as the shop window became a stage. Heap also notes that the attraction of outsiders to the bohemian lifestyle became so lucrative that prostitutes began to disguise themselves as everyday Village bohemians and try to solicit unsuspecting customers.<sup>269</sup> A September 1919 report from the Black Parrot club at 133 Washington Place attests that ‘[s]ome of the women, after dancing were sitting on the tables, smok[ing] cigarettes and act[ing] as they would be real Bohemians [...] but in fact they appeared to be professional prostitutes’.<sup>270</sup> As well as an innocent pastime, costume and performance could also be used as a cover for more illicit or duplicitous pursuits. In Dell’s final chapter of *Love in Greenwich Village*, ‘Epilogue: The Fall of Greenwich Village’, he sheds further light on the activity of ‘slumming’ as a pastime of the bourgeois, and the impact on the Village as he sees it. On the ‘professional Villager’, Dell reflects that ‘the imitation, like a malicious caricature, was too close for comfort; and the foundations of a future settled respectability may have been laid in the heart of many a careless inhabitant of the Village by seeing just some such mawkish counterfeit, and having to ask himself, “Do I really seem like that?”’ When the mirror, albeit distorted, was reflected back on those who deemed themselves ‘original’ or ‘genuine’ Villagers, as Dell attests, many began to abandon the Village for other locales. Dell reports on one professional imitator in particular, who he gives the

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<sup>268</sup> ‘John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913’, p. 115.

<sup>269</sup> Heap, p. 168.

<sup>270</sup> MS Committee of Fourteen Papers, Harry Kahan (H.K.), Report on Greenwich Village tearooms, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1919, fol. ‘Sixth 1919 investigative reports’, box 34; cited in Heap, p. 168.

pseudonym ‘Willy the Wisp’, emphasizing both his wispy physique and his intangibility as a ‘real’ Villager:

He went about from table to table, in the Village restaurants, selling his candies – ‘psychic candies,’ he called them, in the line of patter which accompanied the sale. ‘They are the color of your psyche,’ he would say gently. ‘Yes, dear lady, I have looked into your subconsciousness, and seen its secret need, and these are especially for you!’ The visiting bourgeoisie, vastly entertained, sat attentively listening to his whole speech from beginning to end – flattering themselves perhaps that they were being inducted into the mysteries of Village psychology.

Drawing on the Village’s famed associations with psychoanalysis, and disguised as a local ‘character’, through this simple concept, Willy the Wisp turns eccentricity into profit. For this Dell admits, ‘I applaud his enterprise in selling bonbons for top prices; and perhaps bonbons were the very utmost of his creative capacities’, but regrets that even in the Village’s ‘apparent madresses there was good sound business method’. Dell wonders whether the visitors ‘had a sense of patronizing the arts!’ and speculates that the bourgeois, delighted and entertained by this local ‘character’, were completely overawed and naively happy to support any upcoming artistic Villager, without even sampling their work.<sup>271</sup> It was perhaps a gratification for those with money to feel of help to ‘artists’, and some Villagers were willing recipients.

One notable Villager who propelled and benefitted from the Village’s fame was publisher, editor and all round entrepreneur Guido Bruno. Bruno operated from his office, ‘Bruno’s Garret’ on Washington Square South and is recognized as a master of spin and Village propaganda, consciously constructing and promoting the image of bohemianism to propel his own entrepreneurial prospects. Bruno’s marketing activity helped to catapult the Village, transforming it into an institution and he was a showman who took on the

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<sup>271</sup> Dell, *Love*, p. 300.

role of ringleader by introducing the Village's cast of characters and publishing their work in his *Bruno Chap Book* series and little magazines. Ross Wetzsteon argues that Bruno must have been 'a bit of a bohemian in order to fake it successfully, and if Guido was a sham, a charlatan, a fraud, he was also a genuine eccentric'.<sup>272</sup> Stephen Rogers suggests that Bruno was inspired by harnessing the popularity of Puccini's *La Bohème* based on Henri Murger's stories of 1840s Paris, *La Vie de Bohème* (1841), and subsequently sought to 'take advantage of this opening in the market to provide a simulacrum of Continental European Bohemia'.<sup>273</sup> When asked about his background and family, Bruno would nonchalantly reply with cryptic comments such as 'I, Bruno, have given birth to myself'.<sup>274</sup> Like Barnes, Bruno constructed his own esoteric character, as well as marketing the Village as a scene and a site of spectacle for outsiders.

In 'Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians', Barnes implies that not only has the Village become a sham for onlookers, but the charade is found wanting in comparison to its hyperbolic repute. Edwards states that in experimenting with the subgenre of urban travel writing, 'Barnes frequently foregrounded its narrative and performative aspects so as to engage her audience in imaginary travelling across abysses of class, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual identity'. He adds that '[h]er urban articles were unique in that she employed rhetorical figures, particularly caricature and irony, to develop a distinctive brand of performative, spectacular, and at times scandalous journalism'.<sup>275</sup> One of Barnes's notably caricatured figures is her 'fur-trimmed woman', 'Madam Bronx', named allegorically to reflect her uptown New York provenance north of the Harlem River, and distant enough to be deemed a curious 'outsider'. When she learns that she has arrived at Greenwich Village she is distinctly underwhelmed:

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<sup>272</sup> Wetzsteon, pp. 303-304.

<sup>273</sup> Rogers, 'Bruno's Bohemia', p. 450.

<sup>274</sup> Wetzsteon, p. 304.

<sup>275</sup> Edwards, "'Why Go Abroad?'" , pp. 7, 9.

“But,” she stammered, “I have heard of old houses and odd women and men who sit on the curb quoting poetry to the policemen or angling for buns as they floated down into the Battery with the rain. I have heard of little inns where women smoke and men make love and there is dancing and laughter and not too much light”.<sup>276</sup>

The woman at first finds the Village to be anti-climactic in comparison to the mirage of opulent destitution painted by its chroniclers. While Madam Bronx is initially disenchanted by what she sees, as Diane Warren notes, she later discovers the little shops, cafés, drinking establishments and eccentric characters she is seeking, allowing her to go home satisfied that her ‘newspaper-fuelled delusional projections’ had been fulfilled. Warren adds that Madam Bronx ‘somewhat drunk on the sensational tales she has heard of the Village, is keen to spot live Bohemians, as though they are rare and exotic creatures’. Warren further conceives that, by acting in this extreme way, the woman herself becomes ‘fantastic’ as ‘[t]he sensationalised gaze of newspaper-fuelled cultural tourism is so powerful that it reflects back on itself, and transforms Madam Bronx herself into a figment of the common cultural imagination’.<sup>277</sup> Although Barnes allows Madam Bronx’s thwarted illusions to simmer in the reader’s imagination for a time, this is soon resolved and the Village returned to its pedestalled position in Madam Bronx’s mind. Barnes describes the Village with language accentuating the legend, as each hurried visitor embodies Alice in search of their individual Wonderland. Upon asking for directions, Madam Bronx suddenly spots her White Rabbit, ‘a mere woman in a gingham gown with a portfolio under her arm’, who she hopes will lead her to Bohemia. Madam Bronx monitors Villagers as if on an urban safari: “[q]uick, quick!” she cried, suddenly breaking off in the middle of the sentence and grabbing a hand of either child exactly like

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<sup>276</sup> Barnes, ‘Becoming Intimate’, in *Barnes’s New York*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>277</sup> Warren, pp. 36-37.

the White Queen in *Through the Looking Glass* as she hurried forward. “There’s one now!”<sup>278</sup> Here Barnes’s own reference to Carroll evokes already established comparisons between Greenwich Village and Wonderland, emphasized by the existence of the Mad Hatter’s Tea Room. While Madam Bronx embodies the White Queen, she projects the character of Alice onto both of her daughters.

Barnes somewhat mockingly passes judgement on the obviousness of the woman’s chosen sightseeing locations: ‘[f]or this sad little fur-trimmed woman with her certified daughters was ignorant of those lost places that are twice as charming because of their reticence’.<sup>279</sup> As Daniela Caselli remarks, ‘Bohemia cannot be ‘given away’ in New York and Paris alike. It can only exist as what is already lost: its reality depends on its remaining unknown’.<sup>280</sup> Barnes’s pleas to quell the insincerities of the Village prove a duplicitous deception in themselves, as she claims her intention is to shed the misrepresentations of Village life, meanwhile also instilling tantalizing hints that some elusive pieces of genuine bohemia secretly remain. She laments in ‘Greenwich Village As It Is’ that ‘[t]here are so many restaurants that have been spoiled by a line or two in a paper’. Evoking intrigue and fascination, teasing the reader with esoteric clues, Barnes writes: ‘[n]o, I shall not give them away, but I’ll locate them for those of you who care to nose it out as book lovers care to nose out old editions [...]. This is the real – this is the unknown’.<sup>281</sup> These ‘real’ places, she emphasizes must stay clandestine from urban tourists to preserve their untainted authenticity. In affirming the existence of ‘genuine’ bohemia, Barnes therefore proliferates further intrigue, thus generating new audiences to the district.

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<sup>278</sup> Barnes, ‘Becoming Intimate’, in *Barnes’s New York*, p. 238.

<sup>279</sup> Barnes, ‘Becoming Intimate’, in *Barnes’s New York*, p. 240.

<sup>280</sup> Caselli, *Improper Modernism*, p. 41.

<sup>281</sup> Barnes, ‘Greenwich Village’ and ‘Becoming Intimate’, in *Barnes’s New York*, pp. 226, 240.

## CONCLUSION

The vignettes pinpointed in this chapter serve to exemplify the depiction of Greenwich Village as a series of momentary impromptu performances, and the ways in which Manhattan and its locales came to be interpreted and represented as theatre by artists and writers of the early twentieth century. The theatrical, dreamlike landscape constructed with the help of new technology and architecture combined with the changing social mores, meaning that New York itself became increasingly stage-like and ‘blurred the lines between fact and fiction’.<sup>282</sup> While New York, by the early twentieth century provided the ‘place’ for impromptu performance, Greenwich Village provided the spaces and conceptual stages for an often more curated series of performances.

Through the web of mythology and intrigue woven by many avant-garde residents under the charismatic sway of Guido Bruno, Greenwich Village was actively promoted as a spectacle to be consumed. The area became a zone of ‘cultivated bohemianism’, where its residents, whether willingly or not, contributed to the theatrical and mythical milieu of the wider city.<sup>283</sup> The district bred a verve for make-believe as performance spilled out into the streets and this, accompanied by the cacophonous music emanating from the manifold competing venues and speakeasies, created a theatrical ambiance, only heightened in the numerous hyperbolized accounts marketed in newspapers and magazines.

As facilitated by the changing social mores and ‘culture of looking’, Greenwich Village also produced ample opportunities for scenes to be viewed and watched through windows, from fire-escapes, rooftops or in the streets.<sup>284</sup> In his astutely observed paintings and etchings, as well as instances revealed through his diaries, Sloan epitomizes the early twentieth century fervour for viewing the city, himself an avid spectator of

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<sup>282</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, p. 10.

<sup>283</sup> Parsons, *Djuna Barnes*, p. 9.

<sup>284</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, p. 4.

everyday activity. Sloan captures a vast collection of miscellaneous scenes, often derived from his daily traversal of the city, as well as frequently depicting incidences of impromptu and everyday theatricality, as exemplified in *Hairdressers Window* and *Night Windows*. The growing repute of the Village also made the prospect of slumming as a pastime all the more attractive. With the tools of pretence and myth-making, some of the Villagers, aware of their folly, capitalized upon the already existent bohemian undercurrents. What began among artists, ostensibly as performance and play-acting for the ‘self’ and each other, (as Marvin Carlson notes, occasionally ‘that audience is the self’), ultimately became a performance for outside audiences.<sup>285</sup> Residents began to build on what was already in existence, namely an artistic community and alluring landscape, to formulate an enclave worthy of attention.

In her journalistic New York articles, Barnes tantalizes the reader through omission, heightening the desire to locate those hidden places to which she refers, whilst also casting herself as the stunt woman and hero of her own early gonzo style writing. Similarly, the insider narrator of Dell’s journalism, casting a critical eye over the much-altered Village, is a semi-fictionalized version of himself. Like many accounts of the Village, however, Dell’s viewpoint is always that the bohemianism of the Village is under threat. The notion of its transience is, nevertheless, central to bohemianism and part of its appeal, as bohemia in itself, is self-destructive, because the attraction of its secrecy ultimately brings about its downfall. If a ‘real’ bohemian enclave existed in the Village outside the realms of pretence, it was the circumstances of the Village becoming publicized by insiders which brought an audience of outsiders, and consequently the need for performance; hence the cyclical nature of bohemia.

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<sup>285</sup>Carlson, *Performance*, p. 5.

ACT II. HARLEM, 'A TAXI TRIP TO THE EXOTIC': NELLA LARSON, JESSIE REDMON FAUSET,  
LANGSTON HUGHES AND AARON DOUGLAS

It was merely a taxi trip to the exotic for most white New Yorkers. In cabarets decorated with tropical and jungle motifs—some of them replicas of southern plantations—they heard jazz, that almost forbidden music.<sup>1</sup>

But, while the continuously gorgeous panorama of Harlem fascinated, thrilled her, the sober mad rush of white New York failed entirely to stir her. Like thousands of other Harlem dwellers, she patronized its shops, its theaters, its art galleries, and its restaurants, and read its papers, without considering herself a part of the monster. And she was satisfied, unenvious. For her this Harlem was enough.<sup>2</sup>

*Our journey continues in what was regarded by many outsiders as 'exotic' Harlem. From Greenwich Village, following Seventh Avenue, then crossing onto Eighth Avenue via Broadway and continuing North for the length of Central Park until One-Hundred-and-Twenty-Fifth Street, one arrives in Harlem. Alternatively take subway route 'A' from West Fourth Street up to One-Hundred-and-Twenty-Fifth Street. Our key tour guides for this chapter are writer and librarian Nella Larsen, writer, editor and essayist Jessie Redmon Fauset, poet and writer Langston Hughes, and painter, illustrator and muralist Aaron Douglas. In the early twentieth century, Harlem was a district of many faces, many races, different milieus from day to night, and a quarter where reality and fantasy intermingled and coexisted, concurrently raising hopes and dashing dreams. While the settlement of large numbers of African Americans in the district from the turn-of-the-century gave it a distinct identity, in other quarters of the population curiosity about Harlem was rife. By day Harlem was unremarkable and its citizens largely comprised of people doing their best to earn a living. By night, however, a transformation occurred, metamorphosing into a mythical version of itself, alien to many everyday residents.*

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Nella Larsen, 'Quicksand', in *Quicksand and Passing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928 and 1929; repr. London: Serpent's Tail, 1989), p. 45.

In contrast to Greenwich Village, where play-acting became a form of escapism, much of the everyday theatricality in Harlem often emerged through necessity due to discrimination or the obligation to fulfil a stereotype. Throughout this chapter, I explore the themes of pretence, theatricality and masquerade as they extended their reach into Harlem. My overarching claim embraces the disparity between hardworking daytime Harlem, and Harlem at night when commercialization and sensationalism took precedence. Acknowledging the implications of the racial power dynamics at play in Harlem, I look at notions of cultural stereotyping and reluctant ‘performance’ often necessitated by prejudice. Marcus Garvey (Jamaican-born Black Nationalist and promoter of Pan-Africanism) recognized that the issue of racism did not occur ‘because there is a difference between us in religion or in color, but because there is a difference between us in power’.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, on the topic of power relationships in 1920s Harlem, historian Shannon King notes that ‘[a]lthough black consumers held a semblance of power before and immediately after World War I, slumming whites frequenting Harlem night spots effectively checked black consumer power by the 1920s; white proprietors not only catered to white consumers, to the chagrin of black patrons, but also employed blacks in menial positions’.<sup>4</sup> Recognizing the widespread racial prejudice in New York during this era is important, as not all the players in ‘performances’ referred to here are equal. The power dynamics at play in ‘performances’ by African Americans for white slummers, for example, are of a different texture to the ‘performances’ portrayed by predominantly white artists and writers in Greenwich Village. In this chapter, ‘performance’ is interpreted as anyone or anything that is framed as performative by an audience, while the

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<sup>3</sup> David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem was in Vogue* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 42; Anthony Claude Martin, *The Emancipation of a Race: Being an Account of the Career and Ideas of Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Together with an Examination of Divers Ideological and Organizational Struggles in which He Became Involved* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University, 1973), p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> Shannon King, *Whose Harlem Is This, Anyway?: Community Politics and Grassroots Activism during the New Negro Era* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2015), p. 52.

‘audience’ consists of anyone, from the self to outsiders, who interprets Harlem and its residents as spectacle.<sup>5</sup>

I begin in the first section, ‘The Harlem Scene’, by evaluating depictions of the urban landscape, including conceptual stages such as the streets and subway, as well as exploring the ways in which everyday performance and spectacle had become integral to the district by the 1920s. In the second section, ‘Identity, Passing and Masking’, I explore Harlem from the insiders’ perspective; how the act of passing became an escape route which could simultaneously imprison its enactors, and the ways in which invented and sensationalized notions of African American culture became entangled in the everyday. The final section, ‘Slummers and Outsiders’, looks at how Harlem was viewed in literary and artistic representations from the outside looking in, as, like in Greenwich Village, slummers made their way into the district to sample its night-time ambiance. I call on key Harlem writers and artists as guides, primarily Nella Larsen, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Langston Hughes and Aaron Douglas, and compare their representations of the district while pinpointing significant locations. Other key contributors to whom I make reference include: influential writer, editor and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, writer and poet Claude McKay, painter of the Harlem landscape and its people Palmer Hayden, prolific photographer of African American life James Van Der Zee, as well as pioneering filmmaker Oscar Micheaux.

Referred to as a ‘city within a city’, Harlem, by the 1920s, had become known as the thriving hub of New York’s African American population. The allure of Harlem as a destination enticed hopeful young fortune-seekers from miles around, in search of employment, freedom, acceptance and community. The district had, due to the extension of the rapid-transit system, become increasingly accessible, allowing a convenient commute into many areas of the city. Harlem was initially designated by city planners as

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<sup>5</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 2.

a residential area for the wealthy, hence the construction of large brownstone buildings intended to accommodate the white upper middle-classes.<sup>6</sup> The collapse of the market and subsequent depression between 1904 and 1905 caused the cost of housing to plummet, enabling successful African American realtor Philip A. Payton Jr. to make apartments in Harlem's One-Hundred-and-Thirty-Third Street available for rent to the African American community, who were charged unfairly high prices.<sup>7</sup> This began a trend, and soon many areas of Harlem became predominantly African American, although East Harlem, also known as 'El Barrio', was largely populated by Puerto Rican, Latin American, Italian, Irish and Jewish communities.<sup>8</sup> Rosey E. Pool, a Dutch anthropologist and patron of African American arts, notes in her undated manuscript 'Harlem, The Negro Center', '[b]lack trusts were founded which invested money in Harlem, bought mortgages and houses where the black man was to be supported'.<sup>9</sup> Chad Heap adds that '[f]or black New Yorkers, this overabundance of vacant buildings provided a unique opportunity to improve their living conditions and eventually establish the largest black community in early-twentieth-century America'.<sup>10</sup> It was during this era that Harlem was hailed as 'the capital of Black America' and 'the negro metropolis', where it was thought that the most ambitious, enterprising and talented members of the African American population could, through hard work, earn a decent living. Elizabeth Wilson reports that 'by 1910 many of New York's most prominent blacks lived in Harlem, and at the same time all the major black cultural institutions were relocating from the West Side'.<sup>11</sup> David Levering Lewis estimates, however, that during the 1920s African Americans accounted

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<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis, p. 25; Brooker, *New York Fictions*, p. 175.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Noemi Freidenberg, *Growing Old in El Barrio* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2000), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Brighton, Special Collections, University of Sussex Library, MS Rosey Pool Collection, Miscellaneous Pieces, Harlem, The Negro Center, item 8-5.

<sup>10</sup> Heap, pp. 71-72.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, p. 77.

for ‘no more than 30 percent of the total Harlem population’.<sup>12</sup> Jazz and blues singer Ethel Waters (1896-1977) also noted in her autobiography, *His Eye Is On The Sparrow* (1951), that ‘[i]n those days, Harlem was anything but an exclusively Negro section [...]’. The district was swarming with life—men, women and children of every shade of color’.<sup>13</sup> Many new arrivals in Harlem would later discover, as iconic jazz singer Billie Holiday would, that the reality was still a struggle to ‘kick and scratch out a living’.<sup>14</sup> In Manhattan, this time in ‘the city within a city’, a place upon which many dreams and fantasies were based, there was a disparity between the authentic and the illusory; the reality did not always match the dream.

The ‘great migration’ from the 1910s saw the mass movement of millions of African Americans from the rural south to the urban north, many of whom arrived into Harlem, enabling the district to become a distinctive community in its own right.<sup>15</sup> Harlem developed a reputation for dancing and jazz, attracting many white outside audiences on night-time sojourns seeking an ‘exotic’ experience, a practice known as ‘slumming’. Kevin Mumford notes that ‘spending a night on the town in Harlem might represent the cultural equivalent of taking a Cunard cruise to Africa, an exciting excursion into another social world’.<sup>16</sup> As can be viewed in the ‘Night-club Map of Harlem’ [Fig. 2.1.] by the cartoonist E. Simms Campbell, first printed in the *Manhattan* magazine, the opportunities for night-time adventures were numerous. Having lived in Harlem and attended the Art Students League, Campbell became an extremely successful and popular cartoonist, his regular contributions to *Esquire* magazine in the 1930s making

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Ethel Waters and Charles Samuels, *His Eye is on the Sparrow: An Autobiography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1951), pp. 123-124.

<sup>14</sup> Billie Holiday and William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues* (New York: Doubleday, 1956; repr. New York: Harlem Moon, 2006), p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 143.

him the first African American artist to be employed by a national magazine. Pamela Lee Gray notes that Campbell, along with notable friends including jazz singer and bandleader Cab Calloway, frequented Harlem's Cotton Club, and his 'illustrations of jazz musicians and nightlife, including a cultural map of Harlem, were inspired by his late nights out on the town'.<sup>17</sup> Campbell's playful and stylized map captures the lively ambiance of Harlem nightlife and provides personalized advice on its establishments. For example on 'Club Hot-Cha' he notes 'nothing happens before 2 a.m., ask for Clarence', while at the 'Radium Club' he recommends the 'Big breakfast dance every Sunday morning 4 or 5 a.m.'. The map features multiple theatrical escapades, as dancing waiters and girls in grass-skirts cavort in 'Small's Paradise', while in the streets Campbell depicts numerous miniature cartoon scenes. A woman is ejected head first from a taxi on Seventh Avenue, a man plays his banjo under a lamp-post on the corner of Lenox Avenue and One-Hundred-and-Thirty-Third Street, and a shady gentleman tries to sell 'Marijuana Cigarettes' on Lenox Avenue, meanwhile two gambling policemen remain at the station.<sup>18</sup> Campbell's illustration is a cheerful introduction to Harlem nightlife, ostensibly providing guidance for the uninitiated, as well as accentuating the entertainment possibilities and the theatricality of the Harlem streets. Lloyd Morris notes that as the 'legend of Harlem by night—exhilarating and sensuous [...]—crossed the continent and the ocean', so descended the influx of curious visitors seeking to verify their sensationalized visions of exoticized jazz culture and wild, feverish dancing, 'throbbing to the beating of drums and the wailing of saxophones'.<sup>19</sup> This culturally fascinating area became – to its nocturnal adventurers – a locality where, according to Cheryl Wall, 'in

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<sup>17</sup> Pamela Lee Gray, 'Elmer Simms Campbell', in *Harlem Renaissance Lives from the African American National Biography*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 101-102.

<sup>18</sup> E. Simms Campbell, 'A Night-Club Map of Harlem', *Manhattan: A Weekly for Wakeful New Yorkers*, 18 January 1932, 1.1, pp. 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd Morris, *Incredible New York: High Life and Low Life from 1850 to 1950* (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 333.

contrast to their own world, discipline, hard work, and frugality were counterfeit coin in the realm of imaginary Harlem'.<sup>20</sup> As author and historian Nathan Irvin Huggins observed, Harlem was 'merely a taxi trip to the exotic for most white New Yorkers'.<sup>21</sup> The convenient opportunity for a short jaunt to a culturally different environment, provided the sensation of a four or five hour-long vacation. While Greenwich Village provided slummers with the opportunity to glimpse into a bohemian fantasy, the Harlem night-time experience tended to plunge outsiders into an entirely new cultural encounter.

In contrast to the spectacle of night-time Harlem, the Harlem Renaissance was a network of intellectuals, activists, writers and artists, who sought, from post-World War One through to the 1930s, to champion the incorporation of African American artistic and academic work into mainstream culture. Key participants in the Harlem Renaissance aimed to rise above the Jim Crow influenced *de facto* segregation which impacted on the everyday lives and work of African Americans. Associated with the term 'New Negro', as featured in the 1925 poetry, prose and essay collection *The New Negro* edited by writer and philosopher Alain Locke, the Harlem Renaissance contributors also sought to promote and integrate African American art and literature within the wider cultural cannon. Henry Louis Gates Jr. observes that the 'New Negro' movement was a reaction to the way African American culture had been defined by 'an onslaught of stereotypes – reinforced subliminally in advertisements and on trade cards, and overtly in pulpits on Sunday and even in the law'.<sup>22</sup> As Wall adds, 'the ersatz culture marketed to blacks as their own was clearly insufficient. It borrowed enough of the authentic traditions to retain some power, but it existed dysfunctionally in a vacuum'.<sup>23</sup> She also notes that 'the New

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<sup>20</sup> Cheryl A. Wall, *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Huggins, p. 89.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'Harlem on Our Minds', in *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. by Richard J. Powell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 160-168 (p. 163).

<sup>23</sup> Wall, *Women of the Harlem Renaissance*, p. 99.

Negroes felt compelled to increase their own identification with their traditions. Unfortunately, they were often as ignorant of these traditions as anyone else and embraced the popular imitations instead'.<sup>24</sup> In response to the aspirations of the movement, Harlem Renaissance writer James Weldon Johnson wrote in his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) that 'nothing will do more to change the mental attitude and raise his status than a demonstration of intellectual purity by the Negro through his production of literature and art'. Johnson extensively details notable African American contributions to everyday culture, in literature, music and dance, including 'Uncle Remus stories', 'spirituals', 'cakewalk and ragtime'.<sup>25</sup> The 'New Negro' became synonymous with a new racial pride and boldness, as well as the flourishing artistic growth and ideas which arose towards the end of World War One. For some key instigators of the Harlem Renaissance and 'New Negro' movements, the types of caricatured dancing and exoticized jazz exhibited during Harlem's night-time vogue could be interpreted as a performance of race, and stood in direct opposition to the call for sincere and meaningful African American art. For others, including Hughes, the Harlem night, whether real or performed, remained a direct source of fascination and inspiration.

While recognizing the depth and variation in existing scholarship, I aim to both build on, and take a new approach to Harlem of the early twentieth century. By shedding light on the district as a performative spectacle, both in terms of the physical space of Harlem, its perceived 'exotic' population, as well as its 'slumming' audience, I show how facets of urban modernity blended with the theatricality of nightclubs, and enduring influence of segregation, to create a complex web of spectatorship and interactions upon the urban stage. Focussing specifically on the urban landscape, 'passing' and 'slumming',

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<sup>24</sup> Cheryl Wall, 'Passing for what? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen's Novels', *Black American Literature Forum*, 20.1 (1986), 97-111 (p. 100).

<sup>25</sup> James Weldon Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1922), pp. vii, ix.

I explore concepts of everyday theatricality and spectatorship in relation to the locale, as well as from both the insiders' and outsiders' perspectives. I evaluate how the milieu of theatricality extended beyond the Harlem nightclub, whilst also addressing the disparity between daytime and night-time in the district, and the tension between the supposed frivolity of nightlife and the more austere ideals of the Harlem Renaissance. Without attempting to appraise the success of the movement as a whole, to exemplify my argument I draw from the rich body of work, largely by African American writers, artists, campaigners, musicians, photographers and film-makers from the early twentieth century, commonly placed under the umbrella terms of 'Harlem Renaissance' or 'New Negro' movement.

#### I. THE HARLEM SCENE: 'AN ENORMOUS OUTDOOR STAGE'

The dark, mysterious hue of gas lighting, interspersed with vivid dashes of electricity, served to shroud the Harlem night in mystery, with pools of darkness and murky light accentuating the theatricality of the nocturnal experience. As William Chapman Sharpe notes, due to the uneven distribution of electric lighting in the city, Harlem was reliant upon gas lighting well into the 1920s, resulting in it being 'simply darker in Harlem than elsewhere in New York'.<sup>26</sup> Richard Dennis observes that the quality or hue of lighting could, depending on location, have a significant influence on atmosphere, as 'the qualities of different forms of gas and electric light made for very different experiences on the street'. The quality of light had the potential to introduce a heady, seamier shade to the ether. Dennis emphasizes the disparate impressions made by gas lighting, stating that '[a]ccording to its context, it could signify modernity and metropolitan improvement or the flames of hell and urban degeneration [...] gas lighting was synonymous with, at best

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<sup>26</sup> Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 19.

the theatre, restaurant and bar, at worst crime, gambling and prostitution'.<sup>27</sup> As well as appealing to urbane New Yorkers in its potential for 'exotic' amusement, Harlem also had a different feel when compared with electrified areas of New York. On the subject of the effects of gas-lighting, Lynda Nead agrees that it 'seemed to have the power equally to create illumination and to cast shadow [...]. Gas does not destroy the night; it illuminates it [...]. Gas lights darkness; whereas electricity annihilates it'.<sup>28</sup> Dennis expands upon this concept, stating that 'whereas gas created oases of light in the dark, electricity abolished the darkness'.<sup>29</sup> The contrast between light and dark in Harlem would, for those used to the bold electrical glow radiating from Midtown, have added a further sense of novelty to the excitement and drama of the Harlem night. The difference in lighting also served to more firmly entrench the divide caused by cultural and racial assumptions about non-white Americans. As Sharpe observes, the comparative darkness of the less prosperous areas of the city, had particular significance in Harlem and as the 'jungle myth' proliferated so did the 'assumption that African Americans embodied the night'.<sup>30</sup> Hughes wrote in his poem 'Negro' (1922); 'I am a Negro: | Black as the night is black, | Black like the depths of my Africa'.<sup>31</sup> The mirroring of the often darker skin-tone of Harlem residents in the hue of the area's night-time lighting only served to fuel commonly held prejudices and misconceptions during the early twentieth century. Due to many white outsiders' singularly night-time slumming ventures, Harlem's African American population became associated with the night, and, according to Sharpe grew symbolic of 'darkest Africa'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dennis, p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 83.

<sup>29</sup> Dennis, p. 129.

<sup>30</sup> Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 177.

<sup>31</sup> Langston Hughes, 'Negro', in *Vintage Hughes* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 177.

The lights that *were* present in Harlem added to the feeling of excitement and drama and, in spite of forced cultural stereotypes, the beauty of Harlem at night was widely appreciated. Sharpe notes, ‘it was still possible to wonder at nocturnal Harlem’s possibilities without seeing it in primitive terms’.<sup>33</sup> Although not instantly ubiquitous, Harlem’s electric lighting, when it began to arrive in gradual phases from the late 1880s, had a clear impact. The *New York Times* reported on the switching on of the first arc lights along One-Hundred-and-Twenty-Fifth Street in 1887, adding that ‘a large crowd was already gathered, and at 9 o’clock, as by magic, the street which had been dismal was completely illuminated’.<sup>34</sup> The theatricality of electricity is demonstrated here by the audience which had amassed to view the street’s newfound brightness.

As Claude McKay vividly conjures in *Home to Harlem* (1928) – the first bestseller by a black author – night-time was a magical vision, even for those Harlem residents who knew the reality behind the façade.<sup>35</sup> He describes the scene as twilight descends, ‘merging its life into a soft blue-black symphony [...] then electric lights flared everywhere, flooding the scene with dazzling gold’.<sup>36</sup> While eliminating the shadowy milieu cast by gas lighting, the introduction of electricity to Harlem brought a safer and bolder ambiance to the district. For Harlem Renaissance poet Arna Bontemps the Harlem night inspired awe and pride as he proclaimed it to be ‘like a foretaste of paradise. A blue haze descended at night and with it strings of fairy lights on the broad avenue. From the window of an apartment on Fifth Avenue and 129<sup>th</sup> Street I looked over the rooftops of Negrodom and tried to believe my eyes. What a city! What a world!’.<sup>37</sup> The presiding colour of ‘blue’ implied by both McKay and Bontemps not only draws on connotations of

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<sup>33</sup> Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 183.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Electric Light for Harlem’, *New York Times Article Archive*, (31 March 1887) <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9804E7DB1630E633A25752C3A9659C94669FD7CF>> [accessed 5 June 2016].

<sup>35</sup> Brooker, *New York Fictions*, p. 189.

<sup>36</sup> Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem*, ed. by Wayne F. Cooper (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928; repr. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), pp. 290-291.

<sup>37</sup> Arna Bontemps, *Personals* (London: Paul Breman, 1973), pp. 4-5.

Blues music but also associates Harlem with a more muted tone when compared with the invasive glow of electric Midtown, while ‘fairy lights’ accentuate the magical vision which is conjured. Here, the lights became a performance in themselves, accentuating the mysticism and theatricality of Harlem.

Whilst acknowledging the inherent interest in sensationalized Harlem, Johnson also sought to represent the ‘ordinary, hard-working’ people in everyday Harlem.<sup>38</sup> In his autobiography *Along This Way* (1933), Johnson observes the existence of the ‘real and overshadowing Harlem. The commonplace, work-a-day Harlem. The Harlem of the doubly handicapped black masses engaged in the grim, daily struggle for existence in the midst of this whirlpool of white civilization’. He adds that though ‘real’ Harlem was very much present, it was a subtler contender for artistic attention: ‘[t]here are dramatic values in that Harlem too; but they have hardly been touched. Writers of fiction, white and black, have limited their stories to Harlem as a playground’. He recognizes this phenomenon as understandable because the ‘picturesque and more exotic phases of life in Harlem offer a unique and teeming field for the writer’, nevertheless, he hints that ‘[u]nder these aspects lie real comedy and real tragedy’ worthy of consideration. Johnson continues by explaining his belief that ‘the picturesque Harlem was real, but it was the writers who discovered its artistic values and, in giving literary expression to them, actually created the Harlem that caught the world’s imagination’.<sup>39</sup> Johnson suggests that though Harlem was initially a genuine scene of interest, through its extensive representation in hyperbolized literary and artistic accounts, the ‘real’ ‘picturesque Harlem’ had become a disingenuous pretence, and a victim of its own fame. In likening Harlem to a playground, Johnson highlights the possibilities for fun and make-believe, but also alludes to its sham. Shane Vogel adds that the Harlem ‘scene became a formula,

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<sup>38</sup> Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Knopf, 1930), p. 161.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (New York: Viking Press, 1933; repr. 1934), pp. 380-381.

even a cliché, repeated and refined not just in the nightclub and on the Broadway stage, but in novels, short stories, film, poetry, journalism, and historical and sociological studies'.<sup>40</sup> According to Johnson, this Harlem only existed as a literary construction and figment of the imaginary. By shifting emphasis onto the 'real' Harlem, as opposed to the pretence of Harlem at night, Johnson exposes the 'behind the scenes' aspects of the district as understated but equally fascinating. The overt performance of Harlem nightlife was, as Johnson indicates, just one facet of a wider, more nuanced scene, and within the district there was a persistent interplay between the real and the false.

The spectacle of the Harlem night was well known across the city, America and even the world. Daytime Harlem paled in comparison, although this was the 'real' Harlem, the Harlem of the mundane everyday, where people went to work or education, collected groceries and ran errands. Du Bois remarked in 1926 in a scathing review of white writer Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*, that in Harlem, 'the overwhelming majority of black folk never go to cabarets. The average colored man in Harlem is an everyday laborer, attending church, lodge and movie and is as conventional as ordinary working folk everywhere'.<sup>41</sup> Here Du Bois aims to demystify Harlem life in opposition to Van Vechten's prejudiced depiction of the district, as well as dispelling the sensationalized notions imagined by many white outsiders. Vogel remarks that 'visitors to Harlem could take in spectacular Broadway-quality black revues designed to appeal to white audiences'.<sup>42</sup> Heap also observes that although 'books, paintings, and journals produced by Harlem's artists attracted significant attention to the district, in the eyes of most urban whites, the city's vibrant new black community was soon equated with all-night cabarets and the syncopated beat of jazz'.<sup>43</sup> Night-time Harlem had become a

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<sup>40</sup> Vogel, pp. 74-75.

<sup>41</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, 'Books', *The Crisis*, December 1926, pp. 81-82.

<sup>42</sup> Vogel, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Heap, p. 73.

racialized theatrical performance of caricature and pantomime. The streets came alive with rhythm, music and everyday theatre and the scene was intoxicating, but false.

In Larsen's *Passing* (1929), Irene, an African American girl living in Harlem, tries to persuade her friend Clare, who is passing as white, not to visit Harlem for what she herself knows to be a night-time charade. Seeing Clare's appetite for adventure, Irene comes to the realization that '[i]t was going to be harder than she thought to convince Clare Kendry of the folly of Harlem'.<sup>44</sup> Clare's intention of reconnecting with her own race without re-joining it, emerges as a double layered masquerade; as a performer of race she intends to blend with the white slumming crowd, while simultaneously viewing a distorted performance of her own estranged heritage. Within her writing Larsen raises significant questions regarding African American identity. She portrays a variety of characters, some firmly rooted in their racial heritage, some who 'pass' occasionally for access to entertainment, and others for whom 'passing' as white has become an everyday performance and a necessity.

Larsen was born 'Nellie Walker' in the notorious 'red-light district' Levee area of Chicago, and her mother was a seamstress originally from Denmark while her father, listed on the birth certificate as 'colored', was a West Indian cook.<sup>45</sup> The Levee district was infamous for its brothels, saloons, burlesque houses and dance halls, and was reviled in contemporaneous accounts as being 'in the hands of thugs, thieves, murderers and prostitutes'.<sup>46</sup> Biographer George Hutchinson notes, nevertheless, that close to Larsen's birthplace, an upsurge in African American theatrical entertainments took place in the theatres, cafés and cabarets of State Street: 'the Jazz Age was incubated in Nella Larsen's

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<sup>44</sup> Larsen, 'Passing', in *Quicksand and Passing*, p. 194.

<sup>45</sup> Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 106; George Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> William T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago!* (Chicago: Laird and Lee, 1894), p. 257; cited in Hutchinson, p. 17.

hometown – or rather, her very neighborhood. But New York opened it to the world’. Larsen went on to attend Fisk University in 1907, although upon her expulsion for defying strict dress code policy, went to live with her maternal relatives in Denmark. On her return in 1912, Larsen moved to New York to become a nurse.<sup>47</sup> Her arrival in New York coincided with the early stirrings of the intellectual movement in Harlem, to which she would later make significant contributions. In 1922 Larsen took a job as a librarian in the branch of the New York Public Library on One-Hundred-and-Thirty-Fifth Street. Described by Lewis as ‘the intellectual pulse of Harlem’, this library would become a nexus of the Harlem Renaissance movement.<sup>48</sup> Karin Roffman adds that with its exhibitions, performances, debates and lectures, the library served multiple functions as a ‘transformed and transforming theater, a lecture hall, a community meeting hall and a work space for writers’.<sup>49</sup> With night-time theatrical entertainments driving the local economy, the library provided an antidote and acted as a public forum. Situated at the epicenter of the new movement, Larsen was in a prime position to engage with the latest discussions and ideas being generated, as well as interacting with key figures of the era.

In 1928, Larsen published *Quicksand*, set in Chicago, Denmark and New York and drawing on events from her own life, featuring themes of race, class and difficulties in belonging, while the following year, she published her second novel *Passing*. In investigating issues surrounding race and identity, Larsen’s novels raise themes surrounding performance and masking, exploring permanent ‘passing’ as a tool for accessing opportunities. Though Larsen’s literary career was brief, her contributions were significant in raising simultaneous issues of gender, race and class. Plagued by a contentious plagiarism lawsuit for her short story ‘Sanctuary’ (1930), Larsen curtailed her

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<sup>47</sup> Hutchinson, pp. 150, 6, 77.

<sup>48</sup> Lewis, p. 105.

<sup>49</sup> Karin Roffman, ‘Nella Larsen, Librarian at 135<sup>th</sup> Street’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 53.4 (2007), 752-787 (p.761).

career early. It was an accusation from which Larsen would seemingly never recover, as she severed her Harlem connections and retreated into relative obscurity.<sup>50</sup> By withdrawing from her literary contacts in Harlem, though, contrary to rumour, Larsen never began to ‘pass’, she instead drew a veil over her previous existence as a writer and, assuming a new rôle, found work as a nurse on the Lower East Side.<sup>51</sup>

Larsen’s novels published during her time in Harlem, nevertheless, reflect the complex cultural interplay within the district. With its night-time persona and touring audience of slummers parading the streets and venues, the Harlem landscape took on its own everyday theatricality and performativity. As can be seen from the ‘Night-club map of Harlem’ [Fig. 2.1.], the possibilities for diversion were in abundance. Music echoed from within venues and serenaded passers-by, while diversely hued lighting imbued the surroundings with the ambiance of show business. London Fashion and Textile Museum’s ‘1920s Jazz Age’ exhibition suggests ‘[a] continual sense of movement, luxuriating in the rhythms and beats of jazz, was a leitmotif of the era’.<sup>52</sup> In *Quicksand*, Larsen palpably evokes the scene of the night-time Harlem streets through the reluctant experience of Helga Crane:

It was a sulky, humid night, a thick furry night, through which electric torches shone like silver fuzz – an atrocious night for cabareting [...]. The night was far from quiet, the streets far from empty. Clanging trolley bells, quarreling cats, cackling phonographs, raucous laughter, complaining motor-horns, low singing, mingled in the familiar medley that is Harlem. Black figures, white figures, little forms, big forms, small groups, large groups, sauntered, or hurried by. It was gay, grotesque, and a little weird. Helga Crane felt singularly apart from it all.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Hildegard Hoeller, ‘Race, Modernism, and Plagiarism: The Case of Nella Larsen’s “Sanctuary”’, *African American Review*, 40.3 (2006), 421-437 (pp. 421-422).

<sup>51</sup> Hutchinson, p. 462.

<sup>52</sup> *1920s Jazz Age* [Exhibition].

<sup>53</sup> Larsen, ‘Quicksand’, in *Quicksand and Passing*, p. 58.

Under pressure from her companions, Helga is compelled to enter the folly of the Harlem Cabaret, but first she must traverse the streets, an activity which Christoph Lindner regards as enabling Larsen to ‘regender and racialize the Benjaminian flâneur in terms that expand the affective possibilities of the figure beyond those of a passive observer or interpreter of the city’.<sup>54</sup> Emphasizing the caricatured pretence of the Harlem night, Wall notes that ‘Larsen uses a nightclub scene, an almost obligatory feature in Harlem novels, to examine the packaging of manufactured blackness’.<sup>55</sup> The scene she encounters is one of urban chaos, but as she attests, this is not unusual for Harlem. Helga recognizes the Harlem soundtrack of converging sounds as a ‘familiar medley’, echoing the performative and musical nature of the streets, and as Lori Harrison-Kahan observes, Larsen’s use of language and rhythm in this passage is reflective of jazz and ‘conflates nighttime city streets with the scene taking place within the underground cabaret’.<sup>56</sup> As an African American woman, Helga, feels a sense of alienated detachment and remains ‘singularly apart’ from night-time Harlem. Helga’s assertion of Harlem as ‘gay, grotesque, and a little weird’, further demonstrates her ambivalence towards the district at night. Harlem is portrayed as a multisensory experience; the raucous cacophony of sound echoes in Helga’s ears, the humid air, heavy and overbearing, assuming a personified ‘sulky’ mood, electricity beaming out and the passers-by, dramatically varied in appearance, moving at fluctuating speeds towards their individual destinations. These were the immersive set of musical and performative experiences peculiar to Harlem’s night-time street scene.

The impact of Harlem’s night-time entertainment is portrayed as so intense, however, that after visiting the cabaret, Helga is left questioning her own identity. Her

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<sup>54</sup> Christoph Lindner, *Imagining New York City: Literature, Urbanism, and the Visual Arts, 1890-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 137.

<sup>55</sup> Wall, ‘Passing for what?’, p. 100.

<sup>56</sup> Lori Harrison-Kahan, “‘Structure Would Equal Meaning’: Blues and Jazz Aesthetics in the Fiction of Nella Larsen’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 28.2 (2009), 267-289 (p. 282).

experience unfolds as ‘[a] glare of light struck her eyes, a blare of jazz split her ears. For a moment everything seemed to be spinning round [...]. They danced, ambling lazily to a crooning melody, or violently twisting their bodies, like whirling leaves, to a sudden streaming rhythm, or shaking themselves ecstatically to a thumping of unseen tom toms’. The cabaret engulfs Helga’s senses and she is led to forget ‘the grand distorted childishness of it all’, thus reflecting the play-acting performed in Greenwich Village, while ‘childishness’, as Maria Balshaw notes, was also a ‘key primitivist term’.<sup>57</sup> The multisensory impact of the cabaret temporarily disorients Helga as jazz resounds about her, dancers alternate between a languid sway and whirling in disarray, all the while the rhythm of the tom-tom drum pounds, a sound representative of distant Africa.<sup>58</sup> Helga experiences momentary inertia to the cabaret’s more sordid elements, as she is ‘oblivious to the reek of flesh, smoke, and alcohol, oblivious of the color, the noise’. Helga is intoxicated and overwhelmed as she is ‘drugged, lifted, sustained, by the extraordinary music, blown out, ripped out, beaten out, by the joyous, wild, murky orchestra’. As a reluctant attendee of such a distorted display of culture, Helga is perplexed to admit her own amusement, as her dizzying experience leaves her with the ‘shameful certainty that not only had she been in the jungle, but that she had enjoyed it’.<sup>59</sup> Jacquelyn McLendon notes of the scene that ‘[s]ocial attitudes manufacture the fear that holds her in its grips, because they insist that the black body signifies primitive, promiscuous, and immoral behaviour’.<sup>60</sup> Sianne Ngai also regards the jazz as inducing a ‘temporary loss of self’ in Helga, though after re-collecting her thoughts, she becomes resolute in her attitude to disassociate from the racialized implications of the scene, as Helga ‘hardened her

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<sup>57</sup> Larsen, ‘Quicksand’, in *Quicksand and Passing*, pp. 58-59; Maria Balshaw, “‘Black was White’: Urbanity, Passing and the Spectacle of Harlem”, *Journal of American Studies*, 33.2 (1999), 307-322, (p. 318).

<sup>58</sup> *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. by Don Michael Randel, 4th edn (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 897.

<sup>59</sup> Larsen, ‘Quicksand’, in *Quicksand and Passing*, p. 59.

<sup>60</sup> Jacquelyn Y. McLendon, *The Politics of Color in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen* (London: University of Virginia Press, 1995), p. 79.

determination to get away. She wasn't, she told herself, a jungle creature'.<sup>61</sup> Balshaw regards Helga as maintaining a 'performance of identity' and 'asserting herself as spectacle' in negotiating her everyday life, a facet of her character which Balshaw deems Helga has 'lost control' of in the Cabaret scene, before quickly regaining her composed persona again.<sup>62</sup> Helga's ambivalent sensation stems from the equation of jazz and cabaret with the jungle and racialized stereotypes. Vogel remarks that rather than 'the jungle promised by the Negro vogue, *Quicksand*'s cabaret turns out to be a battleground over which the values of black middle-class morality are waged against the intimacies and fugitive socialities of Harlem's nightlife'.<sup>63</sup> Though reassuring herself of what she knows to be true – that she is not 'a jungle creature' – Helga's guilty enjoyment of the chaotic cabaret knocks her assurance of this knowledge, subsequently leading her to fleetingly question her own identity as an African American woman.

Like Larsen, Jessie Redmon Fauset's writing explores African American identity, and particularly the female experience, highlighting themes of passing, masking, costuming, performing and theatricality. Thadious M. Davis reports that '[w]hile her family was never financially well-off, it was educated, cultured and refined' and she progressed to study classical languages at Cornell University. After spending time as a teacher, Fauset gained a master's degree in French from University of Pennsylvania and in 1912 began contributing writing, including short stories and poems to *The Crisis*, founded in 1910 by its editor W.E.B. Du Bois as the official magazine for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. By 1919, Fauset had moved to New York and ascended to the role of literary editor at *The Crisis*, working closely alongside Du Bois, and taking the role of guide and 'midwife' to burgeoning writers including Hughes, Countee Cullen and Claude McKay. Fauset was also a volunteer at the One-

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<sup>61</sup> Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 198; Larsen, 'Quicksand', in *Quicksand and Passing*, p. 59.

<sup>62</sup> Balshaw, "Black was White", p. 317.

<sup>63</sup> Vogel, pp. 93-94.

Hundred-and-Thirty-Fifth Street New York Public Library, overlapping with Larsen's tenure as a librarian.<sup>64</sup> It was during her time at *The Crisis* (1919-1926) that Fauset produced her most highly acclaimed works, including her first novel *There is Confusion* which follows the struggles of Joanna Marshall, an African American girl who navigates the barriers of gender, race and class to achieve her ambition of becoming a dancer. Fauset establishes a discussion surrounding passing and acculturation, as well as accentuating the performative nature of assuming new identities. Fauset published her second novel *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* in 1928, which also documents the difficulties associated with passing and gender, and after the protagonist Angela Murray has crossed the racial divide, she becomes acutely aware of prejudice as a woman.

For Joanna in Fauset's *There is Confusion* (1924), impromptu and everyday street performance plays an important role in ultimately establishing her career as a dancer. As a young girl, Joanna takes part in a 'call-and-response game' with a group of children, while strolling through Sixty-Third Street as 'Italians, Jews, colored Americans, white Americans were there disporting themselves with more or less abandon'. Seeing the African American children 'dancing and acting a game', Joanna enthusiastically takes her sister Sylvia's hand and exclaims "[s]ee those children dancing! Wait, I've got to see that!" Joanna, foreshadowing her future success on the stage, is enraptured by this scene of street performance, as '[w]ith no thought of spectators they joined hands, took a few steps, separated, spun around, smote hands sharply, and then flung them above their heads'. Fauset indicates here that though Joanna and Sylvia have become spectators to the drama, the children continue uninhibited and are 'absorbed, [and] enraptured with the spirit of the dance and the abandon of the music. Joanna, too, was in transport'. Captivated by the dance, Joanna pleads to join in, and promptly 'with the instinct of

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<sup>64</sup> Thadius M. Davis, 'Foreward', in *There is Confusion*, by Jessie Redmon Fauset (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), pp. v-xxvi (pp. xii – xiii).

childhood for a kindred spirit, two of them unclasped hands and took Joanna in'. Instantly exhibiting her charisma and foretelling her talent as a performer, '[s]he outdid them all in the fervour and grace of her acting', immediately drawing a passing audience as '[t]wo white settlement workers stopped and looked at her'.<sup>65</sup> In enacting an impromptu dance performance, Joanna becomes part of the spectacle of the everyday city, drawing onlookers as the street becomes her conceptual stage.

The memory of this dance, learned on the streets has a profound impact on Joanna, and she later performs it in her successful audition at the District Line Theatre in Greenwich Village. Recreating the street on the stage, the directors quickly engage a group of 'ten colored children' from nearby Minetta Lane to perform alongside Joanna.<sup>66</sup> Nina Miller remarks that 'Joanna's dance originates not in the professional dance world or in her own personal artistic vision; rather, it comes straight from the play of urban black children'.<sup>67</sup> This exemplifies the strong reciprocity between the theatre and the city streets, and in this instance not only is a dance from the streets transferred onto stage, but the performers are enlisted directly from the street below. During Joanna's audition, '[h]er voice rang out, her slender flaming body turned and twinkled, her lovely graceful limbs flashed and darted and pirouetted. She was everywhere at once, acting the part of leader, of individual children, of the whole, singing, stamping circle'.<sup>68</sup> Her performance is subsequently greatly lauded by the board of directors, and Joanna is employed as a regular star of 'Dance of the Nations'. Not only does Joanna embody a culturally and racially diverse America on stage, but she performs the very same dance she learnt on the city streets as a child. This emphasizes the symbiotic nature of the city and the stage, demonstrating that while the streets became permeated with theatricality flowing from

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<sup>65</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, *There is Confusion* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924; repr. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), pp. 47- 48.

<sup>66</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, p. 229.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, p. 197.

<sup>68</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, p. 229.

nearby venues and acted as a stage for day-to-day performances, simultaneously elements of the city streets – as represented in artistic and literary depictions – had begun to infiltrate the stage.

Likewise, as the ‘familiar medley’ of escaping music and city noise provided an accompaniment to the Harlem street scene, as Emily Thompson reports, this soundtrack was also reflected back within music itself.<sup>69</sup> Thompson states that the ‘connection between jazz and the sounds of the city was evident to all who listened in’.<sup>70</sup> She cites J.A. Rogers’s article ‘Jazz at Home’ (1925) published in *The Survey Graphic* magazine’s ‘Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro’ edition, which observed of jazz that ‘with its cowbells, auto horns, calliopes, rattles, dinner gongs, kitchen utensils, cymbals, screams, crashes, clankings and monotonous rhythm it bears all the marks of a nerve-strung, strident, mechanized civilization’. Rogers adds that jazz is ‘one part American and three parts American Negro, and was originally the nobody’s child of the levee and the city slum’.<sup>71</sup> As impromptu performance saturated the Harlem night, the music itself borrowed from the city’s incessant clatter. Susan Currell notes that ‘jazz and blues also provided a bridge between the past and present, rural and industrial, by blending the old with new’.<sup>72</sup> Jazz adopted sounds such as horns and calliopes (a loud whistle commonly used on showboats, in carnivals and circuses to attract spectators from far and wide) to incorporate the outside city into the indoor spectacle.<sup>73</sup>

Accompanying Roger’s article is Winold Reiss’s *Drawing in Two Colors or Interpretation of Harlem Jazz I* (printed in black and white) [Fig. 2.2.], which dynamically captures two vibrant male and female African American dancers. Details

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<sup>69</sup> Larsen, ‘Quicksand’, in *Quicksand and Passing*, p. 58.

<sup>70</sup> Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 130.

<sup>71</sup> J.A. Rogers, ‘Jazz at Home’, in *The New Negro*, ed. by Locke, pp. 216-224 (pp. 216, 218); cited in Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>72</sup> Susan Currell, *American Culture in the 1920s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 72.

<sup>73</sup> *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. by Randel, 134.

such as the leg wildly flung in the top left hand corner, the bottle of prohibition era liquor thrown between the dancers, and what appears to be an African ceremonial mask hung on the wall, also enhance the impression of the exoticism of jazz in the scene. Vogel notes that with ‘their intimate interaction between performer and spectators, illicit alcohol consumption, social dancing, potential for interracial contact, public displays of sexuality, and underworld connotations, Harlem’s cabarets provided a powerful symbol of the pleasure and dangers of urban life’.<sup>74</sup> The striking simplicity in Reiss’s use of colour – consisting only of red and black – as well as the animated abandon and geometrical shapes of the dancers add to the tangibility of motion and echoes of jazz in the image. It is also important to consider, as Richard J. Powell does, that ‘though passionately engaged in black representational discourses’, Reiss’s depiction comes from a white perspective.<sup>75</sup> *Interpretation of Harlem Jazz* reflects a more caricatured style than Reiss’s usual emphasis on realism in portraits. Jeffrey Stewart ascribed his interest in racial groups (he had previously painted Native Americans) as a desire to ‘illuminate the distinctions and integrity of different ethnic groups’. Stewart adds that ‘[w]ithout loss of naturalistic accuracy and individuality, he somehow subtly expresses the type and without being any less human, captures the racial and local’.<sup>76</sup> Reiss’s portrayal of Harlem also extended beyond studies of its people and cabarets, and entered into the urban scene.

In *Harlem at Night* or *Interpretation of Harlem Jazz II* (1925) [Fig. 2.3.] Reiss, again using a more caricatured and cubistic style, captures the city in two colours: black and pink. In the jumbled assortment of towers and streets, he illustrates multiple scenes, some silhouetted through windows, others on rooftops. In these scenes, reminiscent of a comic strip, different platforms stage an array of activities; an oversized cat stalks across a roof, lovers talk, a child plays, a woman prays, and men debate below a bright electric

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<sup>74</sup> Vogel, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Richard J. Powell, ‘Re/Birth of a Nation’, in *Rhapsodies in Black*, ed. by Powell, pp. 14-33 (p. 17).

<sup>76</sup> Jeffrey Stewart, *To Color America: Portraits of Winold Reiss* (Washington D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, 1989), p. 17.

light. Reiss conveys the variety and vibrancy of Harlem and its people, depicting numerous scenes on an array of conceptual stages. Reiss's corresponding piece *Dawn in Harlem: A Phantasy* (1925) [Fig. 2.4.] presents a similarly stage-like vision, as a backdrop of skyscrapers blends with Harlem's tenements, each billowing smoke to create a frame of cloud. The circles of the sun illuminating the rooftops of Harlem also demonstrate Reiss's influence upon Aaron Douglas as a student, whose use of concentric outlines, skyscrapers and smokestacks would characterize his work.<sup>77</sup> Amy Kirschke also notes that Reiss was likely influenced by cubism, as well as the German silhouette technique of *scherschnitte*, which in turn shaped Douglas's work.<sup>78</sup> Through juxtaposing the hectic Harlem night with the peaceful dawn, Reiss emphasizes the disparity and versatility of atmosphere and tone in the district, as the scene of night moves mechanically into day.

While the everyday clamor as a soundtrack to city life proved familiar to Larsen's Helga, these metropolitan influences also made their way organically into the very entertainment Helga was persuaded to patronize. A symbiotic exchange was taking place between the modernized city and its artistic product. While the physical infrastructure of the city provided the locus for artists, musicians, writers, performers, photographers, filmmakers, dancers, et al., in return they incorporated facets of the city in varying degrees within their work. In Harlem there was a tug-of-war between high-brow and low-brow, the genuine and the pretend, but one thing was constant: the perpetual backdrop of the metropolis as it manifested itself in many forms. The Harlem population and its outside visitors were a regular audience to the district's modulating but simultaneously incessant soundscape, landscape, backdrop and characters. So ensued a call and response motif

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<sup>77</sup> Amy Kirschke, 'Winold Reiss', in *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. by Wintz and Finkelman, II, pp. 1033-1034 (p. 1034).

<sup>78</sup> Kirschke, 'The Burden of Black Womanhood: Aaron Douglas and the "Apogée of Beauty"', *American Studies*, 49.1/2 (2008), 97-105 (p. 100).

integral to jazz music itself; the city issued the call, while its resident artists came up with a response.

In bandleader Duke Ellington's 'Echoes of Harlem' (1936), Ellington himself establishes the underlying walking bass on piano in a patter reminiscent of footsteps.<sup>79</sup> With the momentum established, each layer builds as Cootie Williams adds his growling plunger mute trumpet line, while the rest of the orchestra keep rhythm. Williams's trumpet solo and the supporting players intermittently echo the sonorous sounds of car horns and wailing sirens as the music borrows from the city. Having built the layers of sound to a crescendo, the stepped piano returns, this time with strings, as the trumpet has the final say. Ellington enfolds the city clamor within his music, and Richard O. Boyer's 1944 interview also confirms Ellington as an attentive listener to the city's soundtrack. Ellington details his inspiration for the piece 'Eerie Moan' (1930) which drew from the night-time 'moan' of the city: '[i]t's the voice of New York City [...]. You really don't hear anything single, just a kind of general breathing'.<sup>80</sup> Similar themes of incorporating the city into music are evident in Ellington's 'Drop me off in Harlem' (1933) with lyrics by poet Nick Kenney inspired by a taxi ride, Earl Hagen and Dick Rogers's 'Harlem Nocturne' (1939) which features smooth saxophone and imitates shrieking horns and footstep patter, as well as James Price Johnson's orchestral 'Harlem Symphony' (1932) which reflects aspects of bustling city life through jazz inflections.

Singer Ethel Waters also took direct inspiration from the discourse of the Harlem tenements and conveyed this spirit in her intimate stage performances in jazz cellars and clubs.<sup>81</sup> In *His Eye is on the Sparrow*, Waters credits her success as lying not in the quality of her voice, but in her storytelling:

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<sup>79</sup> Duke Ellington, *Echoes of Harlem (Cootie's Concerto)*, Duke Ellington Orchestra (Naxos Jazz Legends, Classic Recordings, vol. 4: 1936-1938).

<sup>80</sup> Richard O. Boyer, 'The Hot Bach', in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, ed. by Mark Tucker (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 214-245 (p. 233).

<sup>81</sup> Vogel, p. 88.

they were intrigued by my characterizations which I drew from real life. I'd hear a couple in another flat arguing, for instance. Their voices would come up the air shaft and I'd listen making up stories about their spats and their love life. I could hear such an argument in the afternoon and that night sing a whole song about it. I'd sing out their woes to the tune of my blues music.<sup>82</sup>

Initially broadcast through the air shaft, a narrow gap between blocks which doubled as the loudspeaker of the tenement, Waters draws on the private, real life stories she overhears, engaging her audience by grounding her stage performance in an honest portrayal of everyday truths. Vogel also notes that in their performances, both Ellington and Waters draw 'a line from the air shaft as a space for the performance of everyday life and the cellar as a space for the performance of everynight life'.<sup>83</sup> A tension is established here between the private and the public, but in the day-to-day reality of tenement life, often the private became unavoidably public as normally private scenes were accessible to being viewed, overheard and experienced, thus contributing to the theatricality of the everyday. As the music and performative milieu resonated from within venues and infiltrated the Harlem night, moreover, as exemplified by Ellington and Waters, staged entertainment equally borrowed from the impromptu performances of everyday Harlem, initiating a theatrical exchange.

The resonating sounds of the dumbbell tenement air shafts are further encapsulated in Duke Ellington's piece entitled 'Harlem Air Shaft' (1940). Beginning with gentle rhythmic percussion and lightly tiptoeing then clattering piano, finally building to a crescendo of brass sound, Ellington captures the airshaft soundscape from dawn to dusk. Edward Green notes that 'Ellington was tuned into the diversity of urban sounds [...] and sought ways to render these sounds musically, and to integrate them

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<sup>82</sup> Waters, *His Eye is on the Sparrow*, p. 130.

<sup>83</sup> Vogel, p. 88.

compositionally'.<sup>84</sup> In conversation with Boyer, Ellington remarked on his choice of the air shaft as his inspiration for the piece:

You get the full essence of Harlem in an air shaft. You hear fights, you smell dinner, you hear people making love. You hear intimate gossip floating down. You hear the radio. An air shaft is one great big loudspeaker. You see your neighbors' laundry. You hear the janitor's dogs. [...] You smell coffee. A wonderful thing, that smell. An air shaft has got every contrast [...]. You hear people praying, fighting, snoring [...]. I tried to put all that in 'Harlem Air Shaft'.<sup>85</sup>

Ellington implies the tenement air-shaft as capturing the essential aromas and sounds peculiar to each building, community and the wider neighbourhood, in this instance Harlem. Vogel notes that through his composition of air shaft sounds, Ellington foregrounds 'the experience of the air shaft as a vector, not of disease, but of sound, smell, touch, contact, intimacy, and publicness [...]' an attempt to conjure the mundane sociality of tenement living'.<sup>86</sup> By interpreting the air shaft as an echo chamber in his music, Ellington also enacts a transference of everyday life to the stage. He amplifies the air shaft as a 'loudspeaker' of the community, broadcasting the secrets of the tenements on stage for universal listening. Alongside multiple other functions, the tenement air shafts of Harlem, as well as other districts, served as a point of contact between tenement dwellers, as well as a space for overhearing or eavesdropping on the lives of others, sometimes simply for amusement.

While spectacle was seemingly inexorable in Harlem, everyday sounds carried on the breeze and infiltrated jazz and blues. The palpability of music and rhythm is a

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<sup>84</sup> Edward Green, "'Harlem Air Shaft': A True Programmatic Composition?", *Journal of Jazz Studies*, 7.1 (2011), 28-46 (p. 46).

<sup>85</sup> Boyer, 'The Hot Bach', p. 235.

<sup>86</sup> Vogel, p. 87.

pervading theme among writers and artists. In a report by the city's Noise Abatement Commission in 1930, street sounds included radio and music, peddlers and loiterers, while other sounds included bells, whistles, amusement halls, musical instruments and phonographs.<sup>87</sup> Writer and shipping heiress Nancy Cunard noted of Harlem in 1934 that an 'eternal radio seeping through everything day and night, indoors and out, becomes somehow the personification of restlessness, desire, brooding. And then the gorgeous roughness, the gargle of Louis Armstrong's voice breaks through'.<sup>88</sup> Street acts such as organ grinders with monkeys, accordionists, fiddlers, singers, dancers, and speakers were an everyday sight in early twentieth-century Manhattan. Further emphasizing the prevalence of everyday conceptual stages, impromptu audiences, and the ubiquity of jazz in Harlem, Rosey E. Pool attests that 'Harlem is the capital of jazz. There you may see sometimes by day on some corner a black chap of five or six practicing jazz-steps [...] an unpaid artist, amusing a crowd of lookers-on'.<sup>89</sup> On the subject of Harlem's 'unique characteristic', James Weldon Johnson wrote in 1925 that '[i]t has movement, color, gayety, singing, dancing, boisterous laughter and loud talk. One of its outstanding features is brass band parades'.<sup>90</sup> In New York by 1935, nevertheless, legislation under Mayor LaGuardia, which likened street performers to vagrants, refused to issue licenses to new organ grinders, claiming that they did not comply with the image of the modernized city. In spite of numerous letters from readers of the *New York Times* expressing nostalgia for street performance and its virtues as a social and cultural leveller and morale improver, by January, 1936, all 'itinerant street music licenses' were expired and un-renewable. The decision was non-negotiable, and the *New York Times* reported on

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<sup>87</sup> Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, p. 130.

<sup>88</sup> Nancy Cunard, 'Harlem Reviewed', in *Modernism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 770- 776 (p. 774).

<sup>89</sup> MS Rosey Pool Collection, Miscellaneous Pieces, Harlem, The Negro Center, item 8-5.

<sup>90</sup> James Weldon Johnson, 'Harlem: the Culture Capital', in *Double-take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*, ed. by Venetria K. Patton and Maureen Honey (New Brunswick; New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 21-27 (p. 26).

an incident in Harlem at the turn of the new year in 1936, whereby a band were issued summons to discontinue their playing, and Susie Tanenbaum reports that by 1938, the legislation also applied to performance on the subway.<sup>91</sup> The sound of varied street performers which had long been a part of the city's everyday accompaniment was, by the late 1930s, no more. Though the post-1936 Manhattan streets could no longer offer a makeshift stage to budding performers, plenty of alternative official and unofficial amusements were available both before and after the ban.

Just as the sounds of the city echoed within Ellington's jazz arrangements, Langston Hughes enfolded jazz inflections and performative elements within his poetry. Many of Hughes's poems pay homage to music, and in his essay 'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain' (1926), he writes that his poems try to 'grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz'. He adds that 'jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul – the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile'.<sup>92</sup> To Hughes, jazz is an essential sound which differentiates his own race and gives him a sense of belonging, and as Kathy J. Ogren remarks, 'jazz and blues gave Hughes a voice with which he could assert his own artistic independence'.<sup>93</sup> Hughes places jazz in opposition to the white world which he associates with work and industry, while emphasizing necessitated everyday theatricality, his reference to 'pain swallowed in a smile' implies the requirement for African Americans to perform pleasantries when in white company, an act often deemed as essential in white dominated America of the early twentieth century. Hughes incorporated contemporary jazz and dance crazes into his

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<sup>91</sup> Susie J. Tanenbaum, *Underground Harmonies: Music and Politics in the Subways of New York* (Ithaca, New York; London: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 42-43.

<sup>92</sup> Hughes, 'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain', *The Nation*, 23 June 1926, pp. 692-694 (p. 694).

<sup>93</sup> Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 133.

writing – art-forms often dismissed as frivolous and ‘primitive’ by other contributors to the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>94</sup> Hughes continues in his essay by attributing the rejection of jazz and celebration of ‘highbrow’ culture by some Harlem Renaissance associates to conditioning through a broadly white education. Critic Catherine Morley also observes of Hughes’s work that ‘[t]he presence of jazz in his poetry is deliberately subversive, its improvisational quality a rebellious challenge to the closed structures of dominant white literary forms’.<sup>95</sup> Hughes concludes by proclaiming: ‘[I]et the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing the Blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand’.<sup>96</sup> To Hughes, jazz was a rich and nuanced celebration of culture and a ‘revolt’ against the monotony of the everyday, whereas many other Harlem Renaissance contributors could not hear the intricacies of the music and simply rejected jazz as a primordial stereotype.

In his vast body of work, Hughes also captured the atmosphere of early twentieth-century Harlem; the everyday theatricality of its streets, the excitement and rhythm of its venues, and its abundant variety of people and cultures. Born in Joplin, Missouri, Hughes later studied at Lincoln University, Pennsylvania from 1926 to 1929, and subsequently made the permanent move to Harlem.<sup>97</sup> At the forefront of literary innovation, Hughes’s regular contributions to *The Crisis* magazine made him one of the most defining poets, not just of Harlem’s literary upsurge, but of the entire literary generation. In an acceptance speech for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s Spingarn medal in 1960, Hughes accredited his writing success to the entire ‘Negro people’, commenting that ‘[w]ithout them [...] there would have been no poems; without

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<sup>94</sup> David Chinitz, ‘Rejuvenation through Joy: Langston Hughes, Primitivism, and Jazz’, *American Literary History*, 9.1 (1997), 60-78 (p. 64).

<sup>95</sup> Catherine Morley, *Modern American Literature* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012), p. 201.

<sup>96</sup> Hughes, ‘The Negro Artist’, p. 694.

<sup>97</sup> Arnold Rampersad, ‘Langston Hughes: The Man, the Writer and His Continuing Influence’, in *Langston Hughes: The Man, His Art and his Continuing Influence*, ed. by C. James Trotman (New York; London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 21-36 (p. 21).

their hopes and fears and dreams, no stories; without their struggles, no dramas; without their music, no songs'.<sup>98</sup> Hughes was extremely well connected, both within the Harlem Renaissance, and outside; his friends, associates and correspondents included numerous significant writers, poets and artists of the era. Although nurtured by members of the Harlem Renaissance movement, Hughes also deviated from many of its more elitist ideals in his work. Leslie Catherine Sanders also attests that, from a young age, and encouraged by his mother, Hughes held an enduring love for the theatre and performing arts, themes which are recurrently evident in his poetry.<sup>99</sup>

In parallel with Hughes's poems, Douglas's paintings and murals feature themes of jazz, dance and performance, his inspiration taken directly from the everyday sights and sounds of the city, while his stylized representations of African American figures capture the Harlem zeitgeist. Douglas was a defining visual artist renowned for his Harlem Renaissance connections, and uses African and particularly Egyptian inflections within his work. His style is mirage-like, using silhouettes or shadows to cast the outlines of people, majestic in stance and brimming with vitality. His figures are set against varying backgrounds as he integrates and blends elements drawn from city, stage, desert and jungle in equal measure. Douglas's colour palette comprises subtle tones of light pinks, purples, blues and yellows, delicately modulated within each work to give his paintings an illusory, ethereal quality. Having graduated in Fine Arts from the University of Nebraska in 1922, and subsequently gaining a degree from the University of Kansas in 1923, by 1925 Douglas had moved from his home town of Topeka, Kansas, his plan being to travel to Paris after briefly visiting Harlem. Captivated by the new possibilities

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<sup>98</sup> MS Rosey Pool Collection, Langston Hughes Occasional Pieces, 1960-1968, Remarks by Langston Hughes in Acceptance of 45<sup>th</sup> Spingarn Medal at NAACP 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention, Northrop Auditorium, University of Minnesota (26 June, 1960), item 4-92.

<sup>99</sup> Leslie Catherine Sanders, 'Introduction', in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, ed. by Arnold Rampersad and others, 16 vols (Columbia; London: University of Missouri Press, 2001-2004), VI: *Gospel Plays, Operas and Later Dramatic Works*, ed. by Leslie Catherine Sanders (2004), pp. 1-10 (p. 1).

arising from the Harlem Renaissance, and inspired by the spectacle and vibrancy of the Harlem streets, Douglas curtailed his journey to Paris.<sup>100</sup> In Harlem, Douglas met many influential artists, writers and campaigners including Harlem Renaissance instigator Du Bois, who would give Douglas's work ample exposure through *The Crisis*. Douglas also came to be inspired by Winold Reiss, influenced by his striking depictions of African Americans, cityscapes and club scenes. As a protégé of Reiss, Douglas would visibly adopt some of his techniques including clear, sometimes geometric lines, and dark, compelling figures.<sup>101</sup> Reiss also encouraged Douglas in connecting with original African art and artifacts in museums and galleries, and although resistant at first, this aesthetic would become prominent in his work.<sup>102</sup> During this time, Douglas also became emboldened in his intention to convey African American heritage, a subject which would remain at the forefront of his work throughout his career.<sup>103</sup>

Douglas's celebration of jazz imagery and the cabaret scene is evident within his work in numerous instances, and Currell observes that Douglas 'incorporated a jazz iconography that used flat black and white geometric abstractions to show abstractions of trumpet shapes, saxophones, drummers and dancers surrounded by zigzags or sunbursts in a highly modern stylisation'. Douglas's mural known as *Dance Magic* (1930) [Fig. 2.5.], commissioned for the College Inn Ballroom at the urbane Sherman Hotel in Chicago (a white only establishment), echoes Harlem's African American jazz clubs, although as Currell notes Chicago's hotel and restaurant ballrooms transformed the city into a center for jazz from the early 1920s.<sup>104</sup> The murals were enlarged from original

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<sup>100</sup> Jeannine DeLombard, 'Aaron Douglas', in *American National Biography Online*, April 2014 <<http://www.anb.org/articles/17/17-00233.html>> [accessed 20 July 2016].

<sup>101</sup> Amy Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race and the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), pp. 28-29.

<sup>102</sup> Richard J. Powell, 'Art History and Black Memory: Toward a "Blues Aesthetic"', in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. by Robert G. O'Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 182-197 (p. 184).

<sup>103</sup> Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*, p. 26.

<sup>104</sup> Currell, *American Culture*, pp. 160, 77.

sketches by Douglas, allowing the impression and atmosphere of Harlem to be transferred to Chicago.<sup>105</sup> Here the saxophonist and the rest of the band are central to the piece, with patrons scattered about on tables, while ominous disembodied hands reach into the scene. Douglas's frequent use of incorporeal hands and arms is a physical representation of his search for racial identity and artistic inspiration outlined in a 1925 letter to Hughes: 'let's bare our arms and plunge them deep through laughter, through pain, through sorrow, through hope, through disappointment, into the very depths of the souls of our people and drag forth material crude, rough, neglected'.<sup>106</sup> A large painted theatrical curtain divides the mural into three scenes, and to the left and right, jungle influences are prominent, reflecting primitivist notions of Africa which commonly emerged in jazz and dance, while a lone trumpet traverses the boundaries from the jazz band in the centre, and enters the tribal scene to the left. Kirschke indicates that the mural 'joined the traditions of African Dance and music with modern jazz'.<sup>107</sup> Contrary to heightening racial stereotypes, by frequently incorporating jungle references within a modern setting, Douglas merges the past and the present with the intention of acknowledging distant African American heritage, while simultaneously championing contemporary culture. Powell also notes that the 'new, diaspora-informed, black visual modernism developed out of an inherent contradiction; a celebration of skyscrapers, Cadillacs and progressivism that existed alongside indelible memories of rural shacks and mule-drawn wagons'.<sup>108</sup> In its positioning within a venue for white patrons, and accentuated by the scene-like illusion of the image, the mural can also be interpreted as a form of theatrical backdrop,

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<sup>105</sup> Susan Earle, 'Harlem, Modernism, and Beyond', in *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist*, ed. by Susan Earle (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 5-52 (p. 30).

<sup>106</sup> New Haven, Connecticut, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, MS Langston Hughes Papers, Douglas to Hughes, 21 December 1925; cited in Richard J. Powell, *The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism* (Washington D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1989), p. 24.

<sup>107</sup> Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*, p. 114.

<sup>108</sup> Powell, 'Re/Birth of a Nation', p. 23.

setting the scene and atmosphere of African American Harlem, without requiring guests to physically enter an unfamiliar space.

By incorporating jazz and blues inflections within their work, Hughes and Douglas actively embrace the multidisciplinary and multisensory aspects of their work, enabling them the freedom to revolutionize and experiment. In his letter to Hughes, Douglas outlines his ambitions and artistic inspiration: ‘let’s sing it, dance it, write it, paint it. Let’s do the impossible. Let’s create something transcendently material, mystically objective. Earthy. Spiritually earthy. Dynamic’.<sup>109</sup> Powell also comments on Douglas’s revolutionary ‘new Negro’ aesthetic, stating that ‘this ‘transformed’ Negro was an art-deco silhouette, enveloped in tonally graded arcs, concentric circles and waves, and hieratically placed in a neo-Egyptian *jazz moderne* setting’.<sup>110</sup> Drawing on his artistic freedom Douglas creates unreal scenes which intersperse desert and jungle locations with influences of performance and the urban, his use of mismatched and disjointed settings reflecting the theatre as scene changes occur within a single piece. In his front cover design for Claude McKay’s autobiography *A Long Way from Home* (1937) [Fig. 2.6.], for example, Douglas depicts a desert scene in the foreground complete with palm trees and a donkey, while rising triumphantly from the sand are the jagged silhouetted towers of displaced skyscrapers.

Douglas’s *Song of the Towers* (1934) [Fig. 2.7.] portrays an impromptu musical performance taking place within the modern urban landscape. The piece is the last in a series of four murals entitled *Aspects of Negro Life* – charting the progress of African Americans through history – commissioned by the Public Works of Art Project for the New York Public Library building on One-Hundred-and-Thirty-Fifth Street. In depicting a ‘song’ Douglas provides a visual manifestation of a usually audible form, enabling

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<sup>109</sup> MS Langston Hughes Papers, Douglas to Hughes: 21 December 1925.

<sup>110</sup> Powell, ‘Re/Birth of a Nation’, p. 23.

comparisons to be drawn with Hughes's music inspired poetry including 'Harlem Night Song', which evokes a calmer vision of the night-time scene, as '[d]own the street | A band is playing', emphasizing the performativity of the Harlem streets as conceptual stages.<sup>111</sup> In a retrospective newspaper interview on *Song of the Towers*, Douglas commented, 'the song is the most powerful and pervasive creative expression of American Negro life [...]. I use three different types in this picture: Songs of Deliverance, Songs of Joy and the Dance and Songs of Depression or the blues'.<sup>112</sup> Powell likens the work itself to a blues piece 'where an improvised solo rides over a fixed composition', although rather than a full band contributing to the overall effect, Douglas is 'the rhythm section, the chorus, the soloist, the composer, and the conductor'.<sup>113</sup> The songs Douglas assigns correspond with the three silhouetted figures seen in the piece, each reflecting a different leg of the African American journey. From right to left appear: a man, suitcase in hand, in search of a new life and freedom during the great migration; in the centre, a saxophone wielding jazz musician, representing the Harlem Renaissance celebrates African American art and creativity; and on the left, a fallen figure cowers from the economic troubles of the depression.<sup>114</sup> The allegorical figures in the sequence centre around a giant cogwheel, symbolic of industry and the economy, and their positions and postures in relation to the wheel in turn reflect their level of success or defeat: one runs towards it, one is fully upright at the summit, and the last lays prostrate beneath.<sup>115</sup> The migrant figure on the right attempts to mount the wheel, as a disembodied hand tries to inhibit him and pull him back to the serfdom of the south, meanwhile the successful jazz musician is triumphant astride the wheel, as the figure representing the depression has tumbled from the wheel altogether.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Hughes, 'Harlem Night Song', in *Vintage Hughes*, p. 25.

<sup>112</sup> Marian McBride, 'Negro Art to Enhance Mansion', *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 10 December 1966, p. 6.

<sup>113</sup> Powell, 'Art History and Black Memory', p. 187.

<sup>114</sup> James Leggio, *Music and Modern Art* (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 210.

<sup>115</sup> McBride, p. 6.

<sup>116</sup> Leggio, pp. 211-212.

The metropolis depicted here juxtaposes New York's two diverging personae: the façade of imposing skyscrapers and diverse entertainment is contrasted with the 'behind the scenes' realities of the city's mechanism, as exemplified by the large cogwheel and multiple factories with billowing smoke. As Powell observes, '[t]he malaise that Douglas perceived as an outgrowth of modern life [...] [is] symbolized in the gauntlet race that his silhouetted protagonist in *Song of the Towers* runs on top of a huge, machine cogwheel'. The image has multifaceted implications, depicting both the performative and the shadowed elements of the city, while bringing into focus the paradoxes of industry, economy and entertainment in Harlem. The influences of jazz combine with the rise of industrialized modernity to reinforce a 'multi-perspective historicism'.<sup>117</sup> Here the jazz musician, emphasized by his imposing position and stance, tops the hierarchy and as James Leggio comments, '[f]or Douglas, this saxophonist embodied the modern African American, 1920s prosperity, and artistic expression; his musical parallels are the songs of joy, dance, or jazz'.<sup>118</sup> Glenn Jordan notes moreover that 'the Black jazz saxophonist – playing solo, improvising, creating – stands here [...] as a symbol of freedom'.<sup>119</sup> The cogwheel is, for the musician, also emblematic of a conceptual urban stage, as the elevated figure surmounts the mechanical podium, lifting his saxophone and ostensibly raising his voice in song to the enclosing majestic skyscrapers. Between the towers is the distant vision of the Statue of Liberty, symbolizing the possibilities of freedom for migrants to the city, while emanating from Liberty's torch and surrounding the singer are concentric circles of light, emerging like spotlights, illuminating the sky and intensifying the performative, stage-like illusion. Powell adds that the circles 'act as a kind of zoom lens, taking the viewer into the center of painted matters'.<sup>120</sup> To Douglas, the jazz

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<sup>117</sup> Richard J. Powell, 'Paint that thing! Aaron Douglas's Call to Modernism', *American Studies*, 49.1/2 (2008), 107-119 (p. 112).

<sup>118</sup> Leggio, p. 212.

<sup>119</sup> Glenn Jordan, 'Re-membering the African American Past: Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas and Black Art of the Harlem Renaissance', *Cultural Studies*, 25.6 (2011), 848-891 (pp. 877-878).

<sup>120</sup> Powell, 'Art History and Black Memory', p. 238.

saxophonist, as a representative of African American art, is centre stage and at the pinnacle of achievement.

The dramatic background scene in *Song of the Towers*, with its magical jutting skyscrapers and jaunty angled factories like ‘slanting and swaying scenery’ parting to reveal the Statue of Liberty, resemble an imaginary theatre backdrop.<sup>121</sup> Upon first arriving in Harlem, the district had prompted a profound response in Douglas, as the upsurge in possibilities for artistic creativity persuaded him to stay. Douglas was also struck by the chaotic nature of Harlem’s crowded streets and in a retrospective speech at Fisk University, Douglas reflected on his arrival in Harlem and his initial observations:

My first impression of Harlem was that of an enormous outdoor stage swarming with humanity [...]. Here life moved across this vast stage without a halt from morning until night and from dusk to dawn. Here one found a kaleidoscope of rapidly changing colors, sounds, movements – rising, falling, swelling, contracting, now hurrying, now dragging along without end and often without apparent purpose. And yet, beneath the surface of this chaotic incoherent activity one sensed an inner harmony, one felt the presence of a mysterious hand fitting all of those disparate elements into a whole to be realized, to be understood only in time and from a great distance.<sup>122</sup>

To artists, Harlem presented a never-ending stream of opportunity to view and capture the eternal variety of life. Here, while en route to Paris, Douglas found his muse as Harlem provided him with the ever-changing, stage-like streets, vitality and artistic environment he was seeking. Douglas’s metaphorical allusion to Harlem as a stage not only accentuates the bustling diversity of the district, but also places significant emphasis on the allure of viewing its characters, watching the impromptu performances and everyday

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<sup>121</sup> Powell, ‘Art History and Black Memory’, p. 187.

<sup>122</sup> Nashville, Tennessee, Fisk University Archives, MS Aaron Douglas Collection: 1937-1974, Harlem Renaissance: workshop on Negro Life and Culture and the Liberal Arts Curriculum (1969), series 8.2, box 3, fol. 3-40; cited in Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*, p. 12.

theatricality of street dramas, as well as listening to the blare of its ceaseless soundtrack. By articulating the stage-like qualities of Harlem, Douglas also aligns himself with the broader inclination among artists and writers of the era, towards envisaging the modern metropolis as spectacle, and interpreting the city in theatrical terms. While acknowledging the unpredictability of Harlem's chaotic scenes, Douglas also implies a sense of design, as if 'a mysterious hand' – emblematic of the hands reaching into his paintings – perhaps a divine director, was somehow fitting the pieces of the everyday drama together.

Artist Palmer Hayden, known for his portrayals of African American life, also depicts the chaotic drama of Harlem's 'outdoor stage' in his iconic work *Midsummer Night in Harlem* (1936) [Fig. 2.8.]. The sidewalk, stoops, windows and fire-escapes act as a multi-leveled theatre auditorium as faces line the street and peer from all directions. Hayden's caricatured style has often been criticized, but in spite of this, he is successful in capturing the 'kaleidoscope' of vitality so vividly conjured in Douglas's impression of the Harlem street scene.<sup>123</sup> In 1943, art historian James Porter famously compared the painting to advertisements featuring 'black face minstrels'.<sup>124</sup> Sharon F. Patton reports, nevertheless, that in response to his critics, Hayden claimed that 'his works made a symbolic reference to comedy, tragedy, and pleasures of a black life-style'. Patton also notes that Hayden considered himself a modernist, a mode in which expressionism surpassed 'descriptive realism'.<sup>125</sup> Drawn out by the oppressive heat of the apartment in summer, people congregate in groups to laugh, chat and tell stories, a woman nurses a baby, a girl reads, a boy rests against a fire hydrant, a languid dog sprawls the sidewalk, a motorcar full of people drives by, a man in a straw boater uses the sidewalk as a

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<sup>123</sup> MS Aaron Douglas Collection, Harlem Renaissance: workshop on Negro Life and Culture, series 8.2, box 3, fol. 3-40.

<sup>124</sup> James Porter, *Modern Negro Art* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. 110.

<sup>125</sup> Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 138.

conceptual stage, serenading the gathering on his ukulele, all the while people in their Sunday-best depart from the church at the end of the street.

The scene in *Midsummer Night* displays the diversity of activity on the streets, as the heat transports the indoors outdoors and the sidewalk becomes an extension of the living space. Some simply watch the scene, others stroll in a Sunday-evening *passaggiata*, while those huddled, gasping for air at brownstone townhouse windows hold perspective over the entire conceptual stage. Patton interprets the painting as ‘a modernist translation’ of a mystical midsummer night, marking the summer solstice and the birth of John the Baptist.<sup>126</sup> The image emits a sense of relaxed happiness and balmy warmth as Hayden captures the Harlem of the everyday, a buffer to the sensationalized depictions of the nightclubs and slumming zones, but vibrant and colorful in equal measure. Hayden encapsulates the enthralling and engaging nature of the Harlem street scene, as streets acted as sociable community centres where numerous activities, interactions and momentary dramas took place. In his investigation into race relations in America, *An American Dilemma* (1944), Gunnar Myrdal reported that ‘Negro people in the city, even of the respectable middle class, spend much of their time on the streets, partly because of their rural background, partly because of the crowdedness and unattractiveness of their homes’.<sup>127</sup> Nancy Cunard also noted in 1934 that ‘the real people are in the street. I mean those young men on the corner, and the people all sitting on the steps throughout the breathless, leaden summer’.<sup>128</sup> Main areas of activity, such as One-Hundred-and-Thirty-Third Street between Lenox Avenue and Seventh Avenue, among various other epithets, became known as ‘the stroll’.<sup>129</sup> As Shane Vogel reports, the act of strolling performed an important role ‘as an African American aesthetic and social practice, [which] had a long

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<sup>126</sup> Patton, p. 138.

<sup>127</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New Brunswick; London: Transaction Publishers, 1996), p. 984.

<sup>128</sup> Cunard, ‘Harlem Reviewed’, p. 774.

<sup>129</sup> Larnell Dunkley Jr., ‘Jungle Alley’, in *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. by Wintz and Finkelman, I, pp. 656-658 (p. 656).

tradition in rural southern street life before northward migration transformed it into a modern remapping of the metropolis (and a necessary escape from the heat of stifling tenement apartments in the summer)'.<sup>130</sup> Strolling enabled the stroller to view and interpret the everyday theatricality of Harlem separately from scenes of the spectacular consumed by urban slummers.

Hughes's poem 'Harlem Sweeties' celebrates the diversity of skin tones in Harlem's Sugar Hill district as viewed whilst strolling: '[s]o if you want to know beauty's | Rainbow-sweet thrill, | Stroll down luscious, | Delicious, *fine* Sugar Hill'.<sup>131</sup> The emphasis here is on strolling for the purpose of seeing Harlem and its 'sweeties' and interpreting them as everyday spectacle. Similar to the Italian tradition of *passeggiata*, as well as aspects of Baudelairean *flânerie*, (its primary purpose being walking and seeing rather than traveling towards a destination), the stroll performed multiple simultaneous rôles. It acted as a meeting point for friends and acquaintances, a method for surveying people and surroundings, an escape from cramped apartment living, as well as a parade for both seeing and being seen, as strollers became both audience and performer.

As depicted in Hayden's *Midsummer Night*, strolling, chatting and lounging, particularly on Sundays, was an enjoyable pastime. James Weldon Johnson also comments in *Black Manhattan* (1930) that '[t]he masses of Harlem get a good deal of pleasure out of things far too simple for most other folks. In the evenings of summer and on Sundays they get lots of enjoyment from strolling'. Johnson adds that in this instance, strolling does not simply refer to walking, but 'those streets are places for socializing'. Johnson's emphasis on strolling as taking place particularly during the evening also accentuates a more relaxed and sociable milieu of evening and night-time Harlem,

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<sup>130</sup> Vogel, p. 150.

<sup>131</sup> Hughes, 'Harlem Sweeties', in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, ed. by Arnold Rampersad and others, 16 vols (Columbia; London: University of Missouri Press, 2001-2004), II: *The Poems, 1941-1950*, ed. by Arnold Rampersad (2001), p. 30.

compared to the exoticized vista often depicted. On the etiquette of the stroll, Johnson explains ‘[o]ne puts on one’s best clothes and fares forth to pass the time pleasantly with the friends and acquaintances and, most important of all, the strangers he is sure of meeting’. The stroll is as much aesthetic as it is social, and Johnson indicates the importance of making an all-around good impression on possible new acquaintances. Alluding to the customs of the average stroll, Johnson notes that as ‘[o]ne saunters along, he hails this one, exchanges a word or two with that one, stops for a short chat with another one. He comes up to a laughing, chattering group, in which he may have only one friend or acquaintance, but that gives him the privilege of joining in’. Here Johnson astutely uncovers the communal topography of the Harlem streets and the social networking habits of its inhabitants. Rather than simply strolling for the purpose of imperviously viewing the urban scenery or people-watching, the Harlem stroll was also interactive, and the street became a dynamic community hub. Significantly in Harlem, strolling became emblematic of freedom and emancipation, and as Johnson concludes ‘[t]his is not simply going for a walk; it is more like going out for an adventure’.<sup>132</sup> The sociability of the street and diversity of activity provided a form of entertainment in itself, as strolling and observing street scenes among Harlem residents served to heighten the district’s performative milieu.

While the night-time held a more obvious performative presence, everyday Harlem held its own idiosyncratic theatricalities. The streets bustled with diverse lives as people of different ages, jobs, cultures and beliefs intermingled. Harlem’s Lenox Avenue subway line, completed in 1904, with stops at *One-Hundred-and-Twenty-Fifth*, *One-Hundred-and-Thirty-Fifth* and *One-Hundred-and-Forty-Fifth* streets enabled necessary connections with the rest of the city.<sup>133</sup> Each carriage provided a snapshot sample of

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<sup>132</sup> Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>133</sup> Lewis, p. 25.

Harlem's residents, workers and clientele and Hughes's poem 'Subway Face' (1924), published in *The Crisis*, captures the nature of fleeting glances and people-watching possibilities aboard the subway. Hughes records the ephemerality of city life, as he experiences a possible attraction to a stranger who he will likely never meet or encounter again. In the poem he directly addresses the anonymous individual: '[t]hat I have been looking | For you all my life | Does not matter to you. | You do not know'. In this brief vignette, Hughes is afforded an alluring glimpse of a possibility of fate, an alternative timeline, which is quickly snatched away. The transitory nature of alternate destinies was a common theme in early twentieth-century New York as lives unfolded in close proximity, but in the most part did not interact. The visibility of other people in high volumes, as Hughes articulates, however added to the tantalizing sense of distance and detachment. The subway existed as a heterotopic space and an alternative conceptual stage, where fleeting glimpses and clues into the lives of others provided diversion. As their lives diverge in opposing directions, however, Hughes remains keenly aware that he will never have the opportunity to convey his sentiments in person: '[n]ow you take the Harlem train uptown; | I take a local down'.<sup>134</sup> The subway here acts both as a convenor, for eliciting potential relationships, and a destroyer, mechanically redirecting prospective partnerships before they have time to be realized. The rigid subway timetable does not make concessions, as the involuntary carriages lurch to their next destination in spite of the people they convey. Here the city's inevitable daily process takes precedence and infrastructure ultimately triumphs.

While segregation shaped many aspects of city life and remained firmly in place up until the 1960s, the subway was an exception where representatives from New York's many diverse communities converged within a confined space. As Jessie Redmon Fauset highlights, nevertheless, the bigotry and intolerance of the world above ground also

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<sup>134</sup> Hughes, 'Subway Face', *The Crisis*, December 1924, p. 71.

pervaded the subway. In her article ‘Some Notes on Color’ (1922) in *The World Tomorrow*, Fauset articulates her observations and frustrations with inequality, noting that African Americans must live ‘with one eye on the attitude of the white world as though it were the audience and we the players whose hope and design is to please’. In acknowledging an underlying need for everyday performance in order to ‘please’ the ‘white world’, Fauset conveys not only passing, but also acting and altering personae as a necessary skill among African Americans of the early twentieth century. As well as interpreting race relations using theatrical language, Fauset pointedly comments on routine discrimination on the subway during her morning commute. As a seat becomes available, Fauset observes the man nearest to it scouring the carriage for a woman to give it to, interpreting his thought process thus: ‘I am the nearest one, “But oh,” says his glance, “you’re colored. I’m not expected to give it to you”. And down he plumps’.<sup>135</sup> Though the subway manifested as a heterotopia and provided a common space for inter-racial and inter-cultural mixing, it was never far from the bias of the racial and social hierarchy which existed in legislation and was customary in social behaviour long into the twentieth century.

Running deep beneath the streets of the metropolis, and in lieu of a window view, the pastimes available aboard the subway included reading, contemplating and impassive people watching. Each subway carriage doubled as a constantly altering stage, whereupon a new haphazard cross-section of the city was exhibited upon arrival in each new location. Hayden depicts a typical crowd in his painting *The Subway* (c. 1930) [Fig. 2.9.], and Michael W. Brooks suggests Hayden’s subway location as the ‘A’ train, which ran through Harlem from 1932, and from which the Billy Strayhorn jazz standard *Take the A Train* took its name.<sup>136</sup> The viewer is positioned as a fellow commuter, surveying the

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<sup>135</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, ‘Some Notes On Color’, *The World Tomorrow*, March 1922, p. 76.

<sup>136</sup> Michael W. Brooks, *Subway City: Riding the Trains, Reading New York* (New Brunswick; New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 1997), p. 187.

everyday theatricality from a seated level across the carriage. Here people from all different backgrounds, some sitting, many standing, are encapsulated and transported within close quarters. The focal point of the painting is an African American gentleman, who, gripping a rail for balance, is depicted by Hayden in dark tones. Although African American himself, Hayden's paintings have often been interpreted as stereotyped or caricatured representations of race. Tracy Fitzpatrick observes of Hayden's subway passenger that 'his expression seems to suggest that his identity is dependent on the viewer's vantage point'.<sup>137</sup> Other passengers congregate nearby: two casually reading newspapers, one man zealously steadying himself, two women staring absently ahead, and in the background an African American serviceman (Hayden himself had been in the army).<sup>138</sup> Lois Fichner-Rathus adds that Hayden's theme of variety is accentuated by 'the juxtaposition of the light and dark hands at the center of the painting'.<sup>139</sup> Though perhaps exaggerated, this snapshot emphasizes extremes in appearance, not only highlighting racial variety, but also differences in height, gender, formality of dress, occupation and bodily stance. Hayden's painting stands as a social commentary on the acute diversity of humanity, and the opportunity the subway provided to view and celebrate its multiplicity.

While the Harlem night provided endless amusement possibilities, daytime Harlem also held its own unique opportunities for watching and spectatorship on everyday conceptual stages, including busy streets and hectic public transport. The uneven night-time lighting in Harlem contrasted with brightly glowing Midtown and created an ethereal sensation of drama, while the intrigue surrounding Harlem's population which held a greater level of diversity than many other districts, as well as its 'exotic' entertainments attracted an audience of outsiders. Despite campaigning by

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<sup>137</sup> Tracy Fitzpatrick, *Art and the Subway: New York Underground* (New Brunswick; New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2009), pp. 111-112.

<sup>138</sup> Amy Kirschke, 'Palmer Hayden', in *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Paul Finkelman, 5 vols (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), I, pp. 393-394 (p. 393).

<sup>139</sup> Lois Fichner-Rathus, *Understanding Art*, 10th edn (Boston: Wadsworth, 2007), p. 72.

instigators of the Harlem Renaissance, many of the carnivalesque misconceptions about African American culture were still being propagated in art and literature by white and black artists, during the contemporaneous night-time zeitgeist of the ‘negro vogue’.<sup>140</sup> From Hughes’s ‘Harlem Night Song’ with its band playing ‘[d]own the street’, perhaps using the sidewalk as a stage, to Douglas’s *Song of the Towers*, where the central saxophonist, positioned atop a giant cogwheel, plays for the enclosed skyscrapers, the city’s infrastructure came to be interpreted as a stage for the performance of everyday theatricality.<sup>141</sup> In the next section, I consider issues of pretence and identity, particularly in works by Larsen and Fauset.

## II. IDENTITY, PASSING AND MASKING: ‘FOOLING OUR WHITE FOLKS’

The early twentieth century saw many questions raised regarding racial, cultural, social and sexual identities, and each were interrogated and brought into direct interplay in differing ways during Harlem’s so called ‘negro vogue’ and simultaneous Harlem Renaissance.<sup>142</sup> Though the Harlem Renaissance as an artistic and literary upsurge came to encompass a broader movement beyond Harlem, the district remained a nexus for cross-cultural, political and creative energy. Influential writers and artists began to question and challenge received notions of what it meant to be African American, while concurrently exoticized venues and cabarets served to further entrench deeply held stereotypes, as well as extending segregation within Harlem itself. W.E.B. Du Bois characterized the complexity of racial identity in 1903 as a ‘double-consciousness’, which he says arose from being both ‘Negro’ and ‘American’.<sup>143</sup> Views of African American identity had been largely shaped by white imposed assumptions, and the Harlem

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<sup>140</sup> Vogel, p. 4.

<sup>141</sup> Hughes, ‘Harlem Night Song’, in *Vintage Hughes*, p. 25.

<sup>142</sup> Vogel, p. 4.

<sup>143</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. by Brent Hayes Edwards (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903; repr. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 8.

Renaissance became an emblem of re-evaluation and innovation. White patrons such as Van Vechten, however, remain contentious as figures of progress, and as Justin D. Edwards remarks, '[o]n the one hand, Van Vechten helped countless black writers publish their work [...]. On the other hand, however, he exploited the vibrant culture of Jazz Age Harlem by taking white friends on "exotic tours" of the area'.<sup>144</sup> Though the Harlem Renaissance movement was never completely free from white influences or patronage, it provided a forum for discussion on racial, social and cultural issues, as well as facilitating interactions between artists and writers.

In Johnson's essay, 'Harlem: the Culture Capital', originally published in Alain Locke's *The New Negro* in 1925, he emphasizes that though commonly perceived as a separate 'quarter', Harlem remained fundamentally interconnected with metropolitan New York: 'the fact that there is little or no gang labor gives Harlem Negroes the opportunity for individual contacts with the life and spirit of New York'. Johnson also comments on the identity of Harlem, adding that 'Harlem talks American, reads American, thinks American'.<sup>145</sup> In contrast to Johnson's proclaimed allegiance of Harlem to the rest of New York and America, however, many white outsiders still viewed and treated Harlem and its residents as spectacle.

Vogel observes nevertheless, the 'dualistic terms' of 'segregated cabarets' and 'black cabarets' and warns that 'these two categories too easily reify valued oppositions that have structured the historiography of the Harlem Renaissance and of black performance more generally: good versus bad, authenticity versus inauthenticity, purity versus contamination, solidarity versus exploitation, creation versus appropriation'. He outlines the danger of these oppositional dynamics in promoting a leaning towards simply dismissing the segregated cabaret as 'a racist institution', thus curtailing further detailed

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<sup>144</sup> Justin D. Edwards, *Exotic Journeys*, p. 142.

<sup>145</sup> Johnson, 'Harlem: the Culture Capital', p. 26.

exploration. With this in mind, my focus here addresses how the impact of segregation and the white-influenced ‘negro vogue’ shaped and altered African American identity on an individual level, as well as necessitating everyday performance.<sup>146</sup> I select specific ‘characters’, some real and some fictional, and explore issues of identity and everyday theatricality on Harlem’s urban stage.

Many early twentieth-century African Americans remained detached from the impression of their culture which was being transmitted across the city from the focal point of Harlem. Access to performance and spectacle had become a regular pastime for many white New Yorkers, with city theatres hosting a vast array of entertainments from highbrow plays to the less salubrious spectacles of vaudeville, cabaret and burlesque. Chad Heap notes that performances drew heavily on white-influenced stereotypes as ‘these largely segregated neighborhoods provided white patrons with the very performances of blackness that they expected to see: jazzed-up versions of the jocular mummies, shiftless urban dandies, and alluring jezebels’.<sup>147</sup> One of the most prolific patrons of the Harlem Renaissance was the white writer and photographer Carl Van Vechten; an influential impresario of the arts, including writing and theatre. Cultural historian James Donald describes him as a ‘wealthy critic, collector, photographer, man-about-town’, stating that he ‘liked to act as gatekeeper between the renaissance and Manhattan and as tour guide to Harlem for his white friends’.<sup>148</sup> Though he provided support for many burgeoning writers and artists, including Nella Larsen, and much of his work seems intended to champion African American culture, Van Vechten also, perhaps unknowingly, frequently adhered to unwanted stereotypes. Within his novel, a *roman à clef* entitled *Nigger Heaven* (1926), Van Vechten’s central character Mary Love (who mirrors the profession of his friend Larsen as a librarian), acknowledges the growing

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<sup>146</sup> Vogel, pp. 89, 4.

<sup>147</sup> Heap, 191.

<sup>148</sup> James Donald, *Some of These Days: Black Stars, Jazz Aesthetics and Modernist Music* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 38.

interest in Harlem from outsiders, both as a destination for performance and as a space where African American writers could become increasingly successful. Mary observes that ‘Harlem *is* a sort of Mecca. In some ways it’s even an advantage to be coloured. Certainly on the stage it’s no handicap. It’s almost an asset. And now the white editors are beginning to regard Negroes as interesting novelties, like white elephants or black roses’.<sup>149</sup> Performances, stages and audiences are central to Van Vechten’s depiction of Harlem, as his emphasis on cabarets, jazz and frivolity fuels a sensationalized stance on the district and its residents.

Even the novel’s highly controversial title evokes the theatre in being slang for the area of the upper circle to which African Americans were often consigned, also referred to in Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* as ‘the nigger heaven of a theater’.<sup>150</sup> As noted by Kathleen Pfeiffer, Aaron Douglas’s illustrations which advertised *Nigger Heaven* in periodicals intended for a mostly white readership, drew directly from the theatrical implications of the title, featuring a theatre balcony raised by two strong male figures, containing the silhouetted shapes of an African American audience [Fig. 2.10.]. For publications with a predominantly African American audience, meanwhile, Douglas’s illustrations place emphasis on the ‘heaven’ aspect of the title; an outlined figure reaching towards the sky and a ladder ascending upwards [Fig. 2.11.].<sup>151</sup> Within the context of the theatre, Van Vechten’s Mary highlights the restriction of African Americans to either the upper circle or as performers on the stage. Catherine Morley also notes the pervasive performativity of Van Vechten’s characters; Adora Boniface, who as well as her performance credentials as a former music hall star, flaunts her wealth and stages lavish parties; Dick Sill, a character who alters his identity and passes for white; as well as

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<sup>149</sup> Carl Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven* (New York: Knopf, 1926; repr. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 49.

<sup>150</sup> McKay, *Home to Harlem*, p. 98.

<sup>151</sup> Kathleen Pfeiffer, ‘Introduction’, in *Nigger Heaven*, by Van Vechten (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1926), pp. x-xii.

Anatole Longfellow, also known as the Scarlet Creeper, an ostentatious pimp-like figure who opens the novel by promenading the streets with a brazen predatory strut. Morley adds that '[a]s part of this fascination with performance, the notion of the *gaze* is one of the novel's central themes. Each of these performers is aware of their audience, conscious that they are being watched, the quality of their performance weighed and measured'.<sup>152</sup> In capturing Harlem as a performative space, both in terms of its abundant cabarets and entertainment venues, and in his representations of caricatured individuals roaming the streets and attracting an audience, Van Vechten embellishes the district's already hyperbolized image for the benefit of intrigued white audiences of the era.

Du Bois was particularly opposed to the representations of African Americans in *Nigger Heaven*, describing the novel as 'a blow in the face' and adding 'it is not a true picture of Harlem life [...]. It is a caricature. It is worse than untruth because it is a mass of half-truths'. He also objects to Van Vechten's depiction of Harlem as defined by its nightlife and the implication that 'the black cabaret is Harlem; around it all his characters gravitate'.<sup>153</sup> Du Bois views Van Vechten's work as a setback for the African American community, both in its portrayal of caricatures and its affirmation in depicting Harlem to white outsiders as little more than a series of cabarets.<sup>154</sup> The offensive nature of Van Vechten's title, and the themes explored within the novel itself, as critic Robert F. Worth reports, split the African American community and sparked protests following its publication.<sup>155</sup> Vogel notes of the novel that the 'final cabaret scene descends into a cocaine-induced nightmarish scene in an underground cabaret-turned-catacomb called Black Mass, where the line between human and in-human, life and death, pleasure and pain, blurs into a frenzy of black performance'. In opposition to the values of the Harlem

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<sup>152</sup> Morley, p. 208.

<sup>153</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, 'Books', pp. 81-82.

<sup>154</sup> Du Bois, 'Books', pp. 81-82.

<sup>155</sup> Robert F. Worth, 'Nigger Heaven and the Harlem Renaissance', *African American Review*, 29.3 (1995), 461-473 (p. 461).

Renaissance in claiming back and re-shaping African American identity, Van Vechten's involvement seems to have directly perpetuated an already burgeoning 'negro vogue' among white outsiders.<sup>156</sup> Contemporary author and journalist George S. Schuyler wrote retrospectively in 1950 that '[m]ost of the white people of Van Vechten's circle knew Negroes only as domestics and had never had them as associates. It was extremely daring for a white person to dine publicly with a Negro, and certainly dance with one'.<sup>157</sup> By crossing the racial divide and actively patronizing Harlem Renaissance figures, Van Vechten defied cultural norms, however, his focus on the cabaret scene was viewed by many as reaffirming and popularizing caricatured views of racial identity and perpetuating stereotypes.

Many writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance address complex issues of selfhood and identity and likewise Van Vechten chronicles Mary's abstraction from the less highbrow art-forms of jazz and uninhibited dance, as well as Harlem nightlife and its supposed 'savagery'. Mary muses: '[w]e are all savages, she repeated to herself, all, apparently, but me! [...] If she could only let herself go, revel in colour and noise and rhythm and physical emotion [...]. But it would not be me, she argued with herself [...]. I must be myself'.<sup>158</sup> The culture understood by Mary as her own does not resonate with her, and although she feels it should and wishes she could 'let herself go', her integrity to remain 'herself' compels her not to participate. Robert M. Dowling states that '[t]he rejection of civilized behaviour and estheticism was too conscious an act for Mary, who wished to engage art on its most visceral level. She found that deep down she had more in common with her respectable foils than with her more "savage" neighbors'.<sup>159</sup> By maintaining her conviction to be herself, Mary is obscured from the insight that some

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<sup>156</sup> Vogel, p. 77.

<sup>157</sup> George S. Schuyler, 'The Van Vechten Revolution', in *Remembering the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. by Cary D. Wintz (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 362-368 (p. 363).

<sup>158</sup> Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven*, p. 90.

<sup>159</sup> Robert M. Dowling, *Slumming in New York: From the Waterfront to Mythic Harlem* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. 153.

exhibitions of the exotic were in part a performance for the fulfilment of outsider expectations. Van Vechten raises the dichotomy between performed ‘primitivism’ propelled by commonplace assumptions of exoticism held by many visitors to Harlem, and the ‘real’ outpourings of abandonment which Mary longs to be a part of. With the prevalence of everyday theatricality in Harlem, however, deciphering the ‘real’ from the performed became a difficult task, as boundaries blurred between displays of true and contrived selfhood.

Similar themes of selfhood, identity and performance arise in McKay’s poem ‘The Harlem Dancer’ (1917), in which he evokes an audience of ‘[a]pplauding youths’ and ‘young prostitutes’ who gaze upon the ‘perfect, half-clothed body’ of a dancer: ‘[t]he wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls, | Devoured her shape with eager, passionate gaze’.<sup>160</sup> Anthea Kraut remarks that the ‘figure of the dancing black female in particular [...] served as a recurrent referent in the period’s discourses of primitivism’.<sup>161</sup> In contrast to the abandoned cavorting alluded to by Van Vechten, however, McKay depicts her as singing and dancing ‘gracefully and calm’, like a ‘proudly-swaying palm’, thus attributing the dancer with a sense of serenity and composure, while Kotti Sree Ramesh and Kandula Nirupa Rani also interpret the imagery of the palm as reflective of McKay’s upbringing in Jamaica.<sup>162</sup> In the final two lines, nevertheless, the speaker abruptly modifies the tone to regard the dancer’s visible aloofness and detachment from her surroundings: ‘[b]ut looking at her falsely-smiling face, | I knew her self was not in that strange place’. By focussing predominantly on the audience’s objectification of the

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<sup>160</sup> McKay, ‘The Harlem Dancer’, in *Complete Poems*, ed. by William J. Maxwell (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 172.

<sup>161</sup> Anthea Kraut, ‘Re-Scripting Origins: Zora Neale Hurston’s Staging of Black Vernacular Dance’, in *Embodying Liberation: The Black Body in American Dance*, ed. by Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Alison D. Goeller (New Brunswick; London: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, 2001), pp. 59-78 (p. 62).

<sup>162</sup> McKay, ‘The Harlem Dancer’, p. 172; Kotti Sree Ramesh and Kandula Nirupa Rani, *Claude McKay: The Literary Identity from Jamaica to Harlem and Beyond* (Jefferson, North Carolina; London: McFarland, 2006), p. 74.

dancer's body, the speaker tracks the gaze of the onlooker, finally falling upon her face, and looking beyond her superficial, performative smile to note a remoteness in her expression. In his reference to the seamy cabaret as a 'strange place', McKay adds a further tone of alienation within the poem. A sense of vulnerability is also conveyed in the delicate timbre of her voice: 'like the sound of blended flutes | Blown by black players on a picnic day'.<sup>163</sup> Though her displayed physicality fulfils its sensory purpose for the audience, the dancer is unable to completely extract her wavering 'self' from her voice and face. Sharon Lynette Jones regards the dancer as having 'a divided or fragmented self, with the woman representing a tension between her exterior world, the smile, and the interior world which conveys a different emotion [...] while physically present, the woman is not mentally or spiritually present'.<sup>164</sup> In declining to lose control, Van Vechten's Mary similarly retains loyalty to 'herself', while conversely, out of economic necessity, McKay's Harlem dancer gives a sensual performance, while her 'self', though still in evidence, is cast elsewhere.<sup>165</sup> James de Jongh remarks that 'McKay's speaker also directs us to a vision of an inner reality. The world may observe a pandering Harlem exotic, dancing for prostitutes and "wine-flushed boys," but the speaker focuses on her contrasting essential and ineluctable self'. De Jongh adds that her 'consummate selfhood is sensed in the innocence of her voice [...] and is rendered principally by allusion to its absence, but in the end it remains ineffable'.<sup>166</sup> Although performance and selfhood are not interchangeably linked, in relation to Harlem nightlife, many writers conflate contrived or exoticized African American performance with an absence of self.

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<sup>163</sup> McKay, 'The Harlem Dancer', p. 172.

<sup>164</sup> Sharon Lynette Jones, 'The poetry of the Harlem Renaissance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry*, ed. by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 195-207 (p. 201).

<sup>165</sup> McKay, 'The Harlem Dancer', p. 172.

<sup>166</sup> James de Jongh, *Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 16.

An alternative perspective is given by Hughes who portrays abandonment through dance as a genuine expression of self, denoting notions of selfhood and performance as subjective to the individual. Anthony Dawahare explains that writers claimed ‘the New Negro was shaped by modernity yet retained in some way a racial essence or character that preceded modernity. The New Negro was as old as Africa but as contemporary as a jazz club in urban Harlem’.<sup>167</sup> Hughes’s poem ‘Negro Dancers’ (1925), for example, captures the dance rhythm and sound of the Charleston in its metre and use of language: ‘[d]a, da | Da, da, da! | Two mo’ ways to do de Charleston!’<sup>168</sup> Hughes’s use of the refrain ‘Two mo’ ways to do de Charleston!’, also emphasizes the significance of improvisation and interpretation within dance styles of the era, as well as in jazz and blues.<sup>169</sup> Hughes interrupts the merriment by directly addressing the previously unmentioned onlookers with a somewhat mocking tone: ‘[w]hite folks, laugh! | White folks, pray!’, as the unrelenting Charleston beat continues.<sup>170</sup> Here the active enjoyment of dance is palpable and undeterred by the crowd of curious spectators. Monica Michlin states that these lines ‘indicate that Hughes was ironically deflecting the white gaze, excluding the whites from an all-black world of uninhibited dancing and singing, but the very inclusion of the white audience was a disruption’.<sup>171</sup> Comparable themes of abandonment and release through dance arise in Hughes’s poem ‘Danse Africaine’, which issues the reader with commands: ‘[t]he slow beating of the tom-toms, | Low... slow | Slow... low – | Stirs your blood. | Dance!’<sup>172</sup> Through his use of language and ellipses, Hughes tangibly invokes the throb of the tom-tom and implores the reader to dance to its incessant beat, a sound which

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<sup>167</sup> Anthony Dawahare, ‘The Gold Standard of Racial Identity in Nella Larsen’s “Quicksand and Passing”’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 52.1 (2006), 22-41 (p. 23).

<sup>168</sup> Hughes, ‘Negro Dancers’, in *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), p. 33.

<sup>169</sup> T.J. Anderson, *Notes to Make the Sound Come Right: Four Innovators of Jazz Poetry* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2004), p. 33.

<sup>170</sup> Hughes, ‘Negro Dancers’, p. 32.

<sup>171</sup> Monica Michlin, ‘Langston Hughes’s Blues’, in *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. by Geneviève Fabre and Michel Faith (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 236-259 (p. 237).

<sup>172</sup> Hughes, ‘Danse Africaine’, *The Crisis*, August 1922, p. 167.

echoes traditional African music. Harlem performance of the era has been frequently categorised by contemporaneous writers and more recent critics alike as ‘false’, ‘exoticized’ and displaced from a genuine sense of both cultural and individual ‘self’. In 1925, for example, Alain Locke wrote of ‘a Harlem of racy music and racier dancing, of cabarets famous or notorious according to their kind [...] a Harlem which draws the connoisseur in diversion as well as the indiscriminating sightseer [...]. It is part of the exotic fringe of the metropolis [...] a Harlem preoccupied with naive adjustments to a white world’.<sup>173</sup> Much of Hughes’s work, nevertheless, affirms and encourages genuine abandonment through dance and performance, not necessarily for the benefit of an audience but for the expression of self.

At a time when many were eager for amusement, the city provided entertainment in plentiful supply. For African American audiences, however, New York’s theatres, concert halls, cabarets and picture-houses did not open their doors so welcomingly. African Americans were often excluded from venues or only permitted restricted access to the same entertainments as their white New York counterparts, while many of the same constraints were applied within Harlem itself. Andrea Barnet notes that ‘[b]lack were unwelcome on 125<sup>th</sup> Street, and they were barred from all but the balcony of the Alhambra Theater, a major showcase for black entertainers. Many white showhouses didn’t allow colored audiences at all’.<sup>174</sup> Although as Lisa Mintz Messinger reports, ‘average African Americans also found other places where they could socialize and relax’, they remained largely excluded from Harlem’s most popular entertainments.<sup>175</sup> The types of prejudice widespread in the jobs market and education, found their way into

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<sup>173</sup> Alain Locke, ‘Harlem Mecca of the New Negro’, *The Survey Graphic*, March 1925, p. 629.

<sup>174</sup> Barnet, p. 200.

<sup>175</sup> Lisa Mintz Messinger, ‘Recreation’, in *African American Artists, 1929-1945: Prints, Drawings, and Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. by Lisa Mintz Messinger, Lisa Gail Collins and Rachel Mustalish (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 67-74 (p. 67).

nearly all aspects life, and all districts of the city, breaking the dreams of freedom which many African Americans had held upon arrival in New York.

One problematic solution performed by some, on an occasional, or sometimes permanent basis, was the act of ‘passing’. Passing is a term used to describe the feigning of a different identity, often to improve the personal circumstances or opportunities of the enactor. The act of passing as a response to racism was a wider issue for African Americans and many other communities during the early twentieth century; a form of pretence which extended its reach not just within Harlem and New York, but across America and numerous locations worldwide. Passing took a firm hold within ethnically diverse cities such as New York, and became a controversial and commonly discussed phenomenon in Harlem, as represented in numerous literary and artistic exemplars. By exploring material on this subject, I acknowledge passing as a broader, less location-specific occurrence, with the intention of contextualizing and illuminating the Harlem-orientated content.

For many, passing involved alterations to their physical appearance, through costume, hair or makeup, and can be viewed as a form of acting or masquerade; namely abandoning an established individuality and attempting to physically and mentally assume another. Ann Douglas notes that ‘[c]onstructed identity is at the bottom an affair of masks and role playing, part of the politics of theatricality’.<sup>176</sup> Passing and the consequences of passing are a common subject in writing which emerged from Harlem, including in Fauset’s *Plum Bun* and Larsen’s *Passing*. The act of passing – or any action where prejudice could be levered towards benefitting African Americans – was referred to by Hughes in his essay for the *Negro Digest* in 1950 as ‘fooling our white folks’.<sup>177</sup> For long-term passers, many of whom disguised for example their Native-American, African-

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<sup>176</sup> Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Noonday, 1995), p. 344.

<sup>177</sup> Hughes, ‘Fooling Our White Folks’, *Negro Digest*, April 1950, pp. 38-41 (p. 38).

American or Jewish heritages, passing often had the desired effect as a prospect enabler, but could also result in different types of exclusion or isolation. Rather than exaggerating certain racial characteristics, as enacted by some bohemian ‘characters’ in Greenwich Village, passers often sought to bury any identifying features, and adopt an entirely new white identity.

Passing remained a contentious subject and was seen by many as a rejection of community; meanwhile, full-time passers often had trouble fully integrating within white society and their adopted identities. Hughes acknowledges that contrary to ‘occupational passing during work hours only’, permanent passing was ‘a more precarious game’, adding that ‘some break down under the strain and go native again or go to pieces’.<sup>178</sup> Sociologist F. James Davis also notes that ‘[t]hose who pass have a severe dilemma before they decide to do so, since a person must give up all family ties and loyalties to the black community in order to gain economic and other opportunities’.<sup>179</sup> Occasional passing, as Larsen suggests, ‘for the sake of convenience, restaurants, theatre tickets’ was deemed more acceptable and there was a sense of gratification to be found in deceiving racially imposed regulations.<sup>180</sup> Hughes adds that ‘most Negroes feel that bigoted whites deserve to be cheated and fooled since the way they behave toward us makes no sense at all’.<sup>181</sup> The act of passing can be viewed as an often necessary type of real life performance, and is frequently alluded to by Harlem’s early twentieth-century artists and writers. Passing could manifest in many forms, and mostly went undetected, although was often executed at great personal sacrifice. Unlike most types of performance for the benefit of an audience, passing required enactors to be covert.

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<sup>178</sup> Hughes, ‘Fooling Our White Folks’, p. 38.

<sup>179</sup> F. James Davis, *Who is Black?: One Nation’s Definition* (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2001), p. 143.

<sup>180</sup> Larsen, ‘Passing’, in *Quicksand and Passing*, p. 227.

<sup>181</sup> Hughes, ‘Fooling Our White Folks’, pp. 38-39.

Oscar Micheaux, an early African American film pioneer of both silent movies and talkies, features passing as a subject in a number of his films. The Micheaux Film Corporation offices were located at West One-Hundred-and-Thirty-Fifth Street in Harlem, and Micheaux himself was known to parade the streets adorned in a Russian fur coat and wide-brimmed hat.<sup>182</sup> Barbara Tapa Lupack acknowledges that ‘Micheaux had a distinctly theatrical flair’, while Lisa E. Rivo notes that he ‘created a mystique around himself’.<sup>183</sup> Through his work Micheaux also developed a recognisable style, and many of his movies showcased relevant issues for African American communities, as well as seeking to critique and counter racial stereotypes portrayed in numerous white-made movies of the era.<sup>184</sup> One film in particular, *Veiled Aristocrats* (1932), based on the novel *House Behind the Cedars* (1900) by Charles Chestnutt, explores themes of racial identity, and the relationship of the middle-class Walden family and local community to the issues surrounding passing. The plot centres around the return of the Walden’s eldest son John, who has been passing as white for twenty years and has gained success as a lawyer. John persuades his sister Rena, who is in love with a dark-skinned African American man, to join him in passing to improve her prospects.<sup>185</sup> After a short time, however, Rena, who is not ashamed of her ancestry, becomes disenchanted with her life of pretence, and returns to elope with her African American lover. While exploring passing and pretence from multiple perspectives, *Veiled Aristocrats* concludes that the benefits of passing, for many, did not outweigh the sacrifices of suppressing one’s own identity through a performance

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<sup>182</sup> Charles Musser and others, ‘An Oscar Micheaux Filmography: From the Silents through his Transition to Sound, 1919-1931’, in *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era*, ed. by Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines and Charles Musser (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 228-277 (p. 266); Barbara Tapa Lupack, *Literary Adaptations in Black American Cinema: from Micheaux to Morrison* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), p. 98.

<sup>183</sup> Lupack, p. 98; Lisa E. Rivo, ‘Oscar Micheaux’, in *Harlem Renaissance Lives*, ed. by Gates Jr. and Higginbotham, pp. 345-348 (p. 347).

<sup>184</sup> J. Ronald Green, *Straight Lick: The Cinema of Oscar Micheaux* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 174.

<sup>185</sup> Alan Gevinson, *Within Our Gates: Ethnicity in American Feature Films, 1911-1960* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 1096.

of race, a view which further situates Micheaux as a champion of African American heritage. Susan Currell acknowledges Micheaux's controversial reputation, noting that '[n]ot only did his films address issues that raised the spectre of race riots and violence, making white censors fear his films for the stirring effect that they would have on black audiences, black middle-class critics feared that the representation of black villains, vice and corruption would reinforce the white stereotypes'.<sup>186</sup> From his locus in Harlem, Micheaux produced and directed meaningful movies which sparked debate and raised issues pertinent to the African American community.

Micheaux's films also regularly featured caricatured depictions of African Americans, a point of contention among critics, although J. Ronald Green interprets Micheaux's inclusion of these characters as a critique of the way in which masking through stereotype often occurred in performances and everyday life as a deflecting mechanism. Green remarks that '[t]he trick that black performers played was to inhabit these stereotypes as a survival niche', but Micheaux believed that '[b]lack in the performing arts desperately needed to shed the caricature being used as a shelter'.<sup>187</sup> Nathan Irvin Huggins also regards the 'black mask of the minstrel' as 'a means of survival' for African American entertainers in finding work and shielding them from violence, adding that 'the modus vivendi depended on the Negroes continuing to play their parts, off stage as well as on. And these black performers knew that their very existence depended on their never pretending to be other than their stage characters'.<sup>188</sup> As represented in McKay's 'Harlem Dancer' who is detached from her sense of 'self', the prevalence of passing and performing caricatures was widespread both on the stage and in day-to-day life, as prejudice necessitated the requirement for everyday theatricality as a form of masked defence.

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<sup>186</sup> Currell, *American Culture*, p. 125.

<sup>187</sup> J. Ronald Green, 'Oscar Micheaux's Interrogation of Caricature as Entertainment', *Film Quarterly*, 51.3 (1998), 16-31 (p. 18).

<sup>188</sup> Huggins, pp. 260-261.

Moving briefly away from Harlem and the era in question here, I show the longstanding necessity for incorporating elements of performance into everyday life in African American communities. Notions of African American performed identity are foregrounded in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), in which characters confess to playing a part and wearing a mask in order to render themselves invisible and therefore impervious to prejudice. On his deathbed, the narrator's grandfather acknowledges his own mask constructed as a shield against racism; 'I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country [...]. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction'. By assuming a mask of humility, though superficially appearing to submit to white governance, the narrator's grandfather launches an attack from the inside. The juxtaposition of combative language such as 'overcome', 'undermine', 'death' and 'destruction' with the cordial, passive actions of 'yeses', 'grins' and agreements, accentuates the self-aware duplicity and invisible warfare undertaken from within. Similarly, Doctor Bledsoe, the president of the narrator's solely African American college informs the narrator of his own performance: 'I had to be strong and purposeful to get where I am [...]. Yes, I had to act the nigger!'<sup>189</sup> Ultimately Ellison's narrator also resorts to concealing his identity in what critic Stanley Edgar Hyman described in 1958 as 'an invisible blackness that conceals a sentient human being'.<sup>190</sup> Bryan Crable remarks on Ellison's concept of self, stating that 'no one performance of self could ever be complete, or even sufficient. Incessant change [...] mandated continuous recreation of identity. [...] We bring our desired, "second," self to life by experimenting, improvising from another set of possibilities, and assessing the result – metaphorically speaking, trying on a new

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<sup>189</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952; repr. New York: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. 16, 141.

<sup>190</sup> Stanley Edgar Hyman, 'The Folk Tradition', in *Mother Wit From the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Jackson; London: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), pp. 46-56 (p. 49).

self'.<sup>191</sup> Ellison not only invokes the necessary performance of African American selfhood, but his essay 'Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke' (1958), a response to Hyman's earlier cited article, he attributes the wider American populace with a historical inclination towards masking, attesting that, 'Americans began their revolt from the English fatherland when they dumped the tea into the Boston Harbor masked as Indians, and the mobility of the society created in this limitless space has encouraged the use of the mask for good and evil ever since. [...] When American life is most American it is apt to be most theatrical'.<sup>192</sup> The pertinent notion of acting or playing a part recurs throughout Ellison's body of work and sheds light on the concept of altering self-identity and persona in order to succeed in a white dominated world. This is a form of masking to which McKay's 'Harlem Dancer' and Micheaux's caricatures, among many other real and fictitious figures, were reluctantly necessitated to succumb. In acknowledging the widely documented cultural phenomenon and longevity of pretence among African Americans, I enable a better understanding of context, thus informing the consideration of everyday performance specific to early twentieth-century Harlem.

Themes of passing and identity arise in *Plum Bun* – written in Harlem while Jessie Redmon Fauset was teaching in local schools – as the central character, a young painter named Angela Murray begins as an infrequent passer, but upon the death of her parents, relocates to Greenwich Village to pass full-time and gain acceptance into the avant-garde social set.<sup>193</sup> She reinvents herself and assumes the rôle of white Angèle Mory, but her new identity leads her to some degree of isolation, 'self-exiled within whiteness', as the masked pretence distances her from making more than a superficial

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<sup>191</sup> Bryan Crable, *Ralph Ellison and Kenneth Burke: At the Roots of the Racial Divide* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), p. 144.

<sup>192</sup> Ellison, 'Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke', in *Mother Wit From the Laughing Barrel*, ed. by Dundes, pp. 56-65 (p. 61).

<sup>193</sup> Erin A. Smith, 'Jessie Redmon Fauset', in *American National Biography Online*, April 2014 <<http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-00524.html>> [accessed June 2016].

acquaintance with those around her.<sup>194</sup> Even Roger, a white man with whom she has built a relationship, remains insincere about his intentions as he is unsure of the suitability of her heritage for the favour of his wealthy father. Angela suffers from an acute sense of loneliness, particularly heightened when she visits the theatre in Greenwich Village and sees many people she could potentially get to know tantalizingly displayed before her. Angela becomes a regular patron of the theatre, ‘not so much for the sake of the plays [...] as for the sake of the audience, a curiously intimate audience made of numerous still more intimate groups [...]. When she came here her loneliness palled on her, however [...]. She wished she knew some of these pleasant people’.<sup>195</sup> Here the audience becomes a part of the performance as Angela observes them and longs to be one of them. Pfeiffer observes that Angela’s ‘attraction to performative entertainment reinforces both her new name and her claim to New York’.<sup>196</sup> The sense of isolation, despite being surrounded by people is further accentuated by the disapproval of Angela’s sister Virginia, who has a darker complexion and feels an undying loyalty to her own race. Virginia becomes victim to her sister’s assumed identity when Angela refuses to recognize her, publicly snubbing her.

With time Angela realizes that her passing is not bringing her the happiness she had desired, and having met a man of mixed heritage with whom she is in love, decides to unmask herself and reveal the truth. Catherine Rottenberg observes that mixed-race or ‘light-enough-to-pass’ characters in literature ‘are frequently interpellated into the symbolic world as black’ and that ‘many protagonists in these texts take the risk of identifying differently in order to access the privileges of whiteness, and most of them pay a high price or are punished for this “transgression”’. Rottenberg adds that ‘Angela

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<sup>194</sup> Carlyle Van Thompson, *The Tragic Black Buck: Racial Masquerading in the American Literary Imagination* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), p. 16.

<sup>195</sup> Jessie Redmon Fauset, *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1929; repr. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), pp. 190, 92.

<sup>196</sup> Kathleen Pfeiffer, ‘The Limits of Identity in Jessie Fauset’s Plum Bun’, *Legacy*, 18.1 (2001), 79-93 (p. 87).

eventually embraces her racial identity both because she has developed a sense of racial pride and solidarity and [...] because she cannot leave behind the influence of community norms'.<sup>197</sup> The novel raises some pertinent dilemmas about the racial, cultural and emotional consequences of passing in Manhattan, as well as exploring the themes of identity, deception and masquerade. The physical act of passing is, in itself, often depicted as a form of theatre and Jacquelyn McLendon confirms that 'passing may be regarded as any form of pretense or disguise that results in a loss or surrender of [...] identity [...]. Implicit in the concept of passing is the insecurity, the lack of permanence'.<sup>198</sup> Though in many cases crucial to accessing opportunities, the widespread act of passing furthered the infiltration of everyday performance and theatricality into numerous aspects of city life, becoming a particularly pertinent and recurring topic for Harlem's resident artists and writers during the early twentieth century.

The themes of identity, masquerade and isolation are threaded throughout Larsen's novels *Quicksand* and *Passing*, both written in Harlem during her time of active participation in the district's literary circles. In *Passing*, one of the main protagonists Irene Redfield comments on the subject of passing saying '[w]e disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt, and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of repulsion, but we protect it'.<sup>199</sup> The ambivalence and conflicting attitudes towards passing are clear and McLendon observes a hypocrisy in Irene's response to the issue.<sup>200</sup> The coexisting paradoxes of contempt, repulsion, admiration and toleration, demonstrate incongruent perspectives on the subject and as Maria Balshaw observes, *Passing* explores the 'impossibility of reading identity, and the

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<sup>197</sup> Catherine Rottenberg, *Performing Americanness: Race, Class, and Gender in Modern African-American and Jewish-American Literature* (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 2008), p. 44; Rottenberg, 'Jessie Fauset's "Plum Bun" and the City's Transformative Potential', *A Journal of American Women Writers*, 30.2 (2013), 265-286 (p. 277).

<sup>198</sup> McLendon, p. 96.

<sup>199</sup> Larsen, 'Passing', in *Quicksand and Passing*, pp. 185-186.

<sup>200</sup> McLendon, p. 98.

conflict between what a subject knows itself and others to be, and what it, and others, appear to be'.<sup>201</sup> Though she passes occasionally, Irene herself is proud of her racial identity, lives in Harlem, and does not wish to pass full-time, remarking that she could not contemplate the thought of a 'dark secret forever crouching in the background of consciousness'.<sup>202</sup> Irene's old friend Clare Kendry, however, who was raised by white relatives and married a white man, had been passing permanently for years, seeking to distance herself from Harlem, while evading the knowledge of her family and friends. Rottenberg remarks that 'Clare "decides" to perform race norms differently. Rather than remain a black-identified woman who strives to approximate norms of whiteness, Clare begins not only to approximate white norms, but also to identify as a white woman'.<sup>203</sup> Mary Condé also interprets the performative nature of Clare's masking, not as a physical transformation, 'but she changes the perceptions of her audience by presenting herself, alternately as a white woman deeply entrenched in social respectability, and as a dazzling entertainer'.<sup>204</sup> Rottenberg and Condé's emphasis on the 'performance' of race is key, as having severed nearly every connection to her heritage, Clare's self-styled identity remains a performance and as a result she becomes isolated, revealing to Irene that she is 'lonely, so lonely'. Clare, despite her efforts and seeming determination to detach herself from her ancestry, is being involuntarily drawn back to her racial reality. In a letter to Irene, Clare confesses '[y]ou can't know how in this pale life of mine I am all the time seeing the bright pictures of that other I once thought I was glad to be free of...It's like an ache, a pain that never ceases'. Here the notion of Clare's essential racial identity seems to convey that even when every outward attribute of race is eradicated, the roots of that identity remain, ultimately hauling the reluctant pretender back to their cultural origins.

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<sup>201</sup> Maria Balshaw, "'Black was White'", p. 321-322.

<sup>202</sup> Larsen, 'Passing', in *Quicksand and Passing*, p. 201.

<sup>203</sup> Rottenberg, *Performing Americanness*, p. 49.

<sup>204</sup> Mary Condé, 'Passing in the Fiction of Jessie Redmon Fauset and Nella Larsen', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 24 (1994), 94-104 (pp. 96-97).

Having adopted a solely white existence and companionship for herself, Clare cannot escape the inexorable power of her true identity, where there remains in the blood running through her veins an ‘instinctive loyalty to race’.<sup>205</sup> In negating a portion of her identity, Clare struggles to find a sense of belonging and is intermittently deflected between cultures, inclining first towards the one she has chosen, and later towards the one she has left behind. Balshaw acknowledges the novel as a comprehensive exploration of female selfhood, noting that ‘the text negotiates the terrain of racial, sexual and gender identity’.<sup>206</sup> The sense of oscillating confusion between different identities is a recurring theme throughout Larsen’s writing and that of many her Harlem Renaissance counterparts, while the portrayal of passing as a form of intermittent or everyday performance further ingrains the theatricality of Harlem.

Masking and concealing are also common performative themes represented by Harlem’s writers. Returning to Joanna in Fauset’s *There is Confusion*, whose ambition is to become a professional dancer; the initial prejudices of white theatre producers prove demoralizing.<sup>207</sup> Joanna is turned away from New York theatres repeatedly, irrespective of talent and as the ‘big theatrical trusts refused her absolutely’ she is unapologetically informed that ‘we’ll try a colored man in a white company but we won’t have any colored women’.<sup>208</sup> The dual impact of racism and sexism which infected institutions of the era is elucidated here, as Joanna’s career is in danger of being slighted, in spite of her talent, while she attempts to navigate her ‘double burden’.<sup>209</sup> Joanna’s talent eventually overrides established prejudices in a production entitled ‘Dance of the Nations’ for the fictitious District Line Theater in Greenwich Village, where she makes her acclaimed debut. Her lifeline is thrown by Miss Sharples, who affirms her belief that ‘art to my eye

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<sup>205</sup> Larsen, ‘Passing’, in *Quicksand and Passing*, pp. 145, 227.

<sup>206</sup> Balshaw, “‘Black was White’”, p. 321.

<sup>207</sup> Davis, ‘Foreward’, in *There is Confusion*, p. vi.

<sup>208</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, p. 275.

<sup>209</sup> Maria Balshaw, *Looking for Harlem: Urban Aesthetics in African-American Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 11.

is art, and there's no sense in letting a foolish prejudice interfere with it'. After her impressive audition Joanna is employed to replace the dancer performing as white, black and red America because of the current star's inadequate representation of 'the colored American'. Joanna experiences immediate onstage success, and although her rise to stardom is near instant, the implications of her race are not ignored: '[p]eople came from all over New York and all its suburbs to see the new dancer—Joanna Marshall. Her success and fame were instant [...]. Special writers came to see her [...] and speculated on the amount of white blood which she had in her veins.'<sup>210</sup> Beth McCoy reports, moreover, that Joanna is misrepresented, if represented at all as 'the press (strongly implied as a monolith of the dominant constructions of whiteness and maleness) downplays, subordinates, and dilutes what it obviously expects to be the potentially threatening public impact of Joanna as a black woman'.<sup>211</sup> By moderating their portrayal of her as African American, and instead focussing on potential 'whiteness', the press accounts mask Joanna's real identity for their readership, while attempting to claim this talented individual for the white world. Susan Levison notes that 'the problematic performer/spectator binary is explored throughout the work, as is the minstrel tradition and the questions it raises about the relationships between impersonation, appropriation, and race'.<sup>212</sup> Through the masquerade imposed by the press, Joanna is made more relatable for white audiences and Elizabeth Ammons also notes the 'theme of art dehumanizing the black woman artist and cutting her off from the black community'.<sup>213</sup> Fauset indicates the pressure on conscious modulations in character or identity in order for African Americans to be accepted within white dominated circles, thus emphasizing a

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<sup>210</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, pp. 226-231.

<sup>211</sup> Beth A. McCoy, "'Is This Really What You Wanted Me To Be?': The Daughter's Disintegration in Jessie Redmon Fauset's "There Is Confusion"', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 40.1 (1994), 101-117 (p. 109).

<sup>212</sup> Susan Levison, 'Performance and the "Strange Place" of Jessie Redmon Fauset's "There is Confusion"', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46.4 (2000), 825-848 (p. 826).

<sup>213</sup> Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 151.

necessity for everyday theatricality. In spite of finding success in Greenwich Village, however, Fauset indicates that Joanna continues as a resident of Harlem – which Brian Spencer, a friend in the novel, describes as ‘the place for colored people’ – suggesting her continuing connection with the African American community.<sup>214</sup>

Joanna is further masked within the performance itself, however, as she is deemed too dark skinned to pass as white for the section of the dance in which ‘white America’ is depicted as a ‘regal, symbolic figure’. The theatre resort to Sylvia’s suggestion of having ‘a mask made for Joanna’ as ‘she could then be made as typically American as anyone could wish and no one need know the difference’. This plan is enacted and would have been fool-proof if not for an enthusiastic ‘inveterate theater-goer’ demanding an encore.<sup>215</sup> As McCoy asserts, ‘[i]f the construction of race were predicated on color only, the mask would have done what it was intended to do; in hiding Joanna’s race, it would have protected artist and show literally and metaphorically. But on opening night, the mask that seemed such a simple and practical solution, somehow lures the very problems it was supposed to ward off’.<sup>216</sup> It is in on this night, however, that in spite of racial prejudice, Joanna becomes a true, but unexpected embodiment of America. At the end of her performance when Joanna goes to take her bows she hears shouts from one member of the audience. Joanna is put in a difficult position when ‘[s]omehow the habitué guessed the truth. “Pull off your mask, America,” he shouted. The house took it up. “Let’s see your face, America!”’ Joanna is coerced into removing her mask and returning to the stage, whereupon she is met with a tense silence as the audience realize her true identity. Joanna’s response is to boldly assert her ancestral heritage as a true American, just as much so as any member of the audience. She states ‘that there is no one in the audience more American than I am. My grandfather fought in the revolution, my uncle fought in

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<sup>214</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, pp. 76, 269.

<sup>215</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, p. 232.

<sup>216</sup> McCoy, p. 111.

the Civil War and my brother is ‘over there’ now” (‘over there’ likely refers to World War One). Her testament is met with approval from the District Line audience and Joanna gains acceptance as a true representative of America. Fauset’s narrator speculates that ‘it would not have succeeded anywhere else but in New York, and perhaps not even there but in Greenwich Village’.<sup>217</sup> Condé also remarks that Joanna ‘gets away with it because she has symbolically passed for white first’.<sup>218</sup> Joanna first conquers the liberal and accepting Greenwich Village audience, followed by commercialized Broadway, and broadens the outlook of fictional spectators to the nuanced and burgeoning possibilities of culturally inclusive American theatre. Rather than her undoing, Joanna’s onstage unmasking is the turning point in her career, a pointed allegory by Fauset on the possibilities of African American accomplishment without passing.

Joanna is symbolic not only of a unity within New York’s disparate racial identities, but also bonds with her audiences as America’s new national sweetheart. Nina Miller observes that ‘this performance is finally everything at once: the pinnacle of stage success couched in perfect professional and cultural integrity, and rightfully asserting the long-overdue equation of Negro and American identity’.<sup>219</sup> Joanna’s achievement, moreover adds pertinence to the view of African American writer Gwendolyn Bennett, on the subject of the play *Meek Mose* (1928) by Frank Wilson performed at The Princess Theatre in Harlem: ‘to us the play in itself and its success or failure was unimportant. We were more concerned with the fact that here had arrived the day when the theater goers of Broadway were willing to attend seriously to the things that Negroes had to say about their own lives’.<sup>220</sup> Miller concurs that ‘the pages of *The Messenger* as well as *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* were peppered with calls for a true “Negro drama” that would bring the race into its own and into American high culture simultaneously’. She concludes that

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<sup>217</sup> Fauset, *There is Confusion*, p. 232.

<sup>218</sup> Condé, p. 100.

<sup>219</sup> Miller, p. 199.

<sup>220</sup> Gwendolyn Bennett, ‘The Ebony Flute’, *Opportunity*, April 1928, p. 122.

‘bringing the race before the national gaze as Joanna does in this culminating performance could only be bested by the opportunity to give back to the race her acquired aura of national desire’.<sup>221</sup> In achieving her ambition against the odds of prejudice, Joanna becomes a pioneer of African American female success, although, as Levison notes, Fauset later reveals Joanna’s anti-climactic experience of fame and recognition as a performer, and ‘the act of performance itself’ as having ‘severe limitations’.<sup>222</sup> By removing the theatrical mask which creates the illusion that she is white, Joanna reveals her true identity and in this fictionalized instance, aided by the liberality of the Greenwich Village audience, breaks down the racial barriers and becomes a star. Jane Kuenz observes that as demonstrated in Joanna’s embodiment of multiple races on stage, Fauset exemplifies ‘that racial identity and authenticity itself can be produced, performed, consumed and exchanged’.<sup>223</sup> The unmasking which sees Joanna go from pretence to truth, and her subsequent acceptance as ‘America’, is symbolic in the context of the Harlem Renaissance which sought the inclusion of African American art, performance and literature within the canon of American culture. The notion of African Americans as masked is also reflective of Huggins’s concept of the ‘black mask of the minstrel’ as ‘a means of survival’ against white prejudice, as well as Ralph Ellison’s concept of performing whilst in white company to ‘overcome ’em with yesses’, thus heightening the significance of Joanna’s unmasking as an un-stereotyped, but formerly masked, African American on stage.<sup>224</sup> In relation to identity, Joanna begins as a representative of her own race, but through hard work and talent, the high point in her career coincides with her transcendence of racial barriers and the removal of masks, in order for her to manifest as a representative of all America.

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<sup>221</sup> Miller, pp. 183, 199.

<sup>222</sup> Levison, p. 830.

<sup>223</sup> Jane Kuenz, ‘The Face of America: Performing Race and Nation in Jessie Fauset’s “There is Confusion”’, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 12.1 (1999), 89-111 (pp. 90-91).

<sup>224</sup> Huggins, pp. 260-261; Ellison, *Invisible Man*, p. 16.

Masquerade and everyday performance in Harlem were common themes of the early twentieth century, though often more out of necessity than a desire to pretend. Establishing the longevity of masquerade, Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem 'We Wear the Mask' (1896), vividly alludes to the need for metaphorical masking among African Americans throughout history. In the line, '[w]e wear the mask that grins and lies, | It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes', Dunbar evokes the need for African Americans to hide or shield their true feelings from white society.<sup>225</sup> The theatricality and 'exoticism' of the Harlem night during the 'negro vogue' was commonly a façade constructed to satisfy the assumptions about African American culture made by white visitors.<sup>226</sup> With long-term passing, caricaturing and stereotyping still prevalent, discussion around African American identity and culture were imperative during the Harlem Renaissance. Passing and masking true identities were forms of performance, pretence and everyday theatricality which pervaded Harlem, but often only as a contentious solution to white imposed prejudices. While passing can be viewed as a form of acting or masquerade, it was very much an isolated activity with the intention of blending into a different society, without attracting an audience; performing an alternate identity, but remaining inconspicuous. The final section focuses on the popularity of Harlem as a destination of amusement for white New York slummers.

### III. SLUMMERS AND OUTSIDERS: 'HARLEM WAS A THRILL'

The nightly influx of slummers to Harlem acted as an audience to the district's unique 1920s spectacle. Chad Heap outlines slumming as broadly having taken place '[f]rom the mid-1880s until the outbreak of the Second World War, [as] an overlapping progression of slumming vogues encouraged affluent white Americans to investigate a variety of

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<sup>225</sup> Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Selected Poems* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>226</sup> Vogel, p. 4.

socially marginalized urban neighborhoods and the diverse populations that inhabited them'. Heap also emphasizes that '[t]he urban black community that attracted slummers, then, was by no means a slum; rather, it was a destination for the consumption of commercialized leisure'.<sup>227</sup> Slumming was often voyeuristic in intent, although sometimes hidden behind a veneer of social reform. Though the culture on display was often billed as an 'authentic' experience, many African Americans did not identify with the sensationalized performances being marketed to white audiences. Further catalysing the appeal of 'exotic' Harlem culture was the white outsiders' fervour for escapism. As Sharpe explains, 'the jungle myth and the promise of an Edenic, prelapsarian uncovering of the body's deepest urges drew people to Harlem in droves', adding entertainer Jimmy Durante's remark that '[y]ou sort of go primitive up there'.<sup>228</sup> Cultural historian Lewis Erenberg notes that 'the lateness of the hour added to the sense that one was venturing to the heart of darkness, the city of night where all things forbidden during the day were available'.<sup>229</sup> Erenberg's reference to 'heart of darkness', as well as connecting Harlem with Joseph Conrad's depiction of Africa, is also loaded with implications of skin tone in reflecting the significantly darker lighting in the district. The contrast he evokes between the seriousness of daytime ventures and Harlem at night further emphasizes the incongruences of day, associated with the hard working populace, and night bringing connotations of more exhilarating pursuits.

The idea of the white city worker falling victim to his own stereotyping and 'going native' is often somewhat mockingly depicted in works by African American artists and writers of the era. James Weldon Johnson recalled in his autobiography *Along this Way* that Harlem's night-time visitors often had trouble throwing off their culturally imposed inhibitions:

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<sup>227</sup> Heap, pp. 193, 2, 75.

<sup>228</sup> Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 178; Jimmy Durante and Jack Kofoed, *Night Clubs* (New York: Knopf, 1931), p. 113.

<sup>229</sup> Erenberg, pp. 255-256.

At these times, the Negro drags his captors captive. On occasions, I have been amazed and amused watching white people dancing to a Negro band in a Harlem cabaret; attempting to throw off the crusts and layers of inhibitions laid on by sophisticated civilization: striving to yield to the feel and experience of abandon; seeking to recapture a state of primitive joy in life and living; trying to work their way back into that jungle which was the original Garden of Eden; in a word, doing their best to pass for colored.<sup>230</sup>

Here there is an extreme role reversal, as Harlem's slummers, who ordinarily had all the freedoms and opportunities which came from being white during the era, sought to cross the racial divide and 'pass' as African American, or at least as close to stereotype as they could muster. The practice echoes minstrelsy, in which white actors, often in blackface, took on caricatured rôles as African Americans, a form of entertainment which began in America during the early nineteenth century.<sup>231</sup> Johnson's reference to slummers as 'captors' is also significant as a reminder of the slave trade, although it is the white visitors here who become 'captive' and are ridiculed in their attempted performance of race. Johnson implies that it was the everyday rigour of 'sophisticated civilization' which brought white visitors to Harlem in search of a sort of a 'primitive' antidote. In a letter to Hughes on the subject in 1928, Zora Neale Hurston lamented: '[i]t makes me sick to see how these cheap white folks are grabbing our stuff and ruining it [...]. My only consolation being that they never do it right and so there is still a chance for us'.<sup>232</sup> Not only are the slummers mocked in their vain efforts to 'throw off the crusts and layers of inhibitions', but they are under the false notion of having participated in a genuine cultural experience.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> James Weldon Johnson, *Along this Way*, pp. 327-328.

<sup>231</sup> William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 1, 9.

<sup>232</sup> 'Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, 20 September 1928', in *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. by Carla Kaplan (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), p. 126.

<sup>233</sup> Johnson, *Along This Way*, p. 328.

Much of the so-called culture enacted in Harlem simply pandered to the prejudiced expectations of white guests, and as Shane Vogel observes ‘[b]y the late 1920s [...] black culture became a hotly consumed commodity, such interracial mixing was as often a manufactured performance for a more modern audience as it was a social transgression’.<sup>234</sup> If it weren’t for the economic profitability, and as Hughes puts it, the virtue in ‘fooling our white folks’, many of these performances of racial stereotypes would likely not have taken place at all.<sup>235</sup> Novelist and essayist Wallace Thurman also noted in 1928 that ‘the white patronage is so profitable and so abundant that Negroes find themselves crowded out and even segregated in their own places of jazz [...]. Harlem’s famed night clubs have become merely side shows staged for sensation-seeking whites’.<sup>236</sup> As a well-known African American district, Harlem provides a pertinent example of segregation and exoticization within entertainment venues, although the practice was also widespread within cities such as Chicago. As Currell remarks, ‘[a]necdotes about the racism faced by even the most celebrated black artists illustrated the central paradox that while whites now enjoyed black music and art, they were far from acknowledging or allowing social equality’.<sup>237</sup> The bridge between real African American culture and what outsiders perceived to be genuine was disconnected, while white-imposed bigotry and exclusion made their way into Harlem’s most popular clubs.

Returning to Larsen’s *Passing*, Irene and her husband Brian demystify the concept of slumming for Clare – passing as white – who has just met famous white writer Hugh Wentworth at a party. Irene informs Clare that it ‘was the year 1927 in the city of New York, and hundreds of white people of Hugh Wentworth’s type came to affairs in Harlem, more all the time’. Having observed the pattern of segregation, Brian adds that

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<sup>234</sup> Vogel, p. 53.

<sup>235</sup> Langston Hughes, ‘Fooling Our White Folks’, pp. 38-41.

<sup>236</sup> Wallace Thurman, *Negro Life in New York’s Harlem: A Lively Picture of a Popular and Interesting Section* (Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1928), pp. 24-25.

<sup>237</sup> Currell, *American Culture*, p. 98.

“[p]retty soon the coloured people won’t be allowed in at all, or will have to sit in Jim Crowed sections”<sup>238</sup> Brian’s apt assumption proved to be correct, as renowned clubs such as the Cotton Club among others, were largely segregated and marketed to white audiences.<sup>239</sup> Clare poses the question: “[w]hat do they come for?”, to which Brian responds, “[s]ame reason you’re here, to see Negroes”<sup>240</sup> In her disguise of whiteness, Clare has become a member of the audience, a curious observer of the African American ‘culture’ on display in Harlem. Likewise, as Emily Bernard notes, Irene – who is not passing – becomes a ‘veritable gatekeeper’ for curious white visitors to Harlem, including Wentworth, as she accommodates slummers and partakes in the spectatorship as an audience to her own race, revealing herself to be ‘every bit as voyeuristic as Hugh’.<sup>241</sup> By promoting performances of the carnivalesque and mythicizing Harlem’s African American population, Vogel also remarks that cabarets ‘imposed limits on creative possibilities for black performers, but also fetishized and spectacularized a primitivist construction of blackness that the New Negro movement committed itself to undo’.<sup>242</sup> When further questioned as to why the pastime of visiting Harlem had become so popular, Irene responds that while some attended ‘purely and frankly to enjoy themselves [...]. More, to gaze on these great and near great while they gaze on the Negroes’.<sup>243</sup> Larsen implies that while the objectification and commodification of so-called African American culture brought an audience of slummers to the district, spectators with the intention of viewing the audience itself were also in abundance. As an African American woman in Harlem, Irene is both the subject of the slummers’ gaze and a participant in the

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<sup>238</sup> Larsen, ‘Passing’, in *Quicksand and Passing*, p. 198.

<sup>239</sup> Vogel, p. 89.

<sup>240</sup> Larsen, ‘Passing’, in *Quicksand and Passing*, p. 198.

<sup>241</sup> Emily Bernard, ‘Unlike Many Others: Exceptional White Characters in Harlem Renaissance Fiction’, *Modernism/modernity*, 12.3 (2005), 407-423 (p. 419).

<sup>242</sup> Vogel, p. 91.

<sup>243</sup> Larsen, ‘Passing’, in *Quicksand and Passing*, p. 198.

chain of viewership, emphasizing the pervasion of everyday theatricality in an inescapable cycle of watching and being watched.

The ‘native’ spectacles performed by African American entertainers in Harlem, as well as in bars and speakeasies such as the Cotton Club – where the ‘entertainment was in watching the black customers’ according to Hughes’s chapter ‘When the Negro was in Vogue’ – led Harlem residents to feel ‘like amusing animals in a zoo’.<sup>244</sup> Harlem dwellers themselves had become a part of the everyday spectacle – although most were reluctant and inadvertent performers – while fascinated touring audiences observed their actions and interactions. Commenting on the situation, Hughes continues, ‘we can’t go downtown and sit and stare at you in your clubs. You won’t even let us in your clubs’.<sup>245</sup> These pertinent reflections on double-standards demonstrate how the ignorance and cultural expectations of white patrons resulted in a Harlem where its people were begrudgingly placed on a city stage and persistently watched by a revolving audience of urban tourists. Miller remarks that Harlem dwellers were ‘perpetually on public display yet visible only through the performance of racialized conventions’.<sup>246</sup> Dancers performed long forgotten tribal routines and assumed the role of exotic entertainers, all the while resenting their forced caricatures. The identity of bohemian Greenwich Village had clear elements of conscious self-construction, whereas the façade of Harlem appears to have been more imposed by racialized assumptions of culture. Though club owners and performers profited from these nightly displays, the show continued outdoors in the everyday theatricality of the streets, as Harlem residents became subject to the visitors’ gaze. Harlem was a reluctant exhibitionist targeted and constructed for profit through ill-informed notions of African American identity.

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<sup>244</sup> Wall, *Women of the Harlem Renaissance*, p. 81; Hughes, ‘When the Negro was in Vogue’, in *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1940), pp. 223-233 (p. 223).

<sup>245</sup> Langston Hughes, ‘When the Negro was in Vogue’, p. 223.

<sup>246</sup> Miller, p. 183.

One regular visitor to Harlem was the Vassar graduate, New York nightlife journalist, and archetypal urbane ‘flapper’, Lois ‘Lipstick’ Long, who, in a 1955 interview with Harrison Kinney, recalled that ‘usually we wound up in Harlem’.<sup>247</sup> In her retrospective article for *The New Yorker*, where Long remained a regular contributor from 1925 into the 1960s, she remembered Harlem of the 1920s, reminiscing that ‘Harlem was a thrill. We went there regularly well after midnight, to smoky lairs called the Drool Inn, the Clam House, and the Hot Feet. Dozens of tiny places...’.<sup>248</sup> It was these ‘smoky lairs’ that Long, under the guise of ‘Lipstick’, frequented for her reviews on New York nightlife and recommendations for slumming opportunities. Joshua Zeitz notes of Long that ‘[n]either her fans nor New York’s many nightclub owners and restaurateurs knew who she was or what she looked like. And that was half the fun. As her column caught on, any number of imposters were spotted around town claiming to be Lipstick, hoping to buck a reservation list or score a better table’. By protecting her identity, Long not only propelled the mythicism surrounding her persona, but also sparked a spate of pretenders, only adding to the theatrics of the New York night. No-one could identify ‘Lipstick’, and she delighted in propelling speculation by baiting her readers with closing statements such as ‘the kindly, old, bearded gentleman who signs himself—LIPSTICK’.<sup>249</sup> Like Djuna Barnes’s journalistic persona, Long – who took a brief foray into acting – constructed and instigated her own self-publicized mythic veneer, a nebulous character projected for the intrigue of her readers.<sup>250</sup>

Long’s articles are peppered with remarks that would now be considered profoundly racist, but stand as a pertinent reminder of what was deemed acceptable

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<sup>247</sup> Harrison Kinney, *James Thurber: His Life and Times* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), p. 380.

<sup>248</sup> Lois Long, ‘That was New York—And Those Were Tables for Two’, *The New Yorker*, 17 February 1940, p. 35.

<sup>249</sup> Joshua Zeitz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), p. 99.

<sup>250</sup> Brendan Gill, *Here at the New Yorker* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), p. 203.

during the era. In her weekly entertainment column ‘Tables for Two’ – which Zeitz notes, ‘brilliantly captured the distinctive sound and feel of the Jazz Age in all its frivolity, bluster, and melodrama’ – Long often seems expressly aware of her readers’ desire for an ‘authentic’ experience of African American culture in Harlem.<sup>251</sup> She often measured and reported on the *mélange* of skin-tones in proportions, in order to gauge the extent to which a particular club was genuinely ‘exotic’. For instance, she observes of The Nest club in Harlem in 1927 that ‘it is as black and white as ever (verging on black as the evening wears on)’.<sup>252</sup> Of Club Harlem, Long conjures the backdrop as ‘very pleasing decoration—acid yellow walls with huge, foggy, dark-blue silhouettes of barbaric negroes and palm trees’.<sup>253</sup> As exemplified by Aaron Douglas’s *Dance Magic* mural [Fig. 2.5.], clubs, cabarets and speakeasies created atmosphere with backdrops and by setting stage-like scenes evoking racialized jungle stereotypes. As Cheryl Wall confirms, ‘Harlem barrooms were refurbished to resemble African jungles, and [...] bands, even the best ones, like that of Duke Ellington began advertising the latest in “jungle music”’.<sup>254</sup> In the same article, Long complained that Club Harlem featured ‘probably the most inferior collection of white people you can see anywhere. Possibly they are hired by the management to give the colored race magnificent dignity by contrast’.<sup>255</sup> In commenting condescendingly on the ‘quality’ of each racial group and mockingly suggesting the white visitors as ‘hired’, Long not only commoditizes the clientele, but also casts them as part of the entertainment, highlighting her own position as a spectator and confirming the inclusion of slummers and Harlem residents as incidental performers within Harlem’s everyday theatrical scene. In her column, Long commonly demonstrates stereotyping of the African American populace and in her attempt at ascertaining the most ‘real’ of the

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<sup>251</sup> Zeitz, p. 92.

<sup>252</sup> Long, ‘Tables for Two’, 30 April 1927, p. 92.

<sup>253</sup> Long, ‘Tables for Two’, 22 December 1928, p. 95.

<sup>254</sup> Wall, ‘Passing for what?’, p. 100.

<sup>255</sup> Long, ‘Tables for Two’, 22 December 1928, p. 95.

Harlem clubs, she neglects to acknowledge that most of the ‘African’ culture on display for white gratification was false, or at least contrived. Her anguish at the clubs in Harlem becoming increasingly ‘white-manized’ is palpable and in 1927 she boldly asserted, ‘I am mad at Harlem [...]. It is getting too refined. All the Harlemites are getting a little ashamed of the Black Bottom, that quaint old native dance handed down by levee working grandfathers’.<sup>256</sup> Patronizing language such as ‘quaint’, as well as ‘charming’, ‘quintessential’ and ‘picturesque’ were terms often applied by white New Yorkers to any culture or race considered ‘other’ during the era, while Long’s reference to the supposed ancestral root of the dance reflects her pursuit of ‘genuine’ culture, and represents the common primitivist theme of tying African Americans back to their associated heritages. Long appears unaware that the ‘black culture’ she has experienced in Harlem was most likely a racialized performance, or at least she wished to shield her readers from this fact.

With its population on public display to a regular night-time audience, the spectacle of distorted and sensationalized African American culture, alongside the echo of Jazz, the music ‘native to an epoch’ pulsating through the nocturnal streets, Harlem had acquired a unique everyday theatricality.<sup>257</sup> Upholding the mirage of Harlem relied upon fulfilling the expectations and imaginations of its visitors. Harlem was easily capable of satisfying its night-time guests’ expectations of exoticized spectacle through performance, although as Long lamented after many visits, and after the district had become popularized, the veneer had begun to tarnish. For pursuers of the African American dream during the great migration, upon arrival in the urban promised land of Harlem, the façade often dropped all too soon, and Kathleen Drowne notes that ‘the average black resident reaped few benefits from these voyeuristic white “slummers”’.<sup>258</sup> Heap, nevertheless attributes slummers as having ‘helped shape American ideas about

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<sup>256</sup> Long, ‘Tables for Two’, 28 January 1928, p. 34; 10 December 1927, p. 104.

<sup>257</sup> Flanner, pp. 296-297.

<sup>258</sup> Kathleen Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance: National Prohibition and Jazz Age Literature, 1920-1933* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), p. 122.

race and sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'.<sup>259</sup> Harlem held two opposing natures embodied by the dichotomies of night and day; the performed and the real. Though the conceptual stages of Harlem's streets, rooftops and tenement air shafts held their own unique everyday theatricality, writers and artists largely focussed on the performativity of the night-time scene, while visitors rarely saw daytime Harlem.

The performance of Harlem at night was run with the precision of a Broadway show, while daytime was behind the scenes, a time when Harlem residents were caught 'floundering in this maze of contradictions'.<sup>260</sup> Indeed, as Johnson ascertained of Harlem's population, 'the vast majority of them are ordinary, hard-working people, who spend their time in just about the same way that ordinary, hard-working people do. Most of them have never seen the inside of a night club'. Johnson's observation counters the 'exotic, colourful, and sensuous' representation of Harlem 'known in Europe and the Orient', which he attributes to the district being 'proclaimed in story and song'. Johnson implies that Harlem's slumming audience not only viewed what was on show in the district, but also peered backstage; 'these seekers after new sensations [...] go beyond the gay night-clubs; they peep under the more seamy side of things; they nose down into lower strata of life'. Johnson also notes that countless reviews of Harlem nightlife gave 'the impression that Harlem never sleeps and that the inhabitants thereof jazz through existence'. In reality, as Johnson suggests, for 'ordinary' Harlem residents, life was often shaped by hard work and routine.<sup>261</sup> The image depicted is of two Harlems, the night being a theatrical stage, and the day being equivalent to backstage, where the hard work and cogs of the machine were hidden.

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<sup>259</sup> Heap, p. 96.

<sup>260</sup> Wall, *Women of the Harlem Renaissance*, p. 98.

<sup>261</sup> Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, pp. 160-161.

## CONCLUSION

The Harlem Renaissance nurtured contributions from African American artists and writers, providing a supportive environment and a forum in which to interact and test ideas. While Hughes remains the Harlem Renaissance's most notable protégé, Douglas, Larsen and Fauset made a valuable and lasting input on the subjects of race, gender, passing and what it meant to be African American during the early twentieth century. Though acknowledging the disingenuous aspects of Harlem's nightlife, Douglas and Hughes actively celebrated and incorporated echoes of jazz, performance and everyday theatricality within their work, differing from the stance of many key Harlem Renaissance figures, while by writing on the subjects of passing and racial identity, both Larsen and Fauset explored key issues relating to selfhood, masking and everyday performance.

In Harlem, performed identities, such as passing or the conscious embodiment of stereotype, were often born out of necessity due to discrimination and white expectation. In Greenwich Village, pretence and disguise were sometimes enacted as a pleasurable pursuit, or as a conspicuous display of eccentricity, meanwhile, in Harlem, the act of passing, though a form of acting in the everyday, was performed discretely with the intention of blending in, often for better access to opportunities and the jobs market, though at the expense of racial identity. By highlighting key themes of theatricality, pretence and identity in the literature and art of early twentieth-century Harlem, I have demonstrated how the district, with its availability of night-time escapades and music escaping from venues and infiltrating the milieu, became stage-like – as Douglas observes, 'an enormous outdoor stage' – across multiple platforms.<sup>262</sup> With its cabarets and jazz, as well as its engaging and diverse population, Harlem became a prime location for slumming audiences to see and be seen, and for Harlem residents to engage with the

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<sup>262</sup> MS Aaron Douglas Collection, Harlem Renaissance: workshop on Negro Life, series 8.2, box 3, fol. 3-40; cited in Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*, p. 12.

district's impromptu and everyday performativity. Harlem's performative qualities, nevertheless, emerged differently and more reluctantly than the Greenwich Village bohemians' forthcoming displays of eccentricity. Motivations regarding pretence and spectacle were invariably divergent between districts, and in Harlem, segregation, discrimination and white imposed notions of race were often at the nexus of proceedings. The phenomenon of pretence was what, by the 1920s and 30s, fuelled the Harlem night-life, as racialized performances demanded by white audiences were enacted for the economic advantages and employment opportunities, but frequently compromised real African American culture. As a result, Harlem became more economically dependent on pretence and myth than other districts, expounded as a result of its 'exotic' appeal. The distorted view of African American racial identity was propelled by white expectations, blurring the lines between pretence and reality within the district.

ACT III. THE LOWER EAST SIDE, 'A TENEMENT CANYON': ANZIA YEZIERSKA, MICHAEL GOLD, JOHN R. GRABACH AND JEROME MYERS

Always these faces at the tenement windows. The street never failed them. It was an immense excitement. It never slept. It roared like a sea. It exploded like fireworks.<sup>1</sup>

How intoxicating were those old tunes of the hurdy-gurdy! I'd leave my basket of herring in the middle of the sidewalk, forget all my cares, and leap into the dance with that wild abandon of the children of the poor.<sup>2</sup>

*The final stop in our journey brings us to one of Manhattan's most prominent migrant districts, the Lower East Side. From Harlem's One-Hundred-and-Twenty-Fifth Street, take the 'D' subway line south to Grand Street. Our key tour guides for this chapter are novelist Anzia Yezierska, novelist and columnist Michael 'Mike' Gold, artist John R. Grabach, as well as artist and memoirist Jerome Myers. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this was a neighbourhood where many new arrivals to America commonly occupied small, overcrowded tenement rooms after passing through the Ellis Island immigration process. Here resided a microcosm of the world, as among others, Italian, German, Russian, Romanian, Polish, Chinese, Irish, and Jewish communities from numerous diaspora intermingled in the bustling streets, toiled in sweatshops and shared cramped rooms, as the disparate cultures united through shared experiences. It was a perpetually transitional community, and for many, simply a stopping-off point on the aspirational journey to a better life. A cyclical pattern occurred, as the influx of new families and individuals continued, while earlier arrived groups dispersed and settled across the wider city, state and country.*

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Gold, *Jews Without Money* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1930; repr. New York: Carroll and Graf, 1984), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, ed. by Alice Kessler-Harris (New York: Doubleday, 1925; repr. New York: Persea Books, 2003), p. 269.

During the turn-of-the-century, the Lower East Side acted as a living organism – constantly moving, evolving and unfolding – as the real-life drama of the everyday transformed the streets into a transient stage-set. While the streets abounded with endlessly changing scenes for the avid viewer to consume, the multi-layered stoops, fire escapes, windows and bed-sheet curtains constituted a lively auditorium. Life spilled out onto the streets, overflowing from cooped up rooms, and it was the infinite variety of people and street activity which drew a clientele of spectating upper- and middle-class outsiders, social reformers and readers of walking-tour literature, each contributing to the layers of intrigue surrounding the district. Windows overlooked the streets and faced other windows, each in turn providing alternate glimpses into the lives of others. The quick succession of migrant communities that arrived in the district, predominantly between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shaped the fabric of the buildings and streets.<sup>3</sup> Peter Brooker notes the population of New York as over five million by the mid- 1910s, ‘one-sixth of whom resided in one eighty-second of the city land area in the Lower East Side’.<sup>4</sup> Each new community, many from various Jewish diaspora, as well as numerous other origins, added layers to the physical, social and cultural structure of the district like a palimpsest. Mike Gold observes that ‘[t]he red Indians once inhabited the East Side; then came the Dutch, the English, the Irish, then the Germans, Italians and Jews. Each group left its deposits, as in geology’.<sup>5</sup> In his earlier influential work *How The Other Half Lives* (1890), social reformer and journalist Jacob Riis (1849-1914) had also observed that a ‘map of the city, colored to designate nationalities, would show more stripes than on the skin of a zebra, and more colors than any rainbow’.<sup>6</sup> The diversity of the Lower East Side created numerous opportunities for

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<sup>3</sup> Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Brooker, *New York Fictions*, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, p. 180.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1890; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 23.

cross-cultural interaction and observation, while the district itself acted as a transient gateway for accessing opportunities in the rest of the city and broader America.

As is depicted in the excerpt from the *Map of the Wondrous Isle of Manhattan* [Fig. 3.1.] drawn by Charles Vernon Farrow (originally published by Fuessle and Colman for the Washington Square Bookshop in 1926), the Lower East Side is signified as ‘The Ghetto’. The depiction of the district is from the perception of an outsider, and the map is not intended as an accurate representation or a real guide, but simply stands as a characterization of the city. The pictorial map also distinguishes the Lower East Side with lines of washing strung between buildings, while a small cluster of concave, layered chinoiserie roofs illustrate ‘China Town’, a baker represents the ‘Italian Quarter’, the distinctive tracks of the elevated railway traversed by carriages symbolize the Bowery, commonly reputed as a shadowed street ridden with crime and vice, and two cartoon policemen in a comically small motorcar speed through the docks towards Manhattan Bridge. Though the illustrative map resorts largely to stereotypes and itself confesses ‘the scale is all askew’, it captures the close proximity of diverse cultures and ethnicities within one area, as well as portraying ‘The Ghetto’ as a distinct district with its own unique identity. Marcus Eli Ravage (1884-1965), a Romanian Jewish immigrant writer, states that on the Lower East Side, ‘[t]here are in it strata and substrata, each with a culture, a tradition, and a method of life peculiar to itself. The East Side is not a colony; it is a miniature federation of semi-independent, allied states. To be sure, it is a highly compact union, territorially. One traverses a square, and lo! he finds himself in a new polity’.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, actor and singer Eddie Cantor, himself born on the Lower East Side, observes the district’s idiosyncratic smell combination: ‘[e]ach street had its own favourite flavor which it cherished with a certain local and civic pride. If, for instance, the

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<sup>7</sup> Marcus Eli Ravage, *An American in the Making: the Life Story of an Immigrant* (New York; London: Harper and Brothers, 1917), p. 87.

tang of herring was missing from Hester Street, the Hester Streeters thought they were walking in a vacuum. Similarly, the Italian quarter had its air pockets filled with garlic; under Williamsburg Bridge blew strong fish breezes'.<sup>8</sup> Farrow's map therefore captures the essence of the Lower East Side, as a defined, but by no means homogenous district.

Through literary, artistic and photographic accounts, principally by residents of the area in the early twentieth century, and in the final section by outsiders looking in, I investigate the theatrical and stage-like elements of life on the Lower East Side. Acknowledging Richard Schechner's notion of the 'broad spectrum' of activities, events, actions and vistas that can be encompassed by the term 'performance', I uncover how the Lower East Side and its residents became framed as performative by both inside and outside spectators, including local residents, artists, writers, tour guides and slummers. The 'audience' I refer to in this chapter, is therefore anyone that 'validates' or interprets the Lower East Side as performance or spectacle.<sup>9</sup> My principal argument here focuses on the ways in which performance and watching became integral to day-to-day migrant existence in the district, as represented in literature and art from the early twentieth century, as well as incorporating explorations of identity, costume and slumming. In this chapter, acknowledging the chronology of migrant arrival in New York aboard ship, I begin with a section entitled 'New World, New Identity', focusing on costume and persona, and the commonly chronicled procedure of assuming an Americanized character upon first arrival, often complete with new apparel and moniker. The middle section, 'A Window on the Street', addresses the streets and tenement life, exploring themes of incidental street performance, people-watching, and overheard sounds, noises and music. The final section, 'An Outsider Looking In', changes perspective to view the district through accounts by outsiders, namely social reformers, slummers and writers of

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<sup>8</sup> Eddie Cantor, *My Life is in Your Hands* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 2; Carlson, *Performance*, p. 71.

walking-tour literature. While Lower East Side residents were mostly working-class migrants, the district's outside visitors, including reformers and slummers intrigued by sensationalized reports, were largely from upper- and middle-class backgrounds, thus emphasising an often exploitative power dynamic between the outside 'audience' and resident 'performers'.<sup>10</sup> My overall aim, without caricaturing, trivializing or diminishing the integrity of the district, is to capture and build a detailed picture of the ways in which incidental and spontaneous theatricality pervaded the Lower East Side for the viewership of itinerant audiences.

Themes of myth and reality pervade narratives of immigrant arrival and subsequent life on the Lower East Side. Disillusionment with the real America, when compared with the unrealisable legends rumoured in the old world, was common. In *Bread Givers* (1925), through the character of Sara Smolinsky, Yezierska alludes to America as a distant unrealistic prospect that families relied on for hope; 'when everything was gone from us, then our only hope was to come to America, where Father thought things cost nothing at all'.<sup>11</sup> On the reality of the arduous Lower East Side routine, writer Bella Spewack (1899-1990) also notes that it was 'Sleep...eat...work. Sleep...eat...work'.<sup>12</sup> Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a newly arrived Italian migrant, recalled a disorientating isolation derived from his anonymous, impersonal surroundings: '[h]ere was the promised land. The elevated railway rattled by and did not answer me. The automobiles and trolley sped by heedless of me'.<sup>13</sup> Vanzetti emphasizes an unfriendly inertia as the personified city perseveres in its inexorable routine in spite of him. On the subject of the illusion of America cast abroad, Carol B. Schoen notes that '[s]ince it is likely that only the successful ones would keep in touch (those who failed would

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<sup>10</sup> Dowling, *Slumming in New York*, p. 116; Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, p. 66.

<sup>11</sup> Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Bella Spewack, *Streets: A Memoir of the Lower East Side* (New York: Feminist Press at City University of New York, 1995), p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Robert W. Snyder, 'City in Transition', in *Metropolitan Lives*, ed. by Zurier, Snyder and Mecklenburg, pp. 29-59 (p. 35).

probably like to keep their failure a secret), the reports that came back from the United States were generally favorable and often widely exaggerated'.<sup>14</sup> Yeziarska also frequently refers to the difficulty in 'finding America' once arrived, and the elusive nature of the vision of America projected abroad. In 'How I Found America' (1920), Yeziarska's narrator acknowledges that in the old world, America had become a byword for hope, but in America there was nowhere else to dream of: '[i]n Russia, you could hope to run away from your troubles to America. But from America where can you go?'<sup>15</sup> The contention between myth and reality foregrounds many immigrant accounts of the Lower East Side from the late nineteenth century; the prevalent myths initially setting an impossible yardstick by which to measure their experiences.

The collective memory of the Lower East Side, recorded both in contemporary accounts, as well as retrospective memoirs, also reflects a disparity between myth and reality. Writer and critic Lawrence J. Epstein concludes that the mythic vision of the district has been particularly formed by the Jewish community, which 'came to think of the area as a sacred place, a place of mythic collective origins for a lot of them, a place to visit, to reconnect to that past, and to be energized'.<sup>16</sup> Though originally from disparate diaspora, the Jewish community was the largest and most dominant on the Lower East Side, and thus, much of the historical chronology of the area has been formed from multiple Jewish perspectives. Catherine Rottenberg states that 'U.S. Jewry has come to perceive the Lower East Side as the site of lost and retrieved origins and, as such this place has become sacrosanct'.<sup>17</sup> Although Jews comprised the majority of the Lower East Side population, they were by no means a uniform group or the only migrant community.

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<sup>14</sup> Carol B. Schoen, *Anzia Yeziarska* (Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Anzia Yeziarska, 'How I Found America', in *Hungry Hearts and Other Stories* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920; repr. London: Virago Press, 1987), pp. 250-298 (p. 277).

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence J. Epstein, *At the Edge of a Dream: The Story of Jewish Immigrants on New York's Lower East Side, 1880-1920* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), p. 259.

<sup>17</sup> Catherine Rottenberg, 'Black Harlem and the Jewish Lower East Side', in *Black Harlem and the Jewish Lower East Side: Narratives Out of Time*, ed. by Catherine Rottenberg (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2013), pp. 1-17 (p. 7).

As novelist Harry Roskolenko remembered in his autobiography, each community ‘lived in a ghetto within a ghetto’, each united by the absence of money but divided by ‘our faces, our speech, our jobs, our music, dances, and books – and of course, our religion and country of origin’.<sup>18</sup> In the preface to *The Lower East Side: Remembered and Revisited*, moreover, Eugene Golombek pertinently observes that ‘[a]s with any such fabled neighborhood, our perception of it is part myth, part reality’.<sup>19</sup> In acknowledging the district as ‘fabled’, Golombek adds to the mysticism, drawing on the tradition of storytelling, as increasingly distorted tales of the Lower East Side passed down through multiple generations of families. This phenomenon is referred to by Mario Maffi as ‘memory’s mythopoeic eye’.<sup>20</sup> Hasia R. Diner, author of *Lower East Side Memories* (2000), admits that she ‘knew that the Lower East Side of my fantasy *little resembled the Lower East Side of history*’, meanwhile Epstein adds that ‘[t]his lost world became enshrined for its memory, not the reality of existence there’.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, for many of the descendants of the generation which occupied the Lower East Side from the late nineteenth century, the district still holds a mystery and fascination, propelled by the collective stories and memories of their ancestors. Gold’s narrator in *Jews Without Money* also shrouds the district in nostalgia in his ode to his childhood playground, an empty lot on Delancey Street: ‘O home of all the twisted junk, rusty baby carriages, lumber, bottles, boxes, moldy pants and dead cats of the neighborhood [...]. No place will ever seem as wonderful again’<sup>22</sup> Shrouded in false expectation from newly arrived migrants, and viewed through the unreal lens of memory and nostalgia, the Lower East Side takes on a fabled form, impossible to decipher the truth from the mythic. Using literary and artistic

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<sup>18</sup> Harry Roskolenko, *The Time that was Then: The Lower East Side, 1900-1914, An Intimate Chronicle* (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Eugene Golombek, ‘Preface’, in *The Lower East Side: Remembered and Revisited*, by Joyce Mendelsohn (New York: The Lower East Side Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Maffi, p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> Epstein, pp. 259-260.

<sup>22</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, p.46.

representations of the district, and acknowledging the allegorical nature of many accounts, this chapter explores theatrical and performative examples throughout works which emanated from the Lower East Side.

#### I. NEW WORLD, NEW IDENTITY: 'JUST LIKE AN AMERICAN'

After the often gruelling journey aboard ship and having successfully navigated the Ellis Island immigration process, new arrivals, as depicted in retrospective literary representations and contemporaneous accounts, were frequently obliged to shed their old identity and assume a new one for the new world. The first stage of Americanization often began with donning a new costume and specific references to 'costume' frequently appear in accounts of migration from the late nineteenth century as a word evocative of performance and masquerade. Epstein notes that on disembarking, the outfits of the newly arrived were often deemed by their Americanized relatives to be too archaic: 'traditional American garments quickly replaced the caps and peasant skirts, kerchiefs and trousers from the Old Country. It was common to see discarded clothing littering the sidewalks'.<sup>23</sup> Meredith Goldsmith adds that 'social workers urged immigrant women to redress themselves American-style, some even before leaving Ellis Island. Consumerism served these women as a powerful means of Americanization'.<sup>24</sup> Though often considered a necessity, Americanization through costume and performance was, nevertheless, at least initially a superficial affectation.

In the novel *Call It Sleep* (1934) by Henry Roth (1906-1995) which charts the migration of the Galician Jewish Schearl family, first to Brownsville in Brooklyn, then to the Lower East Side (echoing Roth's own migration as a child in the 1900s), of the crowd conveyed to the mainland in May, 1907, Roth notes 'a matrix of the vivid costumes of

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<sup>23</sup> Epstein, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> Meredith Goldsmith, 'Dressing, Passing, and Americanizing: Anzia Yezierska's Sartorial Fictions', *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, 16 (1997), 34-45 (p. 34).

other lands, the speckled green-and-yellow aprons, the flowered kerchief, embroidered homespun, the silver-braided sheepskin vest, the gaudy scarfs, yellow boots, fur caps, caftans, dull garbardines'.<sup>25</sup> Roth's authorial voice here seemingly takes the perspective of a judgemental American observer, which Dean Franco refers to as 'the Whitmanesque gaze of a ferry boat captain', documenting the arrival of the 'jowled close-cropped Teuton' and 'scraggly-whiskered Jew'.<sup>26</sup> Though Roth's point of view quickly shifts to the angle of the immigrant child, his use of language in the prologue is representative of what Lori Jirousek refers to as a nineteenth-century American taste for 'gazing at an ever-changing pageant of wonder, often observing the ethnic Other for diversion'.<sup>27</sup> By describing the rich variation in attire and colours, nevertheless, Roth portrays the broad cultural diversity of this group of migrants, while his reference to 'vivid costumes' also expresses the visual spectacle, and implies a theatricality to the scene.

Roth carefully describes the appearance and attire of his key protagonists, noting the mother Genya as already disguised in American clothes, a costume either sent in advance by Albert, the already Americanized father, or hurriedly donned at Ellis Island. Roth suggests that though Americanized in appearance, Genya's real status as a newcomer is betrayed by 'the timid wondering look in her eyes', while their young son David's distinctly European appearance is confirmed by an 'outlandish' straw hat, which Alfred promptly throws in the sea, instructing Genya that she 'should have left it behind!'.<sup>28</sup> By assuming costumes and new identities, recent arrivals, many of whom like the Schearl family settled on the Lower East Side, took on new rôles to enable success in the New World. With the cyclical arrival and dispersal of migrants, the Lower East Side provided a platform for numerous instances of everyday performance and costume, which

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<sup>25</sup> Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep* (New York: Robert O. Ballou, 1934; repr. London: Penguin, 1977), p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Dean Franco, 'Affectionate, Anxious, and Perplexed', *Studies in Jewish American Literature*, 31.1 (2012), 11-18 (p. 11); Roth, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Lori Jirousek, 'Spectacle Ethnography and Immigrant Resistance: Sui Sin Far and Anzia Yezierska', *MELUS*, 27.1 (2002), 25-52 (p. 25).

<sup>28</sup> Roth, pp. 9, 10, 15.

aided in the necessary concealing of the newly arrived and shielded them from exploitation. As Roth indicates, in America the native costumes of the migrants constituted a form of spectacle, while by performing an Americanized character, migrants were better able to integrate. In this case, therefore, everyday performance is an intentionally discrete and behind the scenes necessity, but is nonetheless a performance.

As a first step towards acculturation, costume and performance are often represented in literature as imperative. In Belarusian-born Jewish writer, Abraham Cahan's (1860-1951) *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), David seeks to 'dress like a genteel American' and emulate the American manner by 'watching and striving to imitate the dress and ways of the well-bred American merchants [...]. All this, I felt, was an essential element in achieving business success; but the ambition to act and look like a gentleman grew in me quite apart from these motives'. David's performance of Americanism is fuelled not only by the possibility of success, but also by a class-driven desire to project the 'genteel' persona of a 'gentleman'.<sup>29</sup> Rottenberg regards David's attempt to perform norms of class [...] [as] inextricable from his attempt to act and look like a *white* gentleman', while Lauren S. Cardon observes David's 'purchase of fine clothing as marking his elevation in status and his symbolic assimilation into American culture'.<sup>30</sup> The symbolism of assimilation is key, as it was by no means an instant or absolute process. Delia Caparoso Konzett also notes by 1902, the 'ritual of sending a picture to Old World relatives in rented American clothes upon landing at Ellis Island to document the immigrant's remarkable overnight transformation'.<sup>31</sup> The concept of assuming rented American costumes demonstrates the initial superficiality of

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<sup>29</sup> Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, ed. by James Chametzky (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917; repr. New York; London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 260.

<sup>30</sup> Rottenberg, *Performing Americanness*, p. 113; Lauren S. Cardon, *Fashion and Fiction: Self-Transformation in Twentieth-Century American Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), p. 86.

<sup>31</sup> Delia Caparoso Konzett, *Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 62.

Americanization, and the performance of instant acculturation for the observation of relatives back home.

In her study on Italian women in industry (1919), Louise Odencrantz notes that women would often ‘bring large quantities of clothing with them from Italy, representing sometimes their accumulations for a dowry – heavy linen underwear, thick, heavily lined waists, clumsy shoes, and wide, bright skirts [...]. But they have scarcely landed at Ellis Island before they begin to discard these Italian costumes for American clothing’.<sup>32</sup> Klara Stephanie Szlezák comments that in the old world, clothing had brought a visible sense of belonging: ‘[n]ot only did it represent regional and/or national origins, it often also helped to express religious orientation’.<sup>33</sup> Clothing served multiple functions, as an indicator of gender, wealth, fashions, occupation, age, status and religion, but in America the customs were different, and transformation into an American, particularly for the young, commonly occurred from the outside in. As conveyed by numerous writers including Roth and Yeziarska, therefore, costume and everyday performance could be a necessity on the Lower East Side, accentuating a hidden theatricality which pervaded the district. Rottenberg also emphasizes the ‘compelled aspect of performativity’ and observes that while literary scholars address notions of performativity in early twentieth-century African- and Jewish-American literature, ‘they do not offer a theoretical explanation of performativity, which is crucial if we are to go beyond reductive notions that conflate performativity with a chosen or playful performance’.<sup>34</sup> In America, style of dress presided over quality, and acquiring the superficial Americanized appearance through disguise and performance could be important in finding work. In his monograph *Selling Style* (2003), Rob Schorman identifies clothing as ‘the interface between the individual

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<sup>32</sup> Louise Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry: A Study of Conditions in New York City* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1919), p. 229.

<sup>33</sup> Klara Stephanie Szlezák, “‘Capturing’ Immigrant Children: The Issue of Americanization in Photographs by Augustus F. Sherman and Lewis W. Hine”, *Universitätsverlag, Amerikastudien/ American Studies*, 57.1 (2012), 9-29 (p. 18).

<sup>34</sup> Rottenberg, *Performing Americanness*, pp. 7, 9.

and the social world, and if citizenship involves participation or membership in civic or community enterprise, then clothing can help mediate that relationship'.<sup>35</sup> New Americans were often eager to shed old affiliations and merge with their new surroundings, thereby improving prospects while also introducing a hidden aspect to the theatrical milieu of the Lower East Side.

Themes of costume, identity and transformation appear regularly in Lower East Side writing, and as Konzett remarks, '[t]he importance of dress in the New World had by this time [1920s] become a convention in immigrant literature'.<sup>36</sup> Establishing this theme in Cahan's 'The Imported Bridegroom' (1898), upon welcoming a potential suitor for his daughter to the Lower East Side, Asriel 'did not go directly to his residence, but first took his importation into a large "clothing and gents' furnishing store" on Broadway, from which the *illoui* emerged completely transformed'.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in her later autobiography *The Promised Land* (1912), Mary Antin (1881-1949), who arrived in Boston from Russia in 1891 also recalls visiting 'a dazzlingly beautiful palace called a "department store," [where] we exchanged our hateful homemade European costumes, which pointed us out as "greenhorns" to the children on the street, for real American machine-made garments, and issued forth glorified in each other's eyes'.<sup>38</sup> The term 'greenhorn' is used here to describe inexperienced newcomers, and as in the case of Antin acquiring Americanized costumes enabled a more discrete profile. Odencrantz attests that '[t]he first year in this country frequently means much skimping [sic] and saving to get new clothes, especially among the younger women who want to look American'.<sup>39</sup> In an oral history interview for Elizabeth Ewen's study *Immigrant Women* (1985), Sophie Abrams, a Jewish garment

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<sup>35</sup> Rob Schorman, *Selling Style: Clothing and Social Change at the Turn of the Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 118.

<sup>36</sup> Konzett, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> Cahan, 'The Imported Bridegroom', in *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of the New York Ghetto* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), pp. 93-162 (p. 120).

<sup>38</sup> Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), p. 187.

<sup>39</sup> Odencrantz, p. 229.

worker who emigrated from Minsk to the Lower East Side in the early twentieth century also remarked on the importance of appearing American:

I was such a greenhorn, you wouldn't believe. My first day in America I went with my aunt to buy some American clothes. She bought me a shirtwaist, you know, a blouse and a skirt, a blue print with red buttons and a hat, such a hat I had never seen. I took my old brown dress and shawl and threw them away! I know it sounds foolish, we being so poor, but I didn't care. I had enough of the old country. When I looked in the mirror, I couldn't get over it. I said, boy, Sophie, look at you now. Just like an American.<sup>40</sup>

Abrams's physical disposal of her old world clothes symbolizes her desire to disunite from her old identity and cultural ties and assume a new Americanized persona, while her accumulation of American possessions evidences her initiation into American consumer culture. Aligning consumerism with everyday theatricality, Deborah Fairman also notes that 'the department store literally and intentionally transformed the city street into a spectacle of desire'.<sup>41</sup> The immediate change, moreover, generated by the acquisition of new clothes is the superficial projection of an American character. This is evidenced by Abrams's observation that she appeared '[j]ust like an American', emphasizing an underlying sense of detachment from America in spite of her costume, meanwhile accentuating the performative nature of Americanization.<sup>42</sup>

Clothing also served an important rôle as an enabler in the Lower East Side labour market. In another interview from Ewen's study, a Russian migrant describes how wearing a leather jacket, which had been desirable and practical in Russia, had unintentionally marked her out as a 'Bolshevik' in America, making it difficult for her to

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<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985), p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> Fairman, p. 206.

<sup>42</sup> Ewen, p. 68.

find work. Upon the realization that the jacket was proving problematic; ‘I dressed myself in the latest fashion with lipstick in addition, although it was so hard to get used to at first that I blushed, felt foolish and thought myself vulgar. But I got a job’.<sup>43</sup> By shedding her Russian style jacket and assuming a more Americanized character, employment opportunities became available where they hadn’t been previously. Jane Schneider and Annette B. Weiner observe that ‘[a]s much as cloth discloses it can conceal [...] homogenizing difference through uniforms or sackcloth, or superimposing disguised identities through costumes and masks’.<sup>44</sup> The key to success for some migrants of the Lower East Side was therefore in part reliant on Americanized costumes, masks and performance. Whereas in the old world and for the older generation, clothing choices had been influenced by quality of material and practicality, in America, greater importance was placed on consumerism and commodification. Amy Koritz notes that ‘new immigrants wishing to look and act like real Americans sought out consumer goods as a means of speeding assimilation’.<sup>45</sup> An interviewee of Ewen’s who arrived in America in 1911 recalled thinking, ‘Yes, I’m almost an American [...]. The essential thing in America is to look stylish’.<sup>46</sup> Here costume and cultural identity are closely interlinked. Akin to an actor assuming a rôle, in order to become an American, it was deemed important to first appear American.

Disguise, performance and masquerade are common themes which also occur in both Yeziarska’s fictional writing and in accounts of her life. Yeziarska was born in a small town near the Russian-Polish border, and emigrated to New York with her family aged about nine, settling on the Lower East Side in the 1890s. Yeziarska initially trained as a school teacher, but when her subsequent writing career proved fruitful by the 1920s,

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<sup>43</sup> Ewen, p. 69.

<sup>44</sup> Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider, ‘Introduction’, in *Cloth and Human Experience*, ed. by Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (Washington D.C.; London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), pp. 1-4 (p. 1).

<sup>45</sup> Koritz, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Ewen, p. 69.

she would weave a complex web of mythicism and embellishment surrounding her life. Schoen notes that '[s]he achieved sudden, dazzling success, fame, and fortune' and began to curate her own constructed identity, styling herself as the character of 'Sweatshop Cinderella'.<sup>47</sup> Yeziarska's daughter Louise Levitas Henrikson also observes that '[i]t's hard to find Anzia's real face [...]. Whenever she talked about herself [...] she had a way of rearranging or inventing the facts to suit her current feelings'. Henrikson reveals a 'tattered clipping from an unknown source, ca. 1925' by Henry Harrison, the headline reading 'A Scrub-Woman Who Became a Great Novelist', and the subheading earnestly clarifying: 'Anzia Yeziarska, Who Came to America in the Steerage, Suffered Many Hardships Before She Won Success'.<sup>48</sup> The article encapsulates Yeziarska's self-styled persona, a media image grounded in truth, but difficult to extricate from its fictitious framework. Katherine Stubbs regards Yeziarska's biography as a 'strategic construction of her own life story as a rags-to-riches narrative'.<sup>49</sup> In her own life, therefore, Yeziarska, or at least the image projected of her, became a dramatized version of the truth; a constructed character. Henrikson also fittingly divulges that when unhappy with teaching domestic science, Yeziarska resolved to become an actress and gained a scholarship to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts: 'she had enough emotional excess to be an actress, the way she was always dramatizing the daily encounters of life'. Ultimately after her acting classes concluded, Henrikson reports that Yeziarska set her next ambition to become a writer, though the theatricality of her writing style and dramatization of scenes no doubt in part emanated from her professional acting training.<sup>50</sup> Though Yeziarska draws from truths and experiences of life on the Lower East Side, much of her writing,

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<sup>47</sup> Schoen, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Louise Levitas Henrikson, *Anzia Yeziarska: A Writer's Life* (New Brunswick; London: Rutgers University Press, 1988), pp. 1-3.

<sup>49</sup> Katherine Stubbs, 'Reading Material: Contextualizing Clothing in the Work of Anzia Yeziarska', *MELUS*, 23.2 (1998), 157-172 (pp. 157-158).

<sup>50</sup> Henrikson, pp. 19-21.

including her own autobiography, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (1950), was heavily fictionalized.

As well as acquiring an American style, particular forms of employment required a specific aesthetic. In Yeziarska's *Bread Givers*, Sara pursues career in teaching, and realizing the importance of prioritizing her appearance in this profession, visits a Fifth Avenue department store: 'I could buy anything now. Anything. I could begin my career as a teacher as well dressed as any of them. The dark night of poverty was over'. Sara is unable to contain her elation at her new costume:

I tried them on again before the big mirror in my hotel room – hat, coat, shoes, the whole outfit, even the new handkerchief. For the first time in my life I was perfect from head to foot. Now I laughed aloud in my pleasure. There was no saleslady around before whom I had to act as though I were used to it always. No prima donna dressed up for the opera ever felt grander than I, ready to be a teacher in the schools.<sup>51</sup>

Sara's costume enables her to fully embody her rôle as a teacher. Away from the pretentious department store where she had to 'act' in order to uphold a performance of entitlement, Sara is able to appreciate the impact of costume in altering her appearance. Stubbs notes the motif of acquiring commodities and garments in Jewish immigrant literature, observing that 'ready-made clothing is prized for its almost magical transformative power, its aura of respectability; it functions as testimony of an immigrant's new American status'.<sup>52</sup> In comparing Sara's sense of grandeur when attired in her costume to that of an operatic 'prima donna', moreover, Yeziarska's use of language demonstrates awareness of the theatrical implications of Sara's assuming a new rôle, as well as the performative elements of teaching. Goldsmith notes of this scene that

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<sup>51</sup> Yeziarska, *Bread Givers*, pp. 238-240.

<sup>52</sup> Stubbs, p. 157.

‘Sara [...] has internalized the aesthetic of the show-window: she has outpaced her sisters in the struggle for Americanization’.<sup>53</sup> She also remarks that ‘[p]erformative self-revision brings Yeziarska’s heroines to the threshold of agency, yet the ephemerality of these performances reminds us of just how difficult it was, and just how few were permitted, to cross the threshold into American culture’.<sup>54</sup> In her position as teacher, accumulation of commodities and successful broadening of prospects, Sara becomes identifiable as an American and an embodiment of the success stories dispersed abroad.

Conversely, in Yeziarska’s short story ‘Soap and Water’ – which appeared in *Hungry Hearts* (1920), a collection of stories featuring the lives of Jewish migrants on the Lower East Side and was later adapted into a silent film in 1922 – having toiled long hours in a laundry to enable her studies, the narrator is slighted by the dean of her college. Miss Whiteside informs her: ‘she could not recommend me as a teacher because of my personal appearance. [...] She pointed out that my collar did not set evenly, my belt was awry, and there was a lack of freshness in my dress. And she ended with: “Soap and water are cheap. Any one can be clean”’. Miss Whiteside is dismissive of the girl’s hardship and attributes her dishevelled appearance to a lack of care. Incensed by her unfair treatment, but powerless the protagonist comes to the realization ‘that after graduation the opportunities for the best positions are passed out to those who are best-dressed, and the students too poor to put up a front are pigeon-holed and marked unfit’.<sup>55</sup> Yeziarska’s reference to ‘putting up a front’ demonstrates the implied need to perform and costume oneself in order to disguise the overt markers of poverty. Here clothing and style are esteemed above knowledge and talent for teaching, and for those who could not afford to look the part, the cycle of poverty endured.

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<sup>53</sup> Goldsmith, ‘Dressing, Passing, and Americanizing’, p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> Goldsmith, “‘The Democracy of Beauty’: Fashioning Ethnicity and Gender in the Fiction of Anzia Yeziarska’, *Yiddish*, 11 (1999), 166-187 (p. 183).

<sup>55</sup> Yeziarska, ‘Soap and Water’, in *Hungry Hearts*, pp. 163-177 (pp. 163, 172).

Yeziarska herself had a complex relationship with clothing and costume, as articulated in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, in which she recalls that as a child she had ‘felt like the Village idiot in [her] immigrant clothes’, but later in life acknowledges, ‘I never could or would fit into the up-to-date clothes that everybody else wore. [...] now that I had the money enough to shop at the best stores, perversity made me cling to my pushcart clothes’. In feeling betrayed by her ‘immigrant’ style of dress, Yeziarska aligns her childhood self with the character described in ‘Soap and Water’, although her later refusal to relinquish her ‘pushcart clothes’ following success has often been ascribed to the lucrateness in maintaining her ‘authentic’ Lower East Side persona; as Stubbs attests ‘she publicly performed her identity through clothing’.<sup>56</sup> In cultivating or exaggerating a persona through costume and performance, Yeziarska came to physically embody her Lower East Side roots, while also echoing the performativity of identity as exemplified by many of her characters.

Many migrants, including both Yeziarska and Gold, also changed their names to become assimilated more fully. Henrikson notes, for example that upon arrival, Yeziarska’s family ‘was instantly Americanized. The oldest brother Meyer Yeziarsky, who had reached America a year or two earlier, had been officially renamed Max Meyer [...]. Anzia Yeziarska turned into Hattie Meyer’.<sup>57</sup> The complex issues surrounding cultural and racial identity are explored, moreover in an unpublished manuscript by Yeziarska entitled, ‘We Can Change Our Moses But Not Our Noses’, as the protagonist expresses remorse at severing her name and cultural ties for the sake of opportunities: ‘the day I gave up my Jewish name, I ceased to be myself. I ceased to exist. A person who cuts himself off from his people cuts himself off at the roots of his being, he

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<sup>56</sup> Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse: My Story* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950; repr. London: Virago, 1987), pp. 39, 56; Stubbs, p. 158.

<sup>57</sup> Henrikson, p. 14.

becomes a shell, a cipher, a spiritual suicide'.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, during his lifetime Gold frequently edited aspects of his identity, for example his birth name was Itzok Isaac Granich, but he later published under the name 'Irwin Granich', until he became an editor of *The Liberator* as 'Michael Gold' in 1921 (Rachel Rubin attests that he chose the name to protect his identity during the Palmer Raids capturing radicals in 1919-1920).<sup>59</sup>

Born on the Lower East Side to Romanian-Jewish parents, Gold is best known as a radical, political activist and communist, contributing articles to socialist and communist newspapers and journals including, *The Daily Worker*, *The Masses*, as well as editing *The Liberator* alongside Claude McKay.<sup>60</sup> Gold established himself as a true proletarian writer, a home-grown tenement representative, and in his essay 'Towards Proletarian Art' (1921), he professed that '[t]he tenement is in my blood. When I think it is the tenement thinking. When I hope it is the tenement hoping. I am not an individual; I am all that the tenement group poured into me during those early years of my spiritual travail'.<sup>61</sup> Gold's deep connection as a product of the tenements and the Lower East Side are expounded throughout his work, and particularly in *Jews Without Money* and his later retrospective essay 'A Jewish Childhood in the New York Slums' (1959). As well as altering his identity, Gold also restyled and edited aspects of his literary persona, often diminishing particular details. For example, in 1914 he gained access to Harvard University, and though, due to financial difficulties he remained for only one semester, Gold later denied the claim that he had ever attended; '[c]ertain enemies have spread the slander that I once attended Harvard College. This is a lie. I worked on the garbage dump

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<sup>58</sup> Boston, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, MS Anzia Yeziarska Papers; cited in Schoen, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Gold, 'Toward Proletarian Art', in *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology*, ed. by Michael Folsom (New York: International Publishers, 1972), pp. 62-70 (p. 62); Rachel Rubin, *Jewish Gangsters of Modern Literature* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Berman, 'East Side Story: Mike Gold, The Communists and the Jews', *Radical America*, 17.4 (1983), 39-55 (p. 39); Adam McKible, *The Space and Place of Modernism: The Russian Revolution, Little Magazines and New York* (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 129.

<sup>61</sup> Gold, 'Toward Proletarian Art', p. 65.

in Boston, city of Harvard. But that's all'.<sup>62</sup> Michael Folsom notes that 'Gold often lacked a clear sense of the distinction between fictional and autobiographical fact'.<sup>63</sup> Barbara Foley observes, nevertheless, that of the proletarian fictional autobiography genre, it is 'Gold, who comes closest to projecting a straightforwardly autobiographical persona – his hero is named "Mikey Gold" and speaks in the first person – nonetheless composes dramatic scenes and dialogue suggestive of fictional representation'.<sup>64</sup> In a similar way to Yeziarska, therefore, Gold curated and dramatized his own public persona through fictionalized accounts of his life story.

A renaming scene arises in *Out of the Shadow* (1918), a fictionalized memoir by Rose Cohen, a Russian Jew who arrived on the Lower East Side as a child. Maria Lauret has noted that name changing became 'a trope of trauma in most immigrant narratives'.<sup>65</sup> When Cohen's protagonist Rahel begins work in a sweatshop, the workers collaborate on Americanizing Rahel's name, primarily suggesting 'Rachel', until she is advised; '[d]on't let them call you Rachel. Every loafer who sees a Jewish girl shouts 'Rachel' after her'. Finally she settles on 'Ruth'. In the sweatshop the 'slightest cause for interruption was welcome', and as a result, assigning Rahel with a new identity becomes a collective amusement.<sup>66</sup> By adopting new names, modes of dress and Americanized mannerisms, like performers, many new migrants came to embody different personas, but as Yeziarska suggests, this could result in detachment from selfhood and cultural identity. Epstein notes, nevertheless, that by the time their wives arrived from the old country, some men had acculturated so completely that 'the women seemed like strangers from a strange

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<sup>62</sup> Gold, 'Love on a Garbage Dump', in *Mike Gold*, ed. by Folsom, pp. 177-85 (p. 177).

<sup>63</sup> Michael Folsom, in *Mike Gold*, ed. by Folsom, p. 177.

<sup>64</sup> Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham, North Carolina; London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 288.

<sup>65</sup> Maria Lauret, *Wanderwords: Language Migration in American Literature* (New York; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 76.

<sup>66</sup> Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow: A Russian Jewish Girlhood on the Lower East Side* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918; repr. Ithaca, New York; London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 82.

world'.<sup>67</sup> For Jake in Cahan's novel *Yekl* (1896) his assimilation had been so intensive that three years after his arrival on the Lower East Side, 'the thought of ever having been a Yekl would bring to Jake's lips a smile of patronizing commiseration for his former self'. By transforming from Yekl into Jake, over time Jake intentionally severs ties with his former self. In spite of his perceived acculturation, however, Cahan portrays Jake as a performative figure, as in the sweatshop he draws 'an attentive audience to an impromptu lecture', while self-aware of 'the performances of his brawny arms and magnificent form'.<sup>68</sup> Aviva Taubenfeld observes, however, that 'Jake remains consistently insecure about his ability to enact his American identity successfully before members of his audience whom he considers more Americanized'.<sup>69</sup> Having changed name and identity, Cahan indicates therefore that beyond the superficial and performative, acculturation was a more complex and lengthy process.

As indicated by Cohen's depiction of Ruth, the Lower East Side was central to New York's garment trade, its exploitative sweatshops creating low waged work for many of the district's inhabitants. The significance of the garment trade also serves to heighten the importance of clothes and costume in the district. Every day in small sweltering rooms, men and women toiled to make clothes for the American public. As Stubbs remarks, 'many Russian Jewish immigrants were both producers and consumers of ready-made clothing'.<sup>70</sup> In 'Hunger' (1920), Yeziarska describes the sweatshop scene from the perspective of Shenah who is eager to begin work: '[a]ll her fear had left her. She flung open the door and beheld the wonder of a factory – people – people – seas of bent heads and busy hands of people – the whirr of machinery – flying belts – the clicking

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<sup>67</sup> Epstein, p. 96.

<sup>68</sup> Cahan, 'Yekl', in *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom*, pp. 1-93 (pp. 23-24, 1-3).

<sup>69</sup> Aviva Taubenfeld, "'Only an 'L'": Linguistic Borders and the Immigrant Author in Abraham Cahan's "Yekl" and "Yankel der Yankee"', in *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*, ed. by Werner Sollors (New York; London: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 144-166 (p. 156).

<sup>70</sup> Stubbs, p. 157.

clatter of whirling wheels all seemed to blend and fuse into one surging song of hope – of new life – a new world – America!’<sup>71</sup> Yeziarska’s evocation of the performative sweatshop sounds intermingling into a ‘surging song of hope’ is accented with palpable rhythm and corresponds with Cahan’s description in *Yekl*, as the machines ‘led off in a duet, which presently became a trio, and in another few minutes the floor was fairly dancing to the ear-piercing discords of the whole frantic sextet’.<sup>72</sup> Similarly in ‘Circumstances’ (1898), Cahan writes that the sweatshop ‘rang and trembled with a chaos of mournful and merry song, vying with the insolent rattle of the machines. There were synagogue airs in the chorus and airs of the Jewish stage’.<sup>73</sup> In equating the sounds of the sweatshop to music, dance, song and theatre, Cahan and Yeziarska ascribe a performative atmosphere to the monotony of the sweatshop.

Clothing and costume also aided in expressing personal identity, promoting confidence, and impacting on employability and marriageability. In Yeziarska’s short story ‘Wings’ (1920), Shenah Pessah becomes captivated by an American sociologist, John Barnes, who is studying the Lower East Side and its people. She seeks to impress him and pawns a precious feather bed inherited from her mother, so she is able to afford new clothes: ‘I can’t no more wear my ‘greenhorn’ shawl going out with an American’. Here Shenah’s sartorial decisions gain a new significance, as she sacrifices an item of sentimental value in an attempt to impress John and improve her future prospects. Seeing her sadness at parting with the item, ‘[t]he last memory from Russia’, the pawnbroker empathetically questions her need for money, to which Shenah ponders ‘how could he possibly understand her sudden savage desire for clothes?’ Having exchanged the item for ten dollars, Shenah proceeds into the Americanized realm of consumerism:

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<sup>71</sup> Yeziarska, ‘Hunger’, in *Hungry Hearts*, pp. 35-64 (pp. 41-42).

<sup>72</sup> Cahan, ‘Yekl’, in *Yekl*, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Cahan, ‘Circumstances’, in *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom*, pp. 203-224 (p. 221).

Shenah Pessah scurried through the ghetto streets, seeking in the myriad-colored shop windows the one hat and the one dress that would voice the desire of her innermost self. At last she espied a shining straw with cherries so red, so luscious, that they cried out to her, “Bite me!” That was the hat she bought.

The magic of those cherries on her hat brought back to her the green fields and orchards of her native Russia. Yes, a green dress was what she craved. And she picked out the greenest, crispest organdie’.<sup>74</sup>

In choosing her outfit, rather than simply seeking to emulate American styles and fashions, Shenah seeks to ‘voice the desire of her innermost self’. As Cardon remarks, ‘she lets her emotions rule her decisions by selecting a dress for its brightness and the nostalgia it evokes rather than with calculated strategy’.<sup>75</sup> Here Shenah not only wishes to impress John with her attire, but she also views her costume as a form of self-expression. Andrew R. Heinze notes that ‘psychological adaptation of the immigrant to American society was largely defined by this enormous leap in material circumstances and possibilities’.<sup>76</sup> Shenah’s choice is emotional, rather than practical or stylistic, and though her new clothes are American made, her decision remains influenced by nostalgia for her homeland, emphasizing the way in which her dual-identity is reflected in her choice of clothes, as well as an unspoken tribute to the sacrifice of her Russian-made feather bed.

When Shenah is re-acquainted with John and is adorned in her new costume, she informs him, “I’m through for always with old women’s shawls. This is my first American dress-up”. In casting aside the garments of her old country and donning American attire, Shenah symbolically assumes a new identity. In using the phrase ‘American dress-up’, nevertheless, Shenah also implies that she is simply disguising

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<sup>74</sup> Yeziarska, ‘Wings’, in *Hungry Hearts*, pp. 1-34 (pp. 17-21).

<sup>75</sup> Cardon, pp. 97-98.

<sup>76</sup> Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption and the Search for American Identity* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 33.

herself to perform as an American, her new identity remaining superficial. John also acknowledges her masquerade and responds, “[s]plendid! So you want to be an American! The next step will be to take up some work that will bring you in touch with American people”. Shenah’s initial motivations for becoming American are prompted by romantic interest, although John’s primary concern with her appears to be sociological. Upon visiting a library with John, nevertheless, the well-groomed librarian and library vernacular soon render Shenah an outsider again, as in spite of her new attire she realizes “there were other things to the person besides the dress up”.<sup>77</sup> To Shenah, it becomes clear that although costume could act as a superficial disguise, Americanization would require further efforts.

Similar issues of identity and costume appear in Yeziarska’s short story ‘Where Lovers Dream’ (1920), as Sara, a Russian Jew from the Lower East Side, meets David, an American trainee doctor and they pursue a romantic relationship. David seeks to encourage Sara to become better acculturated as an American. She remarks that:

David was always trying to learn me how to make myself over for an American. Sometimes he would spend out fifteen cents to buy me the “Ladies’ Home Journal” to read about American life, and my whole head was put away on how to look neat and be up-to-date like the American girls. Till long hours in the night I used to stay up brushing and pressing my plain blue suit with the white collar what David liked, and washing my waists, and fixing up my hat like the pattern magazines show you.<sup>78</sup>

As an American himself, David is keen for Sara to emulate new world style and behaviour. Koritz notes that ‘the Jews sought to fit into American culture quickly and thoroughly, and found that commodity consumption and display were effective ways of

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<sup>77</sup> Yeziarska, ‘Wings’, in *Hungry Hearts*, pp. 25-27.

<sup>78</sup> Yeziarska, ‘Where Lovers Dream’, in *Hungry Hearts*, pp. 142-162 (p. 145-146).

achieving this goal'.<sup>79</sup> Heinze also adds that '[n]o transition was more dramatic than the movement from a material life that was nearly medieval to one that thrived on modern mass production'.<sup>80</sup> David's unattainable ideal of female perfection springs from the pages of the 'Ladies' Home Journal', a magazine containing articles on style and housekeeping. Sara explains the time and effort she took in preparing her costume to imitate the American girls in magazines.

Likewise in *Bread Givers*, Sara's sister Mashah is delighted with her Americanized appearance and remarks, "I'm going to hear the free music in the park tonight [...] and these pink roses on my hat to match out my pink calico will make me look just like the picture on the magazine cover".<sup>81</sup> This highlights the influence of magazines as the epitome of American style, as well as illuminating Mashah's desire for beauty and material possessions in spite of poverty. Goldsmith notes that Mashah 'embodies an Americanized aesthetic, which the other women of the family go on to appropriate through copying her habits of consumption'.<sup>82</sup> By acquiring the aesthetic of an American woman, and through the act of consumerism itself, Mashah becomes instantly more acculturated than the rest of her family. Koritz adds that '[t]o become an American was to attain the appearance of an American, something accomplished not by voting but by dressing, acting, and decorating one's home as *Ladies' Home Journal* dictated'.<sup>83</sup> Beyond Mashah's outward appearance of Americanization, however, Cardon also decodes the political symbolism behind her costume, interpreting her 'pink roses' as reflective of the 1912 'Bread and Roses' strike which saw immigrant textile workers in Massachusetts, who had experienced significant wage cuts, call for 'bread and roses too'.<sup>84</sup> The call for 'roses' emphasizes the human desire for items which bring pleasure, in

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<sup>79</sup> Koritz, p. 124.

<sup>80</sup> Heinze p. 33.

<sup>81</sup> Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Goldsmith, 'Dressing, Passing, and Americanizing', p. 40.

<sup>83</sup> Koritz, p. 124.

<sup>84</sup> Cardon, pp. 83-107.

addition to the bare essentials necessary for life. While projecting an American persona through her costume, by wearing roses on her hat, Mashah simultaneously reflects her immigrant status and embodies the desire for a better life.

Returning to ‘Where Lovers Dream’, in addition to instructing Sara on costume, David also coaches her on how to perform like an American; how to eat and talk. She recalls that ‘[o]n holidays he took me out for a dinner by a restaurant, to learn how the Americans eat, with napkins, and use up so many plates [...]. All the way as we walked along he was learning me how to throw off my greenhorn talk, and say out the words in American’. Akin to preparing for a new rôle on the stage, Sara attempts to convincingly adopt an American persona. When David introduces his uncle to Sara and her family, however, performance is not enough to hide their poverty. In the hope of making a good impression, Sara not only costumes herself but also her family in American attire: ‘I made my father put away his black shirt and dress up in an American white shirt and starched collar. I fixed out my mother in a new white waist and blue checked apron, and I blowed myself to dress up the baby in everything new, like a doll in a window’. David’s uncle is not fooled by the disguise, however, and when David suggests he marry Sara, his uncle responds “‘Marry yourself into that beggar house! [...] Poverty winking from every corner of the house! Hunger hollering from all their starved faces! [...] And all the time I was planning for you an American family, people which are somebodies in this world’.<sup>85</sup> Deeply affected by his uncle’s remarks, David becomes withdrawn and eventually leaves Sara. In this instance, Americanized costume and performance are insufficient in hiding both the family’s greenhorn immigrant status and their poverty.

Though clothing could perform a significant rôle as enabler on the Lower East Side, campaigner, writer and one-time sweatshop worker Marie Ganz emphasizes that costume was not enough to relieve the suffering of the poor. In her autobiography (1920),

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<sup>85</sup> Yeziarska, ‘Where Lovers Dream’, in *Hungry Hearts*, pp. 146-153.

Ganz recalls an incident in 1914 on Rivington Street, in which a large group of unemployed men were waiting to roll bandages and sort through cast-off clothing sent for the poor in return for fifty cents per day. Ganz explains that '[m]any of these men had already come into possession of some of the cast-off clothes, and there were all sorts of fantastic costumes in the line. Here was a man wearing a high silk hat, striped evening trousers and a sweater. Another was in rags except for an immaculate pair of white kid gloves'. The mismatching discarded 'costumes' sent by the wealthy, as Ganz notes, were just a small gesture compared to the scale of suffering on the Lower East Side in 1914. Here the provision of what Ganz terms 'fantastic costumes', silk hats and white gloves, act purely *as* costumes; simply disguising the outward marks of underlying poverty beneath the cast-off attire of the affluent. The appearance of the Lower East Side's unemployed residents partly attired in formal clothes, moreover, created a spectacle in itself. By costuming the poor with ill-fitting, incongruous clothes, using language echoing the theatre, Ganz indicates New York's benefactors as engaging in a 'farce' of charity, an attempt to circumvent the primary causes of suffering on the Lower East Side and absolving responsibility by covering the evidence.<sup>86</sup>

Themes of impromptu spectacle continue, as Ganz, so incensed by the treatment of the poor, positions herself on the conceptual stage of 'the curb' and raises a rallying cry for 'all victims of oppression to ignore the rich man's law and to assert their rights', and soon a large crowd 'from streets and alleyways and tenements' gathers to hear her proclamation.<sup>87</sup> By raising her voice and pitching herself on a sidewalk stage, on the Lower East Side streets Ganz began to draw an audience in campaigning for the rights of laborers. Hours were long in the sweatshops and conditions dangerous, as evidenced by the notorious Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911, in which 146 trapped migrant

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<sup>86</sup> Marie Ganz and Nat J. Ferber, *Rebels: Into Anarchy and Out Again* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1920), p. 122.

<sup>87</sup> Ganz and Ferber, p. 124.

workers lost their lives, a tragedy which prompted strikes, unionization and ultimately reforms in workplace safety.<sup>88</sup> As Yeziarska notes in ‘How I Found America’, ‘little by little, step by step, the sanitation improved [...]. Our shop was caught up in the general movement for social betterment that stirred the country’.<sup>89</sup> Improvements eventually came about with the help of campaigners, activists and social reformers such as Ganz.

Costume and performance played a necessary role and as the interface between the internal and external human form, and in the extreme diversity of the Lower East Side, presentation and appearance could often be the key to success. Those who could not afford to style themselves as Americans were conspicuous as ‘greenhorns’, and were often less prosperous in the jobs market. On the Lower East Side, therefore, in contrast to escapism and make-believe in Greenwich Village, performance and costume are often represented in accounts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an obligation. In aiding Americanization, the types of costume and performance discussed in this section – while enhancing the everyday theatrical milieu of the Lower East Side – were intentionally inconspicuous. As evidenced by Ganz’s rousing speech and assembled crowd, nevertheless, more overt instances of impromptu spectacle and everyday theatre also pervaded the streets, as is explored in the next section of the chapter.

## II. A WINDOW ON THE STREET: ‘A THEATER WITHIN A THEATER’

The physical setting of the Lower East Side, with its multifaceted layers and levels, constant street activity and eternal din, made the streets a continuous spectacle; a free show, haphazardly staged and accessible to tenement dwellers at any time. The tenements lent themselves to the theatre; the stoops as the stalls, the windows and overhanging fire escapes as balconies or upper circle, the washing-lines as the curtain pelmet, and the

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<sup>88</sup> David Von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), pp. 2-4.

<sup>89</sup> Yeziarska, ‘How I Found America’, in *Hungry Hearts*, p. 288.

street as the stage, playing host to perpetual performance. Whether a permanent resident of the tenements, or a curious outsider, the Lower East Side abounded with multifaceted scenes. On the subject of the performativity and scenes, largely focusing on theatres and entertainments of immigrant New York, Sabine Haenni's *The Immigrant Scene* (2008) analyses the influences of 'ethnic amusements' on wider culture. On 'urban scenes' Haenni notes that the 'prominence of theatrical practices in the city has been largely neglected in recent studies, which have tended to emphasize the rise of a visual, frequently homogenizing and disembodied spectacular culture and which usually subsume theater under the visual'. Nevertheless, she adds:

if we think of urban space as performed and experienced as a series of related, if diverging urban scenes, if we think of turn-of-the-century urbanity as constituted through a wide range of theatrical practices (which include cinematic entertainments), then we arrive at a far less homogenizing account of the emergence of mass culture—at a definition of mass culture comprising a series of dramatized scenes.<sup>90</sup>

By envisioning New York City as a space comprised of a collection of performative urban scenes, Haenni encompasses the city's numerous theatrical spaces and routines, broadening the interpretation of theatrical scenes and practices to include various elements of turn-of-the-century urbanity, as well as analyzing immigrant theatre and cinema, and their subsequent influence on broader mass culture and views of immigration.

The tenements of New York were in their own way part of the performance as a sham of solid construction. In his article reflecting on New York's Little Italy, Pietro di Donato (1911-1992), who was born in Hoboken, New Jersey to Italian immigrant parents,

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<sup>90</sup> Haenni, p. 14.

and was himself a construction worker from a young age, knowingly remarks on the fabric of the Lower East Side tenements as:

a brick and stone and tin poem to the architectural conceit of the mushrooming metropolis of a century ago. Irish, English and Italian masons laid up the intricate patterns of bonds, fretted jambs and stately sills, the curved and flat arches, the showy quoins and stone balconies and stoops. Smiths molded and soldered seamless sculptured shapes of tin for baldachins before entrances and for imposing roof cornices. Iron shops hammered and joined the fanciful wrought-iron of fire-escape landings, railings and ladders. Never again in American construction will be seen the imaginative postures, the flaunt, daunt, myth and craftsmanship of the mask of the Tenement.<sup>91</sup>

With his expert eye, di Donato deconstructs the tenement, excavating each stratum and exposing the components which constitute its façade. Di Donato's use of language and terminology not only demonstrates his construction knowledge, but also evokes the irony and 'conceit' of the tenement as a structural 'mask'; its 'intricate patterns of bonds', 'stately sills', 'showy quoins', 'seamless sculptured shapes of tin', 'imposing roof cornices' and 'fanciful wrought-iron of fire-escapes', in turn emphasize the building as an architectural pretence of grandeur; a disguise. Though some tenements afforded a more ornate decorative finish, appearances could be deceptive, and as Luc Sante notes, tenements were frequently built 'using cheap materials and employing shortcuts in every aspect of construction'<sup>92</sup> The materials of brick, stone, tin and iron in di Donato's précis each endeavour to mask the poverty harboured within their walls, and he adds that

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<sup>91</sup> Pietro di Donato, 'Little Italy Seventy-Five Years Later', in *A Documentary History of the Italian Americans*, ed. by Wayne Moquin and Charles Van Doren (New York; Washington: Praeger, 1974), pp. 414-418 (pp. 414-415).

<sup>92</sup> Luc Sante, 'Introduction', in *How the Other Half Lives*, by Jacob A. Riis (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. ix-xxii (p. ix).

‘[b]ehind the mask were dark, airless, disease-breeding cells’.<sup>93</sup> The prioritization of embellishment over quality also reflects the temporary set-like nature of architectural designs debuted at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago which William H. Wilson regards as a ‘transient yet eternally enthralling vision of huge, white neoclassic buildings, blue lagoons, and green naturalistic landscaping’. The notion of superficial artifice also links with the City Beautiful movement which arose circa 1900 to 1910 as a ‘cultural agenda, a middle-class environmentalism, and aesthetics expressed as beauty, order, system, and harmony’ which Wilson notes, ‘found physical realization in urban design’, as the embellishment of public buildings, parks, and streets became ‘the tokens of the improved environment’.<sup>94</sup> In deconstructing the tenement, di Donato reveals the material edifice as little more than an elaborate stage-set, a veneer concealing the everyday realities of the city behind its ‘imaginative postures’.<sup>95</sup> The historical layering of individual tenements and architecture through time is peculiar to the story of each building, from their initial construction, through the hands of multiple landlords and diverse tenants, all are distinctive and reflective of their past, enabling the physical fabric to be read as a palimpsest.

The duplicitous interior of the tenement apartment also manifested as deceptive. In his memoir, *An American in the Making*, Marcus Eli Ravage, newly arrived from Romania, remembers the apartment of his cousin on Allen Street which ‘joined their windowsills right on to the beams of the Elevated trestle’. He remarks that:

During the day my relative kept up the interesting fiction of an apartment with specialized divisions [...]. But between nine and ten o’clock in the evening this imposing structure suddenly crumbled away in the most amazing fashion. The

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<sup>93</sup> di Donato, ‘Little Italy’, p. 415.

<sup>94</sup> William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 53, 1.

<sup>95</sup> di Donato, ‘Little Italy’, p. 414.

apartment suddenly became a camp. The sofas opened up and revealed their true character. The bureau lengthened out shamelessly, careless of its daylight pretensions. Even the wash-tubs, it turned out, were a miserable sham. The carved dining-room chairs arranged themselves into rows that faced each other like dancers in cotillion. So that I began to ask myself whether there was, after all, anything in that whole surprising apartment but beds.<sup>96</sup>

The lack of space in tenement flats meant that through design, furnishings could often serve a dual function so as to accommodate larger numbers within a smaller space. Like a scene change in the theatre, the set transforming and unfolding for the third act, so the tenement apartment evolved itself into a sleeping area and the wash-tub became a sink with a draining board. Cohen's narrator Ruth also recalls of her tenement upbringing that everything occurred in the living room; '[h]ere we slept, and washed, and dressed, and ate'.<sup>97</sup> Ravage infers the sudden conversion as somewhat disconcerting to a newcomer, imbuing individual features with human traits of deception; the sofas unveil their 'true character', the bureau 'shamelessly' discloses its 'pretentions' and the wash-tub is exposed as a 'miserable sham'. By revealing the truth behind the mask, di Donato and Ravage uncover the tenement exterior and interior as little more than a charade. The themes of sham and disguise permeate Ravage's account of his American experience. He recalls that his initial impressions of America were not favourable, noting that he 'very emphatically hated America', and neither did he admire Americanized English; 'I recognized it for the sham it was'. In spite of his disappointment, Ravage remembers that 'an occasional ray would penetrate through the gloom and reveal another America than that of the slums'. He adds that 'in the mean time the East Side Ghetto *was* my America, a theater within a theater, as it were'.<sup>98</sup> Here Ravage transposes the Lower East Side to

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<sup>96</sup> Ravage, pp. 71-72.

<sup>97</sup> Cohen, p. 186.

<sup>98</sup> Ravage, pp. 72, 86-87.

the similarly dark, constricted space of the theatre and compares the district to the stage, a microcosm of the world and the sole territory of his boundary led existence at this time. By specifying ‘a theater within a theater’, Ravage emphasizes his stifling confines, as well as indicating the Lower East Side as a localized theatre within the wider theatre of the city, and more broadly, America.

The concept of the tenements as a stage-set or theatre extended beyond the physical fabric of the buildings. Bella Spewack was born in Transylvania in 1899 but raised on the Lower East Side from the age of three, and later, alongside her husband Samuel, would become one half of the writing duo who most famously penned the stage musical *Kiss Me Kate* (1948), with music and lyrics by Cole Porter. In her memoirs of childhood, written aged twenty-two but published posthumously in 1995, Spewack recalls at the age of twelve, finding escape from the boundaries of the Lower East Side in school and reading, the tenement clamour being simply a sideshow: ‘Lewis Street with its figures was like a badly painted backdrop against which the people of my books, school, and settlement played the most important roles. Sometimes the people of my backdrop exchanged places with these, and then I drew back and hid until the backdrop was itself again’.<sup>99</sup> Spewack uses theatrical language, reflective of her later career, in depicting her Lower East Side street as simply the unrealistic ‘backdrop’, in front of which the key characters in her life performed their various ‘roles’. Her description of the tenement backdrop as ‘badly painted’ not only implies the unkempt appearance of the buildings, but also suggests the hazy and faded insignificance of the street in her memory.

For many, escape could be found in the dreamlike rooftop vista, a vast backdrop reaching far beyond the confines of the tenements to the Midtown towers. As Ganz describes in her fictionalized autobiography, ‘our housetop had a wonderful fascination to me – the cool breezes, the far vistas over the city’s roofs, the mysteries of the night sky,

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<sup>99</sup> Spewack, p. 66.

the magic moonlight – a fairyland, a place of romance after the dreary day in the stuffy little rooms below or in the crowded, noisy streets’.<sup>100</sup> Ganz’s nostalgic memory of escapism imbues the tenement rooftop with a magical, filmic connotation. Critic Paula Rabinowitz also notes: ‘[w]harf, river’s edge, fire escape, rooftop, stoop – the locations of urban escape’.<sup>101</sup> Likewise, Nick Yablon suggests that late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century accounts envisioned the urban rooftop as a utopian space, ‘[a]n oasis of quiet or an island in the air’.<sup>102</sup> In comparison to the cramped tenement rooms, the rooftop was a sanctuary of open space and a shifting stage-like platform, which, like the living room, was adaptable to multiple purposes, from dancing or sleeping to hanging washing or pigeon keeping. Gold notes that ‘[w]e children played on the roof [...]. We flew kites, or explored the upper world from roof to roof [...]. Yes, the roof was important. All roofs were social playgrounds and bedrooms’.<sup>103</sup> Within the limited environment of the tenement, flexibility of space was invaluable and the rooftop signified a space of retreat.

Rooftops also play a significant rôle in Henry Roth’s *Call It Sleep*, as David is initially transfixed and intimidated by the untrodden shadowy stairs leading to the unknown space of the tenement roof: ‘[t]hey were inviolable those stairs, guarding the light and silence’. By demarcating the stairs as a portal to an unfamiliar open space, Roth foretells David’s need for retreat later in the novel. In an instance of voyeurism, which also positions the window as a conceptual stage, David, knowing his mother Genya had earlier emerged from the bath, is mortified to discover a group of boys discussing how from the rooftop they had espied ‘a lady washin’ huhself inna washtub’.<sup>104</sup> Though the audience of boys hadn’t seen her face, they report seeing ‘[e]v’ything’ – which Elaine Orr

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<sup>100</sup> Ganz and Ferber, p. 5.

<sup>101</sup> Paula Rabinowitz, “‘Between the outhouse and the garbage dump’: Location Collapse in Depression Literature”, in *Critical Approaches to American Working-Class Literature*, ed. by Michelle M. Tokarczyk (New York; London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 17-35 (p. 22).

<sup>102</sup> Yablon, ‘Roof Life’, p. 14.

<sup>103</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, p. 127.

<sup>104</sup> Roth, pp. 142, 291.

interprets as ‘a story of male triumph’ – while for David ‘[t]he rush of shame set in his cheeks’ as he questions ‘[w]hy did she let them look. Shades, why didn’t she pull them?’<sup>105</sup> Genya’s performance, either inadvertent or reflecting her apathy towards the tenement gaze, drives David to summon the courage to transcend the boundary of the stairs and climb to the rooftop for respite. Prior to his ascension David is tentative as the stairs ‘beckoned even as they forbade’, but once traversed, he encounters ‘[q]uiet. Sunlight on brow and far off plating the sides of spires and water-towers and chimney pots and the golden cliffs of the streets’. The next day, David again longs for the ‘precinct in the sky, that silent balcony on the pinnacle of turmoil’.<sup>106</sup> David’s yearning for a silent expanse or balcony acknowledges the rooftop as a heterotopic space of escape on the threshold of the hectic city. Sam B. Girgus interprets the symbol of the rooftop in *Call It Sleep* as ‘part of a metaphoric cosmology that incorporates the terror and evil of the basement with the hope for rebirth on the roof’.<sup>107</sup> Though far from silent, on the rooftop David finds a unique calm: ‘[w]hat sounds from the street, what voices drifted up the air-shafts, only made his solitude more real, the detachment of his reveries more delightful’. Here, the interjection of city noise into the relative serenity of David’s immediate environment serves to heighten the notion of the rooftop as a space apart. The interruption of David’s solitude, moreover, by a boy flying a ‘rag-tailed, crimson kite’ which ‘ducked and soared’, signals the rooftop as a shared, multi-functional space, and David acknowledges ‘a bond of kinship [...]. They were both alone on the roof, both inhabitants of the same realm’.<sup>108</sup> In describing the rooftop as a realm, through the eyes of a child, Roth conjures the rooftop as a magical kingdom, a rare adaptable open space removed from the cramped tenement apartment and frantic streets below.

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<sup>105</sup> Elaine Orr, ‘On the Side of the Mother: “Yonnonidio” and “Call it Sleep”’, *Studies in American Fiction*, 21.2 (1993), 209-233 (219); Roth, pp. 291-292.

<sup>106</sup> Roth, pp. 292-293, 296.

<sup>107</sup> Sam B. Girgus, *Hollywood Renaissance: The Cinema of Democracy in the Era of Ford, Capra, and Kazan* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 155.

<sup>108</sup> Roth, pp. 296-297.

The tenements were sweltering in the summer, with very little ventilation, and the addition of gas lamps and a stove contributed to the oppressive atmosphere. Upon visiting the Lower East Side in 1912, the British writer Arnold Bennett responded to the tenements from an archetypal outsiders' standpoint, remarking that 'the architecture seemed to sweat humanity at every window and door', while Henry James who recorded perspectives on his native city in *The American Scene* (1907) after years spent abroad in Europe, remarked on 'a swarming that had begun to thicken, infinitely, as soon as we had crossed to the East Side'.<sup>109</sup> Mary Esteve observes that 'swarm' is often used in accounts to 'describe the kinetic circulation of urban crowds', although it also somewhat derogatorily signifies overcrowding.<sup>110</sup> Though instilled with overtones of prejudice, Bennett's reference to 'sweat' echoes the overwhelming humidity and overcrowding of the tenements and sweatshops, where many of the men, women and children found work. With its population living in close quarters, the tenements and streets of the Lower East Side gave rise to numerous unavoidable insights into the lives of others, as well as providing opportunities for overhearing and observing the neighbours.

In these stifling conditions, people relished any available open space and burst out from apartment dwellings into the open air. As Epstein remarks, 'with the complete lack of privacy, the inevitable squabbling among family members, the sense of being trapped, and the summer heat, the immigrants felt an urgent need to get outside'.<sup>111</sup> David Nasaw also notes that in summertime 'entire families – abandoning their last grasp at privacy – relocated on the docks, in the parks, at the stoops, the fire-escapes or up on the roofs'.<sup>112</sup> In Gold's *Jews Without Money*, which was published in 1930, but set around the turn-of-

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<sup>109</sup> Arnold Bennett, *Your United States: Impressions of a First Visit* (New York; London: Harper and Brothers, 1912), p. 245; Henry James, *The American Scene* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1907), p. 131.

<sup>110</sup> Mary Esteve, *The Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in American Literature* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 61.

<sup>111</sup> Epstein, p. 59.

<sup>112</sup> David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1985), p. 12.

the-century as a fictionalized autobiographical account of Jewish-American life growing up on the Lower East Side, he vividly conjures the practice of rooftop escape:

Like rats scrambling on deck from the hold of a burning ship, that's how we poured on the roof at night to sleep. What a *mélange* in the starlight! Mothers, greybeards, lively young girls, exhausted sweatshop fathers, young consumptive coughers and spitters, all of us snored and groaned there side by side, on newspapers or mattresses. We slept in pants and undershirt, heaped like corpses. The city reared about us [...]. I saw the mounds of pale stricken flesh tossing against an unreal city [...]. Some nights it rained. The heavens suddenly split, the thunder rolled down the Brooklyn Bridge. We saw the lightning, like a stroke of insanity, as it created huge nightmare vistas of an unbelievable city of towers, New York'.<sup>113</sup>

Gold's recollection of his rooftop bed captures the theatrical outlook; a '*mélange*' of weary bodies cast against the backdrop of the 'unreal city' and his description pays homage to the city as an incidental illusory spectacle. Evoking wild horses, Gold notes that the skyscrapers 'reared about' and created an 'unbelievable city of towers', which unfolded before him as his night-time vista. In the foreground, Gold depicts the infinitely diverse sleepers which amassed under the stars to escape the tyrannous heat, thus humanizing the otherwise phantasmagorical scene of lights and towers. In depicting a varied cross-section of age, gender, health and occupation among the rooftop sleepers, Gold situates them as part of the spectacle, assorted characters performing upon a conceptual rooftop stage.

The rooftop served multiple functions as a relatively unconfined communal space where tenants could experience some degree of liberation. With space at a premium,

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<sup>113</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, pp. 126-127.

rooftops also served as venues for performance and entertainment. Mario Maffi notes the transformability of space on the Lower East Side, locations adapting to new purposes with each new community: ‘the old Theatre Comique (514 Broadway) was a former synagogue, the new Comique was the former Church of the Messiah’.<sup>114</sup> Nasaw also notes that ‘[t]he city was many things at the same time to the same people’.<sup>115</sup> As a writer for theatre, Spewack remembers ‘dancing on the roof of the public school on Houston Street [...]. The roof was all lit up, and a regular orchestra with a fiddle played for us. There were hundreds of girls all dressed up and clean, all partnered off’. Here, the school rooftop, complete with lights and a resident orchestra is transformed into a stage for the ‘dressed up’ young people to perform.<sup>116</sup> Kathy Peiss interprets partnered dancing as a facet of ‘heterosocial modernity’ in the 1910s and 1920s, noting that ‘nightclubs and amusement parks legitimated interaction between the sexes in such practices as dating and close dancing’.<sup>117</sup> Cohen’s Ruth also experiences dancing and entertainment atop the roof:

One night as I came out of our room into the hall I caught a few strains of music coming from the roof. I went up and found under the sky, blue and bright with stars and the city lights twinkling all around, a group of Irish-American girls and boys waltzing to the music of the harmonica. I sat down in the shadow near one of the chimneys and watched the stars and the dancing and listened to the song of “My Beautiful Irish Maid”.<sup>118</sup>

Ruth is drawn by the echo of music resonating through the thin tenement walls, and finds herself a spectator to an alternative cultural rooftop performance, the backdrop of city

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<sup>114</sup> Maffi, p. 90.

<sup>115</sup> Nasaw, p. 12.

<sup>116</sup> Spewack, p. 68.

<sup>117</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. 7.

<sup>118</sup> Cohen, p. 89.

lights gleaming and mingling with the stars. Belle Lindner Israels remarked in 1909 that during an average night-time winter stroll on Grand Street, ‘the glare of lights and the blare of music strike you on every side’.<sup>119</sup> As an audience to the ‘waltzing’ and Irish song, Ruth is so enamoured by the performance that she ‘went up every evening’.<sup>120</sup> Peiss explores cultural implications of amusement at the turn-of-the-century, reporting that ‘Irish women [...] did not attend musical entertainment, but 35 percent preferred theater trips or dancing’.<sup>121</sup> Sarah E. Chinn also remarks that ‘[d]ancing appears again and again in immigrant stories, however briefly. The space of dancing is the space of adolescent independence’.<sup>122</sup> The close proximity of tenement life, and the diversity of residents made cross-cultural experiences a relatively common occurrence, and here Ruth is drawn by the rooftop performance of the tenement’s Irish community.

John R. Grabach also depicts the roof as a space for musical serenade in his painting *Rooftop Jamboree* [Fig. 3.2.]. Windows, washing lines, and a neighbouring crowded rooftop provide the backdrop, while in the foreground, four central figures slump against the railings, one playing a concertina and another a ukulele, as nearby onlookers stop to listen. Virginia M. Mecklenburg notes that Grabach drew his inspiration from ‘[t]he excitement of the streets and the spirit of the people “living and doing, going about their affairs”’. In *Rooftop Jamboree*, he captures an informal tone, as the figures appear relaxed in formation and body language, while the term ‘jamboree’ overstates this small gathering with a knowing irony. As both a functional and recreational space, the tenement rooftop, like the street, acted as a communal area where numerous activities, performances and interactions could take place. Grabach, originally from Newark, New Jersey, found inspiration in the urban scenes of New York, and particularly the Lower

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<sup>119</sup> Belle Lindner Israels, ‘The Way of the Girl’, *The Survey*, 3 July 1909, p. 494.

<sup>120</sup> Cohen, p. 89.

<sup>121</sup> Peiss, p. 69.

<sup>122</sup> Sarah E. Chinn, *Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America* (New Brunswick, New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2009), p. 103.

East Side. Mecklenburg states that ‘his daily treks into New York City to make maps became treasure hunts for pictorial subjects. Tuesdays, he remembers, were washdays; week after week he saw laundry dancing from clotheslines strung between the upper stories of tenement apartments’. His predominant focus on the New York landscape came during the 1920s, and as Mecklenburg notes, he ‘developed a sympathy for the New York street scenes of the Ash Can artists’.<sup>123</sup> Contemporaneous critic Dorothy Grafly applauded Grabach’s work as ‘a projection of the American spirit [...] vital in the American social fiber’.<sup>124</sup> With a studio overlooking Brooklyn Bridge at the southern tip of the Lower East Side, Grabach had a base from which to explore the district and the wider city, as the streets, buildings and people collaboratively became his muse.<sup>125</sup>

For Gold, the rooftop also doubled as a setting for picnics during which his charismatic father recounted dramatic stories. Gold recalls that ‘[m]any summer nights we climbed to the roof. Cans of beer and salami sandwiches were brought along, and my father told stories while we ate and drank’. He remembers the rooftop as an atmospheric setting for storytelling, as ‘[m]oon and stars shone from the black sky that covered New York. My father’s face gleamed mysteriously in the starlight. He smoked a cigar. Behind him stood a cardboard jumble of tenement chimneys and skyscrapers’. Gold’s equating of the jutting angles of tenements and towers to a ‘cardboard jumble’ implies a temporary appearance in the fabric of the buildings, echoing a theatre or film set, as well as emphasizing the haphazard composition of the city skyline. With the dramatic vista established, Gold portrays his father as an enigmatic and masterful performer; ‘[h]e spoke in the low, sure, magnetic voice of a master. He knew his power, and gained a strange dignity when he was telling a story. On the roof, aided by moon and stars, he became

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<sup>123</sup> Virginia M. Mecklenburg, *John R. Grabach: Seventy Years an Artist* (Washington D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, 1980), p. 12.

<sup>124</sup> Dorothy Grafly, ‘American Artists Reflect Europe’s Ideals Too Much’, *Philadelphia North American*, 12 October 1924.

<sup>125</sup> *John R. Grabach: Century Man* [Exhibition] (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, 2007; Youngstown, Ohio: Butler Institute of American Art).

doubly magical'.<sup>126</sup> In Jewish culture, storytelling is an ancient tradition, and Gold's father clearly relishes his chance to perform. He commands the space, making the rooftop his stage and his awestruck children his audience, the city providing a theatrical backdrop. Though not necessarily a wholly accurate representation of events (Gold declared that *Jews Without Money* was 85 percent autobiography), Gold vividly captures the essence of tenement life, depicting multiple scenes of incidental performance and spectatorship.<sup>127</sup>

The iron fire-escape, the balcony of the tenements, also became a multi-functional space for hanging washing, sleeping, and spectating on street activity or being viewed from the street. Harry Roskolenko notes the conspicuousness of this restricted space above the street; '[h]ome came equipped with a fire escape for summer sleeping – an iron porch open to the world'.<sup>128</sup> In di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* (first published as a short story in the March 1937 edition of *Esquire*), a fictionalized account of Italian-American boyhood on the 1920s Lower East Side, impelled by the tragic death of his father, a bricklayer killed in a building collapse (echoing the death of di Donato's own father in 1923), aged just twelve, the protagonist Paul begins his own career in construction. Thomas J. Ferraro notes that '[i]t is di Donato who can take us into the lived interiority of the Italian American building class'.<sup>129</sup> Fred L. Gardaphe adds that 'Di Donato's *italianità* [Italianism] becomes most obvious through the novel's diction; his word choice and word order [...] re-create the rhythms and sonority of the Italian language'.<sup>130</sup> After laying bricks for two weeks, and having been underpaid for his gruelling labour due to his age, Paul is taken ill and forced to rest. After ten days of respite, Paul regains some

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<sup>126</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, p. 84.

<sup>127</sup> Foley, p. 293.

<sup>128</sup> Roskolenko, p. 11.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas J. Ferraro, *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity in America* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2005), p. 50.

<sup>130</sup> Fred L. Gardaphe, 'Italian American Novelists', in *The Italian American Heritage: A Companion to Literature and Arts*, ed. by Pellegrino D'Acerno (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1999), p. 166.

strength and looks for amusement in his tenement block; ‘he sat at the kitchen window looking abstractly at back yards, clothes poles, and windows of other tenements’. Later his mother, Annunziata makes up a fire-escape bed for him in the sun and fresh air, as ‘[h]e lay down on his back looking up through the bars of the fire escape, up past the rusty tin cornice of the tenement parapet, up at a distant sky’. Here, open to the elements, Paul finds solace in the blue sky and is later awoken by the cry of children returning from school:

Annunziata brought him his sweater, and sitting up he looked at the street and his interest gradually followed the gangs of children below in the gutter playing cat-stick, running, fighting, and shouting themselves delirious. From avenue to avenue the six-story discoloured brick face was a cliff with sightless windows and crumbling fire escapes. Separating it from an opposite cliff was a narrow cobbled street bordered with cement sidewalks. And to Paul the third floor right in the center of the block was their little tunnel of refuge, their privacy and home.

From his fire-escape sickbed, Paul surveys the incidental, displaced theatre of the street below; the groups of children, whom not long ago he was one of, cavort and raise ruckus, while the decaying tenement blocks which house his ‘tunnel of refuge’ appear as opposing precipices, conceding little light. In Paul’s tenement-bound existence, spectatorship is depicted as an essential pastime, but di Donato also invokes the multisensory experience of the building. Paul ‘would then wander about the building, going up on the roof and watching the men with their pigeons, the boys with their kites and smokes; sit on the stone stoop or on the curb and talk to the children of his own age and with the neighbors. He became spectator to the atmosphere in which he had always lived’. Divested of both school and work, as a ‘spectator to the atmosphere’, Paul

becomes a *flâneur* of his own dwelling, captivated by the sights, sounds, smell and feel of the tenement and its populace.<sup>131</sup>

Through his use of language, di Donato, (a contemporary of Roth, both of whom were writing retrospectively during the 1930s and addressed multisensory aspects of tenement life through the lens of boyhood) conjures an immersive encounter with the tenement. Ferraro observes of di Donato's style that it 'shocks with physicality: the story shows as strongly as it tells, and its mode of narrating is as olfactory and even gustatory – you're supposed to smell and touch and taste the words – as it is visual and aural'.<sup>132</sup> Pertaining to smell, di Donato notes that '[e]ach flat had its distinctive powerful odor. There was the particular individual bouquet that aroused a repulsion followed by sympathetic kinship; the great organ of Tenement fuguing forth its rhapsody with pounding identification to each sense'. Di Donato's palpable evocation of the individual aromas of tenement flats makes the reader privy to normally confidential observations, adding a new level of authenticity. Di Donato continues by remarking:

Then the winding staired passage of Tenement hallway gaseous in its internationality of latrines, dank with walls that never knew day, acrid in the corners where vermin, dogs, cats and children relieved themselves; the defeated air rubbery with greasy cooking and cut with cheap strong disinfectant [...]. After the show of day, after all the incidents and faces and voices and smells, what was he to think? Did they not all live one atop the other and feel and taste and smell each other?<sup>133</sup>

In his overwhelming onslaught of tangible tenement nuances, di Donato eliminates any vestige of romanticization or nostalgia. Ferraro notes that in 'assaulting the reader; [di

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<sup>131</sup> Pietro di Donato, *Christ in Concrete: A Novel* (Indianapolis; New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1939; repr. New York: Signet Classics, 1993), pp. 102-103.

<sup>132</sup> Ferraro, p. 52.

<sup>133</sup> di Donato, *Christ in Concrete*, pp. 103-105.

Donato] evokes the memory of super-dense living in railroad apartments and hallway-toilet tenements, that overripeness of what we romanticize as neighborhood, which, in fact, would turn most twenty-first-century stomachs'.<sup>134</sup> By engaging the reader in a sensory journey through the tenement, di Donato extends his portrayal of the Lower East Side experience beyond the visual and audible and transports them into the stark realism of the multisensory. His pertinent reference to 'the show of day', associating his depiction of the tenements with performance, not only envelopes visual spectatorship, but also a familiar encounter with the 'incidents', 'faces', 'voices', 'smells', 'feel' and 'taste' of the people and their surroundings.<sup>135</sup>

As part of the 'show', Paul finds curiosity in studying a neighbouring Jewish family on the opposite side of the tenement airshaft. He notices that 'from there came the smells of cabbage soup and chicken fat', and observes 'the heavy drinking glasses of steaming amber tea, the black bread'. The diversity of the tenements provided ample opportunities for cross-cultural contact and friendships, and Paul becomes engrossed in regularly watching the lives of this family unfold: '[h]e watched them each night before going to bed. The old father prayed, the mother made tea, the husky brother sorted his newspapers, and the somber boy with the shaved head studied profoundly. Paul wanted to know him'. Drawn to the 'somber-looking boy' as a potential friend, after witnessing him in a fight due to his being mocked, Paul eventually initiates an interaction. Di Donato writes that '[a]cross the shaft and by his window the boy was settling to a book. He realized Paul was watching him. He put the book aside and looked out into the shaft. They studied each other. Paul saw a round blunt face; the gray eyes and contemplative lips of a thinker; the serious lowered blunt chin of a quiet somber personality'. Paul begins to converse with the boy and discovers that his family had arrived in America

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<sup>134</sup> Ferraro, p. 52.

<sup>135</sup> di Donato, *Christ in Concrete*, p. 105.

three years ago, and his name is Louis Molov, his former Russian Jewish name having been Lazare Molovitch. Paul is later invited over and introduced to Louis's mother; 'Louis spoke to his mother, and Paul knew he was talking about him, for he looked at Paul and said: "Italianisch". The mother smiled and offered Paul a thick slice of pumpernickel'.<sup>136</sup> Primarily through curiosity and boredom, Paul begins surveying the lives of his neighbours and noticing the multisensory aspects of the tenement, his persistent watching ultimately instigating an Italian-Jewish companionship. Margaret Reid observes that 'Catholicism to Paul is not a subculture of America, an ethnic marker, or any other means of division. For him, the poor are all one'.<sup>137</sup> Paul is fascinated by the other family's customs and possessions, and perceives that '[t]hese people smelled of earth, with their quiet strong blunt selves, coarse dark clothes, wooden trunks, books, tea, and bread. And Paul knew Louis would be his friend'.<sup>138</sup> Here, di Donato exemplifies a cross-cultural, cross-religious bond formed initially through gazes from tenement windows over the airshaft.

The spectatorship from window to window is a prevalent pastime frequently recorded in Lower East Side memoirs and stories. Spewack details some of the scenes she recalls from her childhood on Goerck Street, now demolished but reputed as 'a "tough" block'. She recalls:

I looked through the window. In one apartment across the street, I saw a girl combing her long brown hair, her uncovered arms rising and falling like chords being struck on a harp. In another apartment, I saw a little boy clinging to his mother's hips, his face turned up prayerfully to her. He was probably asking for a

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<sup>136</sup> di Donato, *Christ in Concrete*, pp. 104, 121-123.

<sup>137</sup> Margaret Reid, 'Built into the System: Where Protest Lies in Pietro di Donato's "Christ in Concrete"', in *The Turn Around Religion in America: Literature, Culture, and the Work of Sacvan Bercovitch*, ed. by Nan Goodman and Michael P. Kramer (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 3-19 (p. 15).

<sup>138</sup> di Donato, *Christ in Concrete*, p. 123.

penny. In still another, a man was raising his fist to strike. I could see these things quite clearly. The cobblestoned street was very narrow.

The narrow gap between windows facilitated a direct snapshot into the lives of the neighbours. Spewack captures these candid scenes, moving in turn from window to window with a distinctly cinematic motion, foretelling her foray into screenwriting. The fragmentary nature of the scenes, and disconnected tone between each, emphasizes the impromptu nature of people watching as entertainment. The mundane but transfixing motion of a girl combing her hair with rhythmic virtuosity, abruptly contrasts in dynamic with the maternal dilemma of a pleading child, and the still tenser vision of violence in the adjacent window. Intimate views made the constant audience privy to hidden aspects of life; from glimpses through windows as busy lives emptied onto the streets, to ephemeral visions from the windows of the elevated railway carriages which ‘swung in like a wild beast charging at the tenement windows’.<sup>139</sup>

Adding significance to the window as a mode of interaction with the surrounding world, Gold remembers the street where he grew up as ‘a tenement canyon hung with fire-escapes, bed-clothing, and faces. Always these faces at the tenement windows. The street never failed them. It was an immense excitement. It never slept. It roared like a sea. It exploded like fireworks’.<sup>140</sup> In acknowledging the faces at windows, Gold accentuates lack of privacy and the notion of a constant audience to the everyday theatre of the Lower East Side. As in Gold’s allusion to ‘a tenement canyon’, moreover, the tenement streets were frequently likened to organic landscape features, tall and vast like cliffs, caves or canyons. Di Donato describes the ‘six-story discoloured brick face’ as ‘a cliff’, while Yeziarska also identifies the structures as ‘tenement canyons’.<sup>141</sup> Likewise, discussing

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<sup>139</sup> Spewack, pp. 81, 113.

<sup>140</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, p. 13.

<sup>141</sup> di Donato, *Christ in Concrete*, p. 102; Yeziarska, *All I Could Never Be* (New York: Brewer, Warren and Putnam, 1932), p. 52.

George Bellows' 1913 work *Cliff Dwellers* [Fig. 3.3.], Robert W. Snyder and Rebecca Zurier gloss the term 'Cliff Dwellers' as referring to 'a primitive people', reflecting the ancient inhabitation, often by pueblo Native Americans, of high altitude caves forming communities etched into the rock.<sup>142</sup> In contrast, the term also lent itself to the title of Henry Blake Fuller's novel *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1893), referring to the well-to-do residents of one of Chicago's new skyscraper apartment blocks.

Bellows's *Cliff Dwellers* captures the frantic scene of overcrowded streets, and faces peering from every overlooking tenement. Bellows uses the varying heights of fire escapes and windows to substitute niches or cave dwellings, as women hang their washing across the street, while other residents lean precariously from windows, perch on railings or stand atop stoops. Bellows's portrayal of diverse street activity and his construction of multi-layered scenery also echoes the theatre. The use of fire-escapes as balconies for viewing strongly emulates an auditorium, while the congested street overrun with activity reflects the stage, and washing-lines rigged high across the street echo curtains and frame the scene. Snyder and Zurier also note a reciprocity in the imitation of the crowded streets and looming tenements in set designs on the real stage, citing for example, *Salvation Nell: A Drama of the Slums* (1908) by Edward Sheldon.<sup>143</sup> J. Chris Westgate quotes a tenement inspector's reaction to the stage replication of the Lower East Side's Cherry Hill district in *Salvation Nell*, as 'so remarkably true to life in the slums that I could scarcely believe my eyes. I could almost imagine myself going on my daily rounds. Only the old familiar smells were missing'. Westgate notes that *Salvation Nell* was part of a wider body of plays which saw the Lower East Side streets transferred to stage, the theatre acting as a mediator for audiences to access the district by proxy.<sup>144</sup> As

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<sup>142</sup> Snyder and Zurier, 'Picturing the City', p. 110; Frank M. Setzler, 'A Prehistoric Cave Culture in Southwestern Texas', *American Anthropologist*, 37.1 (1935), 104-110.

<sup>143</sup> Snyder and Zurier, p. 110.

<sup>144</sup> J. Chris Westgate, *Staging the Slums, Slumming the Stage: Class, Poverty, Ethnicity, and Sexuality in American Theatre, 1890-1916* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 178.

curiosity regarding the tenements heightened, an exchange occurred; the streets were interpreted as reflecting the stage, and the stage began to realistically mirror the streets.

In Bellows's *Cliff Dwellers*, those not performing tasks gaze upon the pandemonium of congested traffic and people traversing the visibly sweltering street. Snyder and Zurier attest to the prominent positioning of women in the painting as an accurate representation of their crucial role as 'the eyes and ears of the tenement neighbourhood'.<sup>145</sup> In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jane Jacobs argues that the culture of people watching from the stoop (the stepped porch), the windows or fire escapes could act as a method of self-policing, which she refers to as 'eyes upon the street'. She observes that '[n]obody enjoys sitting on a stoop or looking out a window at an empty street. Almost nobody does such a thing. Large numbers of people entertain themselves, off and on by watching street activity'.<sup>146</sup> Bellows fittingly portrays the significance of spectatorship, as the street, overtly theatrical in its staging, sets the scene for recreational bystanders to lean to watch. In the foreground, amongst the central mass of bodies, a boy expressively cowers from the wrath of his mother, a facet of melodrama which John Fagg notes as 'a familiar mode of communication, and one that held currency across attempts to engage mass audiences'.<sup>147</sup> Here the painting's external viewer is cast as an additional observer. Snyder and Zurier note that '[t]o emphasize that these people have no secrets from us, their laundry and bedding flap in the breeze'.<sup>148</sup> A tension exists here between the insider and the outsider. Bellows himself, originally from Columbus, Ohio, stands apart from his migrant subjects, and there is an interplay of gazes, as within the painting; insiders cast eyes largely upon their neighbours, while situated on the outside looking in are both painter and viewer.

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<sup>145</sup> Snyder and Zurier, p. 110.

<sup>146</sup> Jacobs, p. 45.

<sup>147</sup> John Fagg, *On the Cusp: Stephen Crane, George Bellows, and Modernism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), p. 171.

<sup>148</sup> Snyder and Zurier, p. 110.

Bellows had published a preceding lithograph to *Cliff Dwellers* in *The Masses* under the intentionally provocative title ‘Why don’t they go to the Country for a Vacation?’ (1913) [Fig. 3.4.], a piece which Richard Dennis describes as more overcrowded and less ‘decorous’ than its counterpart.<sup>149</sup> Fagg notes that the title conjures ‘a blasé member of the upper classes or a progressive “do-gooder” who surveys the scene and suggests this solution’.<sup>150</sup> The impractical notion of a country vacation from the tenements is evocative of Yeziarska’s short story ‘The Free Vacation House’ (1915), in which a young mother, despite shame at the stigma of charity, accepts the opportunity to visit the countryside, and is subsequently mortified at being paraded through the streets and put on show by the charitable organization as an exemplar of their compassion.<sup>151</sup> Snyder and Zurier also remark on Bellows’s approach to the tenement dwellers as harbouring a ‘mixture of concern and condescension’, contextualizing the work within the wave of social reform which gathered evidence in response to “the congestion of population in New York”.<sup>152</sup> There is a voyeuristic overtone here as the image’s publication in *The Masses*, a prominent socialist magazine, renders viewers removed from the interpreted scene, thus casting readers as an outside audience under the guise of concern. Bellows knowingly caricatures the inquiring social reformer, performing the role of Lower East Side envoy in depicting the district for curious outsiders to consume, but from which many ultimately remain detached.

The overall effect of *Cliff Dwellers* resonates with the claustrophobia of oppressive humidity combined with overpopulation. Marianne Doezema observes that the ‘seemingly unbearable overcrowding was the supreme sensation registered by the middle- and upper-class observers of New York’s tenement districts’.<sup>153</sup> Olivier Zunz documents,

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<sup>149</sup> Dennis, p. 92.

<sup>150</sup> Fagg, *On the Cusp*, p. 170.

<sup>151</sup> Yeziarska, ‘The Free Vacation House’, in *Hungry Hearts*, pp. 97-113 (p. 104).

<sup>152</sup> Snyder and Zurier, p. 110.

<sup>153</sup> Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 189.

moreover, that '[a]reas of New York reached the world record for population density, with 600 to 800 per acre in parts of the Lower East Side'.<sup>154</sup> Bellows captures the lively movement and fervour of the district, and from the perspective of the outsider looking in, the scene is highly dramatized. Zurier observes of Bellows's work that '[d]eliberately seamy images of working-class people are rendered with relish, so that while the ringside crowds and street children appear grotesque, they are also indisputably alive'. In their sensationalized outlook, Zurier also adds that contemporaries were inclined to dismiss Bellows's expansive, dynamic, and animated scenes as 'empty, "noisy" bluster'.<sup>155</sup> From his own perspective as an outsider, novelist Theodore Dreiser attests to the work's honest realism, remarking that it contains '[n]o painted nuances. No hidden ones – any more than the broad, accurate face of life appears to have any at first glance'.<sup>156</sup> In capturing the broad-sweeping multitude of the tenements, rather than specific, targeted incidents, Bellows eternalizes his vision of the wider Lower East Side scene and captures the street's unique theatrical spirit.

Grabach also captures the tenement scene in one of his most striking images, *New York, East Side* [Fig. 3.5.], which complements Bellows's *Cliff Dwellers* in its style, use of colour, composition and subject matter. Mecklenburg observes that many of Grabach's paintings display an affinity with the style and subject matter of Bellows, although, 'Grabach's work shows a far greater interest in decorative composition'.<sup>157</sup> In contrast to the atmosphere of languid vitality in *Cliff Dwellers*, through the body language of his central figures in *New York, East Side*, Grabach also implies a greater sense of despair. There is an enveloping darkness, both in the use of shadow and the painting's energy, as

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<sup>154</sup> Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 20.

<sup>155</sup> Zurier, 'The Making of Six New York Artists', in *Metropolitan Lives*, ed. by Zurier, Snyder and Mecklenburg, pp. 59-84 (p. 83).

<sup>156</sup> Theodore Dreiser, 'The Cliff Dwellers: A Painting by George Bellows', *Vanity Fair*, December 1925, p. 55.

<sup>157</sup> Mecklenburg, *John R. Grabach*, p. 15.

in the foreground, men and women gather inertly upon the stoop, isolated and detached from one another in gesture and aloof in gaze. Their faces portray hunger and disillusionment, and huddled at the base of the step, a woman, her shawl entwined closely about her, gazes searchingly towards the viewer. Here the sense of lethargy is imposed less by sweltering heat, and more by exhaustion; to the left a fatigued woman slumps forward. At the centre of the square, a busy crowd barter with pushcart sellers, meanwhile washings lines are strung high above their heads, and figures lean to survey the scene from their fire escape balconies. As in *Cliff Dwellers*, the encircled formation of buildings with overhanging balconies, washing-line pelmet, and vibrant stage-like streets echo the theatre. Though Grabach depicts onlookers in less detail than Bellows, the distinct outlines of figures at windows are visible.

Comparable tenement-inspired themes are depicted in Grabach's *East Side, New York* (c. 1924) [Fig. 3.6.], featuring a complex web of entangled washing lines, and people at windows and on fire escapes overlooking the jostling crowds in the streets. Mecklenburg notes of *East Side, New York* that '[t]he canvas is a playground of color in which apartment buildings, dotted with windows and iron gratings, provide a backdrop for the lively patterns of clothes dangling from lines. The figures in the foreground are stylized and grouped, decorative shapes more indicative of the generalized life of the streets than of the individual human condition'.<sup>158</sup> Grabach's painting, *Tenements* (1930s) [Fig. 3.7.], also lucidly captures a Lower East Side street scene, each authentic building in the block splashed with autumnal coloured paint symbolic of a peeling façade, as the visibly textured layers of oil on canvas add to the dimension of buildings and give the figures extra vigour. The scene is shrouded in darkness as a predominantly male crowd traverses the streets, likely on their journey home. Two young girls, one seated and one standing, occupy the middle stoop, while an older gentleman, hat in hand, stands in his

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<sup>158</sup> Mecklenburg, *John R. Grabach*, p. 15.

doorway, and all gaze unwaveringly at the procession. From the tenements above, a woman, her sheets drying over the fire escape, tips a barrel of water into the street, as meanwhile, from adjacent windows, three figures, two men and a woman, lean to examine the view. Again, the street is depicted here as a hub of community activity and an unending source of entertainment for onlookers from windows and fire escapes. In his work *Fire Escape* [Fig. 3.8.], Grabach studies the use of the makeshift tenement balcony more closely. Occupied by three figures, this limited outside space doubles as an escape from the humid tenement, as to the left a gentleman dozes in a chair, while to the right a woman clutching a fan reclines and ambiguously grimaces, as a girl, perhaps their daughter, tenderly whispers to her. Grabach portrays a natural everyday scene from family life in the tenements, as with windows wide open, garments flung over railings and washing dangling from the apartment above, the image emits an atmosphere of familiarity. In this moment, impervious to the activity of the streets, it is these figures, elevated on their fire escape platform who become incidental performers on show to the street below.

Due to the cramped and stuffy conditions in the tenements, all kinds of normally private activity became public as the street became an extension of the home, and ‘the lives of the immigrants were played out in the streets’.<sup>159</sup> Betsy Klimasmith remarks that ‘[w]ith the development of the industrial city, notions of private and public space shifted as the commonly held belief that individual homes would nurture a moral American citizenry confronted an increasingly complex and unstable landscape’.<sup>160</sup> From the turn-of-the-century, Maffi observes that, ‘the reappropriation/reinvention of such public spaces as streets, sidewalks, stoops, halls, rooftops, and backyards, to serve as new stages for Old-World rituals and customs, was a *fait accompli* and as such recorded by scores of

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<sup>159</sup> Epstein, p. 59.

<sup>160</sup> Klimasmith, p. 2.

journalists and sociologists, writers and artists. In the streets and on the sidewalks, collective experiences took place that contained a high degree of spectacularity'.<sup>161</sup> The street was a tremendous spectacle, abounding with the rich variety of life on constant display to spectators.

Rose Cohen's protagonist Ruth describes her tenement apartment, recalling that 'there were two windows facing the street through which the sun came in. And if there was less privacy, for the rooms were on the stoop, just a few steps above the sidewalk, it was pleasant to sit down near the window and watch the people passing by'.<sup>162</sup> Watching the drama of the street unfold became a widespread and acceptable activity. Gold palpably invokes the diverse types of entertainment commonly on display:

People pushed and wrangled in the street. There were armies of fowling pushcart peddlers. [...] A parrot cursed. Ragged kids played under truck-horses. Fat housewives fought from stoop to stoop. A beggar sang. [...] Pimps, gamblers and red-nosed bums; peanut politicians, pugilists in sweaters; tinhorn sports and tall longshoremen in overalls. An endless pageant of East Side life passed through the wicker doors of Jake Wolf's saloon. [...] Whirlwinds of dust and newspaper. The prostitutes laughed shrilly. A prophet passed an old-clothes Jew with a white beard. Kids were dancing around the hurdy-gurdy. Two bums slugged each other. Excitement, dirt, fighting, chaos! The sound of my street lifted like the blast of a great carnival or catastrophe. The noise was always in my ears. Even in sleep I could hear it; I can hear it now.<sup>163</sup>

Gold conjures the haphazard multiplicity of the people, activities, noises and smells which constituted Lower East Side street life, and paraded past in the performance of an 'endless pageant', unflinchingly watched by alternating onlookers from windows, fire-

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<sup>161</sup> Maffi, p. 240.

<sup>162</sup> Cohen, p. 186.

<sup>163</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, pp. 13-14.

escapes and roof-tops. The juxtaposition of disparate lives is evident, as beggars, pushcart pedlars, gamblers, politicians, longshoremen, prostitutes, prophets, orthodox Jews and children, are united in their occupation of the same space. Here children find abundant entertainment in hiding under truck-horses, and performing dances to the tunes of the organ grinder's hurdy-gurdy, heightening the theatre of the streets. The incessant noise of the Lower East Side street continues to resound, echoing in the ears of former residents; Gold's narrator confesses, 'I can hear it now'. Saverio Giovacchini compares Malcolm Cowley's depictions of detached high modernist writers of the 1920s with the style of writers such as Gold. He notes that: 'Cowley's portraits of Marcel Proust, writing alone in a room padded with cork to shut out the sounds of the street, and of James Joyce, unwilling to venture outside for fear of physical and bacteriological contamination, stand as symbols of a modernism that, like T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, has consciously "robbed [the present] of vitality"'.<sup>164</sup> James Bloom notes, nevertheless, that Gold attempted to 'reconcile the left politics and modernist poetics, a traditionally schooled literary sensibility and an egalitarian commitment to the masses'.<sup>165</sup> Further asserting his status as an insider, and adding a stratum of realism, Gold makes reference in the extract to 'Jake Wolf', who Mark Slobin confirms as a notable Lower East Side saloonkeeper.<sup>166</sup> By emphasizing the 'real', and having had personal experience of the subject of his writing, Gold bridges the boundary between the imaginary and the real; the outsider and the insider; the writer's desk and the streets.

Yeziarska, herself a former Lower East Side resident, invokes the unique atmosphere and drama of the street scene. Sabine Haenni notes that '[v]isual and literary versions of scenes are helpful to elucidate some of the scenes' formal and ideological

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<sup>164</sup> Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>165</sup> James D. Bloom, *Left Letters: The Culture Wars of Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 113.

<sup>166</sup> Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs: The Popular Music of the Jewish Immigrants* (Urbana; Chicago; London: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 110.

features. [...] To the degree that they take place in urban space, scenes are constituted through various performative practices, emphasizing their theatrical origin'.<sup>167</sup> In a scene from *Bread Givers*, young Sara Smolinsky contributes to the family income as a herring seller on Hester Street, her first day earnings of twenty-five cents allowing her to feel '[r]icher than Rockefeller'. She remembers her sense of euphoria, as suddenly the street came alive with performance:

It began singing in my heart, the music of the whole Hester Street. The pushcart peddlers yelling their goods, the noisy playing of children in the gutter, the women pushing and shoving each other with their market baskets – all that was only hollering noise before melted over me like a new beautiful song.

It began dancing before my eyes, the twenty-five herring that earned me my twenty-five cents. It lifted me in the air, my happiness. I couldn't help it. It began dancing under my feet. And I couldn't stop myself. I danced into our kitchen.<sup>168</sup>

Upon earning her first income, the din of Hester Street, which had previously seemed like noise to Sara, instantly becomes a form of music, 'a new beautiful song'. The street is represented as a communal space shared between all communities, age-groups and occupations, from play-acting children to pushcart peddlers, all escaping the confines of the tenement. The multifaceted elements of the Lower East Side street scene are also captured in the opening to *Hungry Hearts* (1922), a silent film adaptation of Yeziarska's short story collection of the same title, featuring the interwoven lives of families, and evoking the busy streets and fire-escapes laden with washing.<sup>169</sup> Elizabeth Boyle notes that the street 'is both freeing and enmeshing: Hester Street is of course a site of oppression and crushing poverty but the street is also an in-between space outwith the claustrophobia of the tenement rooms, both a connection and an interruption in the

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<sup>167</sup> Haenni, p. 14.

<sup>168</sup> Yeziarska, *Bread Givers*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>169</sup> *Hungry Hearts*, dir. by E. Mason Hopper (Goldwyn Pictures, 1922).

architectural lexicon of the immigrant Lower East Side'.<sup>170</sup> As Hester Street performs its continuous tune, in her exhilaration, Sara begins an involuntary improvised dance to the music of the street. Babak Elahi notes that '[t]he "beautiful song" of her neighborhood makes her dance, and gives her visions of herring and quarters – stock and profit, Old-World substance and American value. She channels this dance of capitalist euphoria into a dance of giving – "I only wanted to show them what I could do, and give it away"'.<sup>171</sup> After her first taste of self-made prosperity, this twenty-five cents is significant in allowing Sara to catch a glimpse of America as the 'golden land' so renowned overseas. Here, the street provides the liminal space between the tenement district and the outside world, a space where Sara is able to regularly perform her honed entrepreneurial routine and transform herrings into currency.

In later life, through hard-work and determination, reflecting Yeziarska's own professional experience, Sara becomes a teacher on the Lower East Side. Having received an education and ascended to a pivotal role in the community, Sara fulfils a common motif throughout Yeziarska's writing; the desire to become 'a person'. Yeziarska's characters repeatedly equate being 'a person' with accomplishment, monetary success and Americanization, implying immigrant life in Lower East Side poverty as dehumanizing. In her role as teacher, Sara remarks that she 'was like a person who had climbed to the top of a high mountain and was still breathless with his climb'. Yeziarska employs metaphors of ascension to describe Sara's new elevated status as a 'person'. Having become successful, nevertheless, from the height of her overlooking classroom window, Sara surveys the district and finds that little has changed on Hester Street:

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<sup>170</sup> Elizabeth Boyle, 'Building Up America: Architecture, Autobiography and the Precarious Construction of Urban Identity in Anzia Yeziarska's Bread Givers', *British Association for American Studies: US Studies Online*, 6 (2004) < <http://www.baas.ac.uk/issue-6-autumn-2004-article-1/> > [accessed 7 November 2016].

<sup>171</sup> Babak Elahi, *The Fabric of American Literary Realism: Readymade Clothing, Social Mobility and Assimilation* (Jefferson, North Carolina; London: McFarland, 2009), p. 144.

The windows of my classroom faced the same crowded street where seventeen years ago I started out my career selling herring. The same tenements with fire escapes full of pillows and feather beds. The same weazened, tawny-faced organ-grinder mechanically turning out songs that were all the music I knew of in my childhood. How intoxicating were those old tunes of the hurdy-gurdy! I'd leave my basket of herring in the middle of the sidewalk, forget all my cares, and leap into the dance with that wild abandon of the children of the poor.<sup>172</sup>

Yeziarska depicts the Lower East Side as cyclical in nature; as someone leaves, another arrives, all the time the typical sights and sounds of the district remaining constant.

Charles Bingham and John Gabriel view Sara as 'a new, redeemed soul looking back at the old, lost soul'.<sup>173</sup> She is able to identify with the children she teaches, recognizing herself in them: '[m]y children used to murder the language as I did when I was a child of Hester Street'. Sara also recalls becoming immersed in the performance of the street, briefly abandoning her herring to indulge in escapism by joining the other children and dancing to the organ-grinder's repetitive tune. Even in her position as a teacher, Sara finds the hurdy-gurdy's invariable tunes 'intoxicating', a nostalgic recognition of her childhood.<sup>174</sup> Cohen also recounts her amazement at encountering a music-box man for the first time, recalling that 'we saw a dark little man with a red bandana around his neck and a silver earring in his ear, wheeling what appeared to be a queer looking box. And then I saw him stop and make music come out of it. And the little girls that followed and others that joined begin swaying to the rhythm, their little pigtailed flying, the little faces alive with enjoyment'.<sup>175</sup> In spite of the evident difficulties of city living, children found plenteous entertainments through street performance, dancing, games and play-acting.

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<sup>172</sup> Yeziarska, *Bread Givers*, p. 269.

<sup>173</sup> Charles Bingham and John Gabriel, 'Economies of Teaching: Class, Money, and Identity in Anzia Yeziarska's "Breadgivers"', *Journal of Thought*, 36.4 (2001), 33-44 (p. 37).

<sup>174</sup> Yeziarska, *Bread Givers*, pp. 269-271.

<sup>175</sup> Cohen, pp. 71-72.

The everyday theatre of the streets encompassed different routines at particular times, from people leaving for work or education, to illicit night-time activities, the scene was constantly changing and evolving. In *Bread Givers*, Sara is introduced to Max Goldstein via her sister Fania, as a possible match. In recounting his life story and how he came to make a living upon arriving in America, Max recalls first finding work shovelling snow, then as a pushcart seller's assistant. Although he could not speak English, Max remembers hollering 'pay cats coals' instead of 'pay cash clothes', his voice reverberating through the streets as part of the performance; 'it was only like singing a song. I didn't understand the words, but my voice was like dynamite, thundering out into the air all that was in my heart, alone in a big city'. Captivated by his unique song, Max began to draw an audience as '[f]rom all the windows, people began to look with wonder at the strange greenhorn singer'. After a month of saving, Max subsequently opened his own second-hand clothes stand in Hester Street, where performance would become part of the enterprise: "[t]hat day, I felt so happy with my riches that I danced and sang in front of my goods to make people come and buy," [...]. "Such a free theatre as I gave them! Hester Street never saw and never heard such acting and dancing and singing in their whole life..." In the hectic streets awash with stalls and pushcart-sellers, Max uses his charisma and evident performing talents in acting, dancing and singing to draw attention to his wares within the crowds. Here Yeziarska directly likens his charismatic display to a 'free theatre', acknowledging the performativity of the Lower East Side streets and of Max's selling style in particular. As a consequence of his penchant for theatrics, Max is approached by a member of the crowd who tells him, 'you're too smart to waste yourself selling second-hand clothes in Hester Street. I'll make you for an actor. I'll give you twenty-five dollars a week to dance and sing on the stage in my theatre on Grand Street'.<sup>176</sup> This instance not only reflects the Lower East Side streets

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<sup>176</sup> Yeziarska, *Bread Givers*, pp. 189-190.

as a location for impromptu theatre, but here the district also manifests itself as an audition space and scouting ground for talent, which is ultimately transported to the real stage.

In Abraham Cahan's earlier short story 'A Ghetto Wedding' (1898), the tone of Nathan the push-cart peddler's song is dependent upon the lucrativeness of business. Nathan cries; "Buy nice dishes for the holidays! Cheap and strong! Buy dishes for Passover!" When business was brisk, he sang with a bashful relish; when the interval between a customer and her successor was growing too long, his singsong would acquire a mournful ring that was suggestive of the psalm-chanting at an orthodox Jewish funeral'.<sup>177</sup> The timeless songs of the push-cart peddlers, whether cheerful or sonorous, continued as a Lower East Side leitmotif through decades. Mike Gold encapsulates the songs of the tenements in his retrospective article 'A Jewish Childhood in the New York Slums' (1959), noting that '[a]mid all its dirt, violence and poverty, the East Side yet sang'. Gold recalls the cacophony of sounds that permeated the tenement walls as, '[t]he pushcart peddlers in the street often chanted raucous little ditties of their own composition, praising their bananas, tinware, gloves, potatoes'. The push-cart peddlers were an intrinsic component within the wider performance, and as Gold reminisces, the tenement songs were composed of many parts. He adds that 'in the gloomy shadows of the sweatshops, above the tyrannous roar and humming of the machines, the workers sang and relieved their hearts'. Gold depicts the songs of the workers as an essential form of escapism from the oppression of sweatshop conditions. He describes the outpouring of song as natural and impulsive: '[s]ong broke out softly and spontaneously there, as in a prison at dusk, or with soldiers on a painful march. The low bitter voices of men mingled with the silver sorrow of the girls, and on my Adams Express rounds, I would often stop

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<sup>177</sup> Cahan, 'A Ghetto Wedding', in *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom*, 224-240 (p. 225).

to listen, and wonder why God had chosen the Jews for so much suffering'.<sup>178</sup> The haunting sound of the sweatshop workers endeavouring to alleviate their suffering through song lingers in Gold's memory, having first overheard the melody at the age of twelve as a night porter for the Adams Express Company equity fund.<sup>179</sup> The discordant, alternating songs of the tenements echoed incessantly and Gold recalls, '[a]t night in my sleep I would hear the bakers sing, the bearded, tubercular young bakers toiling in the rat-infested cellar next-door. [...] Even the prostitutes often sang the old songs of the folk. They sat before their cribs, night and day waiting for customers and sang to help them forget America'.<sup>180</sup> Gold places emphasis on singing as a form of diversion and a momentary escape from enduring troubles. The Lower East Side not only provided the ongoing saga of the streets to be perused through overlooking windows, but everyday activity was also accompanied by a unique soundtrack of clashing song and noise.

Gold recalls the reverberation of song throughout his tenement building as the early morning refrain of housewives mingled with the chant of grandfathers. Maffi remarks that even supposedly private spaces became locations for performance; 'flats (the kitchen, the parlour) became more intimate sets for a private theatre made up of storytelling, religious rituals, family reunions, marriage and birthday parties, Old-World recollections, generational rifts'.<sup>181</sup> Gold remembers:

My mother hummed or sang in the kitchen; at dawn the pensive music of the housewives began to flow down the airshaft walls. From every floor there came also the Biblical lamentation of the grandfathers, rapt in their endless synagogue passions. It was the outcry of the Arabian desert, heard 3,000 years ago in

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<sup>178</sup> Gold, 'A Jewish Childhood in the New York Slums', in *Mike Gold*, ed. by Folsom, pp. 292-319 (pp. 303-304).

<sup>179</sup> Sanford Sternlicht, *Masterpieces of Jewish American Literature* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 2007), p. 38.

<sup>180</sup> Gold, 'A Jewish Childhood', p. 304.

<sup>181</sup> Maffi, p. 241.

Babylon and Egypt, when the Jews were slaves. Now that ancient music penetrated the blood of the young American Jews, as with George Gershwin, born and reared in a tenement only a few blocks from my own'.<sup>182</sup>

Gold portrays the tenements as humming with music and sound from every corner. In ascertaining an element of historicism to the grandfathers' 'Biblical lamentation', Gold adds palimpsestic layers to the music passed down through generations, transported widely with the Jewish diaspora, eventually emerging on the Lower East Side and becoming amalgamated into American popular song. Gold also recalls the 'pensive music' of housewives broadcast via the tenement air shaft. Air shafts first emerged in tenement blocks following the New York State Tenement Act of 1879, legislation which aimed at improving light, air and sanitary conditions. The buildings constructed following this law, often known as 'old-law' or 'dumbbell' tenements due to the shape of their layout, were required to have windows in every room which opened onto the street, an air shaft or a backyard. Andrew S. Dolkart notes, however, that 'the small shafts added little light or air to most apartments, and actually served as conduits for noise and smells, and as flues in a fire'.<sup>183</sup> Despite the introduction of air shafts, darkness prevailed, as exemplified in Yeziarska's 'How I Found America', where upon first arrival in her tenement flat, the narrator 'went to the window and looked out at the blank wall of the next house. "Gottuniu! Like in a grave so dark..."<sup>184</sup> Emily Talen adds that 'the airshaft became a place where residents dumped their garbage'.<sup>185</sup> Excluding its intended purpose as a light and fresh air portal, the air shaft served multiple functions as an acoustic space – an echo chamber for transmitting music and sound – as well as a rubbish dump and a

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<sup>182</sup> Gold, 'A Jewish Childhood', p. 304.

<sup>183</sup> Andrew S. Dolkart, 'Tenements', in *Affordable Housing in New York: The People, Places, and Policies that Transformed a City*, ed. by Nicholas Dagen Bloom and Matthew Gordon Lasner (Princeton, New Jersey; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 45-48 (p. 46).

<sup>184</sup> Yeziarska, 'How I Found America', in *Hungry Hearts*, p. 264.

<sup>185</sup> Emily Talen, *City Rules: How Regulations Affect Urban Form* (Washington D.C.; Covelo; London: Island Press, 2012), p. 148.

transitory meeting place. Distinctive sounds peculiar to every apartment block and street in each district formed the soundscape to the everyday theatre of the city.

In 'The Fat of the Land' (1920), Yeziarska exemplifies an alternative usage for the air shaft as Hannah Breineh converses with her neighbour. Yeziarska portrays the familiar neighbourliness of the tenements as, '[i]n an air-shaft so narrow that you could touch the next wall with your bare hands, Hannah Breineh leaned out and knocked on her neighbor's window. "Can you loan me your wash-boiler for the clothes?" she called. Mrs. Pelz threw up the sash'.<sup>186</sup> The closely adjacent airshaft windows, therefore also provided intimate access to the neighbours. Life in the tenements was characterized by incessant noise, a din generated both within the walls of the tenements and filtered in from outside. Bella Spewack describes Lewis Street where she lived aged twelve, and encapsulates the loud constant chatter of the tenements; '[i]n the summer, the street talked on its stoops. In the winter, it talked in hallways and more briefly in airshafts. It rarely whispered. That was not the way of the street'.<sup>187</sup> In personifying the street's relentless babble, Spewack captures the inescapability of noise as the buildings and the street itself, seldom quietly, overflowed with talk and gossip. Adding pertinence to David's longing to escape to the 'light and silence' of the rooftop in *Call It Sleep*, moreover, Henry Roth encapsulates the soundscape reverberating outside the Schearl's new home on Ninth Street and Avenue D as 'an avalanche of sound'. Roth contrasts the outdoor noises – 'screams, rebukes and bickerings' on Ninth Street, 'beer wagons, garbage carts and coal trucks', horse-carts which 'clattered and banged' on Avenue D, 'the East River on which many boat horns sounded', and 'the 8<sup>th</sup> Street Crosstown car' powering towards the switch – with the interior sounds of his tenement block which offered some relief '[a]fter one climbed from the tumult of the street'. Inside David notices the sound of his own footsteps ascending

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<sup>186</sup> Yeziarska, 'The Fat of the Land', in *Hungry Hearts*, pp. 178-224 (p. 178).

<sup>187</sup> Spewack, p. 66.

the stone stairs, and the sounds emerging from hallway toilets as people ‘rattled newspapers’ and ‘sometimes they hummed, sometimes they groaned. That was cheering’.<sup>188</sup> Roth gives a palpable evocation of the noises of the streets and tenements and the text is infiltrated with sound throughout, prompting Walter Allen to remark that ‘the cacophony never ceases – this must be the *noisiest* novel ever written’.<sup>189</sup> Stephen J. Adams refers to ‘Roth’s ability to create the sensory world of the child, particularly the sense of sound’.<sup>190</sup> Interpreted through the eyes and ears of a child, Roth immerses the reader in a multisensory theatrical journey through the Lower East Side streets and inside the tenements. The constant clamour sets the scene providing a palpable theatrical soundtrack throughout the novel, while visual descriptions vividly evoke the city’s dramatic backdrop.

The sounds of the city echoed through and permeated every facet of life in New York, creating a discordant accompaniment of competing noises. In January, 1929 at The Playhouse Theatre on Broadway, playwright Elmer Rice, himself a former child of the tenements, debuted what would become his most famous play, *Street Scene*. The play takes the theatricality of the New York streets and transfers it directly to the stage. Rice’s directions expressly detail the appearance of the set and even specify the street’s ‘To Let’ signs. He also instructs that ‘throughout the play, there is constant noise. The noises of the city rise, fall, intermingle: the distant roar of El trains, automobile sirens, and the whistles of boats on the river; the rattle of trucks, and the indeterminate clanking of metals; fire engines, ambulances, musical instruments, a radio, dogs barking, and human voices calling, quarrelling, and screaming with laughter. The noises are subdued and in

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<sup>188</sup> Roth, pp. 141-142.

<sup>189</sup> Walter Allen, ‘Afterword’, in *Call It Sleep*, by Henry Roth (New York: Avon, 1964), pp. 442-447 (p. 445).

<sup>190</sup> Stephen J. Adams, “‘The Noisiest Novel Ever Written’: The Soundscape of Henry Roth’s “Call It Sleep””, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 35.1 (1989), 43-64 (p. 44).

the background, but they never wholly cease'.<sup>191</sup> Rice's play captures and recreates on stage the insatiable din of the city, as well as depicting its overcrowding, the penchant for watching out of windows, and the nearness of neighbours from many disparate backgrounds including the Fiorentinos, Kaplans and Buchanans. By transferring the city onstage, Rice also elucidates the reciprocity between the surrounding city and the stage, as performative moments occurred beyond the walls of the theatre, and aspects of the modern city materialized within the theatre itself.

In the tenements there was little opportunity to retreat from reality. The proximity to other families made every day a constant barrage of noise and a chronicle of common neighbourhood difficulties. Gold recalls, 'It's impossible to live in a tenement without being mixed up with the tragedies and cockroaches of one's neighbors. There's no privacy in a tenement. So there was always some girl in our kitchen, pouring a tale of wretchedness to my mother, drinking tea and warming herself at my mother's wonderful heart'.<sup>192</sup> Gold evokes the human drama of tenement life, the lack of privacy and the heavy atmosphere as his mother, burdened not only by her own troubles, absorbs the plight of others. In Yeziarska's *Bread Givers*, Sara's attempts to study are hindered by the persistent racket of the tenement; '[o]h, the noise around me. But I tried to struggle on with the lesson...'. Unable to ignore the intense clamour, Sara becomes increasingly frustrated:

Maybe it was the terrible racket that was muddling my brain. Phonographs and pianolas blared against each other. Voices gossiping and jabbering across the windows. Wailing children. The yowling shrieks of two alley cats. The shrill bark of a hungry pup.

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<sup>191</sup> Elmer Rice, *Three Plays: The Adding Machine, Street Scene, Dream Girl* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), p. 66.

<sup>192</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, p. 30.

The jarring clatter tore me by the hair, stretched me out of my skin, and grated under my teeth. I felt like one crucified in a torture pit of noise.<sup>193</sup>

Music and voices from within the tenement block attempt to supersede each other, while external sounds from the streets interject. Sound emerging from musical instruments or phonographs alone could be construed as performative or recreational, but with the strains of noise combined created a raucous cacophony. Far from engaging or entertaining, here the noise is directly disruptive, and for Sara acts as a potential barrier to success. She discloses the physical and psychological impact of the noise as akin to torture. On the distinction between noise and music Nick Yablon notes that ‘[i]f certain sounds were to be characterized as “music” insofar as they could be contained within the enclosed spaces of the auditorium, concert hall, or parlor, then others that could not be confined in space and which instead circulated freely across the city were coming to be understood as noise’. He continues by adding that ‘[i]n the same way that “dirt” would be conceived by Mary Douglas as “matter out of place” [in *Purity and Danger* (1966)], noise was beginning to be conceived as sound “out of place”’.<sup>194</sup> Likewise, undiscouraged by the difficulty of her task, Sara regains focus telling herself that ‘[a]s you have to shut your eyes to the dirt, so you must shut your ears to the noise’.<sup>195</sup> Just as sound produced by a street organ grinder, pianola, phonograph or emanating from within a venue could be deemed musical entertainment to one person, when unwanted strains intermingled with the city’s pulsating clamour, this could quickly become noise. In her battle with the tenement commotion, through determination, Sara is able to override all disturbances and ultimately improve her situation.

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<sup>193</sup> Yeziarska, *Bread Givers*, p. 164.

<sup>194</sup> Yablon, ‘Echoes of the City: Spacing Sound, Sounding Space, 1888-1916’, *American Literary History*, 19.3 (2007), 629-660 (p. 630).

<sup>195</sup> Yeziarska, *Bread Givers*, p. 164.

The relentless clamour, though diminished, continued through the night and Pietro Di Donato's Paul 'would stay awake listening to the snoring children, the cats moaning, the milk wagons over the cobblestones, the rattling EIs, the whistle-rumble of the river boats, and the stirrings coming and going'.<sup>196</sup> Emily Thompson's innovative research project entitled *The Roaring Twenties*, has recreated a tangible soundscape of New York districts in the years circa 1929. Through unearthing noise complaints recorded by the Noise Abatement Commission, news articles and film footage, Thompson has amassed a cacophony of 1920s sounds presented through an interactive map and sound archive designed by Scott Mahoy. Sounds uncovered from the Lower East Side include a complaint from a Miss Rubin of Attorney Street in 1931 which sights 'noisy cats' as a disturbance, thus corresponding with screenwriter Samuel Ornitz's earlier childhood memory of hearing 'cats sputtering and spitting over the garbage heaps in the gutter'.<sup>197</sup> In a Lower East Side grievance from 1927, the residents of Madison Street complain of noise from an automobile service station, a testament to the advancement and proliferation of the motor car industry. Meanwhile, on Stanton Street in 1930, Mr. Davidson was disturbed by electrical machines at the B. Bloom Factory, and later in 1931, again on Stanton Street, Mrs. Jacobowitz complained about noise from the Blacksmith's shop.<sup>198</sup> In Cohen's *Out of the Shadow*, Ruth remembers that '[a]cross the street there was a blacksmith shop. I liked to listen to the ding, ding, of the hammers beating in unison and we could see the sparks flying'.<sup>199</sup> Ruth's enjoyment of hearing the percussing 'ding, ding' sound from the blacksmith contrasts with Mrs. Jacobowitz's irritation, evidence that one person's noise is another's musical entertainment. The

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<sup>196</sup> di Donato, *Christ in Concrete*, p. 101.

<sup>197</sup> Emily Thompson, 'The Roaring Twenties: An Interactive Exploration of the Historical Soundscape of New York City', *Vectors Journal*, (2013) <<http://vectorsdev.usc.edu/NYCSound/777b.html>> [accessed 11 April 2015]; Samuel Ornitz, *Haunch, Paunch and Jowl: An Anonymous Autobiography* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923), p. 39.

<sup>198</sup> Thompson, 'The Roaring Twenties'.

<sup>199</sup> Cohen, pp. 186-187.

prevalence of resonating sounds which were unique to each locale added a multisensory element to theatrical experience of the modern city.

Thompson also pinpoints the locations of several newsreel items which preserve some of the frequent refrains of the soundscape. For example, the cry of the “Old Clo” peddler – typically a Jewish occupation and the trade of Max in Yeziarska’s *Bread Givers* – as he traverses the streets in 1929, calling “Old Clo” and bartering for old clothes which he would then take to the dealers to be resold to farm and factory workers. Further newsreel film from 1930 depicts the street vendors of overcrowded Henry Street ‘crying their wares’. Separate footage from 1930 reflects the diversity of the area and records the Chinese New Year celebrations on Mott Street, as flags and a dragon accompanied by drums and cymbals are paraded down the crowded thoroughfare, while a crowd stop to spectate, and onlookers watch from neighbouring vantage points. Another film from that day and location in 1930 features two Chinese boys displaying their adept kung fu skills encircled by an audience.<sup>200</sup> Each of these instances exemplifies an element of performance; the peddlers call to attract attention, while the parade in Chinatown draws crowds from the district’s disparate multitudes. Thompson’s research plays like a jukebox of commotion, bringing the streets of the past to life and allowing access to multiple sound-bites from a time when new technology intensified the already deafening din of the city. Thompson adds layers of everyday reality to life in the city and the types of sound peculiar to each district during the late 1920s and early 1930s. By palpably evoking the multiplicity of the urban soundscape, Thompson’s record adds dynamic vitality to multisensory accounts in literature, including in works by Yeziarska, Gold, Rice and Ornitz, which chronicle elements of the city’s distinctive soundscape.

As well as impromptu street theatre, the district held an abundant array of entertainment possibilities, including theatres and cinemas. Maffi notes that by the turn-

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<sup>200</sup> Thompson, ‘The Roaring Twenties’.

of-the-century on the Lower East Side, ‘small storefront theatres appeared, called *nickelodeons*, where theatre combined with new and fascinating technological inventions. Cinema was being born, and by 1907, of Manhattan’s more than 200 *nickelodeons*, at least a third were located south of 14<sup>th</sup> Street’.<sup>201</sup> The presence of kinetoscopes, (devices developed by Thomas Edison in 1894 for the individual viewing of short films through a peephole), as well as the nickelodeon theatre boom, (which saw dance halls and storefronts converted into small makeshift cinemas from 1905), enhanced the variety of amusement available on the Lower East Side.<sup>202</sup> In his oil on canvas painting *East Side Entertainment* (c. 1920) [Fig. 3.9.], Ashcan School associate Jerome Myers exemplifies an incident of travelling theatre, as two clown-like *commedia dell-arte* figures elevated on a temporary stage wedged between two tenement buildings, perform for an audience amassed on the street and spectating from nearby windows. Though not raised on the Lower East Side – although he himself experienced a level of poverty as a child – Myers would later become a long-term observer, fascinated with the district and its people. He once remarked that ‘[a]ll my life I had lived, worked and played in the poorest streets of American cities. I knew them and their population and was one of them. Others saw ugliness and degradation there, I saw poetry and beauty, so I came back to them’.<sup>203</sup> A heavy reliance on romanticization and sentimentality is evident throughout his work and Milton W. Brown suggests that Myers ‘found in the teeming life of the East Side a picturesque and colorful spectacle. The strange costumes and customs of immigrant peoples were a romantic contrast to the drab standardization of native American life’.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Maffi, p. 93.

<sup>202</sup> Ben Singer, ‘Early Home Cinema and the Edison Home Projecting Kinetoscope’, *Film History*, 2.1 (1988), 37-69 (p. 38); Russell Merritt, ‘Nickelodeon Theatres, 1905-1914: Building an Audience for the Movies’, in *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Thomas Schatz, 4 vols (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), I: *Historical Dimensions: the Development of the American Film Industry*, pp. 25-42 (pp. 25-26).

<sup>203</sup> Jerome Myers, ‘The Life Song of the People’, *The Survey Graphic*, 1 October 1923, p. 33.

<sup>204</sup> Milton W. Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 28.

In referring to spectacle and costume, Brown alludes to Myers's interpretation of the city as theatre in his art, while significantly, Myers had also begun his career as a theatrical scene painter and assistant manager in 1886.<sup>205</sup> In his impressionistic autobiography, *Artist in Manhattan* (1940), Myers discloses that 'I was led to paint pictures in which these East Side scenes are lost in a tapestry of romance. Reality faded in a vault of dreams'.<sup>206</sup> Grant Holcomb observes that '[h]is was not a world of sweatshops and street urchins but rather one where people gathered for gossip and barter in the marketplace'.<sup>207</sup> The upsurge of nickelodeons and kinoscopes in ordinary storefronts from the turn-of-the-century improved access to organized amusements and added to the permeating atmosphere of entertainment in nearby streets. Meanwhile, though likely a highly hyperbolized depiction, Myers's portrayal of *East Side Entertainment* positions a physical stage on the tenement-lined streets, emphasizing the prominence of performance and amusement on the Lower East Side in the early twentieth century.

Myers invokes a comparably performative spectacle on the Lower East Side in his painting *Angels of the Fiesta* (1920) [Fig. 3.10.], inspired by his experience of an Italian Catholic festival, 'The Assumption of the Madonna' on Elizabeth Street. He depicts a large gathering of children – 'angels', with tall candles – watching the procession of an opulent religious idol (*carro trionfale*) through the streets, and reports that '[t]riumphant chords sounded from the glittering street band'. Myers recalls that '[t]he street was ablaze with festoons of colored lights, the street shine gloriously outlined against the night sky'. Above the proceedings, Myers positions two 'angels', which he notes were 'suspended on ropes', and flying through the air scattered flowers on the crowd below. He also observes the crowd of fascinated spectators, and in the painting depicts figures peering from above,

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<sup>205</sup> Grant Holcomb, 'The Forgotten Legacy of Jerome Myers, (1867-1940): Painter of New York's Lower East Side', *The American Art Journal*, 9.1 (1977), 78-91 (p. 79).

<sup>206</sup> Myers, *Artist in Manhattan* (New York: American Artists Group, 1940), p. 49.

<sup>207</sup> Holcomb, 'Jerome Myers: Sunday Morning (1907)', in *Seeing America: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester*, ed. by Marjorie B. Searl (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2006), pp. 147-148 (p. 147).

noting ‘people huddled on the tenement fire-escapes; the windows were crowded with faces alive with dramatic fervour’. Here, in a crowd consisting of ‘politicians’, ‘subway laborers’, ‘mothers’ and ‘models of the great painters’, the disparate Lower East Side audiences delight in the spectacle of one another’s festivals.<sup>208</sup> In ‘Fiesta’, the fourth part of *Christ in Concrete*, moreover, di Donato invokes the spirit of the Italian festival, particularly in the construction workers’ drunken Christmas Eve revelry as they traverse the streets ‘arm in arm, stogies blazing against the night, cap a-jaut, footstep slack and manner philosophic’, as well as in the wedding celebrations of Paul’s uncle Luigi, where ‘[w]ine was drunk as though it were breathed air’.<sup>209</sup> Peter Kvidera observes of ‘Fiesta’ that many of the religious acts depicted by di Donato did not conform to doctrine and that ‘Catholic sacramentalism shapes his characters’ lives through the performative nature of cultural Catholicism’.<sup>210</sup> The notion of performed Catholicism not only echoes the theatrical Italian fiesta depicted by Myers, but also implies the enactment of merged cultural-religious rituals as a matter of routine in the novel.

During his training at the Art Students League under George de Forest Brush, Myers’s preoccupation with the wider perspective of city and street life was discouraged, and he later noted that ‘Brush did not believe in doing the crowd, but to me the impression of group life became a guiding star’.<sup>211</sup> By the late nineteenth century Friedrich Nietzsche, among others had hailed ‘the century of the *crowd*’, and as Mary Esteve demonstrates in her monograph *The Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in American Literature* (2003), crowds featured extensively in the public consciousness by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>212</sup> Myers traversed the streets, sketching

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<sup>208</sup> Myers, *Artist in Manhattan*, p. 160.

<sup>209</sup> di Donato, *Christ in Concrete*, pp. 158, 191.

<sup>210</sup> Peter Kvidera, ‘Ethnic Identity and Cultural Catholicism in Pietro di Donato’s “Christ in Concrete”’, *MELUS*, 35.3 (2010), 157-181 (p. 167).

<sup>211</sup> Myers, *Artist in Manhattan*, p. 19.

<sup>212</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 197; Esteve, p. 2.

visions; his fascination with crowds prompted painter and critic Guy Pène du Bois to later remark that he appeared to be ‘a sort of day and night prowler, a phantom in the city streets, passing in and out of crowds’.<sup>213</sup> On the joyous scenes displayed in Myers’s work, Holcomb observes that ‘[a]lthough they lived in slums, the lives of these men and women seemed nourished by an immense hope and spiritual happiness’.<sup>214</sup> Myers depicted numerous scenes of everyday street entertainment and music which drew Lower East Side residents together, including *Band Concert Night* (1910), which captures a large crowd in attendance at an open air concert, *The Tambourine* (1905), which portrays the frequent scene of children dancing in the street to the strains of a hurdy-gurdy, as well as *Waiting for the Concert* (1921), which evokes a gathering of children awaiting entertainment. Brown remarks that ‘though he may have clothed it in romance, Myers, in recognizing the life of the poor as a fit subject for art, was acting as a realist. [...] Although he was more immersed in slum life than any of the other realists, he never saw it as a social laboratory’.<sup>215</sup> Though highly embellished, Myers’ paintings and accounts evoke the dramatic, colourful scenes and musical accompaniments which arose from such a culturally diverse population. The physical landscape of the Lower East Side’s buildings and streets, as well as the cultural amalgamation within the tenements provided numerous opportunities for observation and spectatorship. From sights, to sounds and smells, the district compelled Lower East Side writers to invoke accounts beyond the visual, incorporating elements of theatre and spectacle within their work, and taking readers on a multisensory journey. With its multiple possibilities for experiencing immigrant theatre and viewing films at numerous small nickelodeons, as well as countless opportunities for spectatorship, everyday theatricality and impromptu performance, as is

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<sup>213</sup> Guy Pène du Bois, ‘Artist in the Wilderness of New York’, *New York Tribune*, 31 March 1940, p. 7.

<sup>214</sup> Holcomb, ‘The Forgotten Legacy’, pp. 79, 90.

<sup>215</sup> Brown, *American Painting*, p. 28.

addressed in the last section of this chapter, the district also became popular with outsiders.

### III. AN OUTSIDER LOOKING IN: 'THE SPECTACLE OF THE HUMAN DRAMA'

By experiencing the Lower East Side through the filter of writing or images, some outsiders failed to engage with the reality of their encounters, the deprivation of the tenements simply providing them with a type of real life drama. Maffi observes the proliferation of real theatre for diverse audiences within the district, remarking that, 'theatre literally *saturated* the neighborhood. [...] All classes and communities of the Lower East Side sat side by side with slummers, theatre-goers, journalists in search of copy, artists in search of local color, outsiders interested in the neighborhood's cultural life, and a large repertory was needed to satisfy them all'.<sup>216</sup> From the 1880s, for those in pursuit of an 'authentic' experience, slum tourism provided a first-hand insight, allowing upper- and middle-class slummers to 'rub shoulders with sinners and to get a whiff of the sin prohibited in their own respectable worlds'.<sup>217</sup> Jennifer Fronc notes that '[o]ften headed by police escorts, these slumming parties ventured into the immigrant quarters to see how the other half lived'.<sup>218</sup> In the opening to his short story 'Sisters of the Golden Circle' (1909), the popular writer O. Henry commented on the accumulation of sightseers and spectators; '[t]he sidewalk was blockaded with sightseers who had gathered to stare at sightseers, justifying the natural law that every creature on earth is preyed upon by some other creature'.<sup>219</sup> For residents of the Lower East Side, slumming tours were a demeaning addition to their day-to-day existence.

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<sup>216</sup> Maffi, p. 215.

<sup>217</sup> Allen, *The City in Slang*, p. 81.

<sup>218</sup> Jennifer Fronc, *New York Undercover: Private Surveillance in the Progressive Era* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 56.

<sup>219</sup> O. Henry, 'Sisters of the Golden Circle', in *The Complete Works of O'Henry* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1953), p. 81.

In *Jews Without Money*, Gold illustrates the localized insider reaction to slumming as a form of urban recreation:

Then a big sightseeing bus rolled down. A gang of kids chased it, and pelted rocks, garbage, dead cats and stale vegetables at the frightened sightseers. “Liars, liars”; the kids yelled, “go back up-town!” Joey and I joined in the sport. What right had these stuckup foreigners to come and look at us? What right had that man with the megaphone to tell them lies about us? Kids always pelted these busses. The sport is still popular on the East Side.<sup>220</sup>

Here Gold draws attention to the prevalence of slumming as an exploitative pastime, bringing upper- and middle-class outside visitors to the Lower East Side. An organized ‘sightseeing bus’, commonly referred to as a ‘rubberneck wagon’, methodically makes its way through the Lower East Side ‘slums’ for the pleasure and curiosity of those securely sheltered within the vehicle.<sup>221</sup> As Gold indicates, nevertheless, the unwelcome urban tourists receive little mercy from the children of the district, who proceed to vandalize the bus in response for being made into a spectacle. ‘Liars, liars’, and ‘go back uptown!’ echoes their vengeful refrain, sending a clear message to the unsolicited visitors not to return. On a similar scene described in James Huneker’s (1857-1921) collection of travel writing, *New Cosmopolis* (1915), whereupon Huneker is ‘jeered’ at by locals and forced to avoid ‘rotten fruit’ projectiles, John Fagg notes that ‘the possibility of detached perception is interrupted and the East Side asserts itself as something more than mere visual spectacle. It stares back and it expresses its grievances’.<sup>222</sup> Gold’s reference to the activity as a ‘sport’ also demonstrates an element of enjoyment in the recreation of terrifying unsuspecting slummers. Gold conveys the humiliation at being viewed as part

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<sup>220</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, p. 55.

<sup>221</sup> Allen, *The City in Slang*, p. 83.

<sup>222</sup> Huneker, pp. 65-66; John Fagg, ‘From Back Number Aesthetics to New Expression: James Gibbons Huneker’s “New Cosmopolis”’, *European Journal of American Culture*, 28.1 (2009), 21-40 (p. 24).

of the scenery by ‘stuckup foreigners’, as well as the commercial aspect to the enterprise led by ‘that man with the megaphone’.<sup>223</sup> Irving Lewis Allen articulates the extent to which the tour bus had become a lucrative industry by the 1920s, noting that ‘[t]our operators in Times Square used touts and steerers who worked hotel lobbies to hook tourists, and decoys were paid to occupy some seats, for the outlanders, like sheep, would hesitate to enter an empty bus’.<sup>224</sup> As referenced in the ‘Greenwich Village’ chapter of this thesis, moreover, John Sloan parodies the craze for sightseeing tours in his etching ‘Seeing New York’ (1917) [Fig. 1.30.]. Whether accessing the Lower East Side remotely through literature and photography, or by physically entering the area, commonly retaining distance by remaining on a bus or tour, outsider curiosity brought a regular audience to the district.

Written accounts by outsiders frequently portrayed sensationalized visions of the district, giving rise, by the late nineteenth century, to the type of literature Carrie Tirado Bramen terms as the ‘intra-urban walking tour’.<sup>225</sup> Walking tours provided literary vignettes into the realities and diversities of city life, conjuring ‘scenes’ for the inquisitive reader. The featured communities were often somewhat disparagingly referred to as ‘picturesque’, ‘charming’ or ‘quaint’. Part of the objective of walking tour literature was to guide the middle-class reader’s eye beyond the poverty of the city’s more deprived areas and towards a romanticized but reassuring depiction of ‘rough and rugged pleasure’.<sup>226</sup> As Christine Stansell notes of Steffens, ‘[t]hese expeditions were more or less formulaic and the encounters predictable: affable walks down Broadway or the Bowery [...]. The floating milieu created its own ritualized ramble’.<sup>227</sup> Although the ‘intra-urban walking tour’ echoes the pursuits of the urbanite Baudelairean flâneur, as

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<sup>223</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, p. 55.

<sup>224</sup> Allen, *The City in Slang*, p. 84.

<sup>225</sup> Bramen, *The Uses of Variety*, p. 159.

<sup>226</sup> Bramen, ‘The Urban Picturesque’, p. 447.

<sup>227</sup> Stansell, *American Moderns*, p. 21.

Bramen remarks, in the increasingly hectic lives of city dwellers, for commuters ‘sitting on the Third Avenue “L” or on the cross-town trolley, reading about downtown perambulations provided a sense of contact with the “other half”’.<sup>228</sup> This was a method of vicariously touring the less salubrious districts of the city without actually experiencing the sights, sounds and smells first-hand. Angela M. Blake also observes that ‘literature encouraging ethnic tourism depicted the supposedly available ethnic types, the “real” Jews and Italians and their neighborhoods, using images that avoided visual realism. [...] travel literature used pencil, charcoal or ink-wash sketches, [...] shunning the realism of the photograph’.<sup>229</sup> As a method of maintaining the intrigue and romanticism surrounding the Lower East Side, literary accounts tended to overlook the harsher actualities of the district. ‘Intra-urban walking tours’ formed part of what Bramen calls the ‘professionalization of spectatorship’, a step beyond what Rebecca Zurier refers to as the ‘culture of looking’, in that the city explorer delegates the actual looking to a reporter or ‘urban connoisseur’.<sup>230</sup> The fleeting nature and second-hand reception of the scenes described in walking tours highlights the increasing emphasis on the theatricality of the unreal city environment and its people.

In Huneker’s *New Cosmopolis*, he establishes his ‘urban connoisseur’ credentials as an experienced city ‘rambler’, his particular ‘hunting-ground’ being the Lower East Side.<sup>231</sup> In the opening essay, ‘The Fabulous East Side’, Huneker recalls his enthrallment with the district of days gone by, and laments the more recent gentrification instigated by reformers, politicians, billionaires, and ‘other destroyers of the picturesque’. Huneker reminisces over the now lost opportunities for masquerade and playacting, remembering that ‘[t]wenty years ago you could play the rôle of the disguised Sultan and with a

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<sup>228</sup> Bramen, *The Uses of Variety*, p. 159.

<sup>229</sup> Angela M. Blake, *How New York Became American, 1890-1924* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 132.

<sup>230</sup> Bramen, ‘The Urban Picturesque’, p. 456; Zurier, *Picturing the City*, p. 4.

<sup>231</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, p. 4; Huneker, p. 21.

favourite Vizier sally forth at eve from Park Row in pursuit of strange adventures'.<sup>232</sup> Here the outsiders' appetite for make-believe, escapism and entertainment is placed above the circumstances and sanitation of the Lower East Side's poor. On Huneker's later expressed regret that the district's 'horrible conditions are not on view for the casual spectator', Fagg notes 'an extreme ocular-centrism, a privileging of visual perception, and visual pleasure, over all other considerations'.<sup>233</sup> The district is evoked as a large outdoor playground and spectacle for visiting audiences, as the tenements create a stage-set for everyday drama, and local residents are cast as supporting actors; '[w]hat hand-to-hand struggles with genii, afrits, imps [...] dangerous bandits, perilous policemen and nymphs or thrice dangerous anarchists!' The real East Side figures of policemen and anarchists are referenced alongside mythical creatures, conjuring a magical ambiance. Huneker longingly recalls: '[t]o slink down an ill-lighted, sinister alley full of Chinese and American tramps [...] to enter the abode of them that never wash, where bad beer and terrible tobacco filled the air with discordant perfumes – ah!'<sup>234</sup> The level of hyperbole applied to the supposedly joyous experience of jeopardy and odours on the Lower East Side seems almost satirical, and as Fagg states, 'Huneker acknowledges a sense of the absurd in the role of the detached urban spectator or *flâneur*'.<sup>235</sup> Alex Murray also regards Huneker's interpretations of the New York landscape as impressionistic and in constant transition, noting his accounts as 'never realist; for him a work of art was to be a fusion of artist and subject'.<sup>236</sup> Though Huneker deploys artistic embellishments in his account of the Lower East Side, in his rôle as guide, his insistence on the district's sightseeing opportunities as having declined, keeps the text grounded.

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<sup>232</sup> Huneker, pp. 4-5.

<sup>233</sup> Huneker, p. 66; Fagg, 'From Back Number Aesthetics', p. 24.

<sup>234</sup> Huneker, p. 4.

<sup>235</sup> Fagg, 'From Back Number Aesthetics', p. 25.

<sup>236</sup> Alex Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 174-175.

Huneker recounts guiding two friends, a ‘Professor’ and a ‘Painter’, on an expedition to the Lower East Side. While Huneker himself remains largely dispirited, the ‘Painter’ is in search of an authentic scene to sketch and the ‘Professor’ is on a quest to find ‘the East Side of George Luks’. The reference to Ashcan School painter George Luks is emblematic of his celebrated portrayals of Lower East Side figures and street scenes from the turn-of-the-century, including *Street Scene (Hester Street)* (1905), as well as *Allen Street* (1905). Huneker’s explorers are represented as outsiders to the district, and are collectors and connoisseurs, not only of art in a physical form, but of the fleeting urban scenes and characters which inspire art. Huneker plays the rôle of dispossessed curator, guiding his guests through the now ‘spoiled’ streets, saddened by the ‘gaudy’ ‘show-places’, the ‘[f]ashionable slummers’, ‘noisy gilded cabarets’ and ‘fake gypsy orchestras’. Huneker insists that, while in the past establishments with ‘genuine Bohemian tables’ could be found, the entertainment available in the district had become merely a performance of bohemianism and a sham, asserting that ‘there was no more East Side, [...] it was only a fable’.<sup>237</sup> Fagg points to Huneker’s intentional usage of the word ‘fabulous’ in the title, as a term deriving from the Latin form *fabula* meaning *fable*, hence its significance in Huneker’s portrayal of the mythic East Side.<sup>238</sup> In a similar tone to Djuna Barnes’s ‘Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians’, explored in the ‘Greenwich Village’ chapter of this thesis, Huneker’s emphasis on the Lower East Side as having been lost, only fuels the curiosity and determination of the ‘Professor’ to discover a genuine ‘Luks’. The ramblers soon become spectators to an incident of impromptu street performance as ‘a red-headed Irish girl clutching a blonde girl, unmistakably a German blonde, [...] were both dreamily waltzing to the faded tune of the Merry Widow’. Enthralled by the display, Huneker relays that ‘[s]uddenly the organ began a gallop. [...]

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<sup>237</sup> Huneker, pp. 5-10.

<sup>238</sup> Fagg, ‘From Back Number Aesthetics’, p. 21; *Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus*, ed. by Maurice Waite, p. 366.

off they went like two abandoned spielers disguised as children of poverty. What movement! What Fire!’<sup>239</sup> In relating this scene of everyday street theatre, Huneker captures the sudden change in performative dynamic as the music and dancing switches from a waltz to a gallop, while his reference to the girls as ‘disguised’ accentuates the notion of Lower East Side residents as an incidental cast of characters. The scene evoked here, moreover, pertinently emulates Luks’ painting entitled *The Spielers* (1905), which depicts two young girls, one with red hair and one with blonde, rosy-cheeked and waltzing happily in an embrace, while pointedly gazing out to the viewer as if posed for their portrait.

In resuming their journey, the men collect many more scenes and multisensory encounters of interest, though Huneker, admitting he ‘came out on this expedition prepared to scoff’, continues to uphold his view of the Lower East Side as a ‘hollow’ vestige of its former self. Although saddened by the demise of ‘genuine’ bohemia, Huneker informs his companions that ‘I faked you a bit of the East Side you writing fellows are always looking for’, and resolves to settle instead for a false ‘tinsel Bohemia’. As guide, curator, and now illusionist, Huneker takes credit for having ‘faked’ a series of deceptive glimpses of scenes throughout the evening, for the benefit of his friends. By accentuating the pretence of a fabricated and synthetic ‘tinsel Bohemia’, Huneker implies that the reformed Lower East Side, now cleaner and healthier, has resorted to a performance of ‘genuine’ moments for the benefit of tourists. A twist occurs in the final moments, nevertheless, as the urban explorers encounter a young flower seller wearing a ‘huge shawl’ in which she nurses a stray cat; a ‘regular Luks’, they concur.<sup>240</sup> In denying the existence of the ‘genuine’ and affirming the loss of the Lower East Side as a destination for urban connoisseurs, Huneker tantalizes his readers, finally conceding to

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<sup>239</sup> Huneker, pp. 9, 11.

<sup>240</sup> Huneker, pp. 6, 19-20.

the existence of a 'real' East Side moment, as mediated and verified through the subjects of Luks's paintings.

In contrast to Huneker's distaste for the professionalization of Lower East Side tourism, as Gold remarks in *Jews Without Money*, '[t]he East Side has always been a generous garden for professional people. Many careers of splendour and importance have been founded on this misery of a million Jews'.<sup>241</sup> From the late nineteenth century, progressive reformers visited and began to take an interest in the Lower East Side, often applying their own middle-class standards and values to the district and highlighting the need for improvement. Prominent social reformer and journalist Jacob Riis (1849-1914) drew attention to the difficulties of tenement life through his pivotal work *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (1890). He documented the conditions in New York's slums through a series of powerful photographs and descriptions, candidly exposing the harsh realities of poverty in the city. In 1888, using a magic lantern, Riis narrated a lecture and exhibition on his photographs for the New York Society of Amateur Photographers, presenting his viewers with 'a cinematic experience'.<sup>242</sup> An article in the *New York Tribune* reported that:

Jacob Riis, a police reporter, who for some years served the *Tribune* in that capacity, showed nearly a hundred views from photographs taken by himself with the aid of members of the society, illustrating scenes with which his work brought him into contact. [...] Every place of misery, vice and crime that was not too horrible to show was presented, but Mr. Riis was so ingenious in describing the scenes and brought to his task such a vein of humor that after two hours every one wished that there was more of the exhibition, sad as much of it was.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Gold, *Jews Without Money*, p. 225.

<sup>242</sup> David Leviatin, 'Introduction', in *How the Other Half Lives*, by Jacob Riis (Boston; New York: Bedford/St Martins, 2011), pp. 1-31 (p. 3).

<sup>243</sup> 'Pictures of Police Life', *New York Tribune*, 26 January 1888, p. 10.

In gathering an audience to the poverty of the Lower East Side, Riis's disconnected spectators associate the exhibition with entertainment. The *Tribune*'s use of the word 'scenes' and account of Riis's 'humor' equates the images with a form of real-life theatre, applying levity to the subject of poverty, meanwhile the contentious desire for 'more of the exhibition' seems to insensitively request widespread poverty for the purposes of amusement. The *New York Herald* also reported that 'it was unanimously agreed by the large and appreciative audience that the entertainment provided for them had proved most excellent'.<sup>244</sup> As Bonnie Yochelson and Daniel Czitrom remark, Riis's magic lantern exhibition series, featuring a hundred slides, was 'both an entrepreneurial and a theatrical venture'.<sup>245</sup> While reformers like Riis set about highlighting and documenting the hardships which were taking place, most made their observations from the perspective of outsiders looking in, as an audience, careful to distance themselves from what they saw. The works produced brought a wider viewership to suffering, including desensitized readers and exhibition attendees, emphasizing the need for change, while also adding an element of voyeurism to the plight of the city's poor. Exhibitions and publications of this sort provided outsiders with a window on the Lower East Side, without them needing to set foot on its streets. The admission in the *Tribune* that despite finding the exhibition 'sad', the viewers had wished there was more, exposes a certain market for 'picturesque' human suffering, thus attaching a price-tag to images of New York's poor.

The notion of outsider intrigue into the lives of the 'other half' also appeared in later accounts by insiders to the district. In Rose Cohen's *Out of the Shadow*, Ruth is admitted to hospital uptown after becoming unwell from anaemia. There she is introduced to a woman, herself troubled after the death of her mother, who proceeds to attend to

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<sup>244</sup> 'Where Vice Flourishes: Phases of Tenement House Life in this City Aptly Portrayed', *New York Herald*, 26 January 1888, p. 4.

<sup>245</sup> Bonnie Yochelson and Daniel Czitrom, *Rediscovering Jacob Riis: Exposure Journalism and Photography in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 87.

Ruth and read to her aloud. Cohen recounts that '[o]ne day after she had gone the patients whispered to each other, and the nearest to me asked, "Do you know who that woman is?" Of course I did not. "She is a daughter of one of the biggest millionaires in the United States. You are very fortunate to have such a friend"'. Having been previously unaware of the fortunes of her mysterious guardian, Ruth is led to question 'why I was receiving so much attention. I did not know that the part of the city where I was living was called the East Side, or the slums, or the Ghetto, and that the face of the East Side, or the Slums, or the Ghetto was still new and a curiosity to the people in this part of the city, a sight to cheer any unhappy person'.<sup>246</sup> Ruth's realization at the Lower East Side being a site of spectacle, as well as a focus of charity, prompts her to question the motives of the woman who had shown her kindness and empathy. Cohen makes reference to a perceived dark sentiment of pleasure derived from wealthier individuals in observing the misfortune of others. Though some middle-class visitors to the Lower East Side likely had honourable intentions, many voyeuristic outsiders often visited as an exploitative audience to the district, whilst under the guise of charity.

Returning to Shenah Pessah and John Barnes in Yeziarska's short story 'Wings', when encountering John, a sociology professor who takes a keen interest in Shenah, much to her chagrin he is more drawn to her as a case study than as a companion. Having taken up residence on the Lower East Side for the purposes of his research, John aims to deliver first-hand experiences and encounters in his thesis. Yeziarska recounts that:

The girl with her hungry eyes and intense eagerness now held a new interest for him.

John Barnes, the youngest instructor of sociology in his university, congratulated himself at his good fortune in encountering such a splendid type for his research.

He was preparing his thesis on the 'Educational Problems of the Russian Jews,'

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<sup>246</sup> Cohen, pp. 240-241.

and in order to get into closer touch with his subject, he had determined to live on the East Side during his spring and summer vacation.

By classifying Shenah with the dehumanizing term ‘splendid type’, Yeziarska divulges to the reader John’s true motives for gaining her trust. In this example of dramatic irony, Shenah is victimized by John’s ‘compelling power that made people open their hearts to him’. In a form of academic slumming, perhaps intended for the greater good, John seeks to intermingle with Russian Jews and gain access to the insider’s perspective. His superior and somewhat manipulative attitude, nevertheless, identifies him as an outsider, patronizingly labeling Shenah as a ‘[p]oor little immigrant’. John establishes an exchange in his role of professor, introducing Shenah to reading ‘sensible books’, and Shenah in her role as ‘immigrant’, educating him in her customs and culture. Later, Yeziarska notes that ‘[h]e became suddenly enthusiastic. But it was the enthusiasm of the scientist for the specimen of his experimentation – of the sculptor for the clay that would take form under his touch’.<sup>247</sup> Barnes is heralded as a diligent and scholarly surveyor of the Lower East Side; an audience to the district with his interest foregrounded in learning and observation.

Though an outsider to the Lower East Side, Myers held a quiet fascination, not with sensationalized vistas or fleeting scenes, but with the commonplace activities of daily life. Brown notes that ‘Myers found the East Side slums a land of fantasy and color’.<sup>248</sup> The Lower East Side was Myers’s primary muse, and many of his paintings, etchings and sketches, while heavily romanticized, give an unintrusive dignity and objective innocence to the subjects he portrays. Holcomb notes the hardships of Myers’s own upbringing in Virginia as a possible motive for his compassionate affinity towards the Lower East Side as a subject. Many of Myers’s contemporaries, including Robert

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<sup>247</sup> Yeziarska, ‘Wings’, in *Hungry Hearts*, pp. 5-9, 23.

<sup>248</sup> Milton W. Brown, ‘The Ash Can School’, *American Quarterly*, 1.2 (1949), 127-134 (p. 132).

Henri, were critical of his sentimental style, although in John Sloan's diaries, Myers emerges as a firm friend, neighbour and supporter who believed he should have been included in 'The Eight' exhibition which took place in 1908.<sup>249</sup> On 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1908, Sloan remarked in his diary that Myers's individual exhibition displayed 'several very fine things', 'tho' he slips into sentimentalism'.<sup>250</sup> In his autobiography, *Artist in Manhattan*, Myers attests to his admiration of the Lower East Side and describes himself as a bystander 'with a solitary crayon pencil', capturing 'a panorama which was for me unceasing in its interest, thrilling in its significance. [...] My love was my witness in recording these earnest, simple lives, these visions of the slums clothed in dignity, never to me mere slums but the inhabitants of a people who were rich in spirit and effort'.<sup>251</sup> Myers holds an endless fascination with the Lower East Side and its people, though he is careful to present himself and his work less from the perspective of a voyeuristic visitor, and more as a sympathetic observer.

In 'The Message of Proletaire', published in the literary journal *The Bookman* in 1911, in which Louis Baury interviewed Myers among other artists, Myers divulges his observation that '[s]ight-seers are continually touring "Chinatown"' and exposes the "'opium dens' and 'gambling houses' [...] through which credulous visitors are escorted [...] [as] the most palpable shams'.<sup>252</sup> In evoking slummers in search of 'exotic' and clandestine experiences in Chinatown (centered in the streets surrounding Canal Street, south of the Italian Quarter, as depicted in Fig. 3.1), Myers elucidates the way urban ethnic tourism permeated each community of the Lower East Side, propelling pretence and charade to fulfill expectations and to make a profit. Rather than the pursuit of amusement, however, Myers's motive, seems to be tolerance and understanding between

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<sup>249</sup> Holcomb, 'Sunday Morning', pp. 147-148.

<sup>250</sup> John Sloan, 'John Sloan Diaries, 1906-1913', p. 160.

<sup>251</sup> Myers, *Artist in Manhattan*, p. 48.

<sup>252</sup> Louis Baury, 'The Message of Proletaire', *The Bookman*, 11 December 1911, pp. 399-413 (p. 409).

Manhattan's diverse communities; '[t]o this teeming metropolis of the poor whom I studied, to them I came in quiet friendship. To them I owe much'. Myers comments on his painting *East Side Children* (1931) [Fig. 3.11.], in which he depicts an 'old brick façade' in front of which children are gathered on the street and stoop and people lean and look from open windows, as 'a typical sidewalk of New York'. He notes the way in which the 'broken-down windows [are] framing their human content, basking in the summer air', thus presenting the windows as vignettes, not of suffering, but of contentment. Myers continues by directly addressing the melodramatic vistas of the Lower East Side portrayed by other artists:

To the artist whose instincts turn to violent drama, this simple façade would become but the backdrop for a night scene of terror: direful figures would come slouching furtively out of the door; an artificial light would flood a window, outlining a hag in a drunken stupor; the children would become little monsters – and another willful sensation would go to an exhibition.

In his critique of the image of the East Side depicted by other artists, Myers envisions a bustling theatrical scene. His use of performative language, such as 'violent drama', 'backdrop' and 'night scene' echoes Myers's brief theatrical career as a scene painter, as well as elucidating his opinion of other artists who resort to the dramatic and hyperbolized. Myers's artistic output is no less inclined towards the 'real', however, as in opposition to the sensationalized visions of suffering projected by some contemporary outsiders, Myers idealizes scenes and eradicates all evidence of discontent, acknowledging that '[t]he factory clothes, [and] the anxious faces disappeared'.<sup>253</sup> Baurly also notes the 'depth and aesthetic sensitiveness' of Myers's work compared to a generation devoted to the 'superficial and trivial', as well as deeming that '[t]o him it is inevitable that the slums should appear as a rôle in a great sociological drama'. In

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<sup>253</sup> Myers, *Artist in Manhattan*, pp. 49, 228.

articulating the part played by Myers's paintings in the wider 'sociological drama', Baury envisions the city as a social study of human theatre and credits Myers as a necessary representative in facilitating encounters with the Lower East Side.<sup>254</sup>

Myers himself draws on the theatricality of the city in *An Artist in Manhattan*, recalling early morning on Broadway as 'the vast scene has had its curtain call, the play is over', as well as lamenting the dilution of 'human drama' in New York at his time of writing in 1940.<sup>255</sup> Significantly, on his painting *Sunday Morning* (1907) [Fig. 3.12.], which illustrates smartly dressed residents in their Sunday-best, Holcomb notes 'the stage-like setting' as a 'familiar compositional device that reflects Myers' early training as a scene painter in New York theaters'. The sentimentalism of Myers's scenes are reflective of an unrealistic theatrical set, while the characters he conjures upon his brushwork stage always appear well-fed and well-groomed, an image deviating from the poor conditions which Holcomb notes 'haunt the photographs of Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis or paintings by George Luks'. Holcomb adds that Myers's artistic vision 'precluded any sense of the grinding poverty, the squalor, and deprivation often found and documented on the Lower East Side'.<sup>256</sup> As a long-term visiting observer of the Lower East Side, Myers's fervent preoccupation with largely mundane scenes evoke the everyday Lower East Side, although his disregard for the manifestations of poverty at any level render his work self-consciously idealized.

By superficially addressing the poorer districts of the city, outside writers, photographers and tour guides often applied a rhetoric which propagandized Lower East Side suffering, while allowing the root issues to slip under the radar. These illusory tactics reflective of the magic-lantern technology of the age, tied into a pattern of consciously trivializing underlying issues within the city. In the article in *Harper's New*

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<sup>254</sup> Baury, 'The Message of Proletaire', p. 404.

<sup>255</sup> Myers, *Artist in Manhattan*, pp. 52, 57.

<sup>256</sup> Holcomb, 'Sunday Morning', pp. 147-148.

*Monthly Magazine* in 1898 entitled 'How the Other Half Laughs', writer and drama critic John Corbin posited that: 'you may pity the people of the East Side, if you must, ten hours a day, but when the arc-lights gleam beneath the tracks of the elevated, if you are honest you will envy them'.<sup>257</sup> While some middle-class writers and social reformers aimed to highlight the city's poverty, others set about twisting the truth and alleviating social responsibility. The concept of the wealthier contingent of the city viewing Lower East Side dwellers with envy, also emphasizes the sense of disconnection from the 'other half' and a tendency to romanticize and exploit the poor. Keith Gandal adds that publications such as Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* brought to the public consciousness 'a new territory for adventure which is exciting partly because it is dangerous and strange and partly because the slum presents a more advanced culture of consumption, one whose vulgar styles of spectacle and speech these writers incorporate into their own'.<sup>258</sup> The poverty of New York's tenements merged into the urban scenery as a spectacle in their own right, whilst, hiding the harsher realities of the city in plain sight.

## CONCLUSION

As depicted in works by Yeziarska, Gold, Grabach, and Myers, among many others, the Lower East Side of the early twentieth century was significantly shaped by the migration of numerous newly arrived communities from all over the globe, many drawn to the district by cheaper rents and the possibility of employment. In the old world, the reputation of the Lower East Side, New York and America itself transcended the boundaries of reality. Rumour and exaggeration transformed the new world into a mythic dreamscape where anything was possible, consequently for many newly arrived migrants, there was inevitable disillusionment. While the myth of America conjured self-made

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<sup>257</sup> John Corbin, 'How the Other Half Laughs', *The Harpers Monthly*, December 1898, p. 30.

<sup>258</sup> Keith Gandal, *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 13.

prosperity and opportunities for all, the reality often meant a struggle in poor, overcrowded conditions for low wages.

Though the reality of America frequently disappointed, for numerous communities escaping persecution, starvation and poor health, the Lower East Side was still an improvement. Identity played an important role in success in the new world, and while the Lower East Side residents constituted an amalgam of global communities and customs, Americanization in appearance and name (so as not to be recognized as a ‘greenhorn’), was often the first step towards finding employment. Initially through costume and pretence, many newly arrived migrants sought to become quickly acculturated. The widespread hardship on the Lower East Side also made entertainment and escapism an important facet of life. The district came alive with immigrant theatre and multiple venues featured performances directed towards diverse audiences. Impromptu performance also permeated the streets and tenement buildings, as the close proximity of lives generated abundant opportunities for people watching within buildings, on the streets, in shops, from windows, fire-escapes, rooftops and stoops.

The streets were a communal and transient space, serving multiple functions; as an escape from the stuffy tenement apartments, a playground for children, a centre of commerce and a mode of traversal. Copious interspersed people and activities made the street an endless theatre, new scenes constantly emerging and unfolding. Within the supposedly private space of the tenement, moreover, visceral multisensory spectacle also abounded as cross-cultural noises, smells and scenes infiltrated the localized environment. From the late nineteenth century onwards the district’s distinctive ambiance drew an outside audience of middle-class slummers and voyeurs, keen to catch a glimpse of the lives of the ‘other half’. The contributing factors of pretence and costume, designated and impromptu theatre spaces, as well as the incoming gatherings of intrigued

spectators, merged to create a theatrical milieu and a theoretical auditorium comprised of costumed performers, stage-set streets and a gallery of onlookers.

## EPILOGUE

He put me into a taxicab and whirled me uptown among the glittering electric lights of Broadway. We stopped in front of a highly lighted place. Loud strains of music poured out as a man in uniform swung open the door for us. I was frightened about going in at first.

I thought it might be another foolishness like the vaudeville show. But the next moment I was in a dazzle of lights and bright coloured walls. The brass band lifted me fiercely out of myself and shook me to the roots. Crowds, what crowds of couples. Women's white shoulders against men's black coats. Women and men letting go toward each other, drunk with the fiery rhythm of jazz.<sup>1</sup>

While the locales of Greenwich Village, Harlem and the Lower East Side held their own distinguishing identities, urbane Midtown, verdant Central Park and exhilarating Coney Island were epicentres of entertainment, consumerism and leisure, and facilitated space for the cross-over and intermingling of Manhattan's numerous communities. Anzia Yezierska's portrayal of Broadway captures the dazzling theatrical glow, pulsating jazz and feverish dance crazes of the era, as relayed through the awestruck eyes of Lower East Side local Sara Smolinsky. Drawing on the cross-cultural and inter-community opportunities which existed in early twentieth-century Manhattan, Lori Harrison-Kahan notes that '[o]nce we situate Yezierska's texts in the Jazz Age, it is no longer incidental that this black musical form is a source of inspiration'.<sup>2</sup> Yezierska's account of Sara losing herself 'in the mad joy of the crowd' elucidates Broadway as a cultural nexus, where the city's diverse assortment of characters interacted and coalesced in a more neutral space of abandonment, meanwhile, the 'strains of music' echoing from venues enhanced the performativity of the city streets.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> Lori Harrison-Kahan, "'Drunk with the fiery rhythms of jazz: Anzia Yezierska, Hybridity, and the Harlem Renaissance', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 51.2 (2005), 416-436 (p. 428).

<sup>3</sup> Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, p. 193.

In situating the districts of Greenwich Village, Harlem and the Lower East Side alongside each other, this thesis has demonstrated how each unique location became the subject of theatrical and performative interpretation in literature, art and other multi-disciplinary representations of early twentieth century Manhattan. In my analysis, I have acknowledged how the types of performance on display varied according to the racial and socio-economic power dynamics at play in each district respectively, while the motivations of the various ‘audiences’ who viewed and perceived the city as theatre were also diverse, and in some instances exploitative. Boosterism and sensationalism also abounded – particularly in walking tour literature – proliferated by those who had a vested interest in marketing certain districts as theatrical. Meanwhile, as the physical anatomy of the city itself scaled up, generating spectacle, the changing cultural climate brought an entertainment zeitgeist, and made ‘looking’ at passers-by an acceptable activity in the streets of the metropolis.<sup>4</sup> With its architectural vista and within its distinctive communities, as I have shown, early twentieth-century Manhattan staged numerous instances of performativity and theatricality; themes which, in turn, came to be incorporated within numerous multi-disciplinary representations of the era, as the city was interpreted in theatrical terms.

I wish to emphasize, nevertheless, that though each unique district addressed in this thesis displayed different forms of performance and theatricality, the fervour for spectacle was not confined solely within distinct quarters, but radiated across the city through mass culture and the desire for escapism. The city existed as a constantly evolving organism, conveying people through its streets, subways and elevated railways, and although distinct communities settled, there was little stasis as residents traversed and interacted on the Manhattan map. Lower East Siders, as Yeziarska illustrates, found

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<sup>4</sup> Zurier, *Picturing the City*, pp. 3-4.

amusement in Midtown, while Greenwich Villagers visited Harlem, Harlem residents relocated to the Lower East Side, and so forth in cyclical fashion, while all interacted in collective areas such as Central Park and Coney Island. In accentuating the vivacity of the city and movement across the metropolitan network, I wish to underscore the notion that though this thesis divides chapters by place, Manhattan's districts were distinctive, but highly interlinked and by no means self-contained. In addition to the binding motif of theatricality traceable throughout accounts of early twentieth-century Manhattan, the rise in modern infrastructure and mass culture centralized and inter-connected the city's more disparate districts.

Although early twentieth-century Manhattan was better connected, not all districts benefitted from electrical innovation as quickly or extensively as Midtown, and racial and class prejudice infiltrated every stratum of the metropolis. While acknowledging Midtown as New York's modernized 'face' marketed to the world and as the epicentre of organized theatre in the city, this thesis has extended beyond Manhattan's most overtly theatrical destinations and examined how performativity extended into more localized districts. Each chapter has evaluated the impact of the themes and language of theatricality which emerged in correlation with the upsurge in modernity and changing social mores. By focussing on the concept of impromptu city stages and everyday theatrical moments this thesis has also demonstrated how in Greenwich Village, Harlem and the Lower East Side alike, multi-purpose spaces such as windows, fire-escapes and roof-tops functioned as vantage points over the city's altering architectural vista and ephemeral scenes inherent to everyday life. I have also exemplified the familiar motifs and rhetoric used to represent city stages and the everyday theatrical experience which emerged through a wide range of art-forms during the early twentieth century.

Though the types of scenes evaluated in this thesis have varied depending on place – for example, accounts from Greenwich Village have been more likely to capture

spectacles of the avant-garde, while representations of the Lower East Side often evoke congested streets and bustling crowds – the way in which scenes are interpreted by observers and commentators, (often using language or forms borrowed from the theatre including platforms and crowds) has remained comparative across the districts addressed. While the Village’s Guido Bruno invokes ‘the eternal show of daily life’ and John Sloan records and eternalizes scenic anecdotes espied through windows, from rooftops and in the streets; in Harlem, Aaron Douglas interprets the district as ‘an enormous outdoor stage swarming with humanity’; meanwhile on the Lower East Side, Marcus Eli Ravage envisages the area as ‘a theater within a theater’ and Bella Spewack likens Lewis Street of her childhood to ‘a badly painted backdrop’.<sup>5</sup> Throughout this thesis, numerous examples have evidenced how the language and themes of the theatre transcended multiple genres, including personal diaries, literature and memoirs, and diverse artistic disciplines such as painting, photography, film and music, to represent distinctive districts of the city.

The theatricality of the city extended beyond more overt displays of spectacle, as writers and artists depicted examples of performing in everyday life, and interpreted numerous ‘scenes’ as performative. Relying on Richard Schechner’s ‘broad spectrum’ approach, which recognizes performance as a ‘continuum’ embracing the span between performance on stage and performance in everyday life, this thesis has been structured on the basis that ‘performance’ is not a limited term, but can be applied to anything that is perceived or interpreted as performative. As Schechner observes ‘[a]ll actors are performers, but not all performers are actors’.<sup>6</sup> In Greenwich Village, venues catered for the make-believe and play-acting of the district’s more bohemian residents, while in contrast, the act of passing performed by some Harlemites emerged as a form of pretence, often enacted through necessity in order to overcome prejudice. Similarly on the Lower

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<sup>5</sup> Bruno, ‘Books and Magazines’, p. 161; Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*, p. 12; Ravage, p. 87; Spewack, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, pp. 170-171, 208.

East Side, it was advantageous for newly arrived migrants to acculturate by assuming Americanized identities and customs as quickly as possible, so as not to be differentiated as a ‘greenhorn’. Not all ‘performances’ were equal, however, and while for Greenwich Village’s bohemian residents, costume and masquerade were sometimes an affectation for amusement, escapism, or financial reward, in both Harlem and on the Lower East Side, disguise and performance often arose due to the uneven power dynamics of race and class, and the obligation to assimilate with the general populace or to conceal true identities for improved prospects. In addressing and comparing issues of identity concerning three unique districts, this thesis has uncovered elements of performance in relation to selfhood and undercurrents of otherwise hidden theatricality, revealing the multi-faceted nature of everyday theatre in early twentieth-century Manhattan.

In this thesis, I have explored different types of ‘audience’, often with different motives for watching and viewing the city as theatrical. I use the term ‘audience’ to describe anyone, or any group of people, who frames and interprets an act, event or vista as performative. As Schechner notes, ‘[i]f I look at what happens on the street, or at the rolling ocean, and see these “as performance,” then in that circumstance they are such’.<sup>7</sup> I have examined the notion of inside residents as onlookers, as well as outside ‘slummers’ as an itinerant audience to each district. In Greenwich Village, as the district became increasingly popular with curious tourists, aspects of ‘genuine’ bohemia began to fade, and in its place arose a performed substitute for the benefit of an audience seeking sensationalism. Likewise, in Harlem, outside visitors arrived to sample an exoticized, racialized experience, while on the Lower East Side, outsiders looked for the ‘picturesque’ in poverty as consumed through guided tours, cursory surveillance from passing vehicles, or through the detached medium of photographic or literary accounts. While the city and its people provided ceaseless entertainment for nearby window gazers,

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<sup>7</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 167.

the arrival of slumming audiences altered the nature of spectatorship, and like a popular Broadway show, made the displayed scenes profitable. By capitalizing on earning potential, certain venues and local characters in districts such as Greenwich Village and Harlem became performative, fulfilling outsider expectations through pretence. In demonstrating how slumming audiences fuelled the mythmaking of each district, I have exemplified the ways in which demand for spectacle propelled an atmosphere of theatricality in the early twentieth century.

Through embracing the structural metaphor of the theatre, this thesis has investigated notions of the city's physical landscape as a series of conceptual stages, exhibiting instances of impromptu performance and everyday theatricality, as well as exploring the concept of residents as performers and spectators, while 'slummers' and urban tourists became an intermittent audience to particular places and spaces. In addition to uncovering the ways in which theatre saturated the streets in the form of lighting, architecture, scenes and ambiance, I have also indicated how theatrical influences informed the perspectives of contemporaneous writers and artists as demonstrated through language and common motifs. In exploring three Manhattan districts in relation to theatrical and performative themes, I have added new dimensions to the picture of the city during the early twentieth century.

As represented in literary and artistic accounts, the city, with its dramatic backdrop, progressively began to reflect a hyperbolized stage-set, while altering social codes and the zeal for amusement encouraged the observation of urban 'scenes'. Performance imbued the physical and metaphysical topography of the metropolis, and the barriers between the theatre and the wider city, the real and the pretend, began to blur, imbuing Manhattan of the early twentieth century with a pervasive theatricality.

APPENDICES

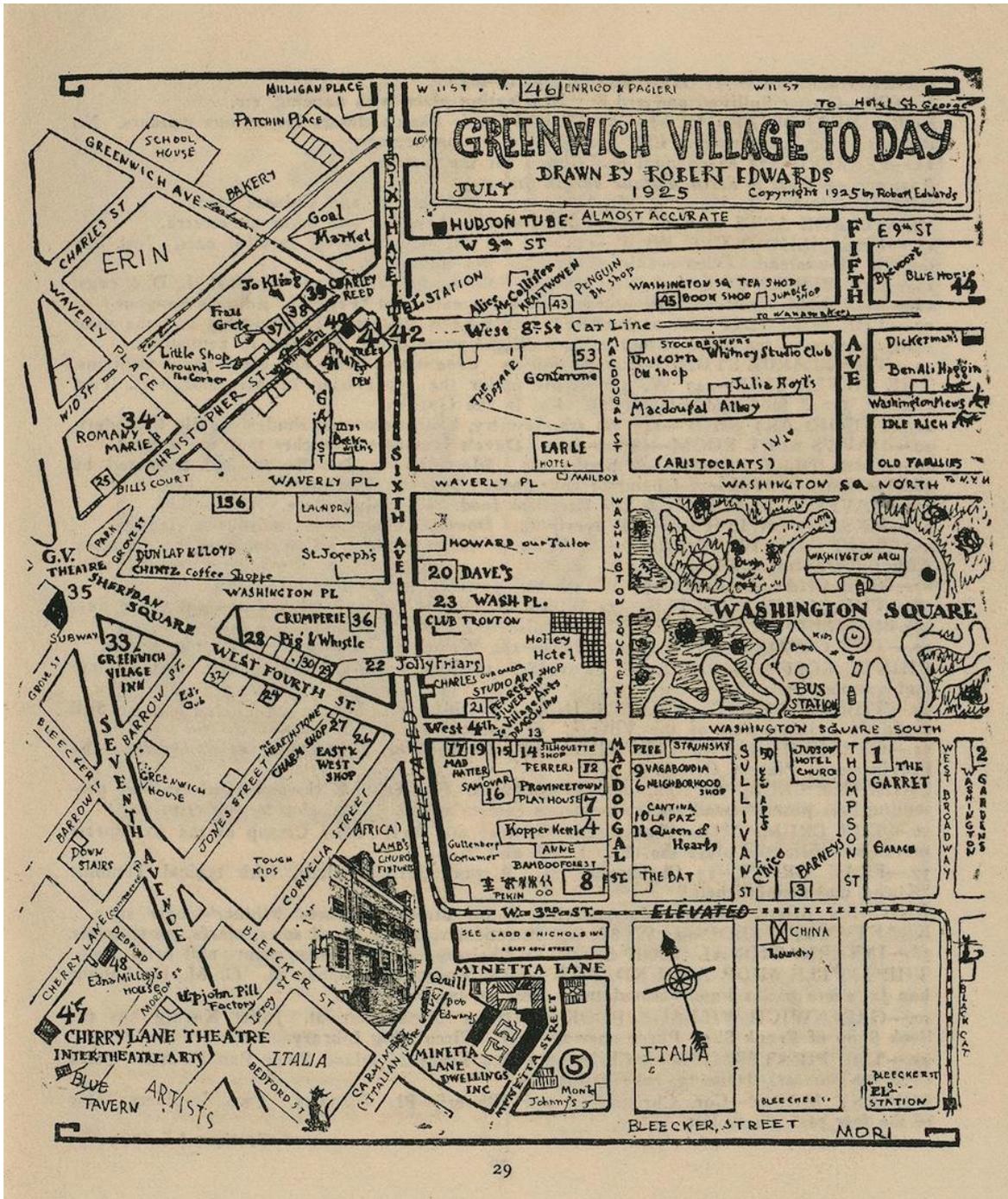


Fig. 1.1. Robert Edwards, 'Greenwich Village To Day', *The Quill: A Magazine of Greenwich Village*, July 1925, 17.1, p. 29



**Fig. 1.2.** *Declaration of Independence of the Greenwich Village Republic*, signed by Gertrude S. Drick, Betty Turner, John Sloan, Marcel Duchamp, Charles Frederick Ellis, Allen Russell Mann, Allen Norton, 23 January 1917, ink on paper, John Sloan Manuscript Collection, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, Delaware

Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.3.** John Sloan, *Arch Conspirators*, 1917, etching with engraving on laid paper, 10.8 × 15.2 cm, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.



**Fig. 1.4.** John Sloan, *Hell Hole*, 1917, etching and aquatint on paper, 19.8 × 24.9 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.5.** Jessie Tarbox Beals, *The King's Threshold*, Patchin Place, 1918, photograph, PC60-66-17, Jessie Tarbox Beals Photographs, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts



**Fig. 1.6.** Theresa Bernstein, *Open Air Show*, 1913, etching, 19.69 × 24.77 cm, private collection

Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.7.** John Sloan, *The City from Greenwich Village*, 1922, oil on canvas, 66 × 85.7 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



**Fig. 1.8.** John Sloan, *Sixth Avenue Elevated at Third Street*, 1928, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 101.9 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Act I. Greenwich Village



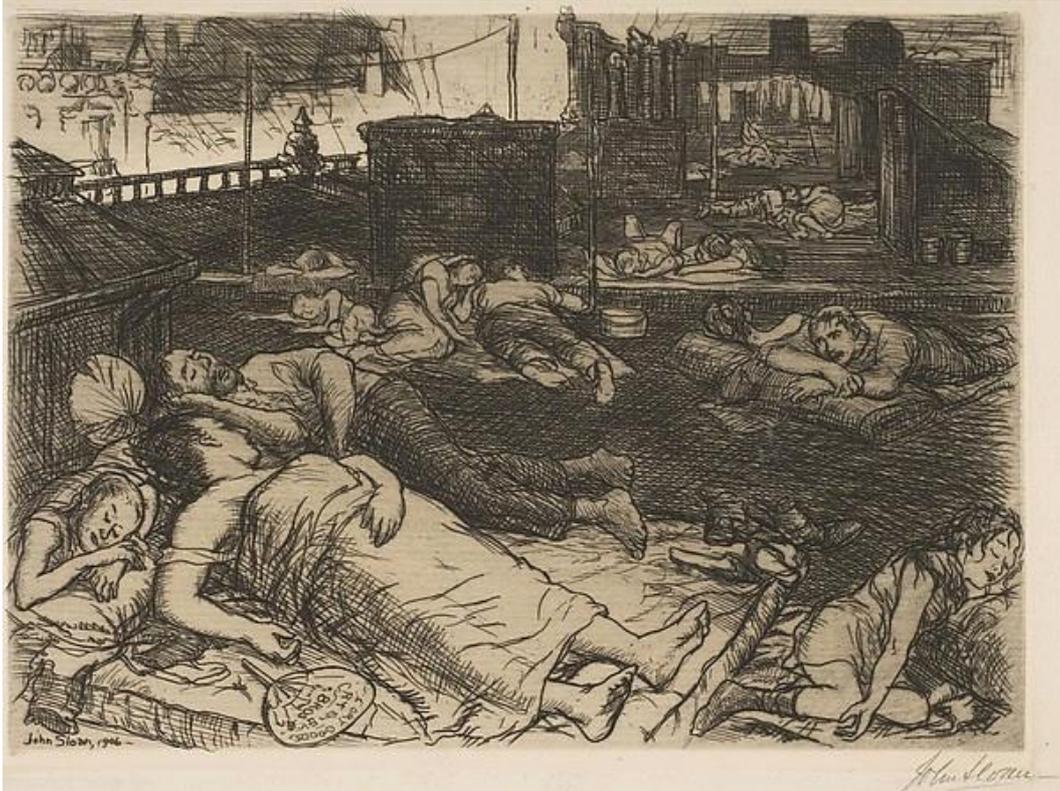
**Fig. 1.9.** Edward Hopper, *Night Windows*, 1928, oil on canvas, 73.7 × 86.4 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.10.** John Sloan, *Red Kimono on the Roof*, 1912, oil on canvas, 60.96 × 50.8 cm, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana

Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.11.** John Sloan, *Roofs, Summer Night*, 1906, etching, 13.3 × 17.8 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



**Fig. 1.12.** John Sloan, *Woman and Child on the Roof*, 1914, etching, 11.1 × 15 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.13.** John Sloan, *Stealing the Wash*, 1921, etching, 9.5 × 5.9 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



**Fig. 1.14.** John Sloan, *Hairdresser's Window*, 1907, oil on canvas, 80.96 × 66.04 cm, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut

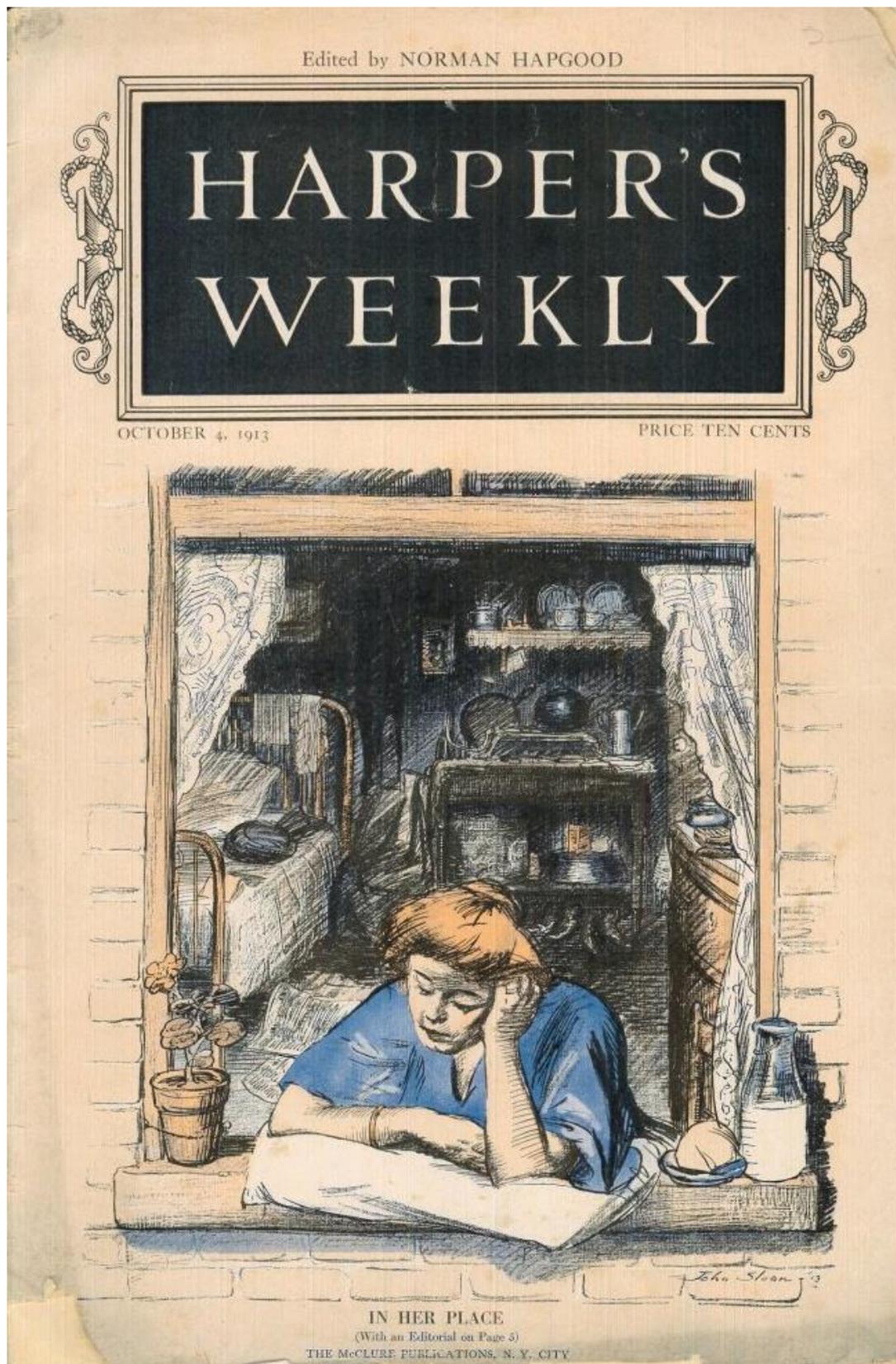
Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.15.** John Sloan, *Night Windows*, 1910, etching, 13.4 × 17.6 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York



**Fig. 1.16.** John Sloan, *A Window on the Street*, 1912, oil on canvas, 66 × 81.2 cm, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine

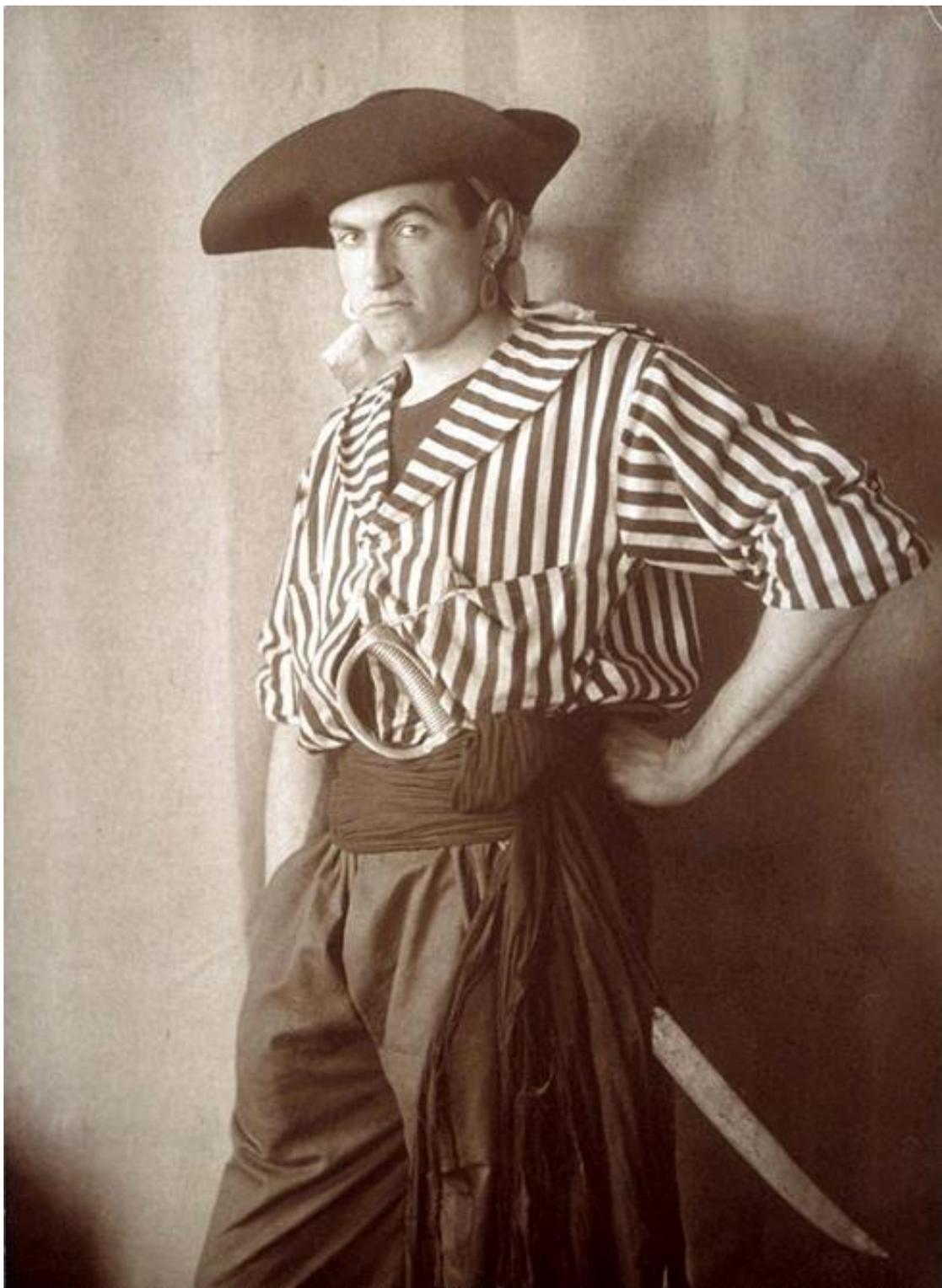


**Fig. 1.17.** John Sloan, 'In her Place', *Harper's Weekly*, 4 October 1913, front cover



**Fig. 1.18.** John Sloan, *Picture Shop Window*, 1907, oil on canvas, 81.3 × 66 cm, Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey

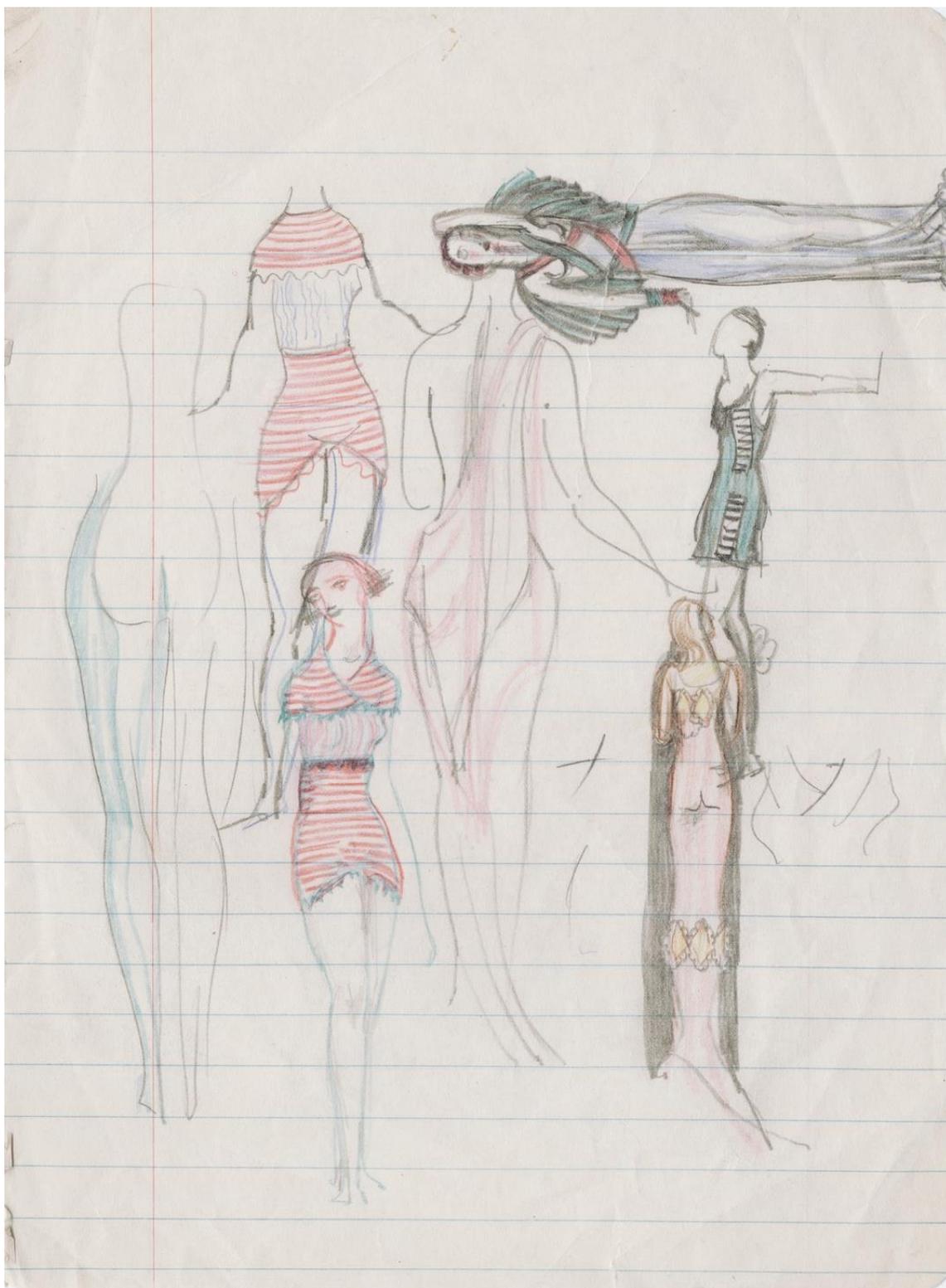
Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.19.** Jessie Tarbox Beals, *Don Dickerman*, ca. 1912 -1920, photograph, PC60-62-13, Jessie Tarbox Beals Photographs, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts



**Fig. 1.20.** John Sloan, *Bandits Cave*, 1920, etching, 17.7 × 12.8 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



**Fig. 1.21.** Mina Loy, 'Colored pencil sketch of women's fashions', undated, colored pencil drawing, YCAL MSS 6, Mina Loy Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut

Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.22.** Jessie Tarbox Beals, *Romany Marie*, ca. 1917-1925, photograph, PC60-63-18, Jessie Tarbox Beals Photographs, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts



**Fig. 1.23.** John Sloan, *Romany Marye in Christopher Street*, 1922, etching, 15.1 × 20.1 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.24.** Jessie Tarbox Beals, *Costume party, Webster Hall*, ca. 1916-1920, photograph, PC60-66-15, Jessie Tarbox Beals Photographs, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts



**Fig. 1.25.** Jessie Tarbox Beals, *Webster Hall*, ca. 1915-1928, photograph, PC60-66-16, Jessie Tarbox Beals Photographs, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts



**Fig. 1.26.** *Djuna Barnes wearing hat and polka dot blouse, c. 1920-1921, photograph, Series 7, Box 2, Folder 1, Item 1.90, Djuna Barnes Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Maryland*



**Fig. 1.27.** Berenice Abbott, *Djuna Barnes*, c. 1926, photograph, NPG.91.63, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.



**Fig. 1.28.** *Portrait of Djuna Barnes*, c. 1920-1930, photograph, Series 7, Box 1, Folder 1, Item 1.48, Djuna Barnes Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Maryland

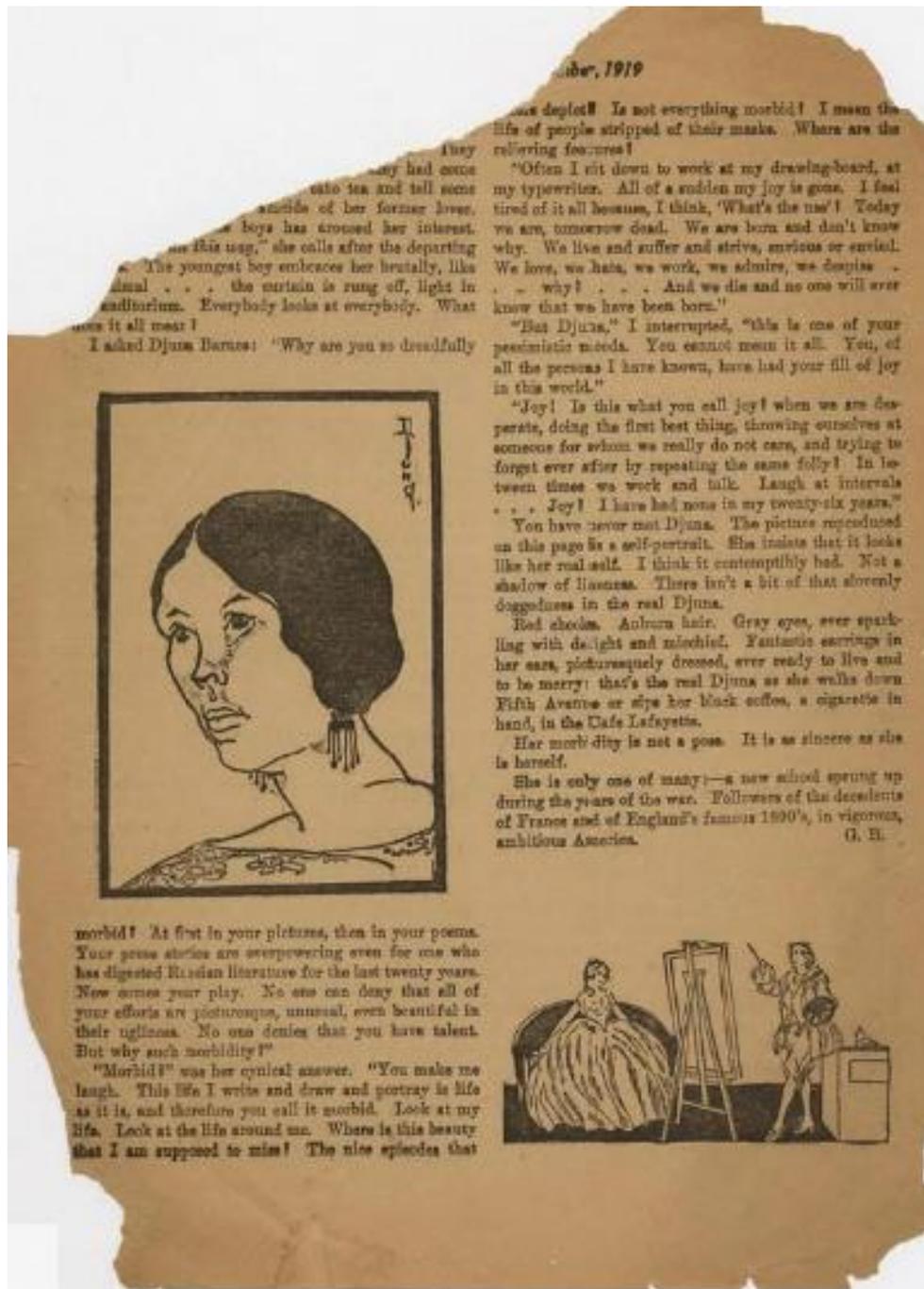


Fig. 1.29. Djuna Barnes, 'Self Portrait', from 'Fleurs Du Mal à la Mode de New York – An Interview with Djuna Barnes by Guido Bruno', *Pearson's Magazine*, December 1919, p. 388; magazine clipping, Series 8, Item 4.41, Djuna Barnes Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Maryland

Act I. Greenwich Village



**Fig. 1.30.** John Sloan, *Seeing New York*, 1917, etching, 6 × 9.5 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



**Fig. 1.31.** Djuna Barnes, 'My Adventures Being Rescued', *New York World Magazine*, 15 November 1914, p. 6; original photograph, Series 7, Box 1, Item 1.34, Djuna Barnes Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Maryland

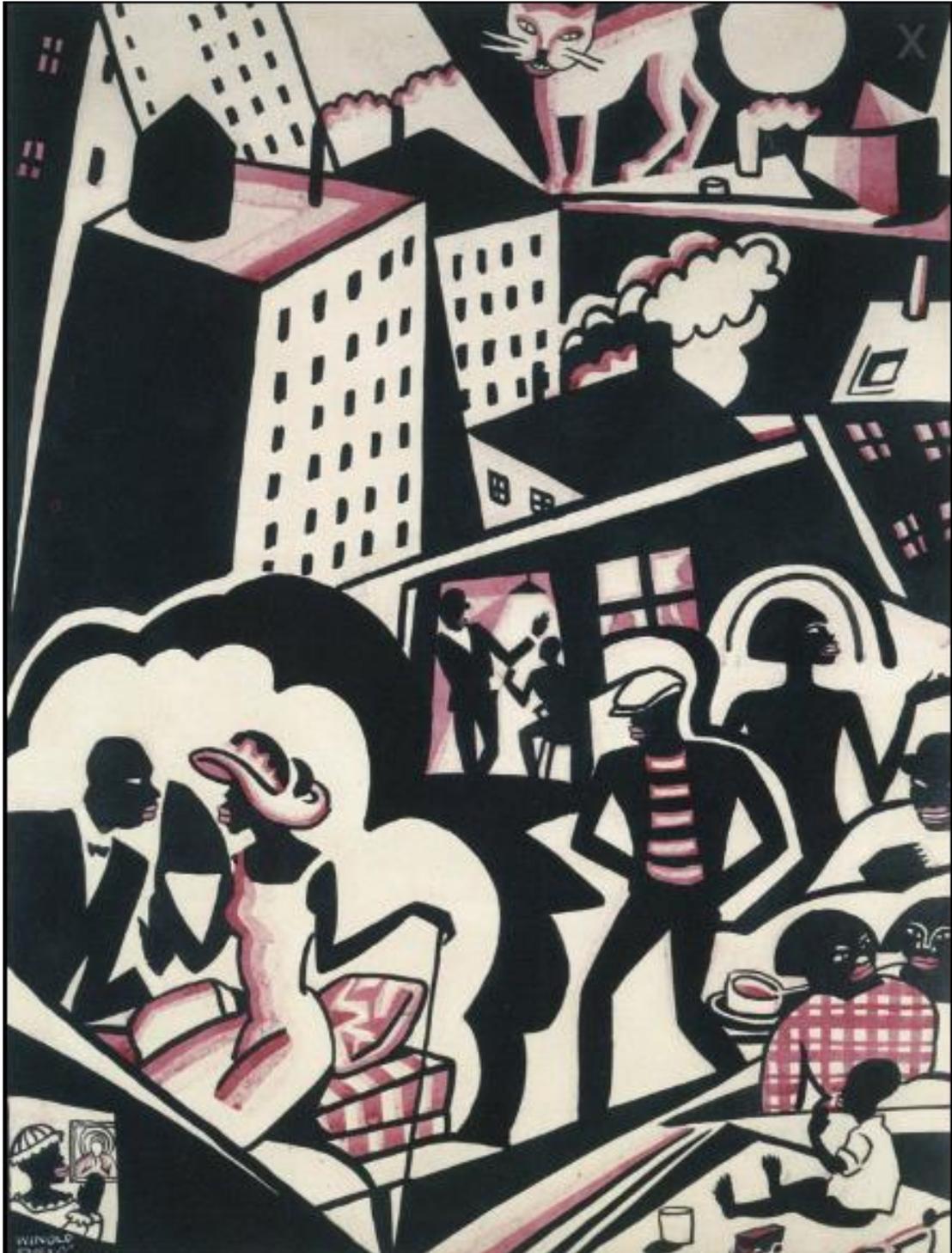


**Fig. 1.32.** Djuna Barnes, 'My Adventures Being Rescued', *New York World Magazine*, 15 November 1914, p. 6; original photograph, Series 7, Box 1, Item 1.35, Djuna Barnes Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Maryland





**Fig. 2.2.** Winold Reiss, 'Drawing in Two Colors' or 'Interpretation of Harlem Jazz I', from J.A. Rogers, 'Jazz at Home', *The Survey Graphic: Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro*, 1 March 1925, p. 666; original lithograph and halftone on Japanese paper, PR13, CN1998:055, Item 53, Winold Reiss Collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.



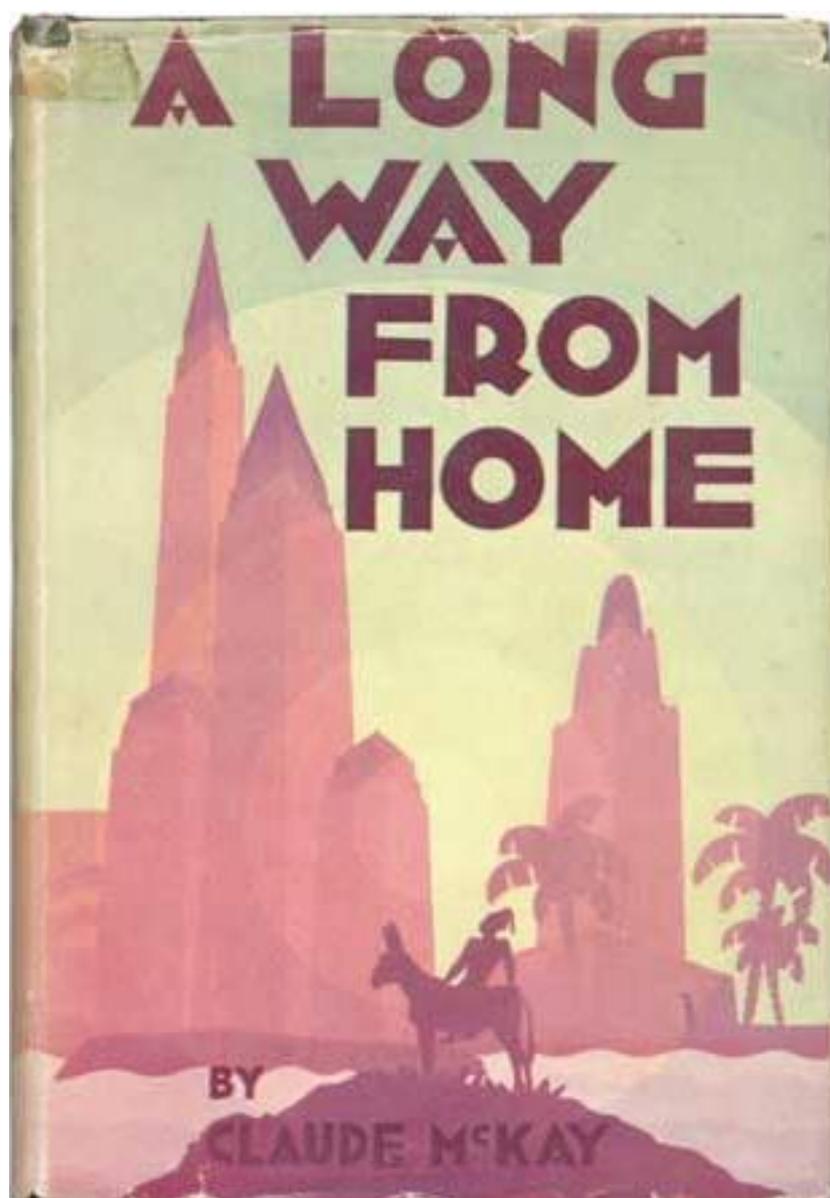
**Fig. 2.3.** Winold Reiss, 'Harlem at Night' or 'Interpretation of Harlem Jazz II', from J.A. Rogers, 'Jazz at Home', *The Survey Graphic: Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro*, 1 March 1925, p. 667; original lithograph, private collection



**Fig. 2.4.** Winold Reiss, 'Dawn in Harlem: A Phantasy', *The Survey Graphic: Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro*, 1 March 1925, p. 663



**Fig. 2.5.** Aaron Douglas, *Dance Magic*, 1930, mural, College Inn Ballroom, Sherman Hotel, Chicago (since demolished); photograph of mural, from Amy Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson: University of Press of Mississippi, 1995), p. 70



**Fig. 2.6.** Aaron Douglas, cover design for Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home* (New York: L. Furman, 1937)

Act II. Harlem

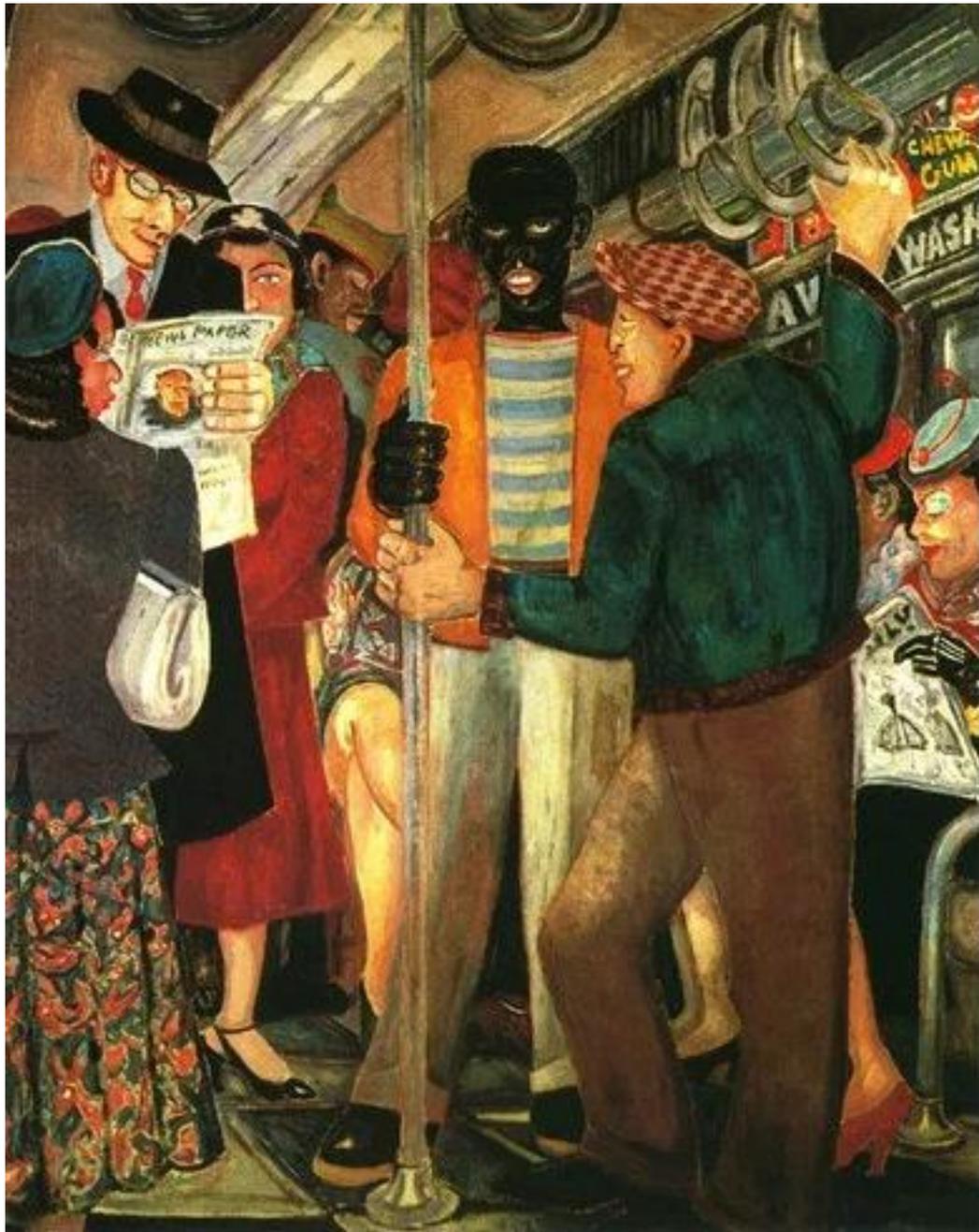


**Fig. 2.7.** Aaron Douglas, *Aspects of Negro Life: Song of the Towers*, 1934, oil on canvas, 240 × 223.52 cm, The New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Art and Artifacts Division, New York

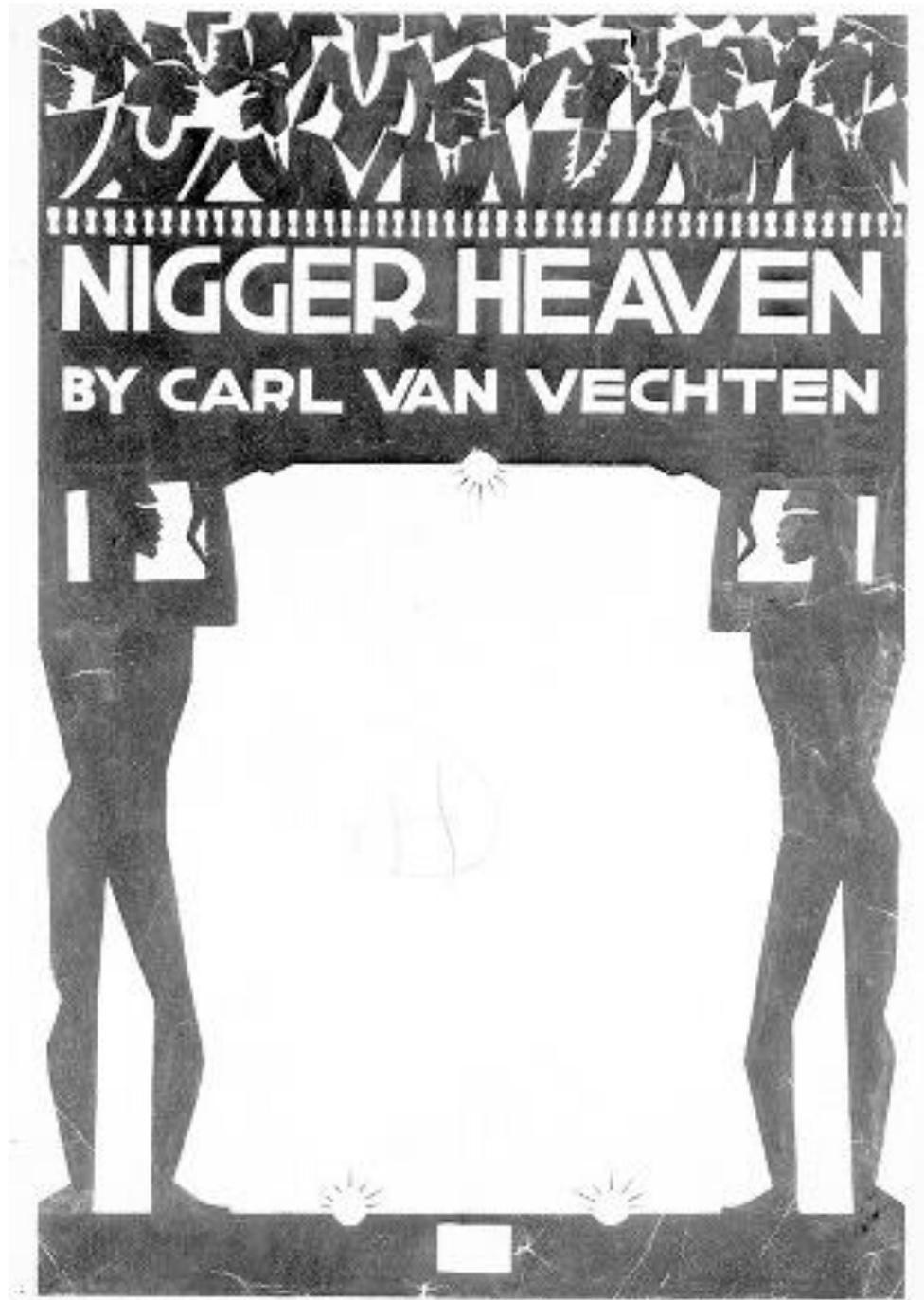
Act II. Harlem



**Fig. 2.8.** Palmer C. Hayden, *Midsummer Night in Harlem*, 1936, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 63.5 cm, The Museum of African American Art, Los Angeles, California



**Fig. 2.9.** Palmer C. Hayden, *The Subway*, c. 1930, oil on canvas, 67.3 × 78.7 cm, Imageworks, Art, Architecture and Engineering Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan

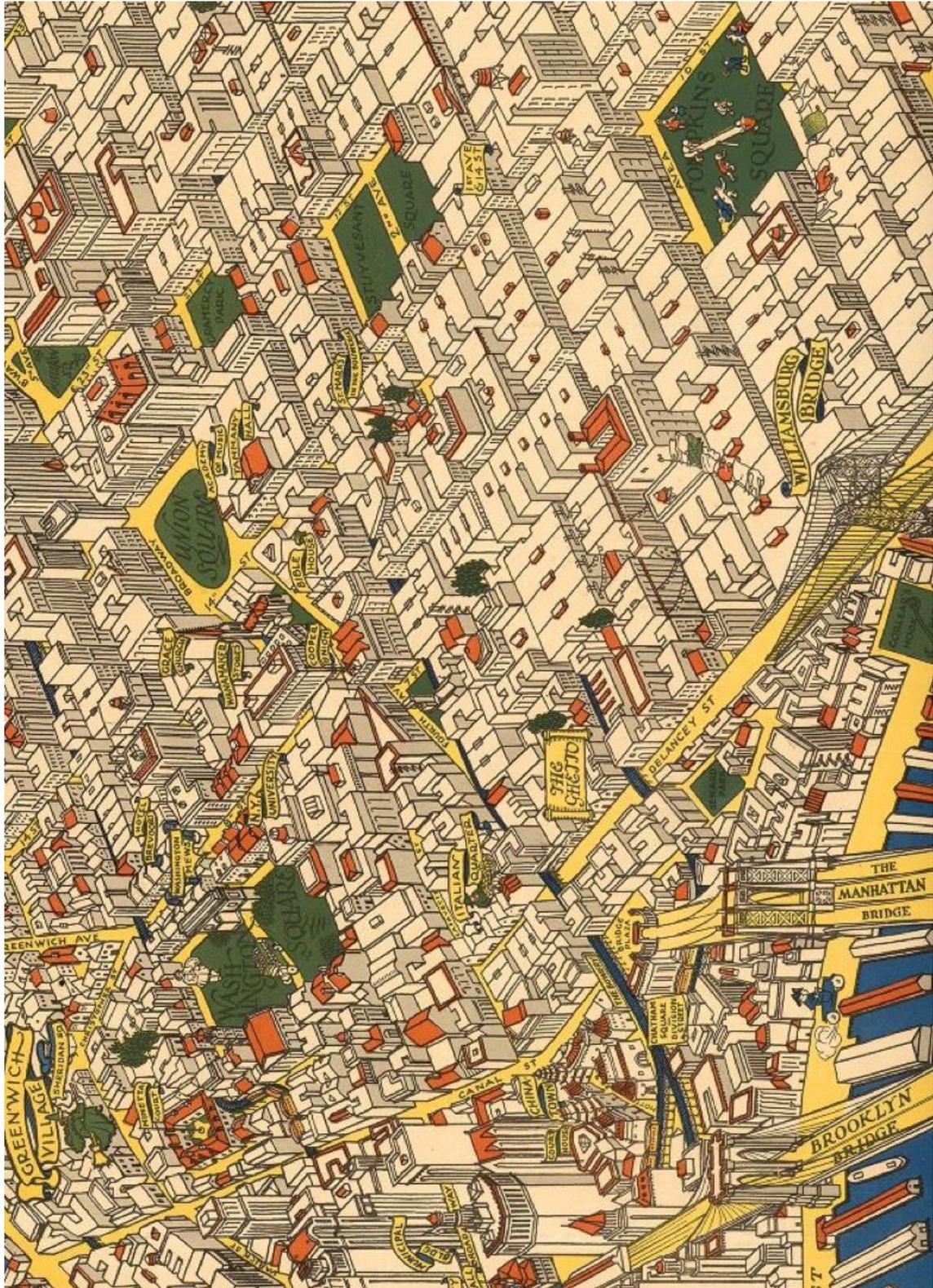


**Fig. 2.10.** Aaron Douglas, advertising design for Carl Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven* (1926); original illustration, 1980.180.1, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut



**Fig. 2.11.** Aaron Douglas, advertising design for Carl Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven*, 1926; original illustration, 1980.180.2, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut

Act III. Lower East Side



**Fig. 3.1.** Excerpt from Charles Vernon Farrow, *A Map of the Wondrous Isle of Manhattan* (New York: Fuessle and Colman and Washington Square Bookshop, 1926)

Act III. Lower East Side



**Fig. 3.2.** John R. Grabach, *Rooftop Jamboree*, no date, oil on canvas, 106.7 × 91.4 cm, private collection

Act III. Lower East Side



**Fig. 3.3.** George Bellows, *Cliff Dwellers*, 1913, oil on canvas, 102.08 × 106.84 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California



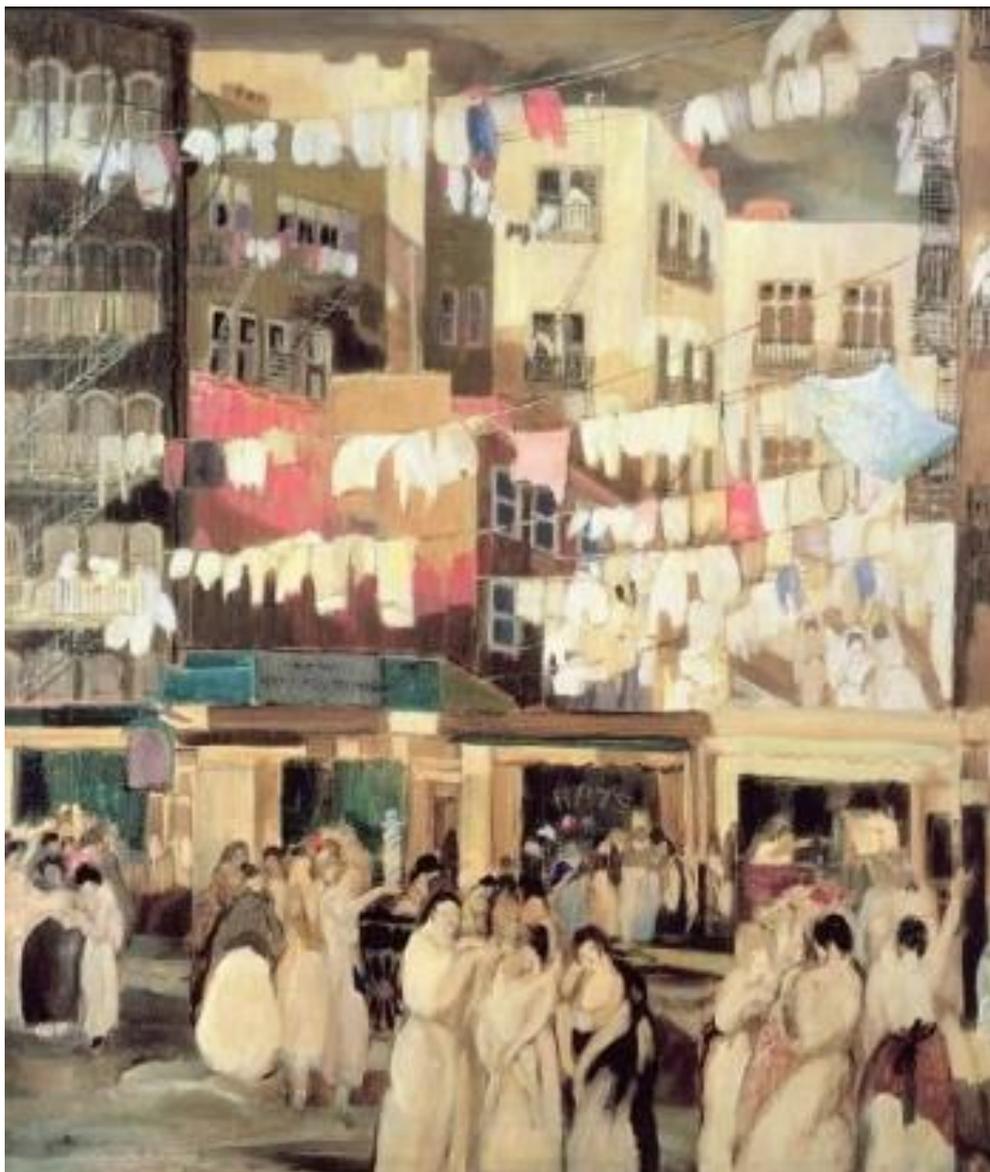
**Fig. 3.4.** George Bellows, 'Why don't they go to the Country for a Vacation?', *The Masses*, August 1913, p. 4; original transfer lithograph, reworked with pen, 63.5 × 57.15 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California

Act III. Lower East Side



**Fig. 3.5.** John R. Grabach, *New York, East Side*, no date, oil on canvas, private collection

Act III. Lower East Side



**Fig. 3.6.** John R. Grabach, *East Side, New York*, c. 1924, oil on canvas, 91.4 × 106.6 cm, private collection

Act III. Lower East Side



**Fig. 3.7.** John R. Grabach, *Tenements*, c. 1930s, oil on canvas, 30.48 × 40.64 cm, private collection



**Fig. 3.8.** John R. Grabach, *Fire Escape*, no date, oil on canvas, 45.72 × 55.88 cm, private collection

Act III. Lower East Side



**Fig. 3.9.** Jerome Myers, *East Side Entertainment*, c. 1920, oil on canvas, 61.6 × 76.52 cm, Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond



**Fig. 3.10.** Jerome Myers, *Angels of the Fiesta*, 1920, oil on canvas, 63.5 × 76.2 cm, University of Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, New York

Act III. Lower East Side



**Fig. 3.11.** Jerome Myers, *East Side Children*, 1931, oil on canvas, Arkell Museum of Art, Canajoharie, New York



**Fig. 3.12.** Jerome Myers, *Sunday Morning*, 1907, oil on canvas, 95.3 × 113 cm, Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York

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