

## Mina Loy's Design Flaws

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*"Mina Loy's Design Flaws" examines a publishing mistake that resulted in the layering of a scrap of the poem "Chiffon Velours" over several lines from of a second poem, called "Photo After Pogrom." This palimpsest was no accident, but turns out to be one of many similar such anomalous designs constructed, archived, and patented by the poet. Loy is one of a number of artists who produced and theorized textual mistakes after the second World War. I argue that Loy and others treated radical dissonance, both poetic and historical, as metaphors. By approaching post-War incommensurability as a site of poetic meaning-construction rather than a sign of the disintegration of meaning, Loy transformed the marks of the total destruction of the subject into an occasion for ontological regeneration.*

Palimpsests are x-rays that expose as a surface the edited layers accumulated in the crafting of texts. Though the material palimpsests of modernism were archaeological discoveries, they emblemize a shift away from textual design modeled on "the dig." Textual archaeology depends upon a sense of individual and historical depth that the culture of palimpsests eroded. There erupted instead an editorial poetics, in which the distinction between poet and editor was collapsed by poets overexposing the editorial history of their work in order to rethink the process and function of textual composition. Mina Loy was one such poet, and this paper will examine in the broad context of her project a single such palimpsest, published in 1947 in Accent: A Quarterly of New Literature, where part of the poem "Photo After Pogrom" was literally buried by the editing process beneath part of a second poem, "Chiffon Velours."<sup>1</sup> Though the former text remained unexcavated for thirteen years pending its publication elsewhere in 1960, "Pogrom" is visible in and part of "Chiffon Velours," forming in the placement of

“Chiffon” over “Pogrom” a literary collage combining two layered texts into a single sculptural piece. (figures 1-3 in Appendix)

In order to argue that we must read what appears to be a mistake as an intentional poetic act, I will first contextualize Loy’s experiments with palimpsest as a mode of collage-production in the larger trajectories of Loy’s engagement with expressionist art, Loy’s editorial poetics in general, and the similar attention to editing practices in which other modernists were engaged in the 1940s. By conceptualizing Loy’s archive as a collection of designed artifacts rather than composed manuscripts, it is possible to read “Chiffon” over “Pogrom” as an example of how illegible material circumstances can become meaningful when treated as metaphors, the figurative device for reading one thing through the mirror of another. Loy uses textual design to model how the most incomprehensible of circumstances and events can become vehicles for sense-making when their illegibility is understood as the foundation of metaphorical meaning. For Loy, combining fragments of poems is a way of exploring metaphor as a feature of experience, and by extension, of recycling senseless forms of experience by using it to produce poetic language. I take seriously the appearance of this palimpsest in 1947, when other writers—like George Orwell, Marianne Moore, and Gertrude Stein—were also turning to the palimpsest in their efforts to reinvent what it might mean to be human after the dehumanizing violence associated with the Second World War. Unlike the modernists writing between the wars, when memories of the legible past functioned as a foil to the immediacy of fragmentation, these post-WWII writers used the palimpsest to banish temporality and its fetishization of original events and circumstances in favor of a productive simultaneity mobilized toward the invention of new contexts for old

circumstances. The very possibility of such inventiveness was figured by Loy and others as a literary antidote to totalitarianism, evidence of an historical porousness without which it would be impossible to reinvent post-totalitarian selves and civilizations.

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In 1947 Accent printed copies of “Chiffon Velours” in which the last lines of the poem were pasted over the final lines of “Photo After Pogrom.” This mistake raises a number of questions which echo similar such queries among other authors and texts of the period about the ethical and aesthetic value of poetic technologies practiced among the avant-garde: What is the nature of a mistake? Is it the same as an accident? Who made the Accent mistake—Loy, her editor, the printer, someone else?—and to what extent can it be said to be intentional? Is it meaningful? I believe that this printing error is legible, and that in the context of Loy’s poetry—which is full of similarly constructed mistakes—what appears to be a meaningless accident becomes a decipherable technique. “Chiffon” over “Pogrom” is a mistake, but this is not to say it lacks design. In order to understand what it means to design a mistake, however, it is necessary to examine certain assumptions about manuscripts, authorial intentions, contingency, and post-War constructions of meaning in art. What follows, therefore, identifies elements of Loy’s poetics more broadly and traces their recurrence in the printing error, suggesting that what appears haphazard there is consistent with a design method.

For instance, the identification of any mistake, and Accent’s is no exception, seems to demand correction by consultation with an authoritative manuscript. It is impossible, however, to consult any such manuscripts in this case or many of Loy’s others because Loy left few complete versions of them. She may have come to the

palimpsest out of necessity, led by editors who continually left deep footprints in her work due to their ineptness in treating the radical ambiguity with which she replaced authorial agency. Thus, though it is tempting to criticize Loy's editors for their irresponsible poetic ecology, doing so would trivialize the poet's effort to provoke them. Her poetic process was singularly resistant to the conventional editorial model of catching and correcting mistakes, because error of a kind particularly enticing to editors was Loy's star innovative device; she loved to misspell, misprint, and disarrange, writing that she had a "subconscious obsession that [she] was being dishonest if [she] ever used a combination of words that had been used before."<sup>2</sup> She disavowed any understanding of grammar ("I don't know what a participle is for instance—how can I find out?"), and generally aimed "to make a foreign language" out of English.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Robert McAlmon "corrected" the willfully misspelled title of Loy's collected poems, *Lunar Baedeker*, (he used instead the standard spelling, "baedeker") just as he and others presumably altered throughout her work Loy's signature grammatical and syntactical gaffes. Of course, it's hard to say for certain what happened to Loy's poetry since it was disseminated, like Emily Dickinson's, outside the publishing circuit.<sup>4</sup> Most of it wasn't published at all, and when it was, acquaintances like Carl Van Vechten and Gilbert Neiman typically initiated the submission. Thus were Loy's antinomian methods plagued by erasure, though in what follows I'll argue that Loy's authorship was predicated on erasure. Her most recent editor, Roger Conover, claims that she "conceptualized authorial erasure long before 'theory' did" (169), and indeed, towards the end of her life she disavowed being an author at all: "Miss Loy says she is a painter but everyone thinks she is a poet" (University of Illinois Library).<sup>5</sup> What does it mean to disavow being a poet

while continuing to write poetry? What did the identity of painter permit Loy to do that poetry did not? I want to suggest that Loy was associating herself in this claim with the painterly tradition of incorporating on the canvas, either as a subject or through collage, aspects of fashion and interior design. Associating herself with painting tapped into more adeptly than textual traditions modernist painting's energy for formal rearrangement. Loy reinvented the text as a textile.<sup>6</sup>

Loy's self-effacement departs from poststructuralist theories of erasure when we consider her treatment of subjectivity and intent. Marianne Moore's famous declaration about her own poetry, "omissions are not accidents," also applies to Loy's. Editorial poets—that is, poets who preserve and render visible the editing process as part of the poetic act—value intentionality in a way that is unfamiliar to those of us who are reading after Barthes and Foucault. The poets' understanding of intention, though, is not straightforwardly circumscribed by the outdated idea that a writer simply means to say something, and does. Consider Marianne Moore's poem "Those Various Scalpels" (1935). It has been speculated that the poem was about Loy, and in it, Moore explains what it means to disavow opportunity as a mode of sense construction.<sup>7</sup> The figure described in "Scalpels" has no use for coincidence; hers is the "hard majesty of that sophistication which/ is su-/ perior to opportunity" (Moore ll 29-30). She dissects destiny "with instruments.../...more highly specialized than the tissues of destiny" (ll 32-33). Loy's poems seem with their many errors to submit themselves to fate, inviting "corrections" that would suppress rather than express the authorial aim. But the cultivation of inaccuracy solicits mistakes from an editor to showcase through the hyperbole of excessive invitations to edit the gravity exerted on ideas by conventional

expression. The epithet “various” in Moore’s title, “Those Various Scalpels,” is a “neology,” describing not the number of scalpels but their function: to “vary” sense by varying the forms with which sense is made. Loy’s irregularities practice “a most dexterous discretion in the placement and replacement of...phrases” by an “uncompromised intellect [who] has scrubbed the meshed messes of traditional associations off them” (qtd. in Conover 203).<sup>8</sup> “English [which] had already been used by *some* other people” (emphasis in original) was in Loy’s mind already a cliché. The editor’s familiarity with common usage is irrelevant to one avoiding common usage. To edit Loy requires figuring out what she meant, which was not what words, syntax, or grammar meant for her. Her editors had above all to read for the particularities of the utterance, or risk destroying meaning rather than restoring it. Loy’s poems signify at the border between convention and divergence from convention, each requiring the simultaneous understanding of conventional and particular meanings. It makes sense to say categorically of her poems that they are mistakes (as opposed to saying that they contain them), insofar as a mistake is by definition the convergence of established norms with some digression from them. Loy “makes mistakes” by constructing moments in which the reader becomes aware of variation.<sup>9</sup>

Loy’s laborious adoption and exposure of the additions, omissions, and rearrangements usually seen as, at best, merely incidental to and, at worst, grave distortions of creative activity bear implications that challenge, in addition to poststructuralist critical conventions, key modernist concepts. Contingency, the occurrence of unanticipated events, has long been considered a staple of artistic imagination and expression among the modernist avant-garde. Chance is there depicted

as a libratory force, evidence of slips—and escapes—in the machine of ideological replication. Hence Dada’s attraction to trash, the refuse of normative consumption, Surrealism’s penchant for automatism as a vehicle for abandoning the regularities imposed by consciousness, Futurism’s love of the crash, with its dramatic rearrangements of destiny, or Vorticism’s hawkish exhortation of the violent reconfigurations of war. Loy is ubiquitously connected to these movements—to Dada, for instance, because of her friendship with Duchamp, who also arranged her last art show in New York, to Surrealism, because photographed by Man Ray, to Futurism, because its rival founders Giovanni Papini and F.T. Marinetti were her lovers, to Vorticism, because she wrote a poem about Wyndham Lewis’s “Starry Sky.” Her poems, however, complicate the notion of “unanticipated events” because she invents ways to “make” mistakes; contingency therefore is inadequate to describe her machinations. Like Pansy Osmond, the maddeningly immobile step-daughter to Isabel Archer whom Henry James calls “ingeniously passive and almost imaginatively docile” (James 348), Loy remakes passivity into a mode of creative action.<sup>10</sup>

Loy’s “various” scalpel is not just a way of slicing language apart to rearrange it; it slices experience up, into ever-smaller pieces of action. The subtleties of consciousness attending the minutia of action are reflected in images of somnambulism, which figure heavily in Loy’s poetry. Consider the female figure in the first of the “Three Moments in Paris” poems. She nods off to the sound of male Futurist voices arguing. But by “understanding nothing/ Sleepily” she catches “the thread of the argument” in her physical assumption of a “mental attitude.” Her torpor is a challenge to the futurist “theories of plastic velocity.”<sup>11</sup> *La Somnambuliste*, barely mobile, is Loy’s muse, just as

she was Djuna Barnes's in the figure of Robin Vote, the anti-hero of Nightwood. Miss Vote is a symbol for democratic action, ironically assigned to Barnes's most sedentary character. Vote generates, however, the most narrative action, though this action seems, deceptively, to be something that happens to her rather than something she causes because her movements are so small as to be indecipherable. Loy responds perversely to the avant-garde injunction: "Life, more life than ever before, is the objective" (39).<sup>12</sup> Instead of embodying new velocities Loy, a "Curie/ of the laboratory/ of vocabulary" ("Gertrude Stein" ll 1-3), discovers movement in smaller, apparently still, even inorganic units.

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In the preceding section, we examined methods and assumptions across Loy's poetry whose presence urge her readers to reorient our understanding of the mistake layering "Chiffon" over "Pogrom," suggesting we might read it as a mistake enacting a complicated form of intention. As Walter Benn Michaels has pointed out, textual studies that are unable to ascribe a determinate authorial intention to the text flounder in their attempts to construct meaning—or, at least, they fail to ascribe what he would deem a meaningful construction of meaning.<sup>13</sup> For Michaels it ought to matter, for instance, whether the Puritan minister Thomas Shepherd intended us to "read" the eighty-six blank pages between the upside-right and upside-down portions of the manuscript of his Autobiography.<sup>14</sup> I have argued that in order to understand Loy's "designs," in both senses of the word, we have to redefine, or at the very least broaden, our understanding of how intention can be managed and expressed. We also have to question the conventional notion of "disinterestedness" as the primary directive in aesthetic creation. As Tobin

Siebers argues, artists do not and should not always control every element of the creation of their work, yet theoretical models still assume that intelligence and technique are entirely at the disposal of the artist.<sup>15</sup> Siebers points out that this gives rise to a cult of the genius “more robust than any conceived during the Romantic period” (72). The notion of any attention to the editing process—indeed, of the writing or any creative process—as disrupting the continuity and completeness of the artwork is, one must admit, completely unreflective of the reality in which artworks are produced.

Having established a conceptual context for Loy’s editorial poetics, in the following section I want to place her ideas in the context of other writers, and to see all of them in the context of their historical moment. These, I believe, are connected contexts, and their connection is best illustrated by George Orwell’s 1984. Orwell’s novel, published in 1949 and based on notions of language Orwell had already begun to explore in “Politics and the English Language” (1946) some years earlier, coincides with Loy’s Accent palimpsest, and theorizes in the context of post-War historical problems the editorial methods employed by Loy and others. My reading of Orwell takes into account standard interpretations of that text as an historical allegory, but also goes beyond them to find in 1984 a commentary on the writing and editing methods by which Loy and other poets were inspired.

Loy reorients her sense of intention because her poems construct what would become an Orwellian conception of the accident as sinisterly erosive of one’s historical perspective and dangerously destructive of aesthetic superfluity. She personifies chance as “Hazard the swindler” and “the deathly handler” (“Letters,” ll 46, 47), perhaps primed to shrink from the accident as a source of aesthetic vitality by the accidental death or

disappearance of her lover, Arthur Cravan, in 1918. The event continued to haunt Loy both psychologically and aesthetically for decades; she was still writing about him in her 1949 meditation on language and loss, “Letters of the Unliving.”<sup>16</sup> While the modernist avant-garde treated accidents as a source of energy, Loy considered them the mechanism of totalitarian historical narratives, and tried to eliminate the category by absorbing them into revised notions of intentionality and meaning. Hers is an expansion of the human into the environment, similar to the cubist and impressionist depictions of landscapes and other still-life objects as unavoidably entangled with the mind. This form of anti-totalitarian aesthetics was modeled in 1984, where Big Brother is an editor, insulating the authoritarian state by correcting “every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance.” Winston Smith, an instrument of the state toiling in the “Ministry of Truth,” is charged with the apocalyptic task of rewriting history in order to pursue the definition of truth in the novel as generated through formal and narrative consistency. Textual inconsistencies prohibit conceptual consistency, which Orwell depicts, in attributing the goal to Big Brother, as a totalitarian instrument. Totalitarianism is in the present, in the extension of the present backward and forward to eliminate time, and thereby, to eliminate change: “How could you make an appeal to the future when not a trace of you, not even an anonymous word scribbled on a piece of paper, could physically survive?” Winston’s work can as easily be seen in quotidian terms as an editor applying the process of “continuous alternation” to “newspapers, ... books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound tracks, cartoons, photographs.” Each is “assembled and collated,” “reprinted,” “the original copy destroyed, and the corrected copy placed on the files in its stead.” The simple editorial

function of correction, the production of true texts, takes on a sinister air, dystopia generated by the treatment of “all history [as] a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as necessary” (41).

The whole idea of “the misprint” becomes part of a totalitarian impetus to correction, subscription—in defiance of historical inconsistencies—to an aboriginal truth, depicted by Orwell as a great forgery:

Books, also, were recalled and rewritten again and again, and were invariably reissued without any admission that any alteration had been made. Even the written instructions which Winston received, and which he invariably got rid of as soon as he had dealt with them, never stated or implied that an act of forgery was to be committed; always the reference was to slips, errors, misprints, or misquotations which it was necessary to put right in the interests of accuracy. (42)

Literary inaccuracy is the antidote to Big Brother’s language, Newspeak, defined by Winston’s friend Syme as produced by “cutting...language down to the bone” (53). Newspeak eliminates linguistic excess, the source of conceptual variety. Big Brother’s “beautiful...destruction of words” (52)—described in the discourse of aesthetic value—“narrow [s] the range of thought” (53) in contrast with the aesthetic of superfluity emblemized by Shakespeare, whose inefficient language in Orwell and other dystopian novels of the era produces minds that wander outside the totalizing limits of an authoritarian regime.<sup>17</sup> Editing, defined as the correction of “slips, errors, misprints” unaccompanied by any admission of alteration, is the paradigm which produces Newspeak, the politicized aesthetic of destruction which visibly edited work would supersede. If Winston hadn’t “scraped clean and reinscribed” his texts, for instance, an

entire history of incongruities would challenge Big Brother's effort to create an eternal present. Subtly combating the editorial state, Winston's only hope is the palimpsest, suggesting that no matter how often a text is scraped clean there will remain some material remnant of the past for scrutiny to descry.

Winston's rebellion appears to be defeated, in the end, but Orwell's postscript from the future confirms the postscript's procession from an anterior with a future, foreshadowed not by grand, sweeping resistance but by barely measurable acts: the little speck of "an identifiable grain of whitish dust" placed on the book where he writes, "as though by automatic action," "his pen...[sliding] voluptuously over the smooth paper," "in large neat capitals—

**DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER**  
**DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER**  
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**DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER**

over and over again, filling half a page" (Orwell 18-19, bold type in original). The "automatic action" of writing in the journal is paradoxically Winston's most lasting act of resistance because combined with the speck of dust, conventionally emblematic in its tiny weightlessness of random meaninglessness, Orwell is able to miniaturize action and habitualize intent. Thus Winston is a "man of action" less in starting a revolution—an effort that always fails in *1984*—than in his recalibration of rebellious action into a smaller unit of measurement: the "grain," or speck of dust.

Mina Loy's archive abounds with specks. They trade the accident, meant to be edited, with artful mistakes, designed to be experienced. Conover summarizes the "editorial guidelines" to his 1999 edition of the poems, called *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*—finally properly misspelled, an excavation of the mistakes Loy meant to make—as the story of "invisible texts behind texts, lost spellings behind corrections, secret erasures behind revisions" (169). The poet's correspondence with various editors reveals that Loy was considerably anxious that aspects of her work that resembled trash not be discarded like trash. Adopting an Orwellian aesthetic of recycling, Loy replaces Orwell's "slip" with the "scrap." Writing to Charlie Ford about the reprinting of "her scrap" from "Der Blinde Junge" in the Little Magazine *View* she pleaded:

You promised me not to reprint [the poem] without this note (see below) [sic]. You did not mention it at Gaby's party, so I thought you were not using it. Now, on the phone, I hear there is no room for the note, that the scrap can more easily be taken out. If there really is no room—it must be taken out. (Charlie Ford papers, box 1, folder 8).

The "scrap" Loy refers to, in syntax confusing whether she means by "it" that the scrap or the entire poem must be "taken out" like the trash, describes the circumstances of the poem's composition in 1922. According to the note, Loy wrote the poem after a ball during which Marcel Duchamp is said to have climbed a paper festoon into the musician's gallery. The poem's publication caused a "bewildering uproar as to the Base immorality of the modernists." On the occasion of this insult, at a second party, Duchamp—in an act Loy declares is committed "In Memorium of that Era"—"let fall his 'favour'—a miniature American flag, into his champagne." Loy's note to Ford,

reminding him of his promise not to reprint “Der Blinde Junge” without the descriptive “scrap,” describes an example of Loy’s tendency to recycle her poems by recontextualizing them, as well as her habit of affixing things, collage-like, to her writing—treating the “text” like a sculpture, an installation piece, or the ancient and medieval parchments to which the technique of palimpsest were applied. While “slips” are specks meant to be corrected, “scraps” are specks that can be collected. They also import an element of the past into the present, to be re-experienced there as an aspect of the present. Notably, Loy’s scraps are less about reminding their perceivers of an original context than creating, through recycling, a new one.

Gertrude Stein also valorizes the “scrap” as distinct from “trash,” writing in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas:

Gertrude Stein had at that time a wretched little typewriter which she never used. She always then and for many years later wrote on scraps of paper in pencil, copied it into French school note-books in ink and then often copied it over again in ink. It was in connection with these various series of scraps of paper that her elder brother once remarked, I do not know whether Gertrude has more genius than the rest of you all, but one thing I have always noticed, the rest of you paint and write and are not satisfied and throw it away or tear it up, she does not say whether she is satisfied or not, she copies it very often but she never throws away any piece of paper upon which she has written. (Autobiography 52)

Stein’s scraps are palimpsests, layered by the accumulation of the same words written in pencil and pen, revised again by simple tracing. The act of rewriting is likened (indeed, it is simultaneous with) the act of rereading; unlike Henry James, Stein’s precedent in the

author as reader who alters the original to fit with the frame of mind of the future reader, Stein acknowledges no difference between writer and reader, implying that writing and reading are indistinguishable—the reader/editor *is* the writer, can only read from within the mind of the writing. Intriguingly, the multiple layers of Stein’s texts are all exactly the same, seeming at first to imply by indistinguishable first and final copies the kind of continuous present that Orwell associates with fascism. And indeed, in “Composition as Explanation” Stein declares outright her desire to evoke a “continuous present” in artworks which forbid the capacity of remembering. Her methods, however, are more Orwellian (that is, more compatible with Orwell’s ideal) than they might seem; Winston’s automatic writing in his journal is, in fact, quite “Steinian.” For Stein the continuous present is generated in visibly edited work that does away with the paradigm of correction. Stein never slips, erases, or misprints, nor does she subscribe to a method of revision predicated on “scrap[ing] clean and reinscrib[ing] exactly as often as necessary” (Orwell 41). Instead, she includes all syntactical permutations in the “original” text, making the first text “always already” a revision. Whereas in another author’s manuscript we might read: “One whom some were [certainly] following was one who was [certainly] [completely] charming,” in Stein we read:<sup>18</sup>

One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was certainly completely charming. (“Picasso” 282).

Stein would write the syntactical permutations on a scrap once and copy the same version—again and again—in pen. She explains that her writing, which like Winston’s in the notebook appears to be “automatic,” involves a process of discovery to which method is indispensable. The automaton is, like a somnambulist, not mindless but entirely mindful: it is a figure for a body lost in thought. To read Stein we adopt the thoughts of the text, just as Loy’s editors had to read for the utterance that had never been made before instead of meanings already generated by use in the form of grammatical conventions. The goal for a reader of Stein is to inhabit the text not as product but as a process, to experience it from start to finish not as readers but as authors, or like the author. Stein’s texts are meant to suffocate the reader’s mind and subject it to her texts’: she presses out the reader’s breath in its grammatical and syntactical synchronization to her sentences.<sup>19</sup> In reading one cannot exist outside this mind or one will lose the text’s process and its thoughts, one will subject it—as Loy’s editors did—to thoughts that already exist, can only be remembered, as opposed to new thoughts that arrive through an encounter with meticulously rearranged language: “Composition is the difference which makes each and all of them then different from other generations and this is what makes everything different otherwise they are all alike and everybody knows it because everybody says it” (“Composition as Explanation” 513). Here Stein ironizes the imagined capacity for free thinking by any other method but her own, noting that conventional demands for original thoughts occur in words that have already been used before: “everybody says” them. Stein, a true formalist, doubts the originality of any thought expressed in language which has, to echo Loy, “already been used by *some* other people.” Thus when Stein explains that her compositions create a “continuous present” (527),

though it may seem her scraps thus challenge Orwell's hope for a sense of historical transformation, Stein's scraps actually produce it by ensuring that nothing is merely "remembered," which would imply that the work of history could be complete, but rather that everything is always "beginning and beginning and beginning" (518).

The scrap is likewise an important configuration for the perpetual beginning in Loy's archive. Much of it is literally scrawled on scraps of stationery and laboratory paper. Loy compared herself to Sappho, writing of her "Songs to Joannes" (1917) that they were "*the* best since Sappho" (Conover 188, emphasis in original) and generally seeming to see her work as an assortment of fragments available, like the pieces of newsprint Picasso affixed to paintings, for collage. The Sapphic effect of the assembled scraps can only have been manufactured; Loy's poems aren't thousands of years old, and her stationery is perfectly intact in other archives. Thus what would otherwise be a manuscript in its fragmentation is converted into curious, multi-dimensional objects that can be held, collected, assembled and reassembled. In this sense they are like the other objects in Loy's archive, many of which are stamped and notarized with dates from the 1940s. They include cut-out silhouettes, lamp shade designs, plans for a "corselet" that would reshape the female figure after middle age, paper dolls, two "build your own alphabet" games, the design for a textile patterned with a chiaroscuro "victory 'V,'" an hourglass made of cardboard and glitter, the plans for a "blotter bracelet for office workers," a new manufacturing material called "chatoyant," and a letter requesting copyright for a musical motif "composed round the lyrical line 'coloured folk have de moon in their eyes.'"<sup>20</sup> The presence of the various letters requesting copyright—most of which are not accompanied by realized objects, and some of which (like the musical

motif) are not meant to be—suggests that Loy possessed an intriguing sense of the relationship between language and form, as though it was not enough merely to describe things. Copyrighting her design plans made the descriptions themselves into something more three-dimensional than a conventional text: the official document (an original) and not the reproducible words is what matters. The copyrighted text becomes a thing, or scrap, emphasizing the importance of the particular piece of paper.

As a scrap, a dimensional text, must be assembled as much as read, it makes sense to call the product of their assembly textiles, making Loy not their author but their designer.<sup>21</sup> Assembly is important in her archive, bulging with patented design plans that control it, and in poems like “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,” an autobiographical epic in which Loy’s father, a tailor, prominently figures. The arrangement and rearrangement of forms is enabled by scraps that can be recombined, creating a kind of “visual” or, more aptly, a “material” literature. Consider the scrap attached to “Der Blinde Junge,” describing Duchamp’s flag drowned in champagne. The message is clear: nationalism, patriotic fervor, politics and other “contents” are submerged in champagne, the emblem of sophistication, which is the art of subordinating content to expeditious formal arrangements. In other words, truth is submitted to rhetoric.<sup>22</sup> Instead of telling us what Love does, she tells us what he wears: “audacious/ fuschia,/ orgies of orchid” (“Mass Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street,” ll 21-23). Peopled not by heroes, but dandies, mannequins, harlequins, and other “walking dolls” (ll 53), the poems describe thought as a mental illumination produced by “imperious jewellery” (sic) (“Apology of Genius,” ll 33) and the value of the soul is evaluated, like gems, by its “still [shine]” (ll 26). Particularly in the poems written between 1942 and 1949, the era Conover describes as Loy’s

exploration of the “compensations of poverty,” Loy had abandoned the salons of Natalie Barney and Mabel Dodge for the street, opting to live as a homeless woman. The shift should be understood less as an experiment with economic identity than with etymology, an extrapolation of her lexical and grammatical experiments into corporeality. Loy loved etymologies, and countless critics have remarked that one cannot read her without a dictionary. The imagery of “glamour” is a pun, an unspoken rhyme with “grammar”; the two words share a root in 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish “grammarye,” referring to the magical art of shape-shifting believed to be practiced by gypsies.<sup>23</sup> Loy studies the grammar of the human body, its mutable syntactical forms. Recycled trash becomes the ultimately glamorous object: its former identity annihilated, only the shape matters.

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A piece of glamorous trash, the palimpsest made of “Chiffon Velours” and “Photo After Pogrom” resembles Duchamp’s ready-mades in its witty combination of found objects into art objects via the “magic” of reassembly. In this text, or textile, designed for Accent shortly after World War II, two apparently inimical poems are woven together by printing and pasting lines 19-23 of “Chiffon” over the last twelve lines of “Pogrom.”<sup>24</sup> The poems were written separately in 1944 and c. 1945, respectively, and sent to Accent along with three others: “Ephemerid,” “Aid of the Madonna,” and “Hilarious Israel,” the former published in 1946 and the latter two in the same issue as “Chiffon” over “Pogrom.” The novelist Gilbert Neiman submitted them after meeting Loy in New York in 1945 at a dinner arranged by Henry Miller. He wrote to Loy suggesting that she send him several poems, which he then forwarded, with her permission, to Accent. These poems, which were accepted by the magazine, were the only of those written during

Loy's fertile period in the 1940s to be published in that decade, and marked her return to publication after thirteen years. Several of the World War II-era poems were published over a decade later, in a magazine founded by Neiman, called *Between Worlds: An International Magazine of Creativity*; "Pogrom" was one of them. While Loy referred to the proofs for "Ephemerid" and "Israel" as "the first perfect proofs I ever received (sic)," (Kerker Quinn archive, University of Illinois), she apologized for not receiving in time to correct the proofs containing the misprinting of "Photo" and Chiffon," and informed her editor that she was enclosing "the latter part of Madonna which was lacking (& The end of Chiffon Velours—which from the line 'Trimmed with a sudden burst' was part of another poem." Accent, however, had already gone to press, so the copies that readers received contained the proper lines from "Chiffon" pasted over the misaligned verses from "Photo."

Kerker Quinn's correspondence with James Laughlin makes it clear that Accent, like many other small presses, was struggling due to the formidable expense of paper during World War II. Accent was disqualified for public funding and eschewed for support by independent presses that "didn't see any sense to publishing a non-profit magazine for scattered aesthetes," especially during a time of war (Kerker Quinn to James Laughlin, 10 June 1942). Accent was kept alive by New Directions' advertisements and cash loans. Possibly it was cheaper to correct a misprint with a fragment of paper than by reprinting an entire page. The fragmentation allowed one sheet of paper to correct multiple copies of the magazine. This resourceful conservation is consistent with Loy's notion of the "compensations of poverty"; it makes sense that she would put scarcity to work in the construction of aesthetic superfluity.

Many elements of the palimpsest similarly make sense. To acknowledge the haphazard circumstances of its origin is not to say it lacks design. Gilbert Neiman, one of Loy's closest readers, thought the "poem" he sent to Kerker Quinn made sense, and Quinn, who published the most innovative poets of his era, accepted the piece for publication. Loy, who did correct the mistake, expressed her opinion on the error thus: "How surrealist!" The exclamation integrates the palimpsest into an aesthetic tradition and seems to take pleasure in the combination. The particular tradition she chooses values the "automatic" act as one produced not by the absence of thought but by individuals lost in thought. Too, she talks about the poems Neiman submitted in units of "parts" and notions of "place": "I am enclosing the latter part" and the "verses you recived (sic) in their rightful place." This suggests that she didn't think of her work in units of the whole, but rather in units of the scrap. Her characteristically erratic spelling—she spells "received" "recieved" and "recived" in the same sentence—also a habit in her poems, make it difficult to determine when it is correct to correct any errors of hers. Other elements of the palimpsest also resonate with the aspects of Loy's method which we have already examined. For instance, "Chiffon" over "Photo" incorporates in the attachment of one to another poem aspects of the scrap, like the one attached to "Der Blinde Junge," as well as components of the design plan, like Loy's design for the dotted "Victory 'V'"—a textile that emphasized, like her penchant for lampshades, Loy's interest in transparency. Loy's "Sapphic" tendency to fragment and recombine her poems, as well as her habit of sending them, handwritten, to her friends, helps to explain how the poems were both broken into pieces, and ultimately recombined in an original printing pairing—without

even a stanza break—lines from antagonistic poems, one describing a pogrom and the other a fashion mannequin.

A few mysteries, however, remain. Accent received, accepted, typeset, and printed “Photo After Pogrom,” and then decided to run only part of it, beneath another poem, where it remained un-indexed, and unread, until 1961. But “Photo” would have fit better with the other two Jewish-themed poems published in the issue, whose juxtaposition Loy approved in a sideways-scrawled “scrap” attached to the top of her letter to Quinn: “I like very well the Israel and Madonna Being together.” “Chiffon”’s departure from those poems is no less radical than its difference from the thematic content of “Pogrom.” Loy, as anyone who wrote in arrangeable, recyclable units must be, clearly was thinking about “Being together.” But why would anyone who read these poems have thought their sense and language so similar as to have been plausibly the same poem, and why did Quinn choose to cover, in his correction of the mistake, the end of “Pogrom” instead of the beginning of “Chiffon”? These mysteries can be solved through close readings of the text(s), which provide in Steinian fashion an imprint of authorial “agency” insofar as agency is understood as a process of thought which is recorded in the arrangement of the poems.

“Chiffon Velours” begins: “She is sere,” evoking in its proximity to the “Chiffon” of the title an unspoken rhyme with “sheer.”<sup>25</sup> This suggests there is something to be seen underneath, as does the title’s near-homonym, *chiffonnière*, an eighteenth-century French work table fitted with several tiers of shallow drawers. Open one, and you might discover something inside. The word “sere” is in itself a kind of *chiffonnière* full of tiered meanings implicit in its unavoidable registry of homonyms, “seer” and “sear.”

Because “sere” is an uncommon word, and one that is used ungrammatically in the poem, readers are likely to flip through more familiar possibilities. “Seer,” for instance, is a clairvoyant, mythically one who speaks in riddles, suggesting that there is a riddle in the poem. Another familiar homonym, “sear,” is the process of scorching a surface—an allusion to images of holocaust, the importance of which motif in a poem about fashion I will revisit below. “Seer” is also a puckered fabric, as in seersucker, iterated in the woman’s unsmooth skin, a “web of wrinkles” (ll 6), and in the rough edges of the paste-over page. “Sere” is the botanical name for a series of changes in a plant’s life cycle; usually “a sere,” this denotation is virtually unrecognizable without the article, obfuscating the meaning that is literally spelled out, and thus inviting readers into a game of hide-and-seek where things are hidden in plain view. Perhaps this is the riddle proposed by the Seer, one similar to that delivered in Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Purloined Letter,” where the missing epistle vanishes in the mist of extreme visibility. Loy wrote elsewhere about both Poe and epistles, in “Poe” and “Letters of the Unliving.” An allusion to Poe, and indeed, to her own poem about Poe, which reflects in its depiction of “hour glass loves” as “corpses of poesy” the virgin corpses described in “Photo After Pogrom” (“the purposeless peace/ sealing the faces/ of corpses--//Corpses are virgin,” ll 16-19), sets up the conceit of inter-textual reading, directing us to look for meaning spread across multiple works.

Despite all of the evocations of tiers and sheerness, though, what we might imagine as the undergarment of the top textile remains hidden by the opacity of the second textile named in the text, “velours,” another name for velvet, and in some contexts, for fur. There is no such textile as “chiffon velours” because the component

compositions are immiscible, like the text constructed of two poems about, in the one case, a fashion mannequin, and in the other, a pogrom. Literary textiles, however, put anomalies to use as metaphors, the comparison of one thing to what it is not. Inaptitude produces figuration.<sup>26</sup> So woven into “Chiffon” are scraps of “Pogrom,” literally called in the former text “memorial scraps,” redeploying a word that has developed resonance in the context of the scrap attached to “Der Blinde Junge.” The scraps in “Chiffon” cover a mannequin, swathed in chiffon or *les chiffes* (rags, or scraps again). The mannequin rests “against the corner stone/ of a department store.” The reference to the corner stone, the foundation of a synagogue, compares the store to a synagogue, thereby “reflect[ing]” (ll 22) the sacred contexts of “Pogrom,” “Madonna,” and “Israel” onto “Chiffon,” in which the mannequin’s “black skirt/ glows as a soiled mirror” (ll 20-21).

“Chiffon Velours” is an elaborate metaphor, the figure for seeing one thing through the mirror of another in a perceptive act only heightened by the dissonance of the things compared. In it, Loy compares a vagabond to a partially disassembled mannequin with pinned-on clothes, tossed in a gutter made of “a yard of chiffon velours” (23). With “Photo,” Loy heightens the stakes of the comparison, suggesting visual commonality between the lifeless mannequin on the street and a neighborhood strewn with corpses after a pogrom. The metaphor is obscene, and grows increasingly so as it becomes clear that “Photo After Pogrom” registers on both literal and metaphorical levels. The “hacked” figures in the poem, blown apart by violence, are depicted simultaneously in the tone of documentary realism and hyperbolic melodrama (“hacked to utter beauty/oddly by murder”). The women are mannequins, or models, “hacked” by photo editors to “utter,” or total, physical perfection. The poem, which includes a fair share of

purple prose, is itself a “hack” job, evoking the poor writing of the hack journalist transfigured into something beautiful. Loy contemplates the “odd[ness]” of finding beauty in a hack-job, comparing it to fashion photo-editing: “Tossed on a pile of dead,/ one woman, her body hacked to utter beauty/ oddly by murder,// attains the absolute smile/ of dispossession” (ll 5-10). Both a literal corpse and a photographed woman, Loy articulates beauty in the language of the pogrom. If beauty is produced by the fragmentation of the human body, the scene of violence is like Greek ruins, its disabled statuary the emblem of western art and achievement. Loy’s aestheticized violence works in two ways, by turning a pogrom into fashion editing, but also by comparing fashion editing to a pogrom. As Poe famously put it, “there is no more poetical subject in the world than the death of a beautiful woman.” The production of beauty through editing is, as in Orwell, associated with authoritarian destruction. The hack job emerges as an ideal, but the “purposeless peace” attained by the end of the poem is only possible by “sealing the faces/ of corpses” in a return to an image that is closed, caulked, and hermetically sealed. “Unassumed composure” facilitates the “erasure of fear”; by composing the fragments, Loy suggests that the decay of the corpses ceases. The “virgin corpses” of the final stanza impart the scenario with physical purity and promise. The pogrom’s chaos, the multiplicity of fragmented bodies, the putrid decay of wholeness: all are finally recombined into “one woman.”

Just as Loy emphasizes the production of “one woman” in “Photo,” she describes the tattered, age-ravished mannequin in “Chiffon” as “model[ing]” the “last creation,// original design/ of destitution.” The projects of making and unmaking are sutured together: the destruction and construction of forms creating the necessary tension through

which meaning derives. Loy's turn to what Leo Bersani calls the "culture of impoverishment"—literally, in her evocation of the mannequin as homeless woman, and figuratively in her destruction of bodily integrity represented by the Pogrom's remains—offers a form of post-War hope by using the disintegration of cultural and bodily forms to create the possibility of new forms. Post-war ontological devastation is recuperated through the recognition that the world's innumerable contents only derive meaning through the interaction of forms with other forms. Rather than interpreting subjective disintegration as inaugurating a new postmodern meaninglessness, Loy saw fragmentation as part of the necessary breaking apart of forms that must precede metaphorical invention.

Loy's evocation of broken classical statuary becomes a way of innervating art, or using metaphorical perception to innervate history, thereby enabling Stein's continuous present of "beginning and beginning and beginning." The fractured body is recomposed not through their violent subjection to an artificial whole, but rather a whole that can only be achieved metaphorically—metaphor being the figure for necessary discontinuity, a wholeness that can only be achieved by the assembly of parts that don't go together, thereby highlighting the artificiality and endless recombability of anything made by them. Corpses are virgins because they don't mean or create anything—thus is the promise of new life, new meaning, derived from the meaninglessness and destruction of holocaust. Unlike Adorno, who thought that silence was the only response to holocaust, these poems suggest that metaphor is a response. The poems are invested in reassembling disjointed parts to make an endlessly awkward meaning and always imperfect self. Merging Christian and Jewish mythologies, Loy renders holocaust the scene of a virgin

birth when new ways of being are extrapolated out of reassembled fragmented forms. Georg Simmel's prescient 1918 essay, "The Conflict in Modern Culture," explains the paradox as a conflict between the elements of culture through which life "realizes itself" (375)—"works of art, religions, sciences, technologies, laws, and innumerable others"—with "the restless rhythm of life" itself. While cultural forms provide a framework for creative life, that life "soon transcends them." In Loy's textile, the symbol of the "infinite fruitfulness of life," the constant movement between "death and resurrection—between resurrection and death" (Simmel 376) is supplanted by "Pogrom's" struggle "against form as such, against the *principle* of form" (377, emphasis in original) and finally recycled to reveal a new kind of form. The principle of holocaust is to "[agitate] against [the possibility of life] being directed into any fixed forms whatever"—what Simmel calls "the form of formlessness."

So how is it possible to reconstruct a soul—Loy uses this word as often as Dickinson and Whitman—in a world devoted to the unmaking of people? The metaphorical recombination of holocaust with fashion is Loy's way of preserving the soul in post-modernity by clinging to the notion that sense is possible, constructing meaning via the process that seems to render it impossible. Without the pogrom there would be no tension, no dissonance, with fashion and no possibility of metaphor. Metaphor becomes the receptacle, literally the "vehicle" of the soul, of sense, of everything the age of nuclear and genocidal holocaust obliterates. Loy's poverty poems reaffirm life by transferring more and more of life to its periphery, moving the receptacle of interiority toward "the externals of life" (314). Understanding holocaust in the language of fashion, precedence for which exists in the figure of the Jewish tailor (of which Loy's father was

one), reinvigorates the human interior by subjecting it to the principle of cultivation. In both “Photo” and “Chiffon,” the withered individual attains “the maximum of inner freedom, a complete saving of the center of life.” Fashion becomes the “marvelous expediency” which “like the law...affects only the externals of life, only those sides of life which are turned to society” (314).

The design flaw in Loy is thus her way of exploring a design flaw in modernist history: the post-War problem of total annihilation, the advent of formlessness.<sup>27</sup> She overexposes editorial praxes to elicit mistakes, in order to generate jarring metaphors. Metaphorical incongruity fosters Loy’s method for replacing by recombining old forms with new forms as a mode of ontological recovery, thereby turning formlessness into the possibility of new formal combinations, which generate a renewed sense of being. “War,” explains Gertrude Stein in Paris France (1940), “is full of fashion” and the “quality of fashion [is] profoundly inherent in war” (41). “War makes fashions” because it is the world-unmaking anterior to world-making. The important quest is for what Simmel calls “the term which encompasses the relative contrast between war and peace: that absolute peace which might encompass this contrast” (393). For Loy, “the purposeless peace/sealing the faces/ of corpses—” (“Photo” ll17-19) can be turned into an “original design” (“Chiffon” ll 14) or a “last creation” (“Chiffon” ll 13) when the “scraps” (ll 16) are recycled with the help of such tools as “a safety-pin” (ll 8). Metaphors are the linguistic equivalent of a safety-pin, holding together a world whose sense must be constructed aesthetically rather than dogmatically by totalitarian religious and political systems. Loy’s version of the claim is further articulated in “Ephemerid,” published in Accent the year before “Chiffon” over “Photo,” a poem which emphasizes the

importance of generative recombination while clinging in the trailing first stanza to the unknowable future produced by it:

The Eternal is sustained by serial metamorphosis,  
even so Beauty is  
metamorphosis surprises! (ll 1-3)

**Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup> Accent was a literary magazine edited by Kerker Quinn out of the University of Illinois. I have personally examined a copy containing the palimpsest, and have confirmed the existence of numerous others through correspondence with libraries housing first-edition publications of Accent. Roger Conover and Marisa Januzzi have also personally examined copies containing the paste-down (see fn 42 in The Lost Lunar Baedeker Poems, ed. Roger Conover (Farrar, Straus and Girous: 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Julien Levy, quoted from a private collection in Conover.

<sup>3</sup> Conover also notes Loy's inconsistent spelling in "Songs to Joannes"—she uses both the British "colour" and American "color" in the same stanza, for instance. She likewise blended the syntactical structures of the five languages in which she was fluent, emphasizing her satisfaction with the effect of this technique: "Having no knowledge of rules to go by—I feel there's something wrong—& at the same time something right" (quod in Conover 173). Loy also collected linguistic curios and archaisms, like "flumes, benison, baldachin, scholiums, ilix, slaked, forward, gravid, phthisis, cymphanous, sialogogues, agamogenesis, filliping, Peris."

<sup>4</sup> Loy's publication record constitutes only about a third of the total body of her work. Roger Conover's "Editorial Guidelines and Considerations" in The Lost Lunar Baedeker Poems also detail the difficulty of editing in the absence of an original manuscript—few of her poems have one. He also cites, in the footnote to "Apology of Genius," Yvor Winters' declaration (in "Mina Loy," *The Dial* 70, June 1926, pp 496-99) that "Emily Dickinson will have been [her] only forerunner." Winters ostensibly refers to Loy's place in American poetry alongside Whitman and Williams, but Conover's emphasis on the

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dissemination of Loy's poems mainly in handwritten letters among friends, some of whom sent them to editors, can also be compared to Dickinson's evasion of official publishing circuitry—for more on which, see Susan Howe's My Emily Dickinson (North Atlantic Books: 1985).

<sup>5</sup> In an interview for "Face of Aspen," collected in the Kerker Quinn archive at the University of Illinois.

<sup>6</sup> For a thorough discussion of the miscontextualization of Loy as a poet (rather than a visual artist) see Raphael Schulte's " 'Face of the Skies': Ekphrastic Poetics of Mina Loy's Late Poems" at [http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/iacd\\_2003F/g\\_am\\_poetry/loy/Face%20of%20the%20skies.pdf](http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/iacd_2003F/g_am_poetry/loy/Face%20of%20the%20skies.pdf) Schulte lists all of the exhibits and salons to which Loy contributed visual art, and provides a very insightful reading of Loy's ekphrastic poetry—including "Chiffon Velours" (though he does not observe or otherwise discuss "Photo After Pogrom." Other scholarship on modernist textiles and painting is also relevant here; I'm thinking of Richard Martin's Cubism and Fashion (Metropolitan Museum of Art: 1999), which contextualizes flatness in Picasso within fashion's departure from the radically three-dimensional figures facilitated by hoop skirts, bustles, and other technologies of bodily expansion in favor of the two-dimensional physique popularized by flappers' smooth, long-waisted dresses. Additionally, Matisse: His Art and His Textiles, by Ann Dumas, Jack Flam, and Lemi Rabrusse (Royal Academy Books: 2005) discusses Matisse's penchant for textiles, claiming that his colorful interiors were vehicles for the replication and juxtaposition of textile designs. These are literal examples of the incorporation of design techniques into painting, but of course, the prevalence of all kinds of expressionist

abstractions in modernist painting suggests that design was central to the medium at a very basic level. Schulte contends that Loy, who went to art school with Klee and Kandinsky, traversed in print, painting, and design post-Impressionist, Expressionist, and other avant-garde styles over the course of the early twentieth-century. Schulte questions the absence of Loy in art historical scholarship on modernism, but concedes the problem presented by a figure whose written work seems to have outlived her other artworks. Neither Loy's poems nor her painting and other design pieces were made to last.

<sup>7</sup> Loy was often figured as a scalpel by her friends and fellow authors. Djuna Barnes, Loy's close friend, caricatured Loy as "Patience Scalpel" in The Ladies Almanack (Carcenet Press: 2006), a parody of Natalie Barney's Left Bank salon of the 1920s.

<sup>8</sup> Loy actually made this latter remark about Gertrude Stein, but Conover points out that they could as easily apply "to her own literary exercise." There clearly existed an affinity and sympathy between the two poets; Loy published a lengthy epigraph on Stein, who declared that only Mina Loy understood "without the commas" (in Conover 203 and Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy, Carolyn Burke, California UP: 1997: 130).

<sup>9</sup> For more on modernist experiments with the principle of variation see Patrizia C. McBride's "The Game of Meaning: Collage, Montage, and Parody in Kurt Schwitters' Mertz" in Modernism/Modernity (14:2: 249-272).

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of "bad faith" (in Essays in Existentialism (Cidatel Press: 1993: 160-164) affords a theoretical model for the exchange of active for passive agency. For Sartre, what psychoanalysis would call the unconscious is actually a disavowal of consciousness, an effort to pretend that something one has caused has merely happened to one. In Sartre's example, a lady flirting with her lunch companion allows her hand to rest

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“unconsciously” in his, denying the agency and freedom of the act and becoming in this denial an object. Sartre believes she does this to avoid responsibility for the consequences of her choices, and of making further choices, and condemns individuals whose bad faith causes them to disavow their freedom. But Loy frequently experiments with the pleasures and possibilities inherent in becoming an object—literally, or of language, frequently even comparing her *corpus* to a corpse and otherwise soliciting the dead body as an image of authorship. Bad faith is for Loy a way of conceding the impossibility of fully accounting for the consequences or implications of the smallest acts, of subjecting herself to their minutiae.

<sup>11</sup> The idea that stillness, the “pose” of thought, is therefore indicative of (mental) action is prefigured in James’s Pansy Osmond in The Portrait of a Lady, Henry Adams’ “The Virgin and the Dynamo,” and Richardson’s aggressively static Clarissa (especially see Jolene Zigarovich in “‘Courting Death’: Necrophilia in Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa,” from Studies in the Novel, June 2000). Also see Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man—especially as depicted in Ross Posnock’s “Ralph Ellison, Hannah Arendt, and the Meaning of Politics” in The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison (Columbia UP: 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Wyndham Lewis in “A Review of Contemporary Art,” printed in BLAST 1915 (Black Sparrow Press: 1993: 38-47).

<sup>13</sup> I am referring to Michaels’ book, The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History (Princeton UP: 2004)

<sup>14</sup> This is an example from Susan Howe’s The Birthmark; Michaels offers it as an instance of the problem with failing to worry about intention. Though I agree with

Michaels's point, I don't agree with his reading of Howe; he believes that Howe does not concern herself with convincing argumentation about Shepherd's intent because Howe does not think it is relevant, but I believe that Howe offers persuasive evidence for attending to Shepherd in the context of his interests in space, blankness, disintegration, and silence. She does not depart from conventions of close reading, which assign meaning to indeterminate signs on the basis of their convincing relationship to other elements of the text. The tradition of counting parts of a book as part of the text is supportable if one sees Shepherd as a writer akin to the transcribers of medieval illuminated manuscripts, William Blake's illustrated manuscripts, Dickinson's homemade books, and Henry James's commentaries on the photographs accompanying his later novels as additions to (rather than replications of) the text. Howe's method, in this sense, is similar to my own in reading Loy's Accent palimpsest.

<sup>15</sup> In "Disability Aesthetics," Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory (7:2: 63-73).

<sup>16</sup> In this poem, Loy explores the letters of a dead or missing man as a metaphor for "erasure/ of the writer" (ll 12-13).

<sup>17</sup> Post-theory scholarship rendered, with its intolerance for questions of authorial identity, questions about Shakespeare's identity (especially the question of whether his plays were products of collaboration) completely irrelevant. The effect is oddly reactionary, permitting a post-Romantic cult of individual genius to survive by protecting the singularity of our great canonical author. Recent scholarship, however, has returned to the two-hundred-year-old contention that many of Shakespeare's plays were not written exclusively by Shakespeare (see Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays, by Brian Vickers, Oxford UP: 2004). Further research is

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required to determine the full context of dystopian authors' allusions to Shakespeare, but it is worth considering whether such references to the Bard in Orwell reflect the idea that Shakespeare is an example of the implicit (textual) totalitarianism of erasure. Reconsidering Shakespeare's texts along the lines for which Vickers argues renders them an example of the editorial poetics I'm describing, since the contributors to "Shakespeare" would not be considered correctors (editors) to be erased and overlooked, but contributors to a fundamentally collaborative text.

<sup>18</sup> It's hard to capture what I mean here without drawing the editorial markings, complete with arrows rearranging "certainly" and "completely," lines crossing through them, question marks indicating openness to reconsidering their ideal placement. The sentence should look more like a graph than a sentence. For more on Stein's graphics, see Gabrielle Dean's "Grid Games: Gertrude Stein's Diagrams and Detectives," in *Modernism/Modernity* (15:2: 317-341).

<sup>19</sup> See Lisa Siraganian's discussion of Stein's constructions of paintings as lacking any "feeling of air" in "Out of Air: Theorizing the Art Object in Gertrude Stein and Wyndham Lewis" (*Modernism/Modernity*: 10:4: 657-676).

<sup>20</sup> All of these objects are assembled in the Mina Loy archive at the Beinecke Library of Yale University. Some can also be viewed online at <http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/beinecke.LOY.con.html>

<sup>21</sup> She did, in fact, design literal textiles (the "Victory V" pattern), as well as lamp shades. She also owned a dress shop in Paris, perhaps explaining the number of poems about mannequins and fashion designs.

<sup>22</sup> Loy loves everything about rhetoric that contemporary rhetoricians hate. While scholars like Tom Miller declare that “Rhetoric is Not a Four-Letter Word” (York College Lecture, October 2006) and insist that the art associated with sophistry can be a force for goodness, Loy appreciates the obscenity implicit in what Wyndham Lewis referred to (in the war issue of BLAST!) as discourse “without any really fundamental issues...involved” (“Editorial,” 6). In this respect, she resembles the Vorticist sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska, who refused in his manifesto, “Vortex Gaudier-Bzreska,” to care for anything (even when fighting in the trenches) but “THE ARRANGEMENT OF SURFACES” (34 in BLAST 1915, *ibid*). In fact, Lewis thought all of WWI was a series of “blasts” (“BLAST finds itself surrounded by a multitude of other Blasts of all sizes and descriptions,” 5) that would rearrange the shape of Europe, and that war was, in this sense, no different from Vorticist art. Appropriately for one with so fine a sense of irony, Loy would return during WWII to such experiments with arrangement, publishing one of them in Accent, the magazine denied public and private funding alike by editors who “thought it was pretty silly to be concerned with literature in wartime” (Kerker Quinn to James Laughlin, 10 June 1942, University of Illinois).

<sup>23</sup> See my essay, “Glamour, and the ‘Fashionable Mind,’” in Soundings 89: 3-4 (2006).

<sup>24</sup> Many of Loy’s poems were published in Accent. See Conover pp 201-210 fn 39, pp 210 n 40 and pp 211 n 42.

<sup>25</sup> Chiffon is a soft sheer fabric, commonly used in evening gowns of the 1930s and 1940s.

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<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of this concept see Walker Percy's "Metaphor as Mistake" in The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do With the Other (Ticador: 2000).

<sup>26</sup> See Oren Izenberg's "Oppen's Silence, Crusoe's Silence and the Silence of Other Minds" in Modernism/Modernity (13: 1: 787-811) for a discussion of Oppen's response to this same problem. Izenberg, however—like Schulte, who also addresses the matter of ontological annihilation in Loy's post-War (I and II) poetry—emphasizes with Adorno and Benjamin the emergence of silence in post-War poetry as a response to incomprehensible developments in the culture of total destruction. I believe, in contrast, that Schulte mistakes Loy's turn to metaphor for a turn to silence; metaphorically speaking, language *resumes*—albeit in a different register—in her poetry. War, that is, creates the possibility for metaphorical language and its new register of meaning by fragmenting the world into pieces that can be creatively recombined. Sense, then, is pervasive in what post-modern criticism has identified as senseless; Loy's post-modern world, made by the culture of total annihilation, is one in which meaning is pervasive. Her poetry heralds a kind of post-secular return to "religious thinking" whereby everything is meaningful, just not according to any one dogmatic rubric (hence the mongrelization of religion in her pastiche of pagan, Christian, and Jewish imagery).



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