

Ornament for Serious Purpose: Mina Loy and Gaudy Consumer Culture

by

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Dedication Page

To my #1 and #3, Alpha, Omega, and Mountain Man Jim.

Table Of Contents

Abstract	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: “All The Virgin Eyes In The World”: Gaudy Spectacle	14
Chapter 3: “Refuse More Profuse Than Man”: Advertising, Extravagance And Waste	43
Chapter 4: “Mannequins, Harlequins”: Imitation And Hyperreality	70
Chapter 5: Conclusion	92
Bibliography	98

Abstract

Mina Loy's work explores the gaudiness of consumer culture in its spectacle, extravagance and underlying falsity. "Giovanni Franchi," "Three Moments in Paris" and "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots" question the perceptive powers and autonomy of Baudelaire's *flâneur* when applied particularly to the modern female subject. Moreover, "Hot Cross Bum" explores the excess involved in consumer extravagance, while "Feminist Manifesto" uses that extravagance to re-appropriate advertising towards Loy's own ends. Throughout, consumer culture is seen as a false veneer; ultimately, however, Loy admits the paradoxical reality of this false consumer culture, and its real implications on modern life in "On Third Avenue" and "Mass Production on 14th Street." Consequently, Loy gives a nuanced and sophisticated critique and exploration of consumer culture, and can be connected to theorists of spectacle like Guy Debord, of advertising like T.J. Jackson Lears, and to Baudrillard's hyperreality.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Mina Loy, if not the most well known modernist poet, was certainly one of the most interesting. In *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*, Carolyn Burke's landmark work in reviving Loy scholarship, Burke traces Loy's globe-hopping avant-gardism, from Italy to New York and from Futurism to Dadaism. Enigmatic and elusive, Loy was rumored to be "an invented artistic persona," (Lusty 245) and much of recent criticism has focused on proving that she was indeed real, tracing her life, her affairs, and her affiliations with feminism and Futurism (sometimes both together).¹ What has resulted, I argue, is a body of criticism that uses Loy's feminism and gender as central interpretive lenses.² Amanda Bradley, in her dissertation on Loy, writes, "My dissertation focuses on Loy as a woman and sometimes feminist as clearly as it does on Loy as a writer" (3) and names the project as a "feminist critical biography" in which "Loy's extravagant poetic reflects

¹ See Sheffield, Rob. "Mina Loy in Too Much Too Soon: Poetry/Celebrity/Sexuality/Modernity." *Literary Review: An International Journal of Contemporary Writing* 46.4 (2003): 625-35. Print.; Lusty, Natalya. "Sexing the Manifesto: Mina Loy, Feminism and Futurism." *Women: A Cultural Review* 19.3 (2008): 245-60. Print.

² See Smedley, C.. *Dirty language: Abjection and experimental writing in Walt Whitman, James Joyce, and Mina Loy*. Diss. University of California, Riverside, 2007. Dissertations & Theses: Full Text, *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2011.; Vermeer, Leslie Anne. *Mina Loy: The language of the body, the language of attack*. Diss. University of Alberta (Canada), 1997. Dissertations & Theses: Full Text, *ProQuest*. Web. 17 Jan. 2011.; Walter, Christina. "Getting Impersonal: Mina Loy's Body Poetics from 'Feminist Manifesto' to *Insel*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 55.4 (2009): 666-92. Print.; Roberts, Andrew Michael. "'How To Be Happy in Paris': Mina Loy and the Transvaluation of the Body." *Cambridge Quarterly* 27.2 (1998): 129-47.

her exaggerated style of living” (iv). Natalya Lusty also admits that Loy’s “legendary status still seems to overshadow the difficulty of her idiosyncratic voice” (245). It is not that this critical lens is erroneous; Loy was indeed personally concerned with the position of women in society, and Elisabeth Frost’s observation that “Loy develops an avant-garde poetics to combat the linguistic and cultural determinism she believed were destroying women’s lives” (30) is well taken. Loy often writes for, about, or to women, sometimes all at the same time, as in “Feminist Manifesto.” Yet this focus on feminism and biography are only two lenses, often used together, among many others.

Indeed there are disadvantages to positioning Loy in such a specialized position, with such a specialized audience, as I argue this position can limit her impact by narrowing the interpretations of her work to only what can be traced to her personal life or beliefs. Bradley reasons “Loy slipped into obscurity for decades” because of her “desire to remain incognito” (1). This may be true, but arguably Loy’s relatively minor stature among modernist poets, even today, is due to the ways the feminist and biographical perspectives have put a limited focus on her poetry rather than opening it up to new lenses – and Bradley affirms this by explaining Loy’s professional obscurity back to her own personal desire. These perspectives were, in fact, responsible for bringing Loy back into contemporary critical debates, and so their importance should not be underestimated. Now that Loy *is* back, however, there may be other ways to look at her.

If Loy’s poetry were looked at through a broader framework and attributed a broader audience and concerns, her poetry might appeal to different readers and

critics, and accrue different kinds of associations. This is not to say that in order to belong to some sort of modernist canon Loy's poetry must be whitewashed and universalized and so made palatable to old white men – this, I believe, is not even possible for a poetry as vibrant and volatile as Loy's. Rather, it is to say that Loy's poetry is rich enough to handle these various associations and frameworks, that her feminism and personality may even make for new frameworks, and that lenses that focus only on her feminism and personal life, valid as they may be, do not encourage a proliferation of associations that could enrich Loy's poetry.

The particular framework I would like to focus on here is Loy's attention to the concept of gaudiness, and how this relates to her concerns and criticisms of consumerism. Gaudiness, in fact, is much talked about when discussing Wallace Stevens, another modernist poet. Stevens, recognized as a multi-faceted poet, wrote that "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" was his favorite poem since it wore "a deliberately commonplace costume, and yet seems to me to contain something of the essential gaudiness of poetry" (263). Moreover, Jess Bowie has laid out a useful definition of what gaudiness means to Stevens' poetry. Interpreting the essential gaudiness of poetry as "The traditional analogy between ornaments and clothing, on the one hand, and metaphor and literary artifice on the other" (388), she writes that gaudiness is "ornament bestowed to no serious purpose," warning that "gaudy rhetoric with no substance, can be dangerous" (394). She further distinguishes gaudiness from decadence, arguing that "This ... should be distinguished from *Harmonium's* 'decadence' – there is now no sense of excess, or gaudiness for its own sake" (403), implicitly defining Stevens' gaudiness as something superficial,

superfluous and trivial next to decadence's more serious ornamentation that is not excessive but rather impressive. Although Elisabeth Oliver concurs that this is indeed how Stevens' gaudiness has been viewed, she adds that these poems "nevertheless differ significantly from the model of 'decorative nonsense' that Stevens' critics often make them out to be" (542).

Gaudiness, when dealing with Stevens, means that which is ornamental and designed to be looked at and involved in spectacle; that which is excessive; and above all that which is superficial, fake and related to nonsense. Accordingly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines gaudy as "Brilliantly fine or gay, highly ornate, showy. Now chiefly in disparaging sense: Excessively or glaringly showy, tastelessly gay or fine" as well as "full of trickery." Even here, then, gaudiness is defined by its spectacle, excess and fakery. Indeed, I argue that Loy, too, utilizes these same definitions of gaudiness and applies them to consumer culture, all while mirroring this gaudiness in her own writing. In so doing, she criticizes consumer culture as superficial while nonetheless involving her modernist poetic in it. Along the lines of Oliver's argument, then, Loy's employment of gaudiness serves an important function, and gaudiness becomes much more than the sum of its parts, not just amounting to "decorative nonsense" but serving as a complex critical tool by mirroring this gaudiness.

Loy's writing is a particularly salient entry point into the gaudiness of consumerism; Elisabeth Oliver notes that Loy's poetry was often "criticized for its 'artificial' and 'decorative' vocabulary" (528). As Bradley herself has pointed out, this use of extravagant gaudiness fits in quite well with Loy's life as well as her

poetics. As Bradley notes, “Contradiction, dramatics – what I call exaggeration and extravagance – were standard course for the behavior and writing patterns of Mina Loy” (1) and she also argues that “Loy’s poetic is extravagant in that it twists words into new meanings, combines many registers of language, and compacts language to complicate its potential meanings. Moreover, Loy’s philosophies of life were extreme” (2). Rob Sheffield also observes this, titling his article “Mina Loy in Too Much Too Soon” and positing that Loy “showed off constantly, hardly ever writing without overwriting. She queened it up with her arrogant wit, her snide eroticism, her verbal daring” (625). Couple this spectacle and extravagance with Loy’s elusive and almost legendary status, and her gaudiness is nearly palpable.

Yet again, to explain and interpret her gaudy poetic only as a function of her extravagant life is to still rely on the same biographical, personal framework that has been used before. Instead, the gaudiness of Loy’s poetry, by mirroring the gaudiness of consumer culture, comments on it. Indeed, both gaudiness and consumerism are involved in spectacle, are excessive, and have an element of cheap reproducibility, trickery and falsity to them. In discussing the ways Mina Loy portrays and criticizes the gaudiness of consumer culture, I will engage with interpretive lenses of Loy’s poetry outside of her personal life and feminism. In doing so, I hope to open up ways to discuss her as a poet concerned with society and modernity as a whole, discussing cultural problems beyond, although including, those of gender and her personal life.

In order to get the full picture of how Loy matches gaudiness and consumer culture, some theoretical terms and frameworks as well as the general layout of this

thesis must be discussed first, beginning with a general discussion of some of the key tenets of consumer culture. Thorstein Veblen famously coined the phrase “conspicuous consumption,” noting that “Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure” (75), and arguing that “A certain standard of wealth in the one case, and of prowess in the other, is a necessary condition of reputability, and anything in excess of this normal amount is meritorious” (30). Thus, consumerism creates a need to constantly buy more and outdo one’s peers, and make sure one is seen buying more; consumer culture becomes a spectacle of extravagance. As David Nye notes, Veblen’s generation was that of “the assembly line and mass production” (599) – and consumption became a display of wealth. Moreover, as Patrick Brantlinger and Richard Higgins argue, Veblen’s comments reveal “The hollowness of a capitalism in which value is no longer tied to productivity or utility and whose ultimate product is a social and cultural wasteland” (455). Thus, conspicuous consumerism is aligned with a kind of gaudiness from the beginning in its spectacle and extravagance.

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin also argues that consumer culture is concerned with *nouveautés* and the continual newness valued in commodities, creating a different kind of extravagance. Michael William Jennings notes that “The primary vehicle of Benjamin’s analysis of the commodity form and its effects is the *nouveauté* ... The *nouveauté* is the ideal exemplification of the antithetical qualities of the commodity in that it manifests not just its eversameness but especially its necessary semblance ... of newness” (97). This is another facet of extravagance for consumer culture, for even if commodities differ from each other minimally or not at

all, there will always be a demand for newer commodities, creating a constant demand for more. Moreover, newness belies the falsity of consumer culture for Benjamin, as modern subjects are “anesthetized by the spectacle of mass culture and the illusory utopian offerings of consumerism” (Mills 20), and “As increasingly ubiquitous contact forces individuals into mass subject positions, Benjamin fears the loss of critical capacity and of the potential for imagination and reflection” (Cruikshank 120). *Nouveautés*, then, showcase the gaudy extravagance and falsity of consumer culture.

Furthermore, commodities have a crucial effect on the modern subjects of consumerism and the consumer culture that Loy herself lived in, particularly through advertising. Tim Armstrong argues that with advertising the modern subject “is re-energized, re-formed, subject to new modes of production, representation, and commodification” (2) and further argues that “capitalism’s fantasy” is about “the complete body: in the mechanisms of advertising, cosmetics ... all prosthetic in the sense that they promise the perfection of the body” (3). Consumer culture aims to perfect and cure the modern subject, and aims to sell the ideal identity by creating a need to be complete and better in a paradigm where the modern subject is incomplete and faulty without certain goods. Yet consumer culture also thrives off of the fact that this completion is never possible, as the production of newer goods creates even more facets to this ideal, unattainable identity. Commodities then attempt to continually define the modern consumer – they become extensions of the consumers’ identities, and the consumer becomes closely aligned with the commodity.

The authenticity of this commodified identity, however, is inherently unstable. With the commodity as a marker of identity, Rachel Bowlby argues, “What is by definition one’s own, one’s very identity ... is at the same time something which has to be put on, acted or worn as an external appendage” (28). Consequently, if the commodified identity is only ever an “external appendage” and something to be “put on” rather than an identity that is actually located in the modern subject, how authentic can this commodified identity be? The consumer identity, as long as it is defined through commodities, can only ever be an appendage, a reproduced identity and subject to questions of its authenticity. Thus, the modern consumer is in some ways made just as gaudy as consumer culture; they are made into a spectacle as they conspicuously consume, they engage in extravagance in the need to buy more, and in seeking commodified identities they align themselves with falsity.

Much of this closely echoes Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s theories on “The Culture Industry” which is characterized by “wish-fulfillment” and where “cultural goods that have become standardized, schematized, and stereotypical” (Cook 103). This is not to say, however that all consumer culture is detrimental and that all consumers have been thoroughly oppressed and duped by this industry. As Umberto Eco argues, although in some ways mass culture “is the mark of an irretrievable loss” of true culture (18), in others it has “made the absorption of ideas and the reception of information a pleasurable and easy task” as “We live in an age in which the cultural arena is at last expanding to include the widespread circulation of ‘popular’ art and culture in which the best compete against each other” (18). This indicates a transition in some critical thought from defining consumer culture

through mass culture, which is seen as debasing and oppressive, and through popular culture, which is imbued with these same movements of community and democratic thinking. Moreover, Eco argues that those texts railing against mass culture may “constitute the most sophisticated product on offer for mass consumption” (18). The second chapter will show that Mina Loy’s poetry demonstrates both a criticism of the spectacles, extravagances and falsities of consumer culture, as well as recuperates some of it for her own use.

The gaudiness of consumer culture and the concerns of modernism interact with each other in ways that reveal them to be deeply linked. This is not immediately apparent, as Reginald Abbot notes that

Modernism’s rejection of realism and its celebration of the artists as an alienated personage producing an arcane product – superior to and outside the common marketplace – would seem to have set it in opposition to consumer/commodity culture and guaranteed its immunity from consumer/commodity study. (193-194)

There have, however, been many recent, fascinating studies connecting modernism with consumerism, including Abbot’s own study of Virginia Woolf and the marketplace.³ Moreover, Frederic Jameson argues for the “designation of modernism as reactive, that is, as a symptom and as a result of cultural crises, rather than a new ‘solution’ in its own right” (*Signatures* 16) and further notes that “With the coming of the market, this institutional status of artistic consumption and

³ See Freedman, Jonathan. *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism and Commodity Culture*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1990. Print.; Gagnier, Regenia. *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1986. Print.

production vanishes: art becomes one more branch of commodity production” (18). Thus, even in positioning itself against commodity culture, modernism necessarily engages in it, and thus becomes an entry point into the ways in which consumer culture shapes modern life. This is what Andreas Huyssen has called the “compulsive *pas de deux*” (24) of modernism and mass culture – born of the same age, they have more ties to each other than modernist producers would like to admit.⁴ Throughout this exploration of consumerism then, different facets of modernism will be explored, even those that, in the third chapter, link the gaudiness of consumerism to modernism.

If seen through this metaphor of gaudiness, then, Loy’s poetry brings together a constellation of points about consumerism that put forth a sophisticated, detailed viewpoint and criticism of the consumer culture circa the early-twentieth century. These criticisms give great insight into that period, since, as Roberta Sassatelli argues, “The desire for consumption ... played an active role in giving shape to modernity” (15). I hope to show how Loy recognizes that consumer culture works off the championing of gaudiness through her style and content. Consumer culture’s commodities are attention-getting and thus involved in a spectacle, excessive and omnipresent through advertising, and finally are mass-produced reproductions that ultimately make consumer culture’s falsity, present both in its

⁴ For more on this, see Bratu Hansen, Miriam. “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism.” *Modernism/modernity* 6.2 (1999): 59-77. Print.; Garrity, Jane. “Selling Culture to the “Civilized”: Bloomsbury, British Vogue and the Marketing of National Identity.” *Modernism/modernity* 6.2 (1999): 29-58. Print.

spectacle and excess, pervasive. Moreover, Loy recognizes the way consumers are implicated in this gaudiness. Since the commodity becomes an extension of the consumer's identity, he too becomes like a spectacle in a shop window, becomes one in an excessive mass of people -- particularly in urban culture, and becomes a replica. The consumer becomes a spectacle: excessive, fake and gaudy. It is this metaphor that draws together Loy's criticisms on consumer culture, and points to consumer culture as gaudy itself.

My three thesis chapters are interrelated, and will work off and through one another to illustrate the gaudiness of consumer culture. The first chapter will situate the place of the consumer, particularly the female consumer, in the spectacle of consumer culture. Throughout "Giovanni Franchi," "Three Moments in Paris," and "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots," Loy demonstrates how the spectator/consumer is increasingly disempowered by the falsity of consumer culture. Moreover, Loy pays particular attention to the female spectator/consumer, as the female consumer easily becomes a spectacle, either by becoming a commodity for the male, or by adorning herself in commodities. Veblen's conspicuous consumerism is here most conspicuous, and the need for commodities to be displayed and noticed is paralleled with the consumer's need to be noticed buying, an act which turns the commodity and the consumer into a spectacle.

The second chapter will focus on the extravagance and excess of advertising and the omnipresence of the commodity in culture, and how this then becomes reflected in consumers as it constitutes them as a mass with an ever-increasing need to buy more for a more complete identity. In this sense, the fakery and superficiality

of consumer culture comes in the inability to fulfill this need, and the detrimental effects this has on the consumer. This section will focus on the poems “Hot Cross Bum,” as it shows what excess does to consumer culture, and “Feminist Manifesto,” a poem that uses the excessive tactics of advertising to resist the commodification of women and create a space for a different identity that is aware of and not utterly oppressed by consumer culture. Here, possible generative aspects to Loy’s criticism will be traced through. What are some ways out of this culture, or ways to resist or prevent it? For Loy, this seems to involve an awareness of the tactics of consumer culture and an ability to wield them for oneself.

Finally, the third chapter will expand on the ideas of the previous chapters, and focus on the role of mass production and imitation in consumer culture. Veblen’s views on conspicuous consumer culture as concerned only with expense and one-of-a-kind luxury will be contrasted against Benjamin’s theories in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” which state that the original is obsolete in terms of mass-production. In this mass-produced realm, authenticity is no longer tied to originality, but to newness, and consequently the falsity of consumer culture can no longer be viewed as inauthentic but as a reality. Likewise, I will examine how Loy acknowledges this new consumer reality in poems such as “On Third Avenue” and “Mass Production on 14th Street.”

All this becomes not only pertinent to the age Loy lived in, but our own as well, and so by examining Loy we examine how a poet construed parts of our own present. The consumer culture that Loy struggled with was the beginning of our own, and so her poetry provides not only a way into the early twentieth century, but

also a way into our own century: her *Lost Lunar Baedeker* becomes a guide map that spans decades. Thus, I hope ultimately not only to widen what has been a somewhat narrow focus in criticism on Loy and demonstrate her broader concerns outside of gender and her personal issues, but also show the lasting importance of those concerns, and the awareness they bring to modernist thought and contemporary consumers.

Chapter 2: “All The Virgin Eyes In The World”: Gaudy Spectacle

Consumer culture is easily associated with spectacle, as it invites spectators (and potential consumers) to view the myriad of goods displayed in shop windows. Indeed, consumers have the opportunity, in adorning themselves with these goods, to participate in the spectacle itself. Moreover, the gaudiness of displaying and wearing goods, as will be shown, deprives the consumer of substance and authenticity, and consumer culture can thus be constituted as “gaudiness for its own sake” (Bowie 403). The spectacle of consumer culture is involved in fantasy and the imaginary, and yet does not deliver on these promises; it is superficial. Furthermore, since these spurious commodities are mystified, fetishized, and sold as ways into newer, better identities for modern subjects, yet once more do not deliver on these identities, consumers are commodified, made superficial and turned into shallow, gaudy spectacles themselves.

The female subject of consumer culture, particularly in Loy’s poetry, is even more affected by these movements. For even without consumer culture, woman is positioned already as an object to be viewed, as a spectacle, and a commodity to be exchanged. Even as a consumer and spectator of goods she is not in a position of power, as all too soon she becomes inseparable from those goods and is a spectacle once more. Female identity is thus doubly commodified. Loy’s poetry portrays and critiques this consumer society and its consequences, particularly for the female subject within it. “Giovanni Franchi” demonstrates how powerless spectatorship has become in a world of the shallow spectacle, while “Three Moments in Paris” seeks to reclaim female subjectivity through denying spectacle and “Virgins Plus Curtains

Minus Dots” demonstrates the lasting effects of the gaudiness of consumer culture on women, even when they are not on display.

Thorstein Veblen’s theories on conspicuous consumption, described above, have already provided a framework for seeing consumer culture as gaudy and as a spectacle, and as overall detrimental to the modern consumer. With the rise of commerciality and metropolises, however, the idea of the spectacle, and particularly the position of the spectator, was initially seen to be potentially positive. In “The Painter of Modern Life,” Charles Baudelaire exults,

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. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world –such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue but can clumsily define ... Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.

(9)

Baudelaire encourages the notion of the man as a mirror or a kaleidoscope, with the spectator as a positive, joyful and pleasurable position rather than, as it will later be seen, a position of passivity, muteness and disability. The *flâneur* may be in the

midst of a throng of people, but he is unique in his abilities to observe and feel at home in this crowd; he is the *man* in the crowd. As Vanessa Schwartz argues, “The *flâneur* is not so much a person as *flanerie* is a positionality of power – one through which the spectator assumes the position of being able to be part of the spectacle and yet command it at the same time” (10). In Baudelaire’s, and subsequent, notions of the *flâneur*, then, spectatorship – and by extension the spectacle of modern life, especially urban life – is something to be reveled in and something to hold command of and participate in. If this realm of spectacle can be called gaudy in the way it relishes in being seen, it is certainly not a negative aspect.

Conversely, Guy Debord’s much later work *Society of the Spectacle* paints a rather dystopian picture of consumer culture as a hegemonic, mind-numbing affair, with the spectator and the spectacle at the heart of its machinations of passivity and fakery. As Debord argues, “In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation” (7). Moreover, in seemingly direct opposition to Baudelaire, Debord writes

The alienation of the spectator [...] works like this: The more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires. The spectacle’s estrangement from the acting subject is expressed by the fact that the individual’s gestures are no longer his own; they are the gestures of someone else who represents them to

him. The spectator does not feel at home anywhere, because the spectacle is everywhere. (16)

Gone are the passions of Baudelaire's *flâneur*, and where the *flâneur* may feel at home everywhere, as he is connected to and understands the crowd, Debord's spectator is separated and alienated, at home nowhere and with an overwhelming sense of unreality. Interestingly, in Baudelaire both the spectator and the spectacle are positive notions, feeding off of each other, where in Debord both are involved in fakery that further alienates the spectator. The spectacle becomes mere representation and the spectator becomes dominated by it and a passive subject with no real identity. As Lynn Voskuil argues, "For Debord, 'spectacle' is the 'opposite of dialogue' [...] it is a hierarchical, homogenizing force that isolates people from each other in the all-consuming marketplace, and the sociability it promotes is inauthentic and illusive" (250). Debord thus illustrates a gaudy world where the image and the spectacle dominate. Where the *flâneur* as spectator is the axis of the crowd, controlling it and giving it meaning, here Debord's spectacle alienates people from each other in a meaningless world.

This quotation from Debord points to the veneer and shallow fakery of gaudiness and spectacle, and it is a fakery that comes from the fantasy world of consumer culture and the fetishization of the commodity. Consumer culture is deeply concerned with images, whether it is through the display of goods in a window or the images of advertising. Going hand in hand with this proliferation of images is the world of fantasy consumer culture attempts to sell. As Michael Miller argues, "For the bourgeois child, growing up in late-nineteenth-century France, the

magical, the exotic, the fantastic, and the extra-ordinary were still the stuff of legendary figures, fairy tales, and heroes of the French nation; but they also had become the stuff of department stores as well” (176). Indeed, commodities themselves take on seemingly magical properties in a consumer culture, what Karl Marx named in *Capital* as the fetishization of the commodity. Marx argues that, “[as] soon as [the good] steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent” noting “The mystical character of commodities” (42) and how value “converts every product into a social hieroglyphic” (45). As Voskuil notes, Marx explained “how manufactured products – common, familiar items – have an almost mystical function in capitalist society” as “everyday items become spectacles” and “their down-to-earth familiarity come[s] to seem fantastic” (256-257). Items are no longer connected to their use value and only emit some mystical social aura. Commodities become spectacles unhinged from their own reality and are sold as fantasy items.

Moreover, these fetish commodities are sold as extensions of identities, as ways to make one’s life magically better – and yet in so doing the consumer is commodified and made into a gaudy spectacle. As Georg Simmel argues, “Every property is an extension of personality; property is that which obeys our wills, that in which our egos express, and externally realize themselves” (344), to which Jean Baudrillard echoes in noting that “Everyone has to be up-to-date and recycle himself annually, monthly, seasonally in his clothes, his things, his car. If he doesn’t he is not a true citizen of consumer society” (qtd. in Bowlby 26). Simmel even connects the

commodity-identity to its very mystification, and furthermore to its spectacle,
writing

By virtue of this brilliance, its wearer appears as the center of a circle of radiation in which every close-by person, every seeing eye, is caught. As the flash of the precious stone seems to be directed at the other – like the lightning of the glance the eye addresses to him – it carries the social meaning of jewels, the being-for-the-other, which returns to the subject as the enlargement of his own sphere of significance. The radii of this sphere mark the distance which jewelry creates between men – ‘I have something which you do not have.’ But, on the other hand, these radii not only let the other participate: they shine in *his* direction; in fact, they exist only for his sake. (342)

Simmel's quotation makes it clear that if one buys the most opulent, luxurious, attention-getting item, this creates an “enlargement of his own sphere of significance” – it gives consumers a better identity. Moreover, it gives them an identity that is a spectacle, one that will draw spectators and in fact exists to draw spectators. Commodity-identities for Simmel operate as spectacles and exist to be seen through the eyes of others, “only for his sake.” This is, however, a precarious position, as consumers turn themselves into commodities and spectacles, and engage in the same kind of fantasy. Moreover, this also links spectatorship directly to looking upon consumer goods, and so closely links the spectator and the consumer.

All this becomes particularly precarious when commodities do not fulfill the fantasies they promise, and in fact reveal the superficial, unreal qualities of these consumer spectacles. For one, as Bowlby argues, depending on a commodity for identity means that one must “put on” that identity (28) like a costume or a mask, making any commodity-identity inherently inauthentic. This fakery is compounded when the life and identities that these commodities promote are fantasies that cannot be sustained. In her book *Dream Worlds*, Rosalind Williams addresses this directly, noting how “reveries were passed off as reality” and then “become the alluring handmaidens of commerce” (65), yet remain firmly rooted in the world of fantasy, never to be fulfilled. Debord also strikes the same note when he argues “The object that was prestigious in the spectacle becomes mundane as soon as it is taken home by its consumer – and by all its other consumers. Too late, it reveals its essential poverty, a poverty that inevitably reflects the poverty of its production. Meanwhile, some other object is already replacing it” (34). The glittering, fantastic commodity loses its luster once it is actually obtained, and its allure fades.

What then becomes of the spectacle of the commodified-identity? Indeed, these identities are revealed to be unreal. Because consumer culture and commodities are so closely linked to the modern subject’s identity, it is no surprise that a world such as this gives rise to feelings of unreality inside the subject. T.J. Jackson Lears documents this in depth, arguing that “feelings of unreality stemmed from urbanization and technological development” and “from the rise of an increasingly interdependent market economy” as well as from secular Protestantism (6). As Lears argues,

Freed from the drudgery of farm life, they were also increasingly cut off from the hard, resistant reality of things. Indoor plumbing, central heating, and canned foods were pleasant amenities but made life seem curiously insubstantial; they contributed to what Daniel Boorstin has perceptively called 'the thinner life of things'. (7)

This again brings back the notion of gaudiness and the gaudy spectacle as having nothing underneath; there is no substance underneath a gaudy spectacle and it exists only as a veneer. When people mistake the fantasy for reality, and they take the fetishized commodity as their own identity, unreality sets in. They are removed from the "resistant reality of things" by buying into this fantasy, and when the fantasy is not fulfilled but turns mundane, this feeling of unreality is worsened.

Commodities, to bring back Debord, promise all the pageantry of a fantasy life, but they are indeed thin and make life "curiously insubstantial," and what they promise is not what they deliver. Don Slater echoes this when he argues "People mistake the appearances of society for its reality or sense [...] people are mistaken about the social conditions that determine their existence and therefore falsely identify their real material interests with the market and commodities, with consumption" (113). As a result, modern subjects are commodified, made into gaudy, superficial spectacles, and are left with spurious identities. Moreover, the role of the spectator post-*flanerie* is rendered evermore powerless. A spectator looking at goods in a shop window does not command urban life, rather all too soon they become a consumer, and after that a commodified, spurious identity divorced

from reality as they adorn themselves in fetishized, mystified goods that do not fulfill their promises. The spectator is not a position of power, nor is the consumer.

Debord's quotation on the poverty of commodities, however, points to how consumerism sustains itself and its fantasies, even as consumers watch as their commodities become mundane, through the newness and Benjamin's *nouveautés*. As Debord argues, "some other object is already replacing" the old. Newness, of course, is also a fake, only a "semblance"; as Bowlby argues, "Competition between different brands of bread is necessarily engaged in presenting one particular type of loaf as superior to or different from its competitors" (23) – so companies add a new feature, some kind of fetishized "yeast of magical properties" (24), but nothing truly new. Nonetheless, something new means something different, and perhaps *this* time the fantasy will come true. This cult of newness is thus revealed to be a fantasy itself, and once again there is nothing substantial beneath consumer culture's spectacles – they are gaudy in every sense of the word, calling out for attention but always superficial.

This is all doubly true for the female consumer, a subject that Loy is particularly interested in. For one, the female is often seen as a commodity and an object to be gazed upon. Anne Friedberg argues that "Women were objects for consumption, objects for the gaze of the flaneur or for the poet who, like Baudelaire, would notice women as mere *passerby*" (62): as Bowlby suggests "A productive channel of investigation might be opened up by considering what woman as ideological sign, and women as subjects caught or participating in various levels of social relations, have in common with commodities – with the things which a buyer

consumes" (27). Baudelaire, it seems, has already started the investigation when he asks

What poet, in sitting down to paint the pleasure caused by the sight of a beautiful woman, would venture to separate her from her costume? Where is the man who, in the street, at the theatre, or in the park, has not in the most disinterested of ways enjoyed a skillfully composed toilette, and has not taken away with him a picture of it which is inseparable from the beauty of her to whom it belonged, making thus of the two things – the woman and her dress – an indivisible unity?
(31)

The woman's identity comes to be signified by the commodities she wears and surrounds herself with; the commodity becomes her identity. Moreover, the scene described by Baudelaire is not from the point of view of the woman as consumer and thus potentially as the subject, but rather from the *flâneur* gazing upon this woman-commodity. The female is denied subjectivity from the start.

The woman-commodity is also fetishized. Baudelaire writes that "Woman is quite within her rights, indeed she is even accomplishing a kind of duty, when she devotes herself to appearing magical and supernatural; she has to astonish and charm us; as an idol, she is obliged to adorn herself in order to be adored" (33). Through fetishized commodities the female becomes further fetishized, something mystical and fantastic. If these fetishized commodities are inauthentic, as they eventually become mundane, and commodity-identities are also spurious, as they are mere costumes, then the positioning of a woman as synonymous with her dress

for the male gaze of the *flâneur* is yet another layer of superficiality that transports the female well away from her real existence and denies her subjectivity. The female, more than ever, becomes a spectacle – now a fetishized, commodified spectacle – for the male gaze. The more she adorns herself and begs to be looked at as a gaudy, superficial spectacle the better she is and the more imaginary she becomes.

To see the female not as a spectacle but as a spectator and consumer is equally problematic, as it is all too easy, as has been shown, for the consumer to become commodified. While Friedberg sees some freedom in positioning the female as a *flâneur*, arguing that as a female *flâneur* “a woman could wander the city on her own, a freedom linked to the privilege of shopping alone” (62), Bowlby, however, urges that there needs to be an “inspection of how women as consumers enter into reciprocal relationship[s] with commodities” (27). Indeed, if one takes Baudelaire’s view of the *flâneur* as a position of power and as a spectator in command of an invigorating spectacle, then perhaps this position of power and command is also tenable for the female Friedberg describes. Yet given how spectators in the market soon become disempowered as consumers and then commodified identities - and Friedberg makes this connection when she links female *flânerie* to shopping – Bowlby’s argument seems pertinent.

Indeed, women have often been depicted as consumers, and consumer culture is noted to be specifically concerned with the wants and fantasies of women, and yet women have not traditionally been positioned as empowered *flâneurs*. As Bowlby writes, “It was above all to women that the new commerce made its appeal,

urging and inviting them to procure its luxurious benefits and purchase sexually attractive images from themselves” (11); here consumer culture is all about superficial images once more, and places women consumers in a sexually objectified position as commodified spectacles. This consumer position thus seems to objectify women more, as even Friedberg notes that to Baudelaire “Women in public spaces were ‘seller and commodity in one,’ not observers but objects in the panopticon of the sexual market” (62). Women may observe and purchase glittering commodities, but this does not imbue them with the spirit of the *flâneur*. Instead, the spectator-as-consumer purchases a commodified identity and turns herself into a spectacle.

Finally, the virginity and virtue of women are also commodified by consumer culture and are fantasies sold to women that are once again unfulfilling and detrimental. Coventry Patmore’s “Angel in the House,” which represents woman as spectral and fantastic as she is virginal, is a good example of how this commodification works. Women must be virtuous, new, untouched – just like a new shipment of commodities. This commodification of virginity, however, is equally as false as any other commodity, and it does not render women as cherished beings. Women are instead interchangeable with one another; women are not given a glowing identity by adhering to the commodification of virginity, but are commodified themselves and made to feel unreal. As Jerrold E. Hogle argues, women become “nearly bodiless, spectral object[s] of exchange” (194) and are asked only to keep their commodified virginity intact before they reproduce. As superficial commodities, they are far removed from their lives and any sense of reality, and “Woman” and “Virgin” become commodified, labels for a mass of objects rather than

individual beings. Virgins themselves become interchangeable with one another in a society that sells them on the fetishism and mystification of virginity, a commodification of virginity that in fact renders them undifferentiated.

Nonetheless, there are ways to view spectacle and spectatorship more positively and less as superficial machinations, even after Debord. As Tom Gunning argues, “We cannot simply swallow whole the image of the naïve spectator, whose reaction to the image is one of simple belief and panic; it needs digesting” (116). Indeed, where Debord argues that the spectacle of consumerism has become “a world-view that has actually been materialized, a view of a world that has become objective” (7) in way that positions it as a dominant hegemony, William Leiss, Stephen Kline and Sut Jhally point out that “A culture never imposes absolute uniformity; all cultures provide for variation and for greater or lesser degrees of individual expression within those basic formats” (64). There are other ways to view the spectator in the modern world besides to critique his or her dumb passivity as a consumer, one that takes into account the way spectators choose to view what they view. As will be shown, however, Loy’s poems discussed here seem to ascribe to more pessimistic views of consumer culture, and if they do provide any positive outlook on consumption it is by denying one’s identification as a spectator rather than by working within this consumer culture. Instead, these rebuttals will be discussed in depth in the second chapter on excess and advertising.

Loy’s poems engage with these discussions in different ways and reveal both a progression of thought about commodified modern subjects, especially women, and that reveal the gaudiness of the consumer spectacle and the spectator and build

a critique of the consumer culture that creates these issues. Although this progression is not necessarily chronological throughout her work, it is nonetheless present and important. "Giovanni Franchi" gives a way into this by demonstrating the powerlessness of spectatorship in a commodified world that is obsessed with newness and uniqueness. Since the newness and uniqueness that commodities promise is ultimately false, the figures of the poem are not made unique by their commodities but are rendered interchangeable. Because of this, there seems to be nothing real for the spectators of "Giovanni Franchi" to engage with, and so they can only guess at truths and often mistake one thing for another.

There are many intersecting gazes in the poem that set up this consumer world not only as a realm of spectacle but a realm of the disempowered spectator.

Loy writes to the readers,

Giovanni Franchi hooligan-faced and latin-born

You imagine what he looked like

Looked it as nearly as he could as the

philosopher looked (38-41)

and so involves them in this act of spectatorship. Crucially though, this gaze's power is hindered, as this act of looking is indeed imaginary, and Giovanni Franchi can only be described in relation to his namesake Giovanni Bapini. Later, Giovanni Franchi is described sitting in his parents' restaurant

At a book

It could not see from that distance

Giovanni watching the munchers supporting his parents

With an eye
On assuring himself
Of their sufficient impression (70-75)

Between these two quotations, the notion of simultaneously looking while being looked at emerges; it also shows the inherent handicap of any gaze. For one, the inability to see from that distance is mentioned, but moreover Giovanni Franchi is watching the eaters and imagining their impressions of him, assuring himself only on the basis of his own limited and biased perspective. The spectator here has an inherently limited gaze.

Moreover, the female spectatorship of the “threewomen,” which focuses primarily on finding out how many toes Giovanni Bapini has, is then also a failed attempt:

Now the threewomen
For pity’s sake
Let us think of her as she to save time
Seeing the minor Giovanni
Sitting at the major Giovanni’s feet
Made sure he must be counting his toes
All to the contrary he was picking the philosopher’s brains
(88-94)

Like the spectatorship above, the threewomen fail at observing. This is made particularly and overwhelmingly clear in the closing lines of the poem:

Oh rats

Quite manifest that Giovanni Franchi
 Some semieffigy
 Damned by scholiums
 Knew no more how many toes-----
 Than Giovanni Bapini knew himself (165-170)

This not only restates the failure of an empowered, acutely observant spectator, but it also brings up the larger, recurring issue of the inability of these characters to know themselves (depending on how the last line is read). The failure of spectatorship becomes tied to the failure of the self. This is also supported by the voice of the speaker, who moves in and out of perspectives. At times they focus on the threewomen, but then move quickly to Giovanni Franchi or Bapini giving a sense of compromised omniscience. This, coupled with the frequent use of rare words like “scholiums” and “semieffigy” and inconstant but present alliteration gives the impression of a fractured viewpoint inaccessible to the reader.

These rare, even outdated words add another layer to these poems. By using these outmoded, distinctive words, Loy contributes to the gaudy atmosphere by making them into spectacles at the same time that these words separate her poetry from the constant need for consumer newness. The spectacles of consumer culture, because of their false promises of newness, are positioned as superficial, glittering veneers distracting consumers from a substantial reality now left behind, and these words at first seem to be mere showpieces of this culture. Passages like “fallacious nobility” (14), “acolytian sincerity” (45), and “diurnal pilgrimage” (150) and words like “cymphanous” (43) transport the poem away from the ordinary, jutting out

from the poem as spectacles. They are idiosyncratic and difficult, coming off many times as newfangled portmanteaus and nonsense – and thus parallel these gaudy, superficial spectacles.

At the same time, however, these words are also difficult simply because they are outdated, and rarely used anymore and in fact are complex in meaning. Thus, they are not actually directly involved in the consumer obsession with newness or in its superficiality. When this diction is coupled with frequent alliteration that evokes Old English verse – such as “divergently directed draughts” (28) – it shows another facet to Loy’s poetry that is separated from the new-fangled dreams of consumerism. By deploying this seemingly gaudy diction, then, Loy both mirrors and maintains a critical, ironic distance from the gaudiness of consumer culture, as these words parallel its gaudiness while still maintaining complexity. Moreover, this employment of diction also points to what will be an eventual shift in gaudiness. Just as these words seem to be superficial nonsense, but are in fact complex, by the third chapter gaudiness itself will need to be considered not as a veneer over real life, but a substantial reality in itself.

For the present, since in a gaudy consumer culture commodities help to define the self, I argue that in “Giovanni Franchi” Loy links the failure of spectatorship to the failure of the promises of commodities and commodified identities, and in the case of the threewomen, the failure of the promises of commodified virginity. Throughout the poem, there is a constant reference to clothing and commodities, and these references seem to be tied directly to identity and to the way commodities can renew identity and make the consumer unique. The

opening lines of the poem describe “The threewomen who all walked / In the same dress” (1-2), who seem, as per Baudelaire, to be indivisible from their clothing and are literally attached to these commodities, as Loy writes that there are “ferns on the flounces of the threewomen” (21). These are the flounces *of* the threewomen, not something they are wearing, but rather something that is a part of them. Moreover, Giovanni Franchi is described in terms of “the fallacious nobility / Of his first pair of trousers” (14-15): here, the trousers represent him becoming a man, and so this commodity can again be seen as part of his personality, even part of his development. While the threewomen are indistinguishable from their garments – and given no individuality in their names – Giovanni Franchi is still measured by his; the personages of “Giovanni Franchi” are thus immediately seen through the lens of the things that they own.

Moreover, there is an obsession with the newness of these commodities, and the need to appear, as Baudrillard observed, up to date with consumer society.

Further describing Giovanni Franchi’s pants, Loy writes

They were tubular flapped friezily

The colour of coppered mustard

What matter

Were they not the first

No others could ever be the first again (16-20)

Later on in the same stanza Loy writes that “Tea table problems for insane asylums / are démodé / Démodé” (23-25). Here is a prime example of commodity fetishism: commodities magically define identities, moreover there is the underlying sense of

the need for newer commodities to continually promise better, more unique identities in a need for the “first”.

Tightly bound to commodification and newness in the poem, as in many of Loy’s poems, is virginity. There is a stress in “Giovanni Franchi” on “the first,” with “The first instinct first again” (29), the “penetralia of Firstness” (31) and a “spoilt ... first love affair” (109), and these undercurrents of virginity are directly related to commodity exchange when Loy writes that the “Philosopher’s toes” (31) which the threewomen wants to see were “As virginal as he had never worn them” (35). The “threewomen” here are squashed into one being, their uniqueness and subjectivity erased. Moreover, this idea that one can wear, or rather not wear, virginity links it directly with the same dress the threewomen has on, or with Giovanni Franchi’s trousers. Virginity is the ultimate commodity in its newness, its unattainable and unspoiled nature. It is the perfect fantasy. Female virginity and the female subject thus become commodified.

This quest for newness, however, is fruitless and even detrimental, as commodities do not fulfill their fantastical promises; the personas of the poem are not made unique or special by their commodities, but rather are commodified themselves. The most obvious reference to this sameness, of course, is “the threewomen” who are described as one unit throughout the poem and are seemingly interchangeable – even as she thinks herself “uniquely the one” (26). This sameness is linked to her commodified virginity and femininity throughout the poem, as Loy writes

The threewomen was composed of three instincts

Each sniffing divergently directed draughts
 The first instinct first again may
 renascent gods save us from the enigmatic
 pentralia of Firstness
 Was to be faithful to a man first
 The second to be loyal to herself first
 She would have to find which self first
 The third which might as well have been first
 Was to find out how many toes the
 Philosopher Giovanni Bapini had first (29-37)

Aside from the emphasis on virginal and feminine obedience, here again is the repetition of and obsession with firstness and newness that again links virginity and femininity to a kind of commodity and its semblance of newness. The threewomen's identity, however, is not made unique by this commodification but rather does not know which self to be loyal to; indeed, the threewomen does not really have a real self. Loy then criticizes how the newness of commodified virginity actually makes women interchangeable with one another, and effects the loss of a real self, rather than making them unique, echoing Hogle's own theories on how the commodification of women makes them interchangeable and separated from their lived realities.

The men, Giovanni Franchi and Giovanni Bapini, are also interchangeable. Not only do they have the same first name, but also the poem makes several unclear references to "him", only occasionally clarifying with lines such a "I mean the older

man” (4). Is it any surprise, then, that the threewomen have trouble knowing anything in this world, or that the reader cannot differentiate between them, or the Giovannis? How can a spectator discern a crowd that clothes itself with false promises that makes them all the same? The fakery of the gaudy spectacle of the commodity makes discerning truth difficult, and makes positioning the spectator in a role of power impossible. In this commodity realm obsessed with the promise of newness and unique identities through commodities, everyone is in fact undifferentiated and commodified, with the female being particularly disempowered. As such, it becomes near impossible to know and speculate upon others and equally difficult to know oneself, or to have a defined self. Consumer culture thus leads to a failure of discernment on the spectator’s part, as all the spectacles of commodities are shallow and fake – and gaudy in this superficiality.

“Three Moments in Paris” is concerned with finding ways to re-empower the female gaze and the spectator, although it deals with much the same issues like the commodification of virginity and the fakeness and failure of spectatorship that results from this commodification. As Andrew Michael Roberts notes, “In ‘Three Moments in Paris,’ Loy evokes and subverts various male discourses of domination and specularisation” (137) and “stages a complex interaction of looks and avoidance of looking between women and images of women: the shop mannequins, the two cocottes and the female narrator” (145). Where the personas of “Giovanni Franchi,” especially the threewomen, utterly failed to command the crowd and possess acute gazes, “Three Moments in Paris,” although portraying the difficulties for the female in a consumer culture, nonetheless suggests a way out.

The commodification of virginity is especially apparent in the third part of the poem, *Magasins de Louvre*. Loy opens with “All the virgins eyes in the world are made of glass” (69), before describing “Long lines of boxes / of dolls” (70-71) which are “Beckoning / Smiling / In a profound silence” (77-79). Here again is the kind of dumb passivity of the threewomen in “Giovanni Franchi,” and the enjambment of the lines makes these dolls seem all the more robotic and mindless. This passivity is linked both to virginity and commodities in the figure of the doll, and later with more items of clothing as “One cocotte wears a bowler hat and a sham camellia / And one an iridescent boa” (88-89). For Loy, to uphold virginity is to become a commodity: to have all the spectacle of purity and newness, all the mystification of the fetishized commodity, and yet be empty. It is through this fetishizing of virginity that women become, as Roberts points out above, mere images of women. As Loy says, these virgin eyes “Stare through the human soul / Seeing nothing” (85-86). As before, this commodified virginity has detrimental effects on the female, hollowing her out and making her a gaudy spectacle even as it promises to make her a cherished item.

Unlike “Giovanni Franchi,” which has made all spectatorship powerless, the female gaze and the female consumer struggle for subjectivity here while the male gaze dominates. When the cocottes are described in *Magasins de Louvre*, it is not immediately clear that Loy is no longer speaking of the dolls, but rather women looking at the dolls. They are here placed in the position of consumer and spectator, but they immediately cycle back into being commodified as

They see the dolls

And for a moment their eyes relax
To a flicker of elements unconditionally primeval
And now averted
Seek each other's surreptitiously
To know if the other has seen (94-99)

When they gaze upon the dolls, their own eyes become glassy, as if they are “seeing nothing.” While the narrator of the poem has her eyes averted away from the shop display “in their shame” (102), these women gaze into the dolls and mirror the dolls, and become commodified themselves. As Abbot notes, “The function of store mirrors is to reflect the consumer’s image superimposed on countless other images of shining, dazzling commodities waiting to be purchased” (207). In the virginal, glassy-eyed dolls, these women see their own image and slip into something primeval – they regress and become stupefied, hollowed out and commodified, only images themselves with nothing underneath. Female spectatorship here then exists only as a function of the consumer, and soon enough the consumer becomes a commodity and spectacle, a hollowed out, narcissistic version of herself.

Instead of showing plenty of empowered spectators, then, “Three Moments in Paris” displays and critiques how easily women are commodified and objectified and made into a spectacle. Spectacle is positioned negatively, as Loy describes it like a glorified garbage dump, writing

While the brandy cherries
In the winking glasses
Are decomposing

Harmoniously
With the flesh of spectators
And at a given spot
There is one
Who
Having the concentric lighting focused precisely upon her
Prophetically blossoms in perfect putrefaction (58-68)

Here spectacle turns the objectified female into a rotting, malformed entity, another sign of the way spectacle is hollowed out and lacks substance; it blossoms out but it is rotting inside. Moreover, it is suggested that it is the male gaze that makes woman into a spectacle, as described in the first section of the poem *One O'Clock at Night*, albeit sarcastically. The speaker describes

As your indisputable male voice roared
Through my brain and my body
Arguing dynamic decomposition
Of which I was understanding nothing (6-9)

Here, the male seems to control everything, indicated further by the line "I had belonged to you since the beginning of time" (2), while the female understands nothing, is "a mere woman / the animal woman" (22-23) and is as blank and glassy as the dolls or the primeval state of the women consumers, only an object for the male to gaze on and again a gaudy, superficial veneer. Male spectatorship seems to dominate the powerless female gaze.

However, it is also in this section, and in some clues in the second and third, where Loy seems to suggest ways to break free from this commodification and objectification. The tone of *One O'Clock at Night* is indeed sharply sarcastic, a tone that carries over into the second section, *Café du Néant* – it is here, Christine Smedley argues, that Loy “more pointedly subjects male physiology to the scrutiny of a female gaze” (210). In so doing, Loy gives her speaker a distance from the male gaze and thus a distance from commodification. So when the speaker writes, again sarcastically, “Anyhow who am I that I should criticize your theories of / plastic velocity” (30-31) there *is* implicitly a criticism, and readers are aware that she *is* someone, not merely a hollowed out spectacle. Once more, when the speaker averts her eyes in *Magasins de Louvre* and they are “inextricably entangled with the pattern of the carpet” (100), she again demonstrates a distance from the spectacle of consumer culture and the commodification of virginity and the female in general. Although Loy wields irony throughout the poem, which in Loy’s other poems is often a way for her speaker to be involved in critical debates while maintaining a perspective on it, the prominent images here are those of a strong distance and separation that seem to indicate a need to be completely outside of – not just loosely connected to – these debates of consumer culture and gender. If female spectatorship is re-empowered here, it has nothing to do with consumerism.

Indeed, this may not be the perfect solution for the double commodification of women in the gaudy, empty spectacles of consumer culture. It does, however, indicate that to separate women from commodities and commodified virginity, although it would not please Baudelaire, is a way out of rotting as a spectacle, out of

the hollowness of becoming a commodity, and out of the dominating male gaze. This is only one small moment among many, however, and a vague one at that. What would a full on resistance look like, and how would it be achieved? Other ways out, or ways to work within, consumer culture will be discussed in the next chapter.

“Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots,” however, demonstrates the experience of being trapped by this commodification of virginity, and what happens to spectacle and spectatorship when a commodity is no longer wanted. In the poem, virginity is once more presented as a commodity. Although virginity is just as preserved and untouched as the glossy dolls in boxes in “Three Moments in Paris” or the newness of “Giovanni Franchi,” since the “Houses hold virgins” (1), the poem focuses on the economic aspects of commodified virginity. These are “Virgins without dots” (5) that admit they are “Wasting our giggles / For we have no dots” (27-28) and describe how

Nobody shouts

Virgins for sale

Yet where are our coins

For buying a purchaser

Love is a god

Marriage expensive (32-37)

With the addition of a dowry, virginity well and truly becomes a commodity, something to be bought and sold; a marriage becomes a business transaction. Yet even though these virgins have no dowry with which to sell themselves, they are

still kept and preserved like the dolls in the boxes, their virginity intact. As Jessica Burstein argues,

These women are as much inmates ... as they are exiles ... The women are in two places at once because they are on the one hand contained in an impregnable system of domesticity, unable to circulate in the market place because they are priceless, in the sense of being sans dots. On the other hand, the telos of domestic wedlock is so fully ingrained in the virgins that the desire to be in a house, that is, the desire to be bought, wedded, and bedded, leaves them scratching at the door of a house they can't get into. (129)

Even with the economic basis revealed, the mystification of the fetishized commodity as something new, unique and cherished, lives on.

As such, these trapped virgins still pathetically offer themselves up as commodities to be consumed. Speaking of the men they see outside the window, men who never glance at them, the virgins note that

... they may look everywhere

Men's eyes look into things

Our eyes look out

A great deal of ourselves

We offer to the mirror (10-15)

Here again the act of looking does not empower the virgins. Instead, while men may look elsewhere, perhaps beyond consumer culture if they wished, these virgins are focused on looking out into the world as if they were commodities behind a display

window waiting to be sold. Adding to this, there are constant lacunas throughout the poem in the spaces between words and lines that give the impression that something substantial is missing from these girls' lives, some kind of subjectivity and awareness. Moreover, since they are unwanted because they have no dowries, they instead must offer themselves up to the mirror in an action that is eerily similar to the women looking at the dolls in "Three Moments in Paris." As Roberts notes, "The looker sees how the object would look on herself ... the shop window acts as a narcissistic mirror" (145-146). Here, it is the mirror that acts as the shop window; they look at what they have to offer, and they engage in their own commodification. They gaze at their commodified images, these superficial veneers, in an unbroken feedback loop, and nothing exists for them but their own commodification and the image of that commodification.

Moreover, the position they are in underlines how difficult it is for women to distance themselves from this commodification in consumer culture. Even though these virgins do not have dowries, they are not suddenly freed from commodification. There is almost no use of gaudy, rare and archaic diction here in this secluded world, and yet commodification is present. Their virginity is simply underlined further and they are stowed away from the world, preserved as "A secret well kept" (38) while someone "Has bolted the door / Put curtains at our windows" (45-46). They still gaze out like the dolls onto streets, and can only wonder as they "See the men pass / They are going somewhere" (47-48). They have not been freed from the shallow images of themselves as they look in the mirror, and the commodification of virginity has still rendered them unable to talk about

anything other than the exchange value of their own commodification. They have merely been spared, if it can be called sparing, the spectacle of consumer culture and instead have been entirely discarded. Even without the spectacle, they still have no selves, (save perhaps the “animal woman” inside the “virgins who / might

scratch” (61-62)), since they have offered *that* up to the mirror. Consumer culture has enveloped them completely, commodified them and made them unreal even as they have been stowed away in box houses like last season’s Christmas gifts when they did not provide the economic incentive.

Thus, throughout “Giovanni Franchi,” “Three Moments in Paris” and “Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots” Loy explores spectacle and spectatorship in consumer culture, particularly as these forces concern women. For Loy, the spectator is not an empowered position, as it is for Baudelaire. Rather, in “Giovanni Franchi” the deception and fakery of fetishized commodities, like the commodification of virginity, makes it seem as though these commodities will make consumers new and unique, when instead they turn them into an undifferentiated mass, thus falsifying any powers of perception figures like the threewomen believe themselves to have; everything is simply a display. “Three Moments in Paris” and “Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots” explore the commodification of virginity, and where the former offers up a way of divorcing the female from commodification and spectacle, the latter shows how easy it is to become entangled in it, gazing at one’s commodified image. Ultimately, this constellation of poems reveals the detrimental effects of a gaudy, superficial consumer spectacle.

Chapter 3: “Refuse More Profuse Than Man”: Advertising, Extravagance and Waste

Aside from engaging in a gaudy spectacle, consumer culture also engages in gaudiness through extravagance – as Veblen notes “anything in excess of [a] normal amount is meritorious” (30). To buy more, to have more, to amass all the goods of consumerism, is to triumph in consumer culture. Moreover, with the constant invention of more new goods that Benjamin fears, there is always more to be had; Slater argues that “Consumer culture is about continuous self-creation through the accessibility of things which are themselves presented as new, faddish or fashionable, always improved and improving” (Slater 10). As pointed to earlier, the commodified identity can always be made better, and in fact can never be finished as long as mass production and consumer culture thrive and continually birth new commodities. As such, this extravagance is once more a false promise, as there will *never* be enough. Thus, consumer culture readily engages in a kind of superficial, gaudy extravagance and excess in its lack of restraint and overabundance of goods.

Tied to this excess, moreover, is the idea of waste and garbage. Veblen again argues not only that the “unproductive consumption of goods is honourable” (69) but that “The standard of reputability requires that dress should show wasteful expenditure” (176). As Brantlinger and Higgins note, “Veblen maintains that there is an innate faculty of judgment or taste for the beautiful, but that in modern ‘pecuniary culture’ genuine taste is almost never separable from a vulgar, wasteful preference for ‘expensiveness,’ whether beautiful or not” (463). Tied directly into extravagant consumerism, then, is the production of garbage, the consumer goods

that have been thrown away because they are *démodé*, as in “Giovanni Franchi,” or have simply lost their luster, as in “Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots.” It is only a small sliver of this extravagant consumer culture – what is new and seems luxurious – that is desirable, and the rest is excess.

I would particularly like to trace these issues as they appear in advertising and theories of advertising. Advertising, by continually creating false needs and selling images, engages in the gaudy fakery and extravagance of consumer culture. Moreover, I would like to explore how advertising, in its extravagances and excesses, was seen to effect modern consumer subjects both for good and for ill – for, as will be shown, while some critics argue that advertising turns consumers into a mass, others position consumers as actively and rationally seeking out advertisements, and with the ability to resist their persuasions. Finally, all this will be with an eye toward how Loy conceives of and critiques the gaudy excesses and waste of consumer culture in “Hot Cross Bum,” and moreover how she provides resistance to the forces of advertising by creating a space for the aware consumer through her appropriation of Futurism in “Feminist Manifesto.”

Leiss, Kline and Jhally argue that advertising, by promoting more and more new kinds of demands, leaves customers unsatisfied (30); in this way advertising can be linked to the same processes of consumer culture that produce a continual need for newer commodities. Moreover, critics of advertising culture have pointed out the elements of falsity in this, as Jerry Mander argues, “It is possible to speak through media directly into people’s heads and then, like some otherworldly magician, leave images inside that can cause people to do what they might

otherwise never have thought to do” (13). Leiss, Kline and Jhally also note that advertising has been seen to create “false needs” that obstruct the real needs of consumers and further delay satisfaction (29). Advertising thus seems to work hand in hand with the gaudy spectacle of consumer culture, as it creates an excess of demand – false demand – for those spectacles.

This is compounded by the image-based nature of advertising, and how it in fact sells mere images of lifestyles and identities as if they were real and available for purchase. As Slater argues, advertisements promote social relations that are only images (114). This can be seen again in Leiss, Kline and Jhally’s study on advertising, when they write that

Most consumer items today are combinations of two types of characteristics – physical and imputed. Let us imagine a new brand of deodorant soap. On one level it is a collection of physical characteristics determined by the chemical ingredients from which it is made ... On another level, it is a collection of imputed characteristics determined by the way it is marketed – for a male or female market, with a ‘macho’ or ‘refined’ image, for a special age profile, and so forth.

(68)

This recalls Bowlby’s theories on the “yeast of magical properties” in two bread brands that are basically the same. Advertising essentially works not to make the product better, but the image of the product seem better, with the ability to ameliorate the consumer’s lifestyle. Susan Strasser even notes the magical, fantastic quality to the images of advertising, with companies “illustrating promotion

materials with pixylike characters that implied the ‘magic’ of mass production” (115); advertising acts much in the same way as the fetishized commodity, as it enshrouds products with fantastic auras and images of happiness.

Lears closely traces and adds to this thrust of advertising in “From Salvation to Self-Realization,” naming it as the “therapeutic” aspect of advertising. He writes that

Amid a mounting din of product claims, many national advertisers shifted their focus from presenting information to attracting attention [...] Advertising was part of a new visual environment, where innumerable images jostled for the attention of a mass audience. But there was more to the change. By the early 1900s the most successful advertising agents were trying not only to attract attention but aggressively to shape consumers’ desires ... Hopkins [one such advertising agent] refused to appeal to a buyer’s reason by listing a product’s qualities; on the contrary he addressed nonrational yearnings by suggesting the ways his client’s product would transform the buyer’s life ... away from sober information and toward the therapeutic promise of a richer, fuller life. (18)

This quotation not only continues the critique of image-based advertising, it links it to extravagance and excess in the constant barrage of advertisements that try to mystify and awe the consumer rather than communicate through facts. Advertising seems no longer to be a choice or an information source, but something imposed on the consumer. As such, not only must advertisements sell extravagant lifestyles, they

must use extravagant means to do so, with bigger fonts and more colorful pictures. As Jennifer Wicke argues, “Words are décor ... text is an impasto to apply with determined excess” (69). Moreover, as advertisers resort more and more to image-making and therapeutic promises and less on actual fact, this extravagance breeds falsity, making advertising ever gaudier. There is always more to be had in consumer culture, always an abundance of things, and this produces a barrage of mere images.

Consequently, this extravagant advertising also produces more feelings of unreality. As Lears argues,

The new attention-getting strategies, particularly the therapeutic emphasis on manipulating feeling rather than presenting information, led advertisers to a nether realm between truth and falsehood. Promising relief from feelings of unreality, advertising nevertheless exacerbated those feelings by hastening what the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre has called ‘the decline of referentials’ – the tendency, under corporate capitalism, for words to become severed from any meaningful referent. (21)

For Lears, this proliferation of advertising creates a worldview that is difficult to decipher because it is not based on fact but on images. The promises of commodities remain unfulfilled, and by extension so do the promises of the advertisements for those commodities. Amassing all the new commodities continually through each season will not give the lifestyles advertisements promise, and the modern subject will be left confused and bereft by this. Mander further argues that as a result of

advertising, “What we see, hear, touch, taste, smell, feel and understand about the world has been processed for us. Our experiences of the world can no longer be called direct, or primary. They are secondary, mediated experiences” (55). Thus, even the notion that lifestyles can be sold through advertising removes the modern subject from reality, as they literally buy into this proliferation of images – again, advertising is gaudy not only in its extravagance but its falsity.

As noted before, waste is tied directly into the extravagance and the constant proliferation of images and advertising. Once again, Brantlinger and Higgins write “Capitalism – or so-called consumer society – is characterized by its prodigal, wasteful ways” (459). Advertising promotes and is directly involved in the extravagance of continually buying more and newer goods, and is thus involved in the creation of mass waste. Not only does advertising use techniques of extravagance, and bombard the modern subject with images, it also promotes lifestyles that demand an excess of goods, the buying power to buy what one does not need but merely wants. As such, the “false needs” that Leiss, Kline and Jhally discuss contribute directly into wasteful consumer culture. Indeed, Veblen believes the modern consumer is driven to buy even more than he will ever want, as the ability to buy wastefully “becomes substantially honourable in itself, especially the consumption of the more desirable things” (69). Needs turn to wants, and wants turn to dreams of amassing more and more goods than can ever be worn, used, or shown off. The perpetual newness of commodities, as Stephen Gennaro notes, also contributes to this waste, as what was once new becomes old and undesirable fast in the face of ever newer goods. All this is in the pursuit of the consumer’s dream – in

fact, this is the very dream advertising attempts to sell once it steps away from listing facts and toward selling happy lifestyles. Commodities are no longer constituted by what they can do in and of themselves, but by how much mystically better they can make the consumer's life – and as more commodities come on the market, things can always get better. Advertising continually sells extravagance and creates waste by creating the need for more.

The extravagance, fakery and waste involved in advertising is, moreover, seen to have lasting effects on consumers and on modern subjects in general, as advertising divorces consumers from their lived reality by encouraging them to buy wastefully and away from necessity. Primarily, advertising is seen as partially responsible for turning the modern public into a mass of consumers, overwhelming them with these false desires and wasteful behaviors. Richard Sennett, when speaking of Georg Simmel, notes that

the inescapable fact of urban life of all kinds was the feeling of being overwhelmed, the feeling that there was too much around one in a city to be dealt with. This excess of psychic simulation, as Simmel called it, led men to try to defend themselves by not reacting emotionally to the people around them in a city; for Simmel this meant they would try not to react as whole human beings with distinct identities. (8-9)

Although Simmel deals primarily with city life rather than particularly with consumer culture and advertising, much the same processes seem to be critiqued with the overwhelming overabundance of commodity culture and the advertising

that promotes it. Under this advertising regime, people are seen to be no longer capable of whole individual thought, but instead follow a kind of groupthink based on the therapeutic murmurs of the advertisements of the day. Here again Debord's theories are useful, as for Debord "The satisfaction that no longer comes from *using* the commodities produced in abundance is now sought through recognition of their value *as commodities*" (33) and "the individual's gestures are no longer his own; they are the gestures of someone else who represents them to him" (15). Consumers no longer follow their own desires, but the desires of companies selling them goods, and commodities are no longer seen rationally.

Surrounded and even invaded by this excess of advertising, consumers themselves are seen to turn into a mass in a world where social relations are mere images (Schwartz 4); thus the unreality produced by advertising is seen to strip consumers of individuality. Lears echoes this and adds to it when he argues that "Lumping individuals en masse, manipulative strategies displayed growing contempt for 'the average man' ... the advertisers' job of 'making customers' closely paralleled the new political consultants' aim of 'making voters.'" Either way, "the 'public' was no longer composed of active citizens but rather of manipulable consumers" (19-20). Here, the very strategies of advertising, the movement from presenting information to manipulating images, reduce consumers to a mindless mass.

Indeed, this points to the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, as they use the term 'culture industry' to blame mass culture not on the masses, but on institutions (Slater 72). Interestingly, although Adorno and Horkheimer seek to shift the blame

from consumers, under these theorizations the consumer is positioned as powerless amid the influx of commodities and the images of consumer culture presented by the culture industry. Furthermore, Leiss, Kline and Jhally argue that

Critics of advertising usually regard advertising as so persuasive, powerful, and manipulative that consumers are unable to decide rationally what exactly their real needs are or how best to satisfy them. The consumer is seen, from this perspective, as the confused and hapless victim of the advertising industry's clever machinations.

(34)

Like Debord's theories on the Society of the Spectacle, this constitutes consumers as a mass of people at the mercy of the machinations of industry with, as Jameson argues, a "conception of mass culture as sheer manipulation, sheer commercial brainwashing and empty distraction by the multinational corporations who obviously control every feature of the production and distribution of mass culture today" (*Signatures* 21). Again, then, advertising can be described through gaudiness, as its extravagance turns consumers into undefined masses, not whole people, giving this extravagance yet another element of falsity.

While these forces may be present, and may indeed inflict a kind of mass mentality on the consumer, there are critical resistances to positioning culture in this way, particularly studies that switch from the terms "mass culture" and "culture industry" and rather use "popular culture" to delineate a consumer culture wherein

consumers have choices, as described in the introduction.⁵ Again, as Gunning has argued, the vision of the naïve spectator may be reductive. Indeed, although Leiss, Kline and Jhally agree advertisements clearly use persuasion, they ask if this idea of persuasion is necessarily bad, or if it is in fact different from manipulation, which uses deception and lying, while persuasion is positioned instead as a “rational process” for the consumer (44). In other words, the advertising world, and by extension the culture industry described by Adorno and Horkheimer, does indeed work under certain aims, but do these aims overwhelm consumer thought and individuality, or do they merely aid them in making choices? Fox and Lears seem to agree, arguing that

Consumers are not only buyers of goods, but recipients of professional advice, marketing strategies, government programs, electoral choices, and advertisers’ images of happiness ... Individuals have been invited to seek commodities as keys to personal welfare, and even to conceive of their own selves as commodities. One sells not only one’s labor and skills, but one’s image and personality, too. (xii)

In this quotation, Fox and Lears are clearly aware of the way consumer culture works, as advertisements sell the images of commodities as ways into a better lifestyle. Within this culture, however, consumers are not oppressed, but “invited to

⁵ See Fiske, John. *Understanding Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.; Rosenberg, Bernard, and David M. White. *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1957. Print.; Eco, Umberto, and Robert Lumley. *Apocalypse Postponed*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994. Print.; Cook, Deborah. *The Culture Industry Revisited: Theodor W. Adorno on Mass Culture*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996. Print.

seek” commodities out and are “recipients of professional advice.” They work within this world.

Granted, the extent of the power that the consumer has is rather vague, for these critics all still refer to the ways consumer culture has shaped the modern subject. Slavoj Žižek has described the state of this kind of consumer as in the “Paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it” (29); although for Žižek a sign of this enlightened false consciousness is irony and cynicism, this strategy, “with all its ironic detachment, leaves untouched the fundamental level of ideological fantasy, the level on which ideology structures the social reality itself” (30). The fact that consumers are aware of and in some ways navigate through consumer culture cannot fundamentally change it. Nonetheless, I would argue that what is important here is that consumer culture and the consumer may be seen as a mediation rather than a power struggle of domination and resistance; the consumer is aware of the consumer culture around him or her and is not a mindless automaton, and yet still lives within it. Michel de Certeau’s concept of the “tactics” of the consumer is appropriate here, for in *The Practice of Everyday Life* he describes how amid the “strategies” of corporations, consumers use tactics that are influenced but not dominated by these corporations; tactics “use, manipulate, and divert these [corporate] spaces” (30).

The work of modernism, again as pointed to in the introduction, also takes up these issues. As Jameson points out, a work of art “allows us to grasp mass culture

not as empty distraction of 'mere' false consciousness, but rather as a transformational work on social and political anxieties and fantasies which must then have some effective presence in the mass cultural text in order subsequently to be 'managed' or repressed" (*Signatures* 25). This concept of how art can work within consumer culture with its own anxieties is, I believe, a useful way to position modernism and consumer culture, particularly where enlightened false consciousness is involved. Modernism does not necessarily present a clear cut way *out* of consumer culture, but it does provide perspectives *within* it that help consumers gain some kind of autonomy. For even though modernism may seek to distance itself from consumer culture and posit its creations as art separated from economy, as Jonathan Crary argues, "Any effective account of modern culture must confront the ways in which modernism, rather than being a reaction against our transcendence of processes of scientific and economic rationalization, is inseparable from them" (85). Modernist responses to consumer culture may be viewed not as ignorant of or reactionary to consumer culture, but again as a much more mediated, symbiotic relationship.

Thus, poems like Loy's, by critiquing and worrying over the gaudiness and extravagance of advertising and consumer culture, can provide pockets of resistance within it. While "Hot Cross Bum" mostly sets up a more pessimistic and dark view of consumer culture that mirrors Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry, and shows the waste that occurs in a world rapt by lurid extravagance, "Feminist Manifesto" uses the techniques of advertising, which are in fact closely aligned to those of Futurism, to carve a space out for consumer autonomy within this system,

especially – once more – for the female. Where the poems on spectacle, “Giovanni Franchi,” “Three Moments in Paris” and “Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots,” focus on the oppression of consumer culture, “Feminist Manifesto” acknowledges the possibility of this oppression without succumbing to it, and instead provides ways to work within it – ways that even “Three Moments in Paris” could not provide. Thus, Loy’s involvement with Futurism presents a toolkit to view consumer culture not simply as oppressing the consumer, nor to view the consumer as able to break free from consumer society. As such, “Feminist Manifesto” is a mediation between “Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots,” which portrays the consumer as trapped, and “Three Moments in Paris,” which presents extraction and distance from consumer spectacle as the only option.

“Hot Cross Bum,” Loy’s investigation of the Bowery in New York City, illustrates a world enchanted by the extravagance and excess of consumer culture, and the mass of waste that lies beneath its ornate pleasures. The imagery of the poem is overflowing with figures of showiness and extravagance, as

Blowsy angels

lief to leer

upon crystal horizons

shelves of liquescent ‘beef’

--staple fodder of their fanciful fall

a Brilliance all of bottles

pouring a benison

of internal rain

leaving a rainbow in your brain (40-48)

This is searing, overwhelming imagery that seems to flood the senses of both the figures of the poem and its readers. In addition to this there is “a hell vermilion / curtain of neon” (1-2), and “faces of Inferno” are “peering from shock-absorbent / torsos” (35-37). Here again is a gaudy, extravagant modern world. “Hot Cross Bum” also showcases extravagance in its very diction and rhythms. Loy again makes use of almost continual alliteration, making the rhythms not unlike Old English Verse, with the “lurid lane / leading misfortune’s monsters” (4-5) all “along the alcoholic’s / exit to Ecstasia” (8-9). This multi-layered alliteration continues all throughout the poem, and when coupled with Loy’s signature of using outlandish gems of words, the poem is extravagant in both form and content.

This kind of gaudy diction, however, again has a critical use. The evocation of Old English verse, and the use of archaic phrases like “lief to leer” (41) and “hoary rovers” (49) imbues these spectacular and extravagant words with a sense of age rather than the continual need for newness. As with the diction in “Giovanni Franchi,” this gives Loy’s poems a critical distance from consumer culture; her style is gaudy, but it is aware of consumerism rather than enraptured with it, and her outlandish words, although appearing as nonsense at first, are also complex. In so doing, moreover, Loy demonstrates how gaudiness is not mere artifice, nor is a gaudy style mere literary artifice. Instead, gaudiness can be used as a complex critical tool. Indeed, as a whole, modernism’s use of highly stylized language and new-fangled free verse is not for mere artifice, but is used as a critical strategy. This

point which is backed up by the way that Loy acknowledges the extravagance of consumer culture by examining its excess, its underbelly, in the Bowery – gaudiness is multi-faceted.

Indeed, many of the figures of the Bowery are composed less with extravagance and more with excess – with waste, and garbage. This fits in nicely with Loy's ethos of the dustbin, as Smedley points out. She notes that Loy “famously told a photographer, ‘My true environment is a dustbin’” (228) and she identified “herself as deject-artist with the human subjects relegated to the abject periphery” (229) with an “attention to the ‘dirt’ of the street” (233). Likewise, in this world of gaudy extravagance, the Bowery receives all the waste. For “Beyond a hell-vermilion / curtain of neon / lies the Bowery” (1-3). As Burke argues, the speaker presents “the Bowery as a zone existing somewhere beyond the city dweller’s consciousness. A kind of urban hell” (419). The Bowery, then, is the wasteful by-product of extravagance, the reality behind the bombardment of images in the modern city-dweller’s everyday life.

There is, however, no real presence of advertising and consumer culture here in the underbelly of the city, but rather only the derelict figures of the street. Nonetheless, the poem contains many of the same concerns, and demonstrates a critique of the excess involved in extravagance, and so provides a good opening to Loy’s second critique of the gaudiness of consumer culture as ornate and wasteful. The figure of the Catholic church becomes, I argue, an equivalent to advertising and consumer culture, as it seeks sell the therapeutic images of better lives. Since the Church is so disconnected from this world of excess and waste, however, it leaves

the denizens of the Bowery as an undifferentiated mass, even as its extravagance leaves the Bowery behind in a trail of waste.

The therapeutic thrust of the church is immediately evident as Loy mentions

Some passing church
or social worker

confides to a brother

how he has managed to commandeer

a certain provision

of hot-cross buns (123-128)

The mention of hot-cross buns seems to be a kind of Bowery communion that hints at the promise of salvation and regeneration – thus, the church advertises for its own product of salvation. Importantly, however, just as in advertising, this is only the *image* of it. As Burke argues, the presence of the buns in the poem is “a parodic communion” as “these buns replace the wafers, and ‘creepy Pete’ stands in for the libation” (419). This is, after all, a realm with the

Bum-bungling of actuality

exchanging

an inobvious real

for over-obvious unreal (31-34)

The Catholic church is presented in “Hot Cross Bum” as this “over-obvious unreal,” selling overblown holy rites as real salvation. Indeed, the church only has

conditional compassion:

appreciation
of your publicity value
to the Bowery

So here comes help

Here comes regeneration (115-120)

What kind of regeneration is this, that is only tied to publicity value and is only a “conditional compassion”? The streetwalkers here are being used as advertisements for the church, images of their promises of salvation and proof of their powers of regeneration. As Burke notes, all this can only be “parodic” – there is no real regeneration to be had here, only the advertisement for it.

Consequently, there is an inherent disconnect between the church and the residents of the Bowery streets that shows how little these promises of regeneration will help them. The church is said to have “the egoless eagerness / of priestly patience / for laic participance” (152-154) which is pitted next to the “impious mystics of the other extreme / shrunken illuminati” (156-157) and they are “oppositional altars” (186). The church’s promises of salvation cannot reach the citizens of the Bowery. While the church deals “on high / disputing / the sheer beauty” (216-218) in order “to entice humanity” (221), the people of the street cannot be enticed by such glitter, because they live in a world of waste.

This is particularly obvious in the closing lines of the poem, where the overabundance and extravagance of the glamoured rites of the church leaves only the excess and waste of the Bowery in its wake rather than any regeneration. Moreover,

throughout this passage Loy demonstrates that these sorts of lavish false promises do not transform the world, they only lay it to waste. The church is described with weighted opulence as

an undertaker's ebon aide
lurks in the portal-to-the-immortal

Saunters steep steps
to fling wide open the glass
doors of an obesely curtained hearse
prior to reception
of consecrated corpse (241-247)

Everything is sacred, consecrated, and laden with extravagance in the "obesely curtained hearse." Yet trailing behind this pomp and circumstance Loy describes

Concordantly
a ravenous truck
comes to a churning stand-still
before the pious façade
hiding the invitatory conveyance
and carriages of florist's grievance

Collecting refuse more profuse than man (250-256)

Here, it is ultimately the waste produced by the excess and extravagance of the "pious façade" that actually reveals it as a façade – a false, extravagant and gaudy

advertisement. The church cannot change the lives of the citizens of the Bowery with their glamorous rites and promises, and only make it worse by the disconnect. These people are already the refuse of the world, and to promise them extravagant and wasteful salvation gives them nothing but what they already had.

In some ways, this places the citizens of the Bowery in a position that is almost clairvoyant about the current gaudy extravagances of the church, and by extension the extravagant consumer culture of the city. This is supported by the references to them as “impious mystics” (156) and “prophet[s] of Babble-on” (69). Indeed, Joshua Weiner argues that “Loy views the bums not as figures for poetry of the Holy Spirit ... but as figures in and of themselves” (235) – they are individualized in some ways, or at least worthy of subjectivity. They are unique in their partially outside perspective. However, in the disconnected, extravagant perspective of the church, and the city that is outside of them, the denizens of the Bowery are nonetheless still constituted as a mass, as they are indeed the refuse of this extravagance. In the Bowery, “the human ... race” is “altered to irrhythmic stagger” (7), while “confluent tides of swarm / loiter” (11-12) among “crowds of the choicelessly corrupted” (16) and where “the murmur of the mass / is become lingua audibly” only “in sodden-mouthed excuses” (84-85). In their own realm they may have clairvoyance, but to the extravagant world of consumer culture, these are a dispossessed people in the underbelly of the city, and they are the masses of waste of the extravagance of the city.

In some contrast, “Feminist Manifesto” deals directly with advertisement by way of its language. Loy’s involvement with Italian Futurism, particularly with F.T.

Marinetti, has been well documented by critics, and her “Feminist Manifesto” (along with poems like “Three Moments in Paris”) is seen as a reaction against Futurism’s misogynistic tendencies while still working within its tenets, using, as Lucia Re argues, “a free-word prose made visually striking and emphatic through the use of expressive spacing, bold capital letters, and underlining” (811) that was typical of Italian Futurist texts. For Re and other critics, then, Loy uses Futurism for her own feminist aims. As Julie Schmid argues, Loy “make[s] use of a futurist-inspired poetics in order to examine the position of women within the movement” (2). Re even suggests that “Feminist Manifesto,” though proceeding from this position, actually addresses both sexes as “Both women and men, according to Loy, are the victims of a cultural construction of gender based on reciprocal exploitation” (812).

Yet Loy’s use of Futurism has other applications, particularly its engagement with consumer culture. As Re notes, even the misogynistic strains of Futurism were actually used more for publicity purposes as “The exaggerated anti-woman discourse and the violent virilism of the first futurist texts ... were principally intended as means to attract attention, to ‘shake up things’; in short, to outrage and scandalize” (799). In its very rhetoric, then, Futurism is connected to consumer culture. Indeed, Walter Adamson argues that Futurism attached itself to consumer culture in order to control it, writing that

Marinetti’s futurism distinguished itself as the most cunning and inventive in the way it resisted commodity culture. Especially in the prewar period, Marinetti went so far as to appropriate self-consciously many of the values and marketing strategies of commodity culture in an

effort to beat the rising entertainment industries at their own game.

(“Avant-Gardes” 868)

Thus, Futurism also has a complicated but nonetheless strong connection with consumer culture, resisting it as much as it was involved in it; once more, then, consumer culture is not merely imposed on the modern subject, but rather modern subjects work within consumer culture, as with the founders and proponents of Futurism.

Moreover, a distinction can be made between Futurism and other modernist movements that further links it to consumer culture. As Adamson argues, we “sharply distinguish between modernism and avant-gardes such as Futurism, dadaism, constructivism, and surrealism, since ... modernism is committed to the autonomy of art while the avant-gardes are concerned with the aestheticization of life” (“Mass Culture” 90). From its inception then, Futurism openly averred that art must draw from life rather than exist entirely outside of it; it must draw from the way consumer culture shapes the world, whereas modernism attempted in some ways to distance itself from the everyday. Indeed, Futurists did not see mass culture as sullyng their work, but rather felt modernity and mass culture were mutually reinforcing (“Mass Culture” 101). Moreover, for Adamson, if the Futurists sought control over consumer culture through their work and ultimately failed, this is not an end to the avant-garde. Instead, “The problem becomes one of finding ways to live with [consumer culture] critically. In this context, avant-gardes as aesthetic ironists can and very likely will continue to play an important critical role” (“Avant-Gardes” 870). Once more, then, there seems no way completely out of consumer

culture, but there are ways to work within it.

Indeed, I would like to suggest that the closest parallel to consumer culture Futurism has is to the gaudiness and extravagance of advertising. Consequently, although Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" is indeed about the place of the feminine within Futurism, it also concerns itself with the way the modern subject is constituted in consumer culture, particularly in advertising, and addresses this ironically and by working within consumer culture. Futurism's rhetoric, with its "integration of the media" (Antonelle, Harmanmaa 777) and its attention-getting aims that Re points out, make it an easy match with advertising, especially considering Loy's own concerns with the way femininity and virginity are given market values and sold as objects of desire. Finally, if, as Žižek has noted, Loy's irony does not fundamentally change the capitalist ideology behind advertising and consumer culture, Loy's Futurist rhetoric does give its own ironic answer back to consumer culture and advertising by creating a subjectivity primarily for women, but broadly for anyone. Thus, through the language of gaudy, extravagant advertising, Loy recuperates the ills of "Hot Cross Bum."

At the root of Loy's worrying over the extravagance of consumer culture is, once more, the bombardment of persuasions that women receive about keeping their virginity – and by extension their femininity- intact. Loy argues that "under modern conditions a woman can accept preposterously luxurious support from a man ... -- as a thank offering for her virginity" (155) and writes of how woman must succeed "in striking that advantageous bargain" (155) or else be "prohibited from any but surreptitious re-action to Life-stimuli" (155). Here then, virginity is

presented once more as a commodity, an exchange for the luxury and extravagance of consumer culture presented by the husband. Furthermore, there is the sense that if a woman does not participate in this market that she herself will turn into the excess waste of that market (as with the virgins with no dots), and be denied any subjectivity as she is prohibited from “Life-stimuli.” Moreover, commodification of virginity is tied directly to illusory promises, as Loy writes that “all your pet illusions must be unmasked” (153), illusions about “the fictitious value of woman as identified with her physical purity” (154). The images that these persuasions of virginity offer up are mere illusions, and in fact Loy writes that in buying into these persuasions they “are glossing over **Reality**” (153). Virginity thus becomes tied to the world of consumer culture, a commodity to be traded and indeed a false promise.

Loy is also concerned with the way both men and women are turned into unidentified masses by this commodification, and instead encourages, in contrast to Eliot’s doctrine of impersonality, the recuperation of individuality. To Loy, both the commodification of virginity and the failures of the feminist movement have rendered modern subjects faceless. Just as Loy rails against the commodification of virginity that works by “rendering her lethargic in the acquisition of intrinsic merits of character by which she could obtain a concrete value” (154) she also warns men and women to “Cease to place your confidence in economic legislation, vice-crusades and uniform education” (153) as “The women who adapt themselves to a theoretical valuation of their sex as a **relative impersonality** are not yet **Feminine**” (155) and “The man who lives a life in which his activities conform to

a social code ... is no longer **masculine**" (153). Here, Loy rails against individuals that are defined by social codes that are beyond them, and are taken in by a culture that sells them images of what they should be, rendering them impersonal. Instead, Loy writes to "seek within yourselves to find out what you **are**" (154), and thus encourages individualization instead of an undifferentiated mass shaped in the culture's – including consumer culture's – image of the marketable man and virginal woman. Modern subjects, then, are encouraged to find themselves within this realm of unreality.

Although Loy's advice within "Feminist Manifesto" is the total destruction of virginity and its commodification, her rhetoric and typography, which are akin to advertising, suggest that there are ways to work within consumer culture rather than to deny it. Loy demands, "as protection against the man made bogey of virtue – which is the principal instrument of her subjection" (154-155), the "unconditional surgical destruction of virginity" (155) and emphatically argues that "There is no half-measure –NO scratching on the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition, will bring about **Reform**, the only method is **Absolute Demolition**" (153). In these lines, Loy rejects reformist feminist movements, and thus seems to reject any kind of notion of the success of reform within a system, instead positing a large-scale overhaul of entire systems and conceptions.

For the specific commodification of virginity apparent in the "Feminist Manifesto," Loy's commitment to total destruction is evident and perhaps indisputable. Even these lines on absolute destruction, however, use techniques

from consumer culture and advertising, and point to how consumer culture must be mediated when its entire structure cannot be destroyed. Indeed, consumer culture played an important role in Loy's own work. For example, as Roger Conover notes, Loy's "Auto-Facial Reconstruction" was in fact a pamphlet used to make Loy money "when she was desperate for income" ("Notes" 218) and "was the first of many entrepreneurial attempts [Loy] made to pitch business ideas to clients" ("Notes" 218). This kind of background places Loy's work not merely as a reaction to or in scorn of consumer culture, but directly involved in it. Burstein even argues that "The practices of Mina Loy... set terms for engaging in an aesthetic economy that eerily resembles mainstream practice. She had a corporate strategy" (169). When this is coupled with the Futurist elements of "Feminist Manifesto," Loy's work can be seen in many ways as an example of consumer culture as much as a critique of it.

The enlarged letters of "Feminist Manifesto" as well as its powerful sentences all take cues from the advertising world and the way these ads were meant to persuade consumers, even as the poem rails against the commodification of the masses through virginity and other social mores. Loy uses the underlining and bold font of certain words to highlight sentiments, but also to create a convincing, extravagant and persuasive voice. Again, then, Loy employs aspects of gaudy consumer culture, but as a critical tool. Through these techniques she is not merely presenting facts, but is also structuring her argument so that it appears better, and promising the amelioration of modern subjects' lives. This is not so far off from commercial advertising, which uses persuasion precisely to promise consumers better lives. Nor is it hypocritical to berate such things as the commodification of

virginity by using the techniques of consumer culture – rather, it presents a way, through irony, to navigate through consumer culture when its utter destruction is unfeasible. Just as the commodification of virginity is illusory and detrimental, so too are the extravagant promises and rhetoric of advertising, because they are a part of the same system – but while Loy urges the abolition of one, she skillfully wields the other for her own uses, demonstrating a way for the consumer to do it as well. Thus, Loy demonstrates how to become a spectator and a consumer within consumer culture who sees it for what it is – and to reclaim subjectivity through this: to use the techniques and gaudiness of consumer culture to critique it.

There are, indeed, issues with this. Since the extravagances and excesses of consumer culture are not to be destroyed by their own rhetoric of extravagance and attention-getting, but rather only mediated, consumer culture is still left largely intact. What does occur, however, is a realistic awareness not only of what these techniques are, but how they shape consumers. For Loy, this means the way advertising can lump consumers into masses and lay them to waste, and the way it sells illusions, aspects she acknowledges throughout “Hot Cross Bum” and “Feminist Manifesto” by referencing the gaudy extravagance of the church and the commodification of virginity. Indeed, by making her rhetoric and typography so eye-catching and extravagant, Loy gets the attention of readers and consumers about this issue and makes them all the more aware of it. Consumers are no longer deprived of rational thought and seen as oppressed, although Loy does acknowledge these forces. Rather, “Feminist Manifesto,” although a part of this consumer culture,

gives a space to move within it as it makes readers aware of the issues and gaudiness of consumer culture present in poems such as “Hot Cross Bum.”

Chapter 4: “Mannequins, Harlequins”: Imitation and Hyperreality

The falsity of gaudiness has been present throughout the spectacle and extravagance of consumer culture, but here I would like to turn specifically to focus on that falsity in mass-produced, cheaply made goods and imitations. With commodities acting as appendages to or even substitutes for identities, authenticity has already been seen as unreliable in consumer culture. However, when mass produced imitations act as these identities and stand in for luxury items, authenticity itself becomes a commodity. Furthermore, I argue that in a consumer culture such as this, Baudrillard’s theories on the hyperreal are useful, supplemented by those of Debord. For when imitation and falsity become layered one over the other they soon become the dominant reality because there can be no more reference to a false consumer veneer over a more authentic, earlier lifestyle . Following this, what use is it to argue for a return to authenticity amid the falsity of consumer culture? Loy’s poems “Mass Production on 14th Street” and “On Third Avenue” acknowledge the implications of using mass-produced, imitation goods as consumer identities, and the implications of mass production as a whole. They do so not by criticizing the lack of reality in consumer culture and mass production, but by admitting that the imitation has become reality. Thus, through these poems, Loy shows recognition of what the false spectacles and empty promises of gaudy consumerism amount to: a world where the representation has become the real.

Veblen’s theorizations on conspicuous consumerism, although outlining the spectacle and extravagance of consumer culture in the need to be seen buying more,

leave no room for the cheapness of the gaudy, mass-produced commodity that attempts to look more valuable than it really is. Veblen argues that

We all find a costly hand-wrought article of apparel much preferable, in point of beauty and of serviceability, to a less expensive imitation of it, however cleverly the spurious article may imitate the costly original; and what offends our sensibilities in the spurious article is not that it falls short in form or color, or indeed, in visual effect in any way. The offensive object may be so close an imitation as to defy any but the closest scrutiny; and yet so soon as the counterfeit is detected, its aesthetic value, and its commercial value as well, declines precipitately. (169)

The object's worth declines, Veblen explains, purely because of expense, since for Veblen the perception of an object's beauty is closely linked with that expense (126) and that even with "an imitation so cleverly wrought as to give the same impression of line and surface to any but a minute examination by a trained eye" (128), the article's value is still lessened as soon as it is discovered to be a cheap counterfeit (128). For Veblen, then, there is no place in consumer culture for the imitation – and more so, there is a firm belief that the truth will out with an imitation, since with a scrutinizing eye the real value of a good will be found out, or else the price tag itself will tell. Because it is less expensive and a counterfeit, the imitation is inherently lesser than the original, no matter how much it looks like it. Expense in this consumer culture is the marker of originality and of value, and thus the expensive commodity will always dominate the imitation.

In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” however, Walter Benjamin constitutes modern commodities in a different, at times oppositional, way, and in a way that exposes gaudy consumer culture’s foundational elements of falsity. He admits that “The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (73) and that “Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority” (73). This sounds much like Veblen’s theories. Yet, with the rise of mechanical reproduction, this dependence of the imitation on the original no longer holds true. As Benjamin writes, all this is “not so *vis a vis* technical reproduction. The reason is twofold. First, process reproduction is more independent of the original than manual reproduction. [...] Secondly, technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself” (73-74). Moreover, as Alys Eve Weinbaum argues, “changes in the mode of production are manifest in transformations in cultural production” (214): these mechanical changes have lasting effects on culture in general. For Benjamin, consumer culture is thus marked by the imitation that Veblen denies.

Here, then, is where the fakery and gaudiness of the mass-produced commodity enters into consumer culture, as the imitation is no longer status-dependent on the original, but in fact begins to change the reception and configuration of that original. This intersection of conspicuous consumerism, which perpetually demands the flashiest and best, and modern mechanical reproduction, which enables cheaply made imitations, constitutes the modern commodity in two seemingly opposed ways. As a status symbol, the commodity must be the best and

most luxurious, but as a product of modern consumer culture, this commodity is often a reproduction that does not carry the same aura of an original, does not need to, and in fact compromises that aura. Moreover, the fact that consumer culture can be constituted in one way as a search for the luxurious and the unique and yet house so many imitations that only purport to be luxurious, underlines again the gaudiness of consumer culture, as society becomes obsessed with what is flashy and extravagant, and yet continually produces imitations of this extravagance – it is flashy, and false.

More importantly, despite Veblen's disdain towards imitation, mass produced consumerism flourished, and this had lasting effects not just on the consumer but also on consumer culture in general. As Williams notes,

The outpouring of new commodities in the late nineteenth century created a world where a consumer could possess images of wealth without actually having a large income. The magic was wrought, in the first place, through the alchemy of scientific and technological advances that permitted hitherto expensive articles to be made much more cheaply or to be imitated convincingly and inexpensively. (92)

In some ways, mass-produced commodities allowed for another layer of the image, the imitation, and the false into gaudy consumerism. In his 1934 travelogue *English Journey*, J.B. Priestley argues, "You need money in this England, but you do not need much money. It is a large-scale, mass-production job, with cut prices. You could almost accept Woolworths as its symbol. Its cheapness is both its strength and its weakness" (401). Thus mass production, and the spuriousness that comes with it,

flourished. Indeed, Alan Tomlinson adds that “He [Priestley] found the new cultural democracy a ‘bit too cheap’, too much a ‘trumpery imitation’ of pretty dubious originals” (15); mass production made the falsity of consumer culture ever more dubious.

Department stores furthered this spurious consumer culture, but partly through them this spuriousness also turned to reality. Elizabeth Outka examines the department store Selfridges through what she calls the “commodified authentic,” a term that contains many of the issues discussed in viewing consumer culture through gaudiness, in its spectacle, extravagance and underlying falsity. Outka argues that “Selfridges offered an intoxicating promise: be awash in a modern sea of plentiful and accessible goods, yet maintain (or obtain) a sense of authenticity, of originality, of non-commercial purity” (313). For Outka,

This strategy promised to balance the seemingly contradictory desires for an autonomous ‘authentic’ realm separate from popular culture or the mass market, and the desire (or need) to accommodate the growing pleasures and demands of the consumer age ... Critically, the strategy also presented, with no sense of paradox, the market itself as the best way to obtain this desired non-commercial aura, for the market would provide shoppers access to such purified goods. (314)

This commodified authentic was branded by Selfridges in two ways: as nostalgia and as luxury (316). Nostalgia “cast a misty glow” (316) over the commodities and marketed them as personalized, hand-made objects rather than mass-produced goods. Meanwhile, the commodified authentic also “drew from an alternative sense

of 'authenticity' as original, new, something that was not a copy and not derived from tradition or previous models: appeals to exclusive new fashions, the one-of-a-kind item, the limited edition" (314-315).

These theories encapsulate many of the ones discussed earlier. Here again are the false promises of advertising, which dangle ideal lifestyles as if they were attainable and here posit manufactured goods as authentic items purified of the market. Here again is the spectacle, the need to distinguish oneself from others, here with goods that only appear luxurious and new. Here is the extravagance, the department stores that offer "an intoxicating promise" that lets the consumer "be awash in a modern sea of plentiful and accessible goods." Moreover, just as mass produced goods add another layer of imitation and falsity to consumer culture and to consumer identities, this marketing strategy of "the commodified authentic" can be seen as another false promise and an imitation, masquerading as the real and moving consumer culture further away from the authentic.

Yet it is interesting to note, as Outka does above, how authenticity becomes connected to newness rather than originality in the strict sense. This is closely related to Benjamin's theories on the *nouveautés* of consumer culture. As Benjamin argued above, it is "the presence of the original" that produces "the concept of authenticity" (73) – and once the original is obsolete in mechanical reproduction, authenticity must undergo a transformation. Since mechanical reproduction has made the aura of the original defunct and freed the imitation from its dependence on the original, authenticity is no longer the realm of the original, but the realm of the *nouveauté* and new-fangled commodities. Whatever is newer is more authentic.

Thus, in continually promising newer better, identities, consumer culture also tries to offer a kind of marketable authenticity that is based not on original items, but on continually producing new items for consumption – thus ensuring, of course, the continual importance of department stores like Selfridges that provide these commodities. As such, it can be argued that reality itself begins to be commodified in what Schwartz notes as “the appeal of the category of reality as an object of consumption” (11) – in consumer culture, authenticity and reality become closely tied to how fast corporate industries can pump out new goods.

It goes further than this, however, for reality becomes not only commodified, but these commodified representations become reality. Indeed, Schwartz argues that “One of the pleasures of modern life ... was the collective participation in a culture in which representations proliferated to such an extent that they became interchangeable with reality”(10). Here, then, as representations and mass-produced imitations are marketed as authentic merely because they are new, consumer culture can no longer be discussed as opposing the real, the original and the authentic, because the use of the authentic has shifted. Consumer culture is no longer the false, gaudy veneer lacquered over top of real, down-to-earth life, and rants of nostalgia for a more authentic past must be reconstituted. Instead, consumer culture and its commodified authentic must be seen as the reality itself, with newer and yet newer goods setting the standard for authenticity.

This domination of the imitation and commodification of reality is mirrored in the theories of Baudrillard and Debord. As Debord argues, “When the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings” (12). Baudrillard

echoes this, arguing that “The very definition of the real has become: that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction ... the real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced: that is, the hyperreal ... which is entirely simulation” (146). Moreover, this is supported by Benjamin’s theories on mechanical reproduction. For as Benjamin writes, “To an even greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility” (76). To echo the above, then, mechanical production allows the reproducibility of the real to occur, as mechanical imitations make the original obsolete and shift the use of authenticity towards newness, allowing imitations of luxury items to be advertised as the real thing as long as they are new. The real and the authentic become tied to the continual production of newness, and are, as Baudrillard argues, reproducible.

This has lasting effects on mass-produced commodified identities. The commodity is already something to put on, and is thus already inherently inauthentic. So if the commodity that creates this identity is a reproduction of the kind Benjamin theorizes and not the luxurious, one-of-a-kind piece Veblen discusses, then this identity is so far removed from any concept of authenticity that it no longer becomes useful to speak of a dichotomy between the “real” consumer identity and the imposed spuriousness of the commodity-identity. When consumers “put on” the auxiliary identity of an already mass-produced commodity, they subscribe to an identity that is not inherent in them *and* that comes from a cheap replica. If an original commodified identity represents a certain personality to the world, an imitation of this can no longer allow for that representation to work in the

same way, as the consumer becomes a referent of a referent. Consequently, imitation goods cannot exactly be seen as making the consumer identity *more* fake than luxury commodity-identities, but make it so that it does no good to speak of the “real” consumer identity underneath it all. Again, then, this allows for the same shift of authenticity, as its old use is made defunct by the imitation; it is no longer about an original, nor is spuriousness about the lack of one.

As a consequence, Mander no longer needs to worry if people believed “that an *image* of nature was equal to or even similar to an experience of nature” and so “did not seek out the real experience” (26); if for Marx commodities are mystified and fetishized so that they have “a purely social reality” (15), this mystified reality becomes pervasive. The image has become the real experience. Following this, Baudrillard writes that

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double ... Never again will the real have to be produced ... A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary. (4)

Mass produced imitations sold as images of happiness are not deceptive representations anymore, and just as mechanical reproduction caused imitations to become authentic, they are now the reality by which consumer culture operates. As Baudrillard writes, “Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of the territory, a referential

being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (2), which Stephen Watt names as "the death of representation" (136). Mass produced consumer culture has become the hyperreal, and its mass-produced representations have become authentic.

This has lasting implications: if reality has been commodified, and representation has become reality, then what is the use of nostalgically lamenting an authentic past and critiquing this unreal present? As such, the previous poems I have dealt with are in some ways only the beginnings of Loy's critique, as they rely on viewing reality as something outside of the fake gaudiness of consumer culture, when for Baudrillard reality is now merely a representation and a commodity inside it. Loy's poems "Mass Production on 14th Street" and "On Third Avenue" show an awareness of a commodified reality that makes distinguishing between the authentic and inauthentic passé. As such, these poems on mass production show a progression (although, again, not chronologically) out of her works discussed earlier to focus not just on false spectacles and the extravagances and excesses of advertising, but on imitation and falsity themselves, and demonstrate how the false facets of gaudy consumer culture become reality.

"Mass Production on 14th Street" and "On Third Avenue" both set up this mass-produced, consumer realm where even reality is commodified. In "Mass Production on 14th Street," mass production itself is described in gaudy, excessive terms as

All this Eros' produce
dressed in audacious

fuschia
orgies of orchid
or dented dandelion
among a foliage of mass-production (20-25)

Mass-production and consumerism are gaudy, overdone and “audacious” here, filling up the page through these masses of flowers and saturated colors. This is also present in the very rhythms and sounds of the poem, as “All this Eros’ produce / dress in audacious” repeats the same long *a* and harsh *d* sounds, soon shifting to the long *o* sounds combined with the *d* sound in “orgies of orchid / or dented dandelion.” Not only does this consistent alliteration give again the impression of an ornate, laden landscape in the echoing of sounds, but the long vowel sounds are laborious to say, making even the mouth full to the brim with these words. Accordingly, Weiner notes the poem’s “panoramic appreciation of sheer multiplicity, of youthful sexuality, of the city’s teeming industry and industrious laborers” (216-217). Consumer culture is a gaudy affair.

As with “Giovanni Franchi” and the commodified identities of the first chapter, “Mass Production on 14th Street” explores the same kind of dependence on the commodity to enhance or even substitute identity. Here “Idols of style / project a chic paralysis / through mirrored opals” (38-40) while “the consumer” (29) “jostles her auxiliary creator / the sempstress” (31-32). The idols of style – themselves either statues or celebrities, but not “real” people – are projecting through mirrored opals, only an image through a mirror, never something real. Even the continual *s* sounds of this passage produce a kind of lulling, dreamlike quality to this realm in

“idols of style,” “paralysis” and “sempstress,” and even in the soft sounds of “chic.”

Thus, these idols of style introduce a realm of duplicity and spuriousness.

Furthermore, the consumer has an “auxiliary creator” – in this case, the seamstress who provides the consumer with fashionable commodities. This idea of an auxiliary identity is useful – here, these commodities are so linked to the modern consumer’s identity that they become her “auxiliary creator,” and her identity depends on them. Nonetheless, this is not a complete, inherent and authentic identity in itself, but rather an auxiliary and a mask to be “put on”.

Moreover, Loy pays particular attention to the mass-produced and imitation goods in this gaudy consumer culture. There is a pervasive sense of falsity present in “Mass Production on 14th Street” that is not present in other poems. Where the spectacular promises of the commodified identities of “Giovanni Franchi” gave a level of spuriousness to the modern consumer, in “Mass Production on 14th Street” these commodified identities are made specifically from mass produced imitations of luxury items. As such, there is no sense of a real, authentic identity underneath these commodities, but rather these imitations and representations become reality. Later in the poem, then, it is no surprise when two lovers

point at the ecru and ivory
replica of the dress she has on,
doused in a reservoir of ruby neon;

only -- her buttons are clothespins
the mannequin’s, harlequins (63-67)

It is easy to see here what Frost means when she argues that Loy's language "plays dual roles as functional social tool and persuasive aesthetic instrument" (30), as in this passage the sounds and aesthetics of her words enforce her critique on the cheap, imitative gaudiness of consumer culture and its paradoxically pervading reality. Here, the repeated *r* sounds and similar sounding *e* and *i* sounds in "the ecru and ivory" are smooth and lulling, again giving the impression that this seemingly unreal world has become reality. However, these *r* sounds place stress on the word "replica," especially because of the enjambment of the previous line and its placement at the start of the next. This has a jolting effect amid the lull and forces the reader to focus on this replica. The consumer of the poem has on a *replica* dress, one with clothespin buttons, and she also becomes interchangeable with a mannequin. Since her identity is tied to a mass-produced commodity, and not an original but a replica, all its traditional authenticity is thrown into question, and her originality becomes as spurious as the commodity.

Thus, the consumer here seems to be only a representation, and doubly removed from reality, yet all too soon these representations become reality. She is not just putting on a luxury item as her own identity, but a replica of that luxury item amid this "foliage of mass-production." Immediately, then, it becomes no use to speak of the consumer's spurious commodity-identity, nor of her loss of authenticity, because these mechanically reproduced imitations have made authentic originality obsolete. Thus, the consumer transforms into the mannequin; she transforms into one of the dominant representation-turned-reality items of consumer culture. Day after day consumers impose themselves onto the mannequin

through shop windows, imagining its display of goods and wealth as their own. The mannequin representation has taken over the reality of the consumer; as the consumer becomes more like the mannequin in her mass-produced commodified-identity, the mannequin must also be seen to be just as real – or only as real – as the consumer. Thus, Gunning’s earlier warning against seeing the spectator as naïve and as confusing the image and reality is only partly true. The spectator and the consumer may be aware of the spectacular forces of consumer culture, but here the image is indeed becoming reality.

The speaker of “Mass Production on 14th Street” is aware of this, and as a result the poem is awash in images of replication and substitution that are real in and of themselves, illustrating a world where newer and yet still newer images of consumer culture have become authentic. Here the consumer has “the statue of a daisy in her hair” (30) while in “the conservatories of commerce” (36) there are “long glass aisles” (37). The poem is like a house of mirrors: there are so many representations that the image in the mirror becomes the only way of seeing, and in its own way becomes reality. Thus, the “statue of a daisy,” reminiscent of the “orgies of orchid” that become nothing but the “foliage of mass production,” becomes as good as a real daisy in this world of “long glass aisles” and continual representation. Indeed the “mirrored opals” (40) referred to above are

imaging
the cyclamen and azure
of their mobile simulacra’s
tidal passing (41-44)

and even further Loy describes as

a windowed carousel
of girls revolving
idly in an unconcern
of walking dolls
letting their little wrists from under
the short furs of summer,
jolt to their robot turn (50-56)

It should be noted that these women are quite like the dolls of “Three Moments in Paris” in their vacant stares; indeed, the two poems share a concern for the commodification of identity and the resulting falsity it produces. In “Mass Production on 14th Street,” however, the falsity created by mass-produced replicas is the reality rather than the irony – these representations become authentic rather than something for the speaker to turn away from, as she does in “Three Moments in Paris.”

Moreover, these passages again show a world full of glass aisles and mirrored opals projecting more and more images. These images pile up throughout the poem, and there seems to be no end to them. Again, the repeated *s*, *o* and soft *c* sounds give a calming, unreal effect with “a windowed carousel” “revolving / idly in an unconcern,” which is taken up by the steady and soft rhythms and alliteration of the *l* sounds in “letting their little wrists.” As a result, the last line of the passage does indeed “jolt” in its changed rhythm and sounds, as again the focus is on the replica and the “robot” – the images and representations of consumer culture.

Moreover, there is a sense of constant turnover and newness here, as the revolving carousel shows the latest models and there is a tidal passing of simulacra. This lends the feeling of a constantly reproduced reality to the poem, a reality that continually proliferates and reproduces itself, and moreover without any reference to a bygone authenticity. Here there is only the authenticity of newness – there is no ironic speaker here to deflate this gaudy consumer culture, and no moving beyond it.

Likewise, in “On Third Avenue,” consumers are seen as an unidentified mass, but rather than being mere shades and representations of themselves, this has become their reality. Loy writes that

Here and there
saturnine
neon-signs
set afire
a feature
on their hueless overcast
of down-cast countenances (13-19)

Here, the neon advertisements of consumer culture loom over these shades, dictating their lives and becoming the only standouts in the poem. These people are “shuffling shadow bodies / animate with frustration” (5-6), to whom Loy declares, “You should have disappeared years ago’ – / so disappear / on Third Avenue” (1-3). Moreover, in “Mass Production on 14th Street” they are described as a “Pedestrian ocean” (3). Again, the s sounds in the passage as well as the rhymes of “Here and there” and “saturnine / neon-signs” complete this image of a mindless mass, as

these sounds lull readers. Consumers here are so far removed from any real, individualized selves that this mass becomes their real identity. In poems like “Parturition,” Loy valorizes a transcendence of the body, but here this disappearance is not the giving up of worldly goods, but rather gaudy mass-produced consumer goods acting on consumers and turning consumer culture into a realm where representation has become reality.

Indeed, there can be no transcendence in this consumer culture, no way out of it. Thus, “On Third Avenue,” like “Mass Production on 14th Street,” affirms the domination of the image as reality. Throughout the poem, the image of the dummy, which can be likened to the mannequin in “Mass Production on 14th Street,” reoccurs, and Loy again parallels this figure to the consumer. This time, however, the consumer is interchangeable with a mannequin even without commodities. After describing the sea of consumers above, Loy writes that

For their ornateness
Time, the contortive tailor,
on and off,
clowned with sweat-sculptured cloth
to press
upon these irreparable dummies
an eerie undress
of mummies
half unwound (20-28)

These consumers have no commodities to enhance their identity, or to make them into spurious images of themselves. Yet underneath their garments and modern conveniences, they are still “irreparable dummies.” When the commodities are stripped away from these consumers, there is no essential authenticity, in the old sense, left. Instead, stripping them only leaves them like mummies, while the contortive tailor of time – and again the tailor is an image of consumerism, as is the sempstress – in fact encourages their undress. The “shimmering surfaces of artificial things” (Bowie 389) of gaudiness have penetrated deep into the very reality of the poem. The multiple repeating sounds of the passage again give a further sense of a dream world that cannot be moved beyond, not only with the rhyming of “dummies” and “mummies” but the constant *u* sounds in these words, as well as “undress” and “unwound.” Once more, as in “Mass Production on 14th Street,” it is the dummy and the mannequin, the hyperreal images of consumer culture, that prevail. The modern consumer is again interchangeable with the mannequin, even without the spuriousness of commodity-identities, and so the mannequin’s image has become the pervading reality of this consumer culture.

Moreover, throughout both “Mass Production on 14th Street” and “On Third Avenue,” Loy’s gaudy, outlandish diction again contributes to this effect of consumer gaudiness while being critical of it, but also supports the notion that these superficial, gaudy veneers have become a reality. Again the spectacular words like “saturnine” (14) and “effulgence” (32) of “On Third Avenue” are yoked together with the alliterative passages of “shuffling shadow-bodies” (5) and “down-cast countenances” (19) or the “rosy scissors of hosiery” in “Mass Production on 14th

Street” that again parallel the poem with Old English Literature and evoke an older age, rather than a newer sheen, that is at odds with and critical of the newness of consumer culture.

Furthermore, throughout these passages Loy does not deny the power of these gaudy spectacles in her critical diction, but is keenly aware of it. In “On Third Avenue” there is mention of a “reliquary sedan-chair” (35) along with “luminous busts” (47) in a world that is “aglitter” (40) and brilliant. The sedan-chair is an older, more out-dated consumer good, and it is attached to one of Loy’s odd words, “reliquary,” that contributes to this gaudy world. Loy’s diction, by placing an outdated good next to a gaudy word that mirrors gaudy consumer culture, brings this older commodity into the newer realm of consumer culture, showing an awareness and irony of this consumer realm by the contrast. Once more, Loy’s diction is glittering, gaudy, and yet complex in its critiques. It bears repeating, moreover, that this kind of sophisticated critique, which manages to be critical even while the poems mirror this gaudiness, again presents gaudiness itself as complex rather than superficial, just as gaudiness in the realm of mass production and representation-turned-reality becomes a force to be reckoned with. Gaudiness is no longer mere artifice in this consumer world, and nor is Loy’s gaudy poetic.

Loy’s phrase “the compensations of poverty,” however, suggests a perspective that is potentially outside this gaudiness. Nonetheless, although this phrasing appears to indicate a viewpoint beyond hyperreality, this perspective is in fact a part of the spectacle and thus once more affirms the way representation has become authentic. In the second section of the poem, Loy writes

Such are the compensations of poverty,
to see-----

Like an electric fungus
sprung from its own effulgence
of intercircled jewelry
reflected on the pavement

like a reliquary sedan-chair
out of a legend, dumped there

before a ten-cent Cinema

a sugar coated box-office
en jail a Goddess
aglitte, in her runt of a tower (29-43)

and then again

Such are the compensations of poverty,
to see-----

Transient in the dust
the brilliancy
of a trolley

loaded with luminous busts;

lovely in anonymity

they vanish

with the mirage

of their passage (45-54)

These “compensations of poverty” thus seem to be the ability to be outside of these gaudy spectacles, away from the glitter and the effulgence. Like the citizens of the Bowery in “Hot Cross Bum,” poverty seems to provide the modern subject with a vantage point on these gaudy affairs because it denies them any participation in conspicuous consumption. I would argue, however, that this vantage point is not outside of consumer culture, as again the domination of the image has made it so that there is no outside vantage point to be had – all is hyperreal. Indeed, as these passages make clear, the compensations of poverty merely include the impoverished as spectators of this gaudy consumerism. These people are firmly placed in the position of seeing, still as potential buyers or, as the first quotation makes clear, cinemagoers. These passages still have the lulling *s* and soft *c* sounds, in “Transient in the dust” and “luminous busts” that make this entire realm seem dreamy and unreal. The spectacles they view are a part of consumerism, with its box offices and once more the “luminous busts” of mannequins. There is no outside perspective, and even the compensations of poverty are still a part of consumer culture’s image making and involved in its spectacle.

Thus, through ‘Mass Production on 14th Street’ and ‘On Third Avenue,’ Loy shows not only another facet of consumer culture, but also its foundation. It can no longer be seen as a fantasy world floating above real life, but rather as the real life itself. Her poems make it clear that there is no outside vantage point and no need for nostalgia; instead everything has become like Baudrillard’s hyperreal, as the representation has turned to reality. Consumerism’s spectacle and extravagance have become the dominant modes of living.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Although they have not been the central viewpoints or interpretive lenses of this thesis, Loy's personal life and her feminist values are certainly facets of her work, and have been featured throughout the thesis in poems like "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots" and "Feminist Manifesto." To shift the critical lens from feminism and her personal life over to Loy's engagement with the gaudiness of capitalism and consumer culture is not to deny these aspects of her work and life, but this shift does open up her work to new avenues of interpretation. Indeed, the range of interpretations even within the works discussed here has been wide, from Baudelaire's spectator *flâneur* and the spectacle of consumerism, through to the excess of advertising and conspicuous consumption, all the way to Baudrillard's hyperreal. Throughout these movements and throughout her poetry Loy explores separate but interrelated facets of consumer culture in a way that reveals this culture's essential gaudiness. Its spectacle, its extravagance and its underlying – and ultimately pervasive – cheapness and fakery are all acknowledged and represented in Loy's poems. Nor is this all a one-sided rant on the falsity of consumerism: Loy admits to and uses the persuasive power of advertising in "Feminist Manifesto," and recognizes that the representation has become the real, that consumer culture can no longer be discussed as false, because this falsity has become reality.

Yet this nod to the reality of consumer culture is not to say that the poems of the earlier chapters dealing with falsity are not useful in their own ways. Indeed, they help to build the wide-ranging critique Loy's poems present on the gaudiness of consumer culture. Again, all of this is not done just to rail in vain against either

false consumerism or the domination of the image and of hyperreality, but rather Loy's multi-faceted critique of the gaudiness of consumer culture shows a progression and awareness of what consumer culture is. Indeed, arguably this awareness is the fruit of her efforts. Loy's poetic voice contains both irony and invective, but both are never applied blindly. Instead, as I hope to have shown throughout these chapters and the poems contained within, Loy expounds a sophisticated viewpoint on consumer culture that is three dimensional and nuanced. In these last critiques, Loy has shown how the gaudiness of consumer culture is not merely a veneer to be taken lightly, but a reality that must be reckoned with, and yet this reckoning would not mean half so much had she not explored the false spectacles and extravagances of that culture in poems like "Giovanni Franchi" and "Hot Cross Bum." Each poem and critique adds to the others, exploring the facets of consumer culture and building a Baedeker that the modern subject can use to navigate through the modern age.

Moreover, just as the authentic has shifted towards the new, the use of gaudiness must shift too. The deceptiveness and false spectacle of consumer culture is ultimately a reality, and gaudiness itself, as the structuring metaphor for this consumer culture, must also be seen as a powerful reality rather than something to dismiss. Jess Bowie has already described gaudiness as nonsense and as a superficial concept next to decadence's more serious, hefty concerns. As such, to bring back the introduction, gaudiness becomes "ornament bestowed to no serious purpose" (394) and the essential gaudiness of poetry only denotes "The traditional analogy between ornaments and clothing, on the one hand, and metaphor and

literary artifice on the other” (388). For Bowie, gaudiness is then something to be taken lightly, at best to pass over and at worst to disdain for its tasteless imitation and falsity. It stands for artifice, particularly of the literary kind, and thus to engage in or explore gaudiness is to deny the seriousness of a work.

Yet just as consumer culture also seems superficial and dismissive at first glance, with its glitter and its leisure classes, this is the reality Loy faced, and that continues to be the reality. The predominant lament – represented, indeed, throughout Loy’s poems, bemoans the movement away from the authentic, the constant need for more, the ever-present theatricality of consumer life – but this gaudiness is the real, this is the average, and this is day to day life. These are real, complex things to be dealt with and faced rather than dismissed as superficial. Gaudiness in varied forms needs to be given a second glance, not as something to be dismissed as nonsense, flat, and unimportant or to be offhandedly scorned, but something that mirrors an important reality of consumer culture and an important reality of the modern age. By extension, then, literary language and metaphor is not mere artifice, but rather literature has the ability to comment on complex movements in culture.

Loy’s writing, which has been seen as equally gaudy, is just as complex and deserving of a second glance. Her work is enigmatic and at times opaque, but it is never nonsense, and it shows in her multi-faceted exploration of the gaudiness of consumer culture. It is gaudy and extravagant, but it is complex. Loy had a glittering life and an extravagant style, and in this glittering consumer world these are important aspects that can take on a variety of meanings. Her wordplay, her diction,

her alliteration – all the ornaments and accoutrements of her idiomatic style are also important functions and social critiques that make the content and concerns of her poetry come alive. Loy’s essential poetic gaudiness is not a superficial veneer; it is one of the cruxes of her poetry and has, throughout this thesis, made her complex critiques of the gaudiness of consumer culture come alive.

Throughout I have stressed the awareness her poems give the modern subject through Loy’s meticulous progression from superficial spectacle, down through the underbelly of excess, and finally to an acceptance of gaudiness as reality. Although this progression does not follow chronologically through Loy’s life – “Feminist Manifesto” was written almost twenty years before “Hot Cross Bum,” and yet here the two are placed side by side – these poems still showcase this progression of ideas and a complex awareness. Awareness also needs to be given to Loy’s work as a whole – awareness about the many things it does and represents, precisely because it is gaudy.

There is one further implication to be drawn out from Loy’s engagement with consumer culture that again demonstrates how pertinent her poetry and critiques are: the parallel between the newness of consumerism and the newness of modernism. Indeed, what could be called modernism’s mantra, “Make it new,” has definite ties to the use of the authentic to denote the new, even as modernists sought to separate their work from consumer culture through this mantra. Kayode Ogunfolabi, referencing Frederic Jameson’s *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, argues that “modernity ... depends on the existence of the old forms of economy and culture to prove its newness” (142), so traditions that came before

become merely “bad copies” (142) of modernity; they are foils to this newness, and it is a newness which is positioned as somehow more authentic. Yet the more modernists sought to “Make it new,” the more modernism was defined against and thus acknowledged what came before it (Friedman 504).

Ironically, then, through upholding newness, mass-produced goods essentially accomplish what modernism, with ‘Make it New,’ cannot. Mass-produced goods, those “bad copies” of luxury items, in fact make the notion of the original obsolete and in so doing break from tradition and establish a new definition of authenticity through novelty. Modernism, however, goes about it in the reverse, attempting to affirm its authenticity through novelty by breaking with traditions – and this time is then continually defined by and against those traditions. It is the copy, then, that becomes authentic in a new way through novelty, while the modernist movement, striving for originality with “Make it New,” can only toggle between its tradition-abolishing aspirations and those cultural traditions it seeks to abolish.

As capitalism is one of the cultural traditions modernism is defined against, it is also inherently a part of modernism. It is little surprise then that modernism, in the quest for newness and authenticity, has strikingly similar aspirations to what mass-produced consumer culture has already accomplished; modernism and consumerism are inextricably linked, a point John Xiros Cooper has written at length about in *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society*. Modernism’s obsession with the authenticity and originality of newness is mirrored in consumer culture’s obsession with the obsolescence of the original and the continual production of authenticity through newness. Ultimately, modernism is not in a separate realm as a

part of an entirely new era, but runs alongside and even within the modern Capitalist age.

In dealing with this consumer culture, then, Loy's works gain significance and pertinence because in dealing with newness, in being modernist poems speaking about and to the implications of consumer culture, they become examples and emblems of their own environment, and important critiques for their time and place. They also, I believe, are useful beyond their years, as the same gaudy forces are still at play in a realm still enthralled by consumer culture. In many ways Loy herself is emblematic of and indeed stuck in her own time: a radical feminist, deeply involved in the short-lived but remarkable Italian Futurism, with a brilliant or at least brilliantly controversial poetic career that soon gave way to reclusive living. Loy lived her life fast and brief, and her career can often be seen only as a snapshot, particularly when critical lenses, thought provoking as they may be, focus on her life. Loy's work and her critiques, however, although not some universal keys to consumer culture, are nonetheless nuanced and thought-provoking both as markers of the contemporary culture Loy lived in and as the roots of what consumer culture has grown into today, with the hyperreality of reality television and the excess of advertising on the internet. Ultimately, then, I hope that the lenses deployed here make it clear that her complex poetry, although rooted in the history of her life, goes beyond the biographical details of living and into a theoretical realm of capitalist production and consumption.

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