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Fashion Sense: Surfaces, Aesthetics, and Urban Space in U.S. Literature and Culture, 1843-1928

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

FASHION SENSE: SURFACES, AESTHETICS, AND URBAN SPACE IN U.S.
LITERATURE AND CULTURE, 1843-1928

By

Monica Bowerman Urban

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

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FASHION SENSE: SURFACES, AESTHETICS, AND
URBAN SPACE IN U.S. LITERATURE AND CULTURE,
1843-1928

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Fashion Sense: Surfaces, Aesthetics, and Urban Space
in U.S. Literature and Culture, 1843-1928

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My dissertation argues that fashion operates in a wide range of nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts to reveal a new form of perception and a mode of resistance predicated on fashion. Rather than being a tool of manipulation, fashion cultivates a conception of self. I take my cue from Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus' theory of surface reading to suggest that the authors of novels and advice literature produce a mode of reading the surfaces of others. The key to understanding the role of fashion in the novel depends on what I am calling "fashion sense." Fashion sense becomes a focal point of nineteenth-century aesthetic culture, providing a new way of feeling outside of hegemonic norms and prescriptive sentiment. This dissertation examines aesthetic strategies for resistance in etiquette manuals, periodicals, and novels. I consider the theories of Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau, and Jacques Lacan to account for the tactical method of surface reading exhibited by authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Margaret Fuller, Theodore Dreiser, Edith Wharton, and Nella Larsen. By tracing the nineteenth-century debates surrounding conduct and

dress, I demonstrate that fashion is part of a larger philosophical discourse. Ultimately, the mass reproduction of both fashion and the novel underscores the way in which intersubjective desire informs industrialization and the use of urban space. I conclude with a discussion of aesthetic activism in new media using fashion.

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Introduction

Surface(s) Matter

Insofar as the field of nineteenth-century takes account of fashion through the dominant method of historicism, we as literary critics have not yet begun to see how fashion can be read and in turn, how it changes our reading of the American novel. My dissertation argues that fashion operates in a wide range of nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts to reveal a new form of perception and a mode of resistance predicated on fashion. Rather than being a tool of manipulation, fashion cultivates a conception of self and a new way of feeling outside of hegemonic norms and prescriptive sentiment, which I call “fashion sense.” My project takes its cue from Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus’ theory of surface reading. I demonstrate the way in which the authors of novels and advice literature produce a mode of reading similar to surface reading, but one which focuses exclusively on the dressed surface of the body. Traditional symptomatic readings that frame fashion as a veil of ideology fail to account for the authors’ attention to surfaces. I contend that surfaces are not the space where the translation of meaning occurs; they are the sites of meaning. The key to understanding the role of fashion in the novel depends on being able to read these surface matters using fashion sense.

Previous scholarship on fashion in literature has tended to read its function symptomatically, arguing that the narrative champions authenticity while maintaining suspicion of others and clothing.¹ Although recent studies on the role

¹ See Karen Halttunen’s *Confidence Men and Painted Women*; Miles Orvell’s *The Real Thing*

of fashion in the work of American authors like Henry James, Emily Dickinson, and Edith Wharton have increased our understanding of the ways in which clothing functions, the impulse to lift the veil of ideology persists.² In these projects, garments are actors, symbols, or moral compasses while the act of consuming is “sacramental” and “sentimental.”³ This insistence that fashion must reveal something hidden, such as one’s true self, contradicts what I see occurring in similar novels.

My argument departs from theories interpreting fashion as conspicuous consumption, a subsidiary of the culture industry, or a form of cultural capital. Although Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno did not address fashion specifically, we can assume they would consider fashionable clothing to be a part of the culture industry. Following this line of reasoning, advertising, clothing manufacture, and department stores would also be forms of entertainment to keep the masses occupied. However, the production and advertising of clothing in the nineteenth century was not concerned with conveying latent messages. Men and women were not choosing among identical pieces of clothing each carrying the subtext of dominant ideologies. Although most fashion was French in design, after transmission to the United States and its diverse communities, both urban and rural, these fashions were modified. As I will address later in greater detail, fashion at this time allowed for individual creative expression as well as

² See Daneen Wardrop’s *Emily Dickinson and the Labor of Clothing*; Gary Totten’s *Memorial Boxes and Guarded Interiors*; Katherine Joslin’s *Edith Wharton and the Making of Fashion*; Maureen Montgomery’s *Displaying Women*

³ See Lois Banner’s *American Beauty*; Frances Cogan’s *All-American Girl*; Nina Baym’s *Woman’s Fictions*; Stephanie Foote’s *The Parvenu’s Plot*; Sarah Way Sherman’s *Sacramental Shopping*; Lori Merish’s *Sentimental Materialism*

calculated maneuvers. These two forms of creativity, the tactical and the personal, begin to resemble forms of high art more so than the commonly accepted definition.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital has often been used to explain taste and social classes. However, in the novels I address, wealthy characters lack a sense of appropriate dress while poor girls demonstrate impeccable style. Instead of being a symbolic representation of the social order, taste appears as either an innate sense of style regardless of wealth or parentage or an aptitude for navigating new social situations simply by reading the dress others. The novels I analyze also reveal an overlap between the cultural capital of different groups and classes. These junctions often become spaces for translation. For example, working-class women are influenced by the styles of both prostitutes and upper-class women. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which prefigures subjects that are acted upon, forecloses opportunities for agency, which I see as integral to fashion. In fact, fashion sense, to use Bourdieu's language, becomes a "feel for the game," not through social class but surface reading (*Logic* 66).

The work of Walter Benjamin, principally his *Arcades Project*, guides much of my analysis. Even though his text is unfinished, it reorients our potential understanding of consumerism, urban spaces, and modernity. For Benjamin, fashion provided a means to understand the past, present, and future. He explains, "the eternal is far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea" (*Arcades* N3, 2). Although Benjamin is a cultural critic, this entry deprioritizes the intellectual, usually revered, and replaces it with the visual. This inversion

remakes a fashionable embellishment into a repository for the infinite. Furthermore, the historical and the philosophical, usually reserved for the mind, are instead read on the surface of a material object. Endowed with the eternal, fashion can be the harbinger of revolution. Benjamin explains that each season of fashion “brings, in its newest creations, various secret signals of things to come. Whoever understands how to read these semaphores would know in advance not only about new currents in the arts but also about new legal codes, wars, and revolutions” (*Arcades* B1a, 1). This passage captures my conception of surface reading. Here Benjamin models the reading of fashion, not for ideological subtext, but for glimmers of future social change. These new laws, wars, and revolutions come about through small cracks in the dominant structure by using fashion as a tool.

The continued resistance to surface reading as a method of literary analysis is reminiscent of Benjamin’s critique of fashionable thinking in “Left-Wing Melancholy.” Literary critics, too, are attached to certain methodologies that may not work effectively for all intellectual problems. Fashion is one of these areas of analysis that does not require symptomatic reading. I propose that the authors of these novels introduce a type of surface reading similar to that of Marcus and Best but which takes into account the strategic use of fashion. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau describes the “space of the tactic is the space of the other” (36-7). The authors of these novels model a type of surface reading in which the characters accept the capitalist social order, but also, as the Other, use fashion tactically and in “clever” ways (xix). Like Michel Foucault, de Certeau

does not define spaces of resistance as being outside of power; he locates modes of dissent, including the use of time and other resources, inside structures of power. Power, for the authors of these novels and etiquette manuals, resides in fashion.

It is helpful to use de Certeau's rejection of the division between production and consumption when reading fashion in literature. The marginalized characters do not question the modes of production, nor mobilize to overthrow oppressive structures, rather they accept the commodity system and find gratification in consumption. They use fashion tactically to attain recognition or inclusion, be it social, economic, or racial. I define tactics in a similar way to Walter Benjamin's description of fashion. Both are transhistorical and anticipatory but are also forward reaching and backward looking. The authors use surface reading as a means of testing the liminal spaces of characters who are neither defined by their past nor by who they want to become in the future. They combine the circumstances of the present and the eternal search for the new to express themselves through fashion.

These aspirational tactics are not purely performative. I modify surface reading to include Jacques Lacan's theory of extimacy: the external expression of the inner self (*Seminar VII* 139). Although many critics, both of literature and fashion, find fashion to be a means of solidifying one's identity, I do not see it as a heuristic process to determine subjecthood, but rather as an expression of a part of the self to be extended at a particular moment. The practice of what is conveyed and when is also tactical. In this way, fashion in nineteenth-century

literature attends to the rapid changes in industrialization, urbanization, and politics. I am interested in not only what the lengthy passages describing clothing can tell literary critics about fashion in nineteenth-century novels, but also what these texts reveal about inclusion and material culture during a historical period fraught with economic turmoil. These narratives depict the reading of others as enabling their marginalized characters to succeed using fashion, despite their lack of wealth or social standing.

This mode of reading becomes a focal point of late nineteenth-century aesthetic culture. Having a sense of fashion is not innate, as evidenced by the proliferation of etiquette books and fashion manuals in the nineteenth-century, like those by B.O. Flower, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Mary Eliza Haweis. The popularity of these books and the authors' engagement with sartorial details suggest that this was another facet of education. Fashion sense draws on what is perceptible and reads that. There is an element of instant comprehension, rather than translation, of what a person wears by simply reading it. Misreading fashion in these novels as metaphorical could cause literary critics to become mired in the symptomatic at the risk of overlooking examples of calculated maneuvering using fashion.

By tracing the nineteenth-century debates surrounding conduct and dress, I argue that fashion is part of a larger philosophical discourse. Many cultural critics, most notably, William James, Henry Adams, and Thomas Carlyle, used the conceit of clothing to weigh philosophical questions. In the Preface to *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907), Adams asserts that his education was

insufficient to understand and participate adequately in the modern age. He explains, "since Rousseau, the Ego has steadily tended to efface itself, and to become a manikin on which the toilet of education is to be draped in order to show the fit or misfit of the clothes. The object of study is the garment, not the figure" (722). For James, clothing was an integral part of his personal and professional life. Known for his stylish dress, especially his polka-dot ties, he served as Chairman of Harvard's Committee on Academic Dress and kept a detailed account book of his clothing purchases each year. Clothing figures heavily into his philosophy of the empirical self in which "the body is the innermost part of *the material Self* in each of us; and certain parts of the body seem more intimately ours than the rest. The clothes come next. The old saying that the human person is composed of three parts - soul, body and clothes - is more than a joke. We so appropriate our clothes and identify ourselves with them that there are few of us who, if asked to choose between having a beautiful body clad in raiment perpetually shabby and unclean, and having an ugly and blemished form always spotlessly attired, would not hesitate a moment before making a decisive reply" (292). Carlyle's illustrious Professor Teufelsdröckh in his satire *Sartor Resartus*, composes an account of the symbolic meaning of clothes, revealing the profound effect clothing has in society where "man's earthly interests . . . are all hooked and buttoned together, and held up by clothes" (41). He uses the metaphor of fashion to suggest that the institutions that make up civilization, like religion and government, are worn out and require retailoring.

“Skin of the World”

Fashion has always been a feminist issue. Throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries in the United States, a dialogic relationship between fashion and feminism persists. Each wave of feminism has used fashion as a component, often either antithetical or beneficial, to its political aims. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 usually marks the beginning of feminism, but the convention also marks the moment when pants for women, then known as bloomers or Turkish trousers, debuted. Many first-wave feminists wore banners and certain colors of jewelry to advertise their commitment to women’s suffrage and other social causes. Temperance, abolition, and the cult of domesticity were pertinent women’s issues, each with correlations to dress.

The second wave of feminism began with a protest of the Miss America pageant and progressed into a sweeping repudiation of makeup, high heels, and bras, all viewed as oppressive tools of the patriarchy. A multiplicity of voices, objectives, and solutions defined the third wave of feminism in the 1990s. Alongside the reclaiming of linguistic terms like “bitch,” forms of visual expression and sexuality, from baby tees to combat boots, were redefined. The third wave attempted to correct some crucial oversights in earlier iterations of the movement by becoming more inclusive in terms of race, class, sexuality, and national origin. Many important rediscoveries of women writers were made at this time. The advent of cyberspace destabilized gender identities, allowing for experimentation with anonymity or extimacy through email, avatars, and chat rooms. Some critics point to a backlash by media outlets against the progress women had made by

trapping women in the quest for beauty through consumer goods.⁴ In the fourth or “post-feminist” wave, fashion has again been recovered as something generative and satisfying. However, predictable critiques emerged arguing that feminism had become something to be commodified and sold back to women.⁵ This stimulating time has also introduced and expanded on ideas of body positivity, intersectionality, genderqueerness, and conscious consumption.

Feminist critics like Iris Marion Young, Shari Benstock, and Kaja Silverman addressed both the pleasure of clothing and the “mundane shared fantasy” of it (Young 206). Scholarly interest in fashion increased in the 1990s, and many critics located agency for women in clothing. Silverman’s psychoanalytic analysis of the ego suggests that in novels like *Sister Carrie* “what purports to be a voyeuristic preoccupation with a female figure often becomes the pretext for endlessly rummaging through her closets and drawers” (186). Both the anxiety and delight in dressing are reimagined for the reader through the novel. In these scenes, the material objectness of the clothing holds the power and interest freed from the body and the limits of the character. These private experiences both of dressing and reading inform each other. Many feminist critics argued that for some women fashion conveyed the most basic expression of gender identity and by maligning fashion we malign that which is female. I explore femininity as resistance in these nineteenth-century novels, especially since women were considered to be the sex most closely related to both the production and consumption of fashion. Feminist analysis of the cultural work of these novels

⁴ See Susan Faludi’s *Backlash* and Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth*

⁵ See Andi Zeisler’s *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement*

also reveals the origins of contemporary debates about the rights of textile workers and the relationship between aesthetics and the role of women in society.

Like feminist critics, I see fashion as a potential site of creative self-expression as well as patriarchal oppression. However, the novels I analyze demonstrate that authors in the nineteenth century were presenting fashion as a personal site of resistance. Helene Cixous' reflections on fashion shares many commonalities with Lacan's theory of extimacy and aids in making the connection between the personal and the global. Cixous observes:

In moving outward, in expressing oneself in in wool, in jersey, in visible forms, the intimate does not show itself, does not exhibit itself. There is no rupture with the body hidden in the body. There is continuity. Transmission of the secret, barely perceptible revelation. Everything is continuous ... the garment doesn't ... gather in its frontiers ... the gentle unbordering of fabrics, the terrestrial fabric, takes place in gradual, light changes of color and substance. Skin of the world. (96)

Like Cixous, I view fashion as continuous with the body as an expression of the self in that moment. She italicizes "show" to stress that the intimate self is not a performance but an uninterrupted part of clothing due to the selection of that particular garment for that particular day. The "barely perceptible revelation" is the surface which can be read but which takes practice to be read. Fabric for Cixous is terrestrial. She is not referring to its prosaic or earth-bound form, but rather she defines fashion as something with which many global communities can associate and read. She extends her metaphor to suggest that just as clothing and bodies lack borders between themselves, so too do nations lack borders when interpreting the world through the surface of fashion. Here she

echoes earlier sentiments of Carlyle, Benjamin, and James on the shared significance of fashion. Finally, her phrase “skin of the world” encapsulates many of the binaries I attempt to dismantle in the following chapters. I see fashion as eliding false separations between production and consumption, past and present, material and immaterial, and the personal and political.

For the purposes of analyzing the dense descriptions of clothing in these novels, I discern slight differentiations between the terms “fashion,” “clothing,” and “dress.” In the nineteenth century, fashion was not simply influenced by Parisian designers but was defined by them. Wealthy women bought Parisian dresses when they traveled abroad, and these designs became the patterns used by dressmakers and tailors in the United States. Magazines advertisements and department store windows featured allusions to the desirability of this cosmopolitan fashion. Despite this transatlantic flow of goods and influence on trends, I see fashion as retaining elements of choice. Dressmakers and home seamstresses altered patterns while female shoppers could choose the lace, flowers, and other decorative ornamentation to individualizes their outfit. These repeated moments of choosing and discarding require a consciousness about one’s self as well as an awareness of local and global trends that is not necessarily present in either dress or clothing.

Like most fashion theorists, I agree that the defining factor of fashion is its constant change. To be sure, fashion trends moved more slowly in the nineteenth century than in the twenty-first century, but change on the individual level was rapid. Men and women followed trends while also attending to how

fashion becomes a personal extension of the self, often turning to advice manuals for guidance. Fashion is simultaneously quotidian, artistic, concealing, and revealing. The terms “dress” and “clothing” are relatively interchangeable. “Dress” is used more commonly in nineteenth-century novels, but both “dress” and “clothing” convey the basic aspects of clothing the body. These terms are inclusive yet abstract, lacking the global influence and personal creativity of fashion.

Fashion history and theory encompasses a wide variety of methods, from the preservationist to the anthropological. Discourses have persisted about fashion for over four hundred years regarding the flow, function, and meaning of fashion. Debates about the practices of fashion range widely from “conspicuous consumption” to “styletribes.”⁶ However, to analyze fashion in the nineteenth-century novel, two main readings of fashion support the reading of fashion occurring in the novels. In the introduction to his *Fashion Theory* reader, Malcolm Barnard contends, “there is no natural way of being anything ... then, identity must be cultural representation. That means that clothing and fashion ... are not the sort of tools [which stand in for one’s identity] that can be picked up and put down at will: we are always already using them. Indeed, identity and fashion work in such a way that we must say we *are* them” (4). I maintain that fashion becomes a mode of seeing in these novels often serving as the definitive mode of perception for the characters. Like Barnard, I find the tactical prospects of fashion to be what differentiates it from many other objects of material culture.

⁶ See Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class*; Ted Polhemus’ *Streetstyle*

In *Adorned in Dreams*, Elizabeth Wilson explains:

Fashionable dress in the western world [is] one means whereby an always fragmentary self is glued together into the semblance of a unified identity ... Fashion speaks to the crowd and the individual at every stage in the development of the nineteenth and twentieth-century metropolis ... [and] is essential to the world of modernity, the world of spectacle and mass communication. It is a kind of connective tissue of our cultural organism. (11-12)

Her analysis helps to define the paradox I see where fashion is both intimate and public. The use of corporeal metaphors like Wilson's "connective tissue" and Cixous' "skin of the world" suggests that fashion is of the body but also of the world. It connects us to others, but does not bind us; it is an expression of the self, but not the whole self.

Trend Setting

The United States during the nineteenth century is an especially dynamic place in which to situate an analysis of fashion. I find fashion to be the site of many important considerations of the nineteenth century including gender roles, consumption, and the rise of visual culture and mass printing. Innovations like the sewing machine, ready-made clothing, electric lighting, plate glass, and large department stores affected consumption and production, first in the cities and later in the rural areas. This era features the shift to mass-produced clothes and books as well as the enormous circulation of fashion magazines and catalogs. Ultimately, the mass reproduction of clothing, books, and periodicals articulates the way in which modernity emerges in tandem with fashion. Mass production of

both fashion and the novel emphasizes the way intersubjective desire informs industrialization.

As a result of wanting to consider the effects of many of these innovations, the novels I chose extend past traditional cut-off points for typical analysis of nineteenth-century literature. Since I am focused on the mass production of clothing, the rise of the metropolis, and the popularity of cheap fiction, I define my period of study by economic events. The publication of my earliest texts coincides with the rise of industrialism in urban U. S. cities while my final text was published immediately before the Great Depression when consumer spending dropped precipitously.

Of course, the texts I chose include detailed descriptions of fashion, but because my argument emphasizes how fashion is used tactically, I chose texts which feature characters that reside outside of the social norms and are relentlessly mobile. They are mobile both between spaces and between social identities. These characters experiment with fashion as they move into cities, sightsee on the frontier, and travel by train, ship, and carriage. I selected texts that are set in urban spaces in order to consider what fashion can tell us about the way anonymity worked in nineteenth-century novels as well as how authors were responding to the rise of visual culture.

Novels form the basis of my source material, but I also consider advice literature, specifically etiquette manuals, and some aspects of periodicals in my analysis. Given the rise of periodical culture at this time, I felt it was important to consider its reciprocal relationship with fashion. In the following chapters, I refute

widely held assumptions that the articles, advertisements, and fashion plates perform a disciplinary function in condemning fashion and cosmetics as an immoral form of indulgence.⁷ Instead, I show how print culture serves an informative purpose by becoming another surface onto which fashion sense can be projected and learned.

The chapters are organized roughly chronologically. My work is less about the search for subjecthood and identity through fashion in different contexts and more about individual expressions of resistance and extimacy amid the backdrop of anonymous urban space. Tactical ways the “weak make use of the strong” runs through each chapter (de Certeau xvii). These texts, whether theoretical, fictional, or philosophical, each connects the experience of modern life to clothing. I extend this continuity to include the way in which fashion is a means of exerting power. This critical framework is expanded in Chapter One as I analyze the etiquette manual, *Fashion, The Power that Influences the World*, by George Fox, the well-known New York City tailor who dressed Senator Daniel Webster, among others. Fox asserts, “the tailor with his shears, the author with his pen, the sculptor with his chisel, . . . , stand on the same relative scale, each desirous of producing that which ennobles and adorns our common humanity” (xxiii). Like Fox, de Certeau finds the fashion of everyday life to be defined by “clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things” as a means of ennobling humanity through the tactical use of fashion (de Certeau xix).

Chapter One, *Skimming the Surface: Labor and Leisure in Popular Fiction and Etiquette Manuals*, lays the groundwork for the way fashion is being read at

⁷ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*

this time. I begin by analyzing George Fox's etiquette manual, *Fashion: The Power that Influences the World*, to consider how his text informs the perception of fashion in the nineteenth century and aligns with the projects of many authors. I maintain that the proliferation of advice manuals suggests not only that the rules of fashion were not always followed, but that the ceaseless publication of these manuals also points to anxieties about dissimulation and social class fluidity. I then show how Fox and authors of popular fiction, like Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, were responding to the increased availability of ready-to-wear clothing by characterizing a new way of experiencing daily life based on that which is visible. Using Phelps' *The Silent Partner* (1871) as an example, I argue that popular texts like these introduce and make accessible to a mass audience this new mode of reading the world. The spending habits and leisure time of working-class women, especially due to the mass production of novels and of clothing, were of concern to social reformers. Although she was part of the sentimental tradition of writing, I contend that Phelps critiques sympathy and offers fashion as an alternate means of social reform and cross-class understanding.

In Chapter Two, *Transcendental Makeovers: Margaret Fuller and the Feminism of Fashion*, I examine a variety of Fuller's publications, such as *Summer on the Lakes* (1843), *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), her *Tribune* dispatches, both domestic and international (1846-1850), and her personal letters to assert that understanding Fuller's relationship to fashion alters our understanding of the feminist potential of Transcendentalism. Fuller, deeply invested in aesthetics, viewed beauty, even beauty outside of nature, as integral

to developing the higher self. Whether visiting the frontier, prisons, or European countries, Fuller advocates for fashion's unique capacity for understanding others, which departs from other transcendental accounts of society. Fuller also uses fashion tactically to improve her own public image and to further her initiatives for social advocacy. By exploring the motif of flowers, which Fuller uses throughout her work and in her own personal style, I contend that flowers are a means to characterize the benefit of variation and to redefine Emerson's idea of the Over-soul. Between the contending forces of aesthetics, politics, consumption, and production, I suggest that Fuller employs objects as a tool to address systemic oppression and understand the changing roles of women in the United States.

Chapter Three, *Under Construction: Urban Spaces, Public Image, and Time in Wharton and Dreiser*, considers the ways in which Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* (1913) highlight the importance of seeing and being seen. I argue that the changing physical landscape, influenced by the City Beautiful Movement (1900-1910) encouraged urban dwellers to give significant attention to their public image as an alternate means to achieve success. Wider avenues, open parks, massive department stores, and restaurant windows enabled observation and display. These changes, along with a thriving periodical culture, disrupt divisions between public and private. I return to de Certeau to illustrate how the characters exert power through fashion in combination with architectural elements such as glass and electric lights. These practices enable them to subvert established patterns

of mobility and instead to use opportunities for spectatorship as sites of resistance. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how the persistent renovation of surfaces, both physical and architectural, greatly influences the apportioning and predictability of time.

I conclude with the chapter, *That Old Negro is Out of Style: Re-Dressing the New Negro in Nella Larsen's Quicksand* in which I explore how Larsen maps the familiar conflict between the Old and New Negro onto the new terrain of fashion. I argue that as Helga moves through different geographic spaces, she uses fashion to experiment with tactical modes of subjectivity outside of stereotypical models of black identity. I turn to Daphne Brooks' theory of "spectacular opacity" to illustrate the ways in which Larsen imagines a mode of surface reading that accepts the clothed black body as the site of meaning while rejecting forced transparency. I also survey advertisements in *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, *The Messenger*, and *The Chicago Defender* published shortly prior to the release of Larsen's novel. My study of these advertisements reveals that tensions between New and Old Negro ideologies manifest in images of both female entrepreneurship and racial assimilation. Many African-Americans, especially those moving north in the Great Migrations were being interpolated as consumers but denied full participation in mainstream society.

The Afterword utilizes Rita Raley's concept of tactical media to suggest that the legacy of nineteenth-century fashion sense can be found in social media and ecommerce. I maintain that the material production of clothes and the virtual

reproduction of messages increase the efficacy of resistance through tactical fashion. Extimacy reoccurs in the extension of the cultivated self through new media. I also survey the reemerging role of fashion sense in both high and low fashion, by drawing correlations between transhistorical phenomena such as etiquette manuals, fashion blogging, and conscious consuming.

Chapter One

Skimming the Surface: Labor and Leisure in Popular Fiction and Etiquette Manuals

Edgar Allan Poe's narrator in "The Man of the Crowd" enjoys an evening diversion of observing the crowd. He reads people based on their appearance, adeptly separating ages, classes, and professions and easily differentiating the "upper clerks of staunch firms ... known by their coats and pantaloons of black or brown, made to sit comfortably" from the "junior clerks of flash houses [in their] tight coats, bright boots, well-oiled hair, and supercilious lips" (426). The narrator does not have any specialized skills of observation, but he can rapidly define a variety of types of people using only their clothes as clues. To put it simply, the narrator has a sense of fashion that makes the divisions between groups "obvious" (426). He can interpret both manner and clothes, clarifying that the junior clerks, "wore the cast-off graces of the gentry" (426). The words "wear" and "cast-off" are sartorial terms paired unexpectedly with the word "graces" but also attest to the way in which fashion and the act of fashioning become a mode of seeing. Although Poe's story is set in London, the early and mid-nineteenth-century United States also experienced the growth of the metropolis with diverse inhabitants, enabling the same types of observations.

The opening of the first department stores, as well as the mass production of clothes due to the availability of the home sewing machine, growing textile mills, and reproducible patterns led to drastic changes in clothing production and consumption. The availability of ready-to-wear clothing rapidly expanded in the

wake of the Jacksonian market revolution. Novels registered this shift in fashion by characterizing a new way of experiencing and reading the world based on that which is visible.

This chapter thus departs from Karen Halttunen's longstanding characterization of nineteenth-century fashion as a form of "transparent sincerity" in which "sentimental dress was simple and unobtrusive precisely because its central aim was to translate purely the inner character into outward forms that could be read by anyone who glanced upon the wearer's person" (90). I, however, insist that popular novels approach the logic of fashion and sincerity in a different way. Although Halttunen's assertion that unadorned dress was thought to be a measure against hypocrisy remains the accepted understanding of the relationship between fashion and sentiment, this perspective renders surfaces nearly inconsequential, serving as conduits of feeling, rather than maintaining their own meaning.

I examine George Fox's etiquette manual, *Fashion, The Power that Influences the World: The Philosophy of Ancient and Modern Dress and Fashion* (1850) and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's popular novel, *The Silent Partner* (1871) to show how fashion infuses the worlds which Phelps and Fox describe. For them, reading others through fashion informs the perception of the world and can be used advantageously. Neither author condemns the woman of fashion, as many in their respective genres do; instead, both convince the reader that can gain a vast amount of information by reading the dress of others.

In this I follow Stephanie Foote's analysis even though she is looking at the realist novel and the etiquette manual instead of the domestic novel as I am. She finds the combination of these two types of texts a place in which refinement "was embodied by a woman as an effect of their ability to read the social as if it were a text and to read themselves as if they were characters within the text" (36). Phelps and Fox approach convincing the reader of their ability to read in different ways. Fox uses multiple examples from public social spaces, private letters, and historical narratives. While Phelps uses fashion as a method of social reform by exposing the limits of sympathy in the ways different classes read each other.

"The President of Fashion"

Ultimately, the availability of ready-to-wear clothing served as a means to a rise in social class. Negotiating new social situations and the increased availability of consumer commodities account for the concurrent proliferation of advice literature. Advice literature comes from a long, Western tradition dating back to the Middle Ages. Comparable texts have circulated in the United States since the Colonial Era as a means of educating Republican Mothers in their rearing of the next generation of proper citizens. Yet the books published in the nineteenth century were far less concerned with moral conduct and more focused on appearances, whether through dress or the performance of gentility. Manners performed a different function in the United States, mainly reflecting good taste rather than good breeding. Advice literature proliferated at this time due to rapid urbanization, immigration, and other forms of social flux. Hundreds

of books on etiquette were published during the nineteenth century, many had multiple editions, and nearly every household had an advice manual or two for reference.

Although they offered detailed guidelines on dress and manners, advice manuals were often pedantic.⁸ The texts are lengthy, some reaching three hundred pages, and included guidance on both daily habits like hygiene and life events such as proper mourning attire. The authors of these manuals were novelists, doctors, architects, publishers, and clergymen.⁹ Regardless of their profession, the authors of this form of advice literature promoted simplicity, harmony, modesty, and neatness in dress, especially for women. As they lay out the framework of dressing well through meticulous descriptions, they work to define the enigmatic realm of taste while also maintaining the status quo. However, these texts were prescriptive, not necessarily reflecting the actual dress and behavior of readers. Nevertheless, the popularity of these texts suggests a great interest in what to wear and how to read the dress of others.

Fashion manuals, as opposed to other types of etiquette and conduct manuals, were not as focused on the reflection of virtue or upbringing through outward appearances. Traditional advice literature can be read as directing readers in not being noticed, mainly through behavior complicit with social norms. Most fashion manuals, however, describe diverse means of getting attention for

⁸ However, the titles of advice books published between 1830 and 1880 demonstrate the varied approaches to fashion, from condemnation to celebration, such as *Hints On Dress: Or, What To Wear, When To Wear It, And How To Buy It* (1839); *Dress As A Fine Art* (1854); *The Art Of Beauty* (1878); *Color in Dress: A Manual for Ladies* (1872) and the ominous, *Moloch of Fashion*.

⁹ See *Ornament, Or The Christian Rule Of Dress* (1838); *Beadle's Dime Book Of Practical Etiquette* (1859)

their good taste and appearance. However, George Fox, the famous New York tailor who dressed Senator Daniel Webster, published a book that stands out among the genre of fashion manuals. *Fashion, The Power that Influences the World: The Philosophy of Ancient and Modern Dress and Fashion* was very popular, having two subsequent editions.¹⁰ Fox's text is a useful study for analysis of fashion in fiction at this time because it presents a philosophy of fashion from the view of a successful tailor who clothed very powerful men on the East Coast. His text models a type of surface reading with which nineteenth-century authors engaged which elaborates on the connection between fashion and power.

Fox's text begins with the traditional type of organization for other books of its type in which the history of fashion is outlined, and each chapter addresses a particular manner of dress. The twenty-four chapters are organized by style of dress in ascending order from least to most casual. Fox's study is capacious, considering varied styles of dress such as the clerical, collegiate, funeral, and promenade dress. Fox is not simply preparing his readers for appropriate dress in diverse situations they may encounter; his goal is to prepare them for everything because, for Fox, fashion is everything. His text is especially interesting in how it moves beyond forms of advice presupposing fear. Most of the advice literature from this period maintains a tone of concern, hesitancy, and

¹⁰ The second edition of his book made international news when the *London Saturday Review* printed a long article which was reprinted as far away as New Zealand describing the work of the "Transcendental Tailor" who has "given to the world an essay on modern Dress and Fashion of transcendental merit" leaving them "inclined to think that 'a free ticket to the best places of society' emanates only from the emporium in Broadway" (xviii, 244). This press release and others in the supplementary section attest to Fox's international reputation as the "Emperor of Fashion" (247).

even reprimand when discussing proper dress. They condemn what they deem to be vanity, vulgarity, and absurdity while advocating conformity and approaches to dress directly correlated with knowing one's place. Fox still treats the subject with dignity but moves beyond the limiting mindset of unease. He crafts inviting and even celebratory descriptions of being fashionable, which deftly move from simply knowing one's self to a tactical deployment of the power of fashion.

The title, *Fashion, The Power that Influences the World*, lacks subtlety or ambiguity. The early pages of the text show the ways in which fashion has influenced everything from history to architecture. Fox explains, "[fashion] is a power which without concerted action, without either thought, law or religion, seems stronger than all of them" (xx). The contents of his text recount the subtle and obvious ways in which fashion is powerful. For Fox, the power of fashion lies in its ability to influence. He mentions notable historical and contemporary figures to establish the transhistorical authority of fashion. Fox's explanation of power is atypical in the sense it avoids negative association; he claims, "wherever we go, whatever we do, whatever we are, Fashion holds the wand of power over us, more blandly, but not less imperiously than the sceptre of empire was swayed by the Caesars" (xxi). Thus, fashion is inescapable regardless of income, profession, or country of origin. Fox's ideas sound similar to Michel Foucault's theories on power in which being outside of power is impossible. For Fox, too, fashion is how power is exerted into the world. Both power and fashion exist everywhere.

The first lines of Fox's Introduction describe fashion as what "has been

and will be, through all ages, the outward form through which the mind speaks to the material universe” (xx). Fox’s definition of fashion underscores the relationship between clothes, material experiences, and the self. He connects the mind and the material universe to demonstrate one can communicate without relying on semiotics or sentiment. He describes how to read the surfaces of others and how this connects with power. Fox emphasizes the fact that

fashion, then, means our outward life. Not merely the dress we wear, the latest dance for the festive hall, nor the style of carriage, or livery of the servant ... Fashion presides at every scene of life; from the cradle to the tomb its empire is unbroken. Its subjects are all mankind. (xxi-xxii)

Here fashion does not elevate internal feelings or personal experience, thus representing another move away from sentiment. The real power in fashion for Fox, and later for Phelps, lies in outward expressions of self, not in translated moments of emotion rising to the surface of the skin or the clothes of the person.

Fox’s main goal of the text is to affirm the pervasiveness of fashion by first describing the salient points of fashion in concordance with the conventions of the genre and then by establishing the omnipotence and omnipresence of fashion to make his final argument of the power inherent in fashion. Fox’s insignia on the frontispiece sets the tone for the text. This simple



Figure 1.1

decoration of a fluffy fox encircled by a leather belt works on multiple levels. It introduces the content of the book through an accessible image and phrase, but

the design introduces the practice of reading based only on visual images as well. The motto, *faire sans dire*, is most commonly translated as to do without speaking; however, the motto could also mean to be without speaking. Fox, as well as many popular novel authors, offered a way for men and women to conceptualize themselves as someone other than a parent, husband, socialite, laborer, servant, or shopgirl. They could realize these possibilities in large cities with new jobs and fresh clothes.

At the beginning of his chapter, *Etiquette in Dress and Fashion*, Fox cites the “all-important data” which help the reader to determine what to wear and how to act (42). The data can be equated with similar forms of data gained from reading others. Fox’s mode of seeing considers “what is due to ourselves in the position we hold in society, and what we owe to those who have a claim on our respect, and in whom we are in daily intercourse” (42). This new mode of perception requires not only an understanding of the self but also of those with whom we interact or aspire to interact. However, each social situation and concept of self is different, requiring continual reevaluation of the data. Fox points out the complexity in aligning one’s character with form, stating, “not only age, but profession, occupation, character of form, character of countenance, and a thousand other circumstances, determine our sentiments of the beauty of attitude or gesture, by determining the nature of the expression we expect from the individual we contemplate” (156). Fox’s suggestion resembles an anticipatory form of tactical surface reading in which one must consider their position as the other and their goals for resistance.

Although he professes to be concerned with the “improvement of taste in general society,” much of Fox’s advice is class-based. Unlike most of the other fashion and housekeeping manuals, Fox fails to make any mention of economizing or the inability to purchase new fashions. Instead, he repeatedly underscores the crucial influence of fashion, explaining, “A rich and becoming costume answers as a passport to the traveller; opens the door of hospitable courtesy to the stranger; gives the citizen a free ticket to the best places in society; forms a decorous ornament to wealth, and where wealth is wanting, in many respects supplies its place” (13). Working-class readers may have assumed that these benefits were not available to them without proper clothing. His omission is corrected in some ways in Phelps’ novel, *The Silent Partner*, where she questions the limits of surface reading across classes.

Similar to other advice manual authors, Fox defines the basic framework of taste as being measured by cleanliness, appropriateness, and taste. Perhaps due to the ineffable quality of taste, he does not encourage readers to trust their instincts on fashion. Although most other advice manuals authors urge the reader to consider the best colors and styles to suit their body and complexion, Fox insists they secure the guidance of a tailor. He explains that “a difference in occupation, stature, form, attitude, complexion, or even manners, will decide the fabric and color of the garment best suited to each individual style; and a thousand combinations have patiently to be elaborated to produce a rare sight – a perfectly well-dressed gentleman” (xxiii-xxiv). These statements are partially self-serving considering the increased availability of ready-made garments,

especially for men, at this time. Also, since tailors were more revered than dressmakers, this gives Fox the liberty to tout his profession while using a less conventional tone in the text.

Many of the other advice manuals present their philosophy of male and female dress in traditionally essentializing ways. Fox differs from other authors by attributing the enjoyment of fashion to both sexes. He reminds the reader that “the peacock, in all its pride, does not glitter in more various and gaudy trappings than does a modern woman of fashion ... we must not omit to mention that man also was, and in most countries still is, as much devoted to this passion as the fair sex” (113). Fox’s own passion for clothing is a welcome departure from the dour and suspicious opinions of other advice manual writers. In his chapter on Hunting Dress, Fox describes the man “arrayed in a brilliant scarlet riding coat, buskin breeches, top boots, cap, spurs, and whip, [who] presents a picture of manliness, courage, and joyous hilarity, which is delightful to behold” (50). This image reminds readers of the element of play in fashion, which symptomatic readings of dress often foreclose. Fox uses the familiar quotation, “the pen is mightier than the sword,” to assert the superiority of fashion over both war and literature, suggesting that “we say that the shears are more powerful than either, or both, because the shears conquer woman, and woman is the mother of all mankind” (58). His circuitous logic nevertheless locates power in both tailoring and motherhood without drawing obvious connections between the re-production of subjectivity through clothes and the reproduction of human life.

Also unusual when compared to other fashion manuals, Fox’s study ties

fashion closely to the government and patriotism. The book itself is dedicated to “the government and the gallant people of the United States” and is replete with allusions to “General Washington [who] was celebrated for his noble appearance, majestic form, and intuitive taste in dress” (30). Fox intends to “offer of suggestions to those who are considered its leaders,” devoting the third chapter of the book to “Suggestions on the Diplomatic Dress of U. S. Ministers, Secretaries of Legation, and Consuls to Foreign Governments” (xii). This chapter is in a prominent position following the first two chapters on the philosophy and history of dress, attesting to its importance. Both Fox and William James advocated more formal and uniform dress for groups which they felt were not only prestigious but also frequently seen in public, whether locally or abroad.

In his discussion of Poe and “The Man of the Crowd,” Walter Benjamin notes Poe’s desire to saddle the crowd with “uniformities of attire and behavior” (175). Although Benjamin labels this impetus “absurd,” both Fox and James viewed uniforms and uniformity as a means of conveying rank for prestigious roles outside of military service and as a solution to the slovenly dress which they often observed. Fox “hoped that the beautiful blue coat, and gold or gold gilt buttons, with the buff vest, for evening costume, will be restored as the dress of Americans — colors so emblematic of those under which the independence of our country was won” (55). Thus for Fox and Benjamin, “the eternal is far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea” (*Arcades* N3, 2). Fox locates the glory of the country’s independence in an outfit resembling what Washington wore, but conveying a long history of pride and unity to his own historical moment.

Adding to his argument about the pervasive power of fashion, he shows that even colonial rule has sartorial features when “the fashions of the conqueror generally prevail over those of the conquered” (117). Fox points to the transcontinental movement of fashion, describing it as having “entered into the life of all nations and will be identified in its influence with our fortunes forever” (xxi). He uses unifying pronouns and continues to emphasize the potential for cooperation through fashion when he addresses the “migratory world of emigrants” to which “we” all belong (192). Fox, a proud immigrant, includes his citizenship forms in the book and devotes a chapter to *The Adopted Citizen of the United States*, using it as a platform to equate fashionable dress with human rights. In a remarkably prescient statement, Fox explains,

It is therefore of the highest importance in the advancement and well-being of all nations that the emigrant should be hospitably received ... and not, as is the common usage, treated with cold indifference on his arrival in this country. Instead of trying to make him a useful member of society, he is more frequently treated as if he were a criminal. (192)

Surprisingly, Fox follows the convention of other authors who advocate assimilation through abandoning national dress and advises his readers to “obliterate” the idea that “the manners, customs and dress of the country he has left are superior” to those in America (185).

Tension exists between Fox’s patriotism and his Anglophilic sources of historical documents and examples that shape his text. Not only does he rarely consider non-Western cultures, but he also groups the English and American styles together as prime examples. It would have been noteworthy for Fox to craft a purely American, or even North American, text with consideration of the

ways in which indigenous groups and immigrants have shaped American fashion.

The final section of Fox's book, *The Supplementary Series*, does the most to connect fashion to power. Essentially, Fox uses this chapter to demonstrate that those who already have power owe it, in part, to fashion. Thus implying to readers who may want but do not yet have power that they too can earn it through fashionable dress. The chapter includes references to English and American costume, essays on fashion from 1790-1868, his personal papers, and some of his press clippings. Occasionally Fox sounds pompous as he refers to his illustrious clients by name. He is mindful of his tendency to namedrop, noting that he hopes "that the great names quoted above will rescue the subject from the shallow apology too often made its abuse, — that it is trifling and undeserving our study" (26). This chapter emphasizes Fox's proximity to powerful men, assuring his readers that he can teach them how to use the power of fashion to influence others and gain respect.

His impressive section of personal correspondence contains letters from Senator Daniel Webster, Commodore Mathew C. Perry, President Millard Fillmore, Editor-in-Chief Horace Greeley, and Chief Justice Salmon Portland Chase, all of who were his clients and shared Fox's interest in fashion. These letters reveal that Daniel Webster requested to be buried in his favorite blue dress coat with gold buttons designed by Fox, Commodore Perry demanded a specific type of English lace, and President Fillmore could not "procure a perfectly fitting pair of pantaloons" until he met Mr. Fox (204). Fox's

correspondence also illuminates the financial cost of being a man of fashion. One client's bill totaled over \$700. This was a huge sum for 1866, especially considering that the average daily wage for a laborer in an urban area was approximately one dollar per day.¹¹

The most fascinating aspect of this chapter is that it reveals not only that these men had a developed interest in fashion, but also that they knew their appearance was being read by others. Fox maintains significant influence over his clients beyond just their style of dress. For example, Senator Webster in his address to the New York Historical Society in 1852 uses Fox's motto to praise the dignity and efficacy of the men of the Continental Congress

imbued deeply with the general sentiment of the country, of large comprehension, of long fore sight, and of few words. They made no speeches for ostentation, they sat with closed doors, and their great maxim was '*faire sans dire*. (204)

Senator Webster's stitching together of the past and the present anticipates Benjamin's *tigersprung* theory in which fashion is a tiger's leap into the past, maintaining a "sense of the modern wherever it stirs in the thicket of what has been" ("Theses" 261). The modern intersecting with the historical informs the dialectical processes with which both Fox and Phelps engage in their writing.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Silent Partner* (1871) was published the same year as the second edition of Fox's text. Most likely, the people who were reading Fox were reading authors like Phelps. She experiments with the type of surface reading which Fox models, but also uses her text to explore the class issues Fox overlooks. In most domestic and sentimental fiction focusing on mill

¹¹ Robert A. Margo - *Wages and Labor Markets in the United States*

girls, fashion can be understood as a marker of either corruption or inherited wealth. The novels frequently follow tropes of the lost heiress or the virtuous girl who marries the factory owner's son; both of which culminate in her gaining riches and arraying herself in decadent fashions and jewels. Some novels depict the taste and neatness of factory girls despite their limited incomes as well. Yet Phelps follows neither of these examples. Instead, she shows how both classes read surfaces and then attempt to use the material as a point of connection between the two groups.

Fox asserts that the primary objective of a "well-bred man of fashion is the hope of his own rights being respected in return for the respect shown to the rights of others," (69). Here he extends the traditional definitions of fashion beyond the scope of clothes to imagine a world based on both humanistic and aesthetic principles. Phelps uses Fox's words as an invitation to examine the role of fashion in achieving equal human rights. Fox sees fashion as having a democratic access and influence, while Phelps uses her text to assess Fox's claims. Though both Phelps and Fox were privileged financially and racially, Phelps' involvement with multiple reform issues as well as her sensitivity to the role of empathy in writing may have influenced her inclusion of working-class women in the world of fashion.

Reading Novels, Reading Others

Although advice manuals were overt in their educational goals, popular novels also had civilizing aims. Sensational, domestic, and romantic novels emerged out of a long sentimental tradition. One of the purposes of the

sentimental novel was not only to invoke emotion but also to demonstrate that feelings must be controlled. In *Mechanic Accents*, Michael Denning suggests that sentiment gives way to sensational and realist modes due to the new “visibility of class [and] of working women in the culture ... the domestic novel was largely blind to working class women; it was a genre based around the kin networks and household of the families of white merchants and manufacturers” (187). Phelps participates in this shift by moving from the families of civil war soldiers in *The Gates Ajar* to lives of mill girls after being inspired to write “The Tenth of January” in response to the 1860 Pemberton Mill collapse.

The mass production of these novels signaled a radical departure from previous reading practices in which English, French, and German literature was read out loud at home in upper-class families. Rising literacy, printing innovations, improved transportation, new libraries, and better interior lighting also influenced the increased readership of popular novels. These novels were much cheaper, more portable, featured highly sensational plots, and were distinctly American. Women, mostly young and working-class, consumed cheap fiction replete with scenes of abduction, prostitution, entrapment, poisoning, blackmail, counterfeiting, and wrongful institutionalization. These novels were thought to be especially immoral due to their sensational plots and the lack of a didactic message of piety and purity. In *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*, Nan Enstad explains that labor reformers disliked “working women’s habits of popular novel romance reading, which they found as trivial as the pursuit of fashion, particularly because it offered a fantasy of magnificent wealth” through

inheritance or marriage (49).¹² I attribute the popularity of these novels, in part, to their providing a new mode of defining the self outside of a linear, *Künstlerroman* type of growth. Instead, detailed descriptions of fashion allowed readers to experiment with fantasies of different constructions of identity through extimacy.

Both fiction and fashion provided affordable and pleasurable diversions for the women. Like Poe's narrator in "The Man of the Crowd" whose entertainment became reading others, many working-class women could practice what they learned about reading others in the sensational novels and apply it on the streets. Young working-class women, in particular, had greater freedom than wealthy women to be in public spaces. In *Cheap Amusements*, Kathy Peiss suggests that because these women "read the fashion columns, and many could observe wealthy women in department stores and the streets for inspiration [they] adapted and transformed" what they saw to suit their own styles (66). She notes that they looked to prostitutes and society women alike for their inspiration.

In 1865, there were over one thousand textile mills with five million spindles in the United States, but by 1910, there were nearly thirty-four million spindles, most of which were in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Of the workers, about twenty percent were women, one-quarter of whom were immigrants, and all of the women were paid about two-thirds less than men.

¹² Dorothy Richardson, a middle-class reformer who spent time in the mills interviewing the women about their reading tastes, wrote in *The Long Day* that the greatest benefit to the "well-being of the working girl of the future would be the wide dissemination of a better literature than that with which she now regales herself . . . Girls fed upon such mental trash are bound to have distorted and false views of everything. There is a broad field awaiting some original-minded philanthropist who will try to counteract the maudlin yellow-back by putting in its place something whole and sweet and sane" (300). The outrage directed at sensational reveals a belief in the connection between body and mind, as well as a certainty that literature can have a substantial influence on its readers.

Many women lived in shared housing, and most were not married. They worked fourteen hour days, were subject to extreme temperatures, hazardous factory conditions, sexual harassment, and disease-causing byproducts. Yet these women were not different than middle- or upper-class women in that they read cheap fiction, sought nightly entertainment, and spent most of their disposable income on clothing. Despite their industrial jobs, they still purchased fashionable clothing for street promenading and saved their more durable clothes for factory work. Even though working in the mills was an unsafe and unsanitary job, and the factory workers were not able to harness the latent agency of production, their reading of novels allowed them to imagine a frame of consumptive agency where working women achieve a different sense of worth.

Class, Commodities, and Community

Phelps, although most well known for her spiritualist novels like *The Gates Ajar*, also examines the role of women in the nineteenth century in *The Silent Partner*. This novel, influenced by Elizabeth Gaskell's 1855 novel, *North and South*, characterizes the friendship between Perley Kelso, a wealthy mill owner's daughter and Sip, an orphaned mill worker who cares for her disabled sister. Perley, the titular silent partner, wants to be made a full partner in her father's mill after he dies. Since she is a woman, the remaining partners try to discourage her business ambitions by threatening her with the repulsive notion of having to "wear a calico dress and keep the books in a dingy office" (65). Perley undergoes a predictable awakening to the injustices of the mill system but does not abandon her sense of fashion. Instead, her mode of seeing as inflected by fashion enables

her to improve conditions in the mill town. Each of Phelps' books engages with some type of social reform.¹³ She wrote three didactically religious books, an anti-vivisection novel, and many proto-feminist novels.¹⁴ *The Silent Partner* explores the social reform of working-class women, but instead of relying on sentiment, Phelps uses fashion as a point of connection between women of different classes.

In the opening chapter, *Across the Gulf*, Perley and Sip first observe each other's dress on a city street before interacting verbally. Perley waits alone in her dry and cushioned carriage after her guests and her suitor have disappeared into the "flash of a fancy-store" to get a new fan which matches her friend's opera dress (18). She looks out of the window and sees a girl in a "dingy plaid dress" on the street in the rain, but only thinks with "languid wonder ...how little difference the weather appeared to make with that class of people" (17; 20). Perley "is used to her gloves, and indifferent to her stone cameos," and on that rainy night, she "really followed with some interest, having nothing better to do, the manful struggles of a girl in a plaid dress, who battled with the gusts about a carriage-length ahead of her" (16-17). The reader already knows to watch Perley, since the narrator has described her as one of those "indexical" people "who never [does] anything that is not worth watching; they cannot eat an apple or button a shoe in an unnoticeable, unsuggestive manner," and even Perley's

¹³ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps also wrote *What to Wear?* (1873) as a means to convince women of the healthful principles of rational dress, blaming fashionable clothes for deforming the body and causing disease (16). Phelps argues, "the clothes of the Girl of the Period characterize her. She never characterizes her clothes ... she is a meaningless dazzle of broken effects" (11). This could be interpreted as a commentary on the reading of surfaces and the simultaneous need for reforms in places other than clothing.

¹⁴ Perhaps a relationship could be drawn between the performance of religion, especially proper mourning, and the performance of being fashionable.

seated body “to a posture-fancier would have been very expressive” (11). Since Perley can be considered an index of fashion sense, Phelps uses the act of the reader watching Perley read others to characterize how the upper class views lower classes.

Perley continues to be amused by what she observes outside of her carriage, interpreting what she sees as its “original ways of holding its hands, and wearing its hats, and carrying its bundles. It had such a taste in colors, such disregard of clean linen” in material terms (17-18). Her reading of surfaces lingers too long on Sip and being curious waves Sip over to her carriage. Bothered by Perley’s “staring,” Sip asks, “‘I wonder what *you* seem like,’ [leaning] into the sweet dimness of the carriage, and gravely study[ing] the sweet dimness of the young lady’s face. Having done this, she nodded to herself once or twice with a shrewd smile, but said nothing” (22). The tactical uses of fashion for these women are very different; Perley uses it to understand others and Sip uses it to survive.

As Sip leans in further, “her wet shawl now almost brushed Miss Kelso’s dress; the girl was not filthy, but the cleanliest poverty in a Boston tenement-house fails to acquire the perfumes of Arabia, and Perley sickened and shrank” (26). The near touching of their clothes echoes the near understanding of each other. Advice manuals that often attributed a habitual lack of cleanliness to the lower classes probably influenced Perley’s reaction. Despite her cloistered view, after talking with Sip, Perley changes her perspective as she gains an “uncomfortable consciousness” that it rains on many poor girls who do not have

coats, hats, or gloves (26). Her discomfort is quickly soothed by her fiancé, Maverick, as he “folded her ermines ... about her and drowned the storm ... with his tender, lazy voice” (28). This opening scene introduces the main issues which Phelps addresses using surface reading: who behaves properly, who is clean, who is seen, and how are people read?

As in Poe’s story, the crowd figures in Phelps narrative to illustrate not only the gulf-like division between the classes but also to locate unified practices of reading others. The narrator wonders, “who has not felt ... in crowds and in hush, from year unto year, to struggle towards each other, - vain builders of a vain bridge across the fixed gulf of an irreparable lot, - a weariness of sympathy” (21). The narrator goes on to observe the observers, explaining, “something of this feeling would have struck a keen observer of Miss Kelso and the little girl in plaid” (21). So, the mixed urban crowd allows for these potential connections across the gulf. However, even when astute observations of others are made, Phelps, coming out of the sentimental tradition is commenting on the fatigue and surfeit of sympathy. As a result of her critique, the limitations of emotional sympathy are remedied in the text through material observations and connections.

Phelps conveys the hardships of being a mill worker most effectively through dress. In a seven-page prose poem that repeats the refrain, “if you are one of the hands,” each new paragraph describes a horror that the elites never imagined. “If you are one of the hands ... you hang up your shawl and your crinoline and understand, as you go shivering by gaslight to your looms, that you

are chilled to the heart ... a little less shawl means a few less winters ... you are a godless little creature ... the bell strikes ... people are out in their best clothes. You pull your dingy veil about your eyes ... you are a miserable little factory-girl with a dirty face” (71-77). In contrast, the narrator notes that for Perley and those like her, “nothing is more conducive to one’s sense of personal comfort than to live in a factory town and not be obliged to answer factory bells” (34). After hearing these bells, Perley draws her “silk and eider shoulder-robe closer” while workers like Sip rush to the factory for a long day of work (34). Although the differently arrayed surfaces of the women initially divide them, as the novel progresses they express similar appreciation for material comforts.

After her father dies, Perley stays in the mill town permanently instead of as in past years when “she put on Five Falls for a few months every year as she put on a white dress, - a cool thing which kept the wash-people busy” (42). Perley and Sip continue to encounter each other in the small mill town. Perley reprimands Sip for going to the theater but later goes into an upper-class theater herself. Sip exposes her hypocrisy, telling her the only difference is “the plating over” (30). The plating over metaphor extends to social constructs of women of different classes. By using the image of cladding a surface, Phelps attempts to underscore the similarities between women from different classes, suggesting that the only distinction is the way they are read. Sip insightfully declares, “we’re rough, and we’re out with it,” but the wealthy men and women hide their flaws and think they are better because they are plated over with superior clothing, jewels, and manners (30). Although the use of the word “rough” was commonly

used to describe working-class women and their lack of sophistication, the adjective also invokes images of a rough surface that would not be pleasant to touch as well as images of a roughly defined outline, making the object difficult to see.

The Warp and Weft of Feeling

Although surface reading dictates most interactions, Phelps exposes the limits of reading across classes without a mediator. As Sip takes Perley through the streets of the mill town, she must be taught how to read what she sees. Perley meets “strange sights for delicate, guarded, fine young eyes; but so pitifully familiar to the little mill-girl ... as familiar ... as Axminster carpets to Miss Kelso” (116). The narrator explains that mill girls like Sip were not accustomed to fine carpets but rather to sights of drinking, prostitution, and abuse. Perley’s surface reading is not yet nuanced enough to see what Sip sees, but she is concerned by the “women with peculiar bleached yellow faces [who] passed by. They had bright eyes. They looked like beautiful moving corpses” (119). Sip flatly states that they are cotton-weavers and that “you can tell a weaver by the skin” (120). Similarly, Perley sees a girl in “blue ribbons ... look[ing] like a Scotch picture,” while Sip only sees Nynee, a fellow mill worker at risk of unwanted sexual advances by her coworker (121). Scenes like this do not suggest that surface reading is faulty, only that it can be context specific. Like the clothes that they wear, sometimes multiple surfaces can be reflected at once, and a person can be both beautiful and corpse-like or innocent yet sexually available. The

mediation of the scenes through Perley, Sip, and the reader also reveals a meta-reflection on the interpretation of texts, both literary and physical.

To return to Fox briefly, he asserts that “universal cleanliness and good manners are essential to a pure democracy. This must be generally recognized and acted upon, or the refined will [leave the country] and we shall be left alone, to wallow in our own brutality and foulness” (71). Like many advice manuals written in the nineteenth century, cleanliness remains the prescribed path to success, virtue, and beauty. However, like Fox, these authors fail to mention the systemic barriers to access clean clothing, houses, and work environments.¹⁵ Phelps experiments with solutions to Fox’s class-blindness, using Sip’s lamentation that others could not “ever guess how much difference the dirt makes” as a touchstone (82). When Sip sees Perley’s home, she exclaims, “you know no more of [being poor] than you know of hell! ... If I was to tell you, you couldn't understand ... You may be ever so clean, but you don't feel clean if you're born in the black” (88). Images of mud, dirt, and clean fabric serve a powerful function in the novel, not in suggesting that dirt or low birth can be concealed with fine clothes, but that the first step to access to the power and pleasure of being fashionable is being clean.

The solution to reading others correctly in order to help them often entails getting dirty. Explaining how she previously understood poverty, Perley says she thought it was a “respectable thing, a comfortable thing; a thing that couldn’t be

¹⁵ This is the primary reason why white became a color of clothing for the upper class; only the wealthy could afford to keep it clean. For example, the detachable cuffs and collars of men’s clothes in the nineteenth century could be changed multiple times per day, thus looking clean and white, if their budget allowed.

helped: a clean thing, or a dirty thing, a lazy thing, or a drunken thing; a thing that must be, just as mud must be in April; a thing to put on overshoes for" (128).

Unsurprisingly, Phelps uses a sartorial metaphor to explain the temporary discomfort of what Perley understand to be the mud of poverty. Later Mr. Garrick, the former mill worker selected to be the new partner "cannot find any dainty words in which to [explain that] it is a very muddy thing to be poor" (146). Muddy, too, can refer to the limits of cross-class assistance and the muddy boundaries between proper and improper behavior. In mill towns, children work long days, drink alcohol, and chew tobacco. A full meal is strong tea and bread dipped in molasses, and a city outfit is often a dingy plaid dress without gloves or a hat. Once Perley can read the surface of the working-class, she does not mind the mud she must walk through to help the families in Five Falls.

This mediation of surface reading presents the opportunity to use fashion tactically. Initially, Sip's uses of fashion remain personal. When she hears the news that her disabled sister is now not only deaf but also blind from woolpicking in the mills, she can only respond to the sound of a "newsboy shrieking [about] a New York wedding ... She wondered what the bride wore, and how much her veil cost ... It seemed imperative to think about the wedding" (187). Images of flowers and tulle allow her to escape momentarily the pain of unyielding suffering that mill work has brought upon her family. Surface reading can keep people out of the mills, too. When a former labor activist employee tries to get a job in the mills the foreman says he "doesn't need to tell them his name [it is] written all over him" (169). The striker knows that they can read the yellow ochre on his clothes and

hear the poverty-induced toothache in his voice (169). His appearance keeps him from having any future influence over the current workers who most likely look and sound just like him.

After her tour of the mills and visits through the streets with Sip, Perley's understanding of the lives of mill workers changes. Her previous conception of the mill town was "that there was some cotton in it she felt sure ... that there were girls in little shawls, ragged men, and bad tobacco, an occasional strike" (42). Phelps again uses the language of fashion to align the view of the reader with that of Perley, anticipating that they will have a similar awakening to the issues. However, Phelps also must remedy the disconnection between the endeavors of women's reform societies and the needs of the working poor.

Phelps portrays the logistical and physical insularity of the wealthy characters by describing them wrapped in furs and silk and being cloistered in elegant houses and carriages. These material practices cause them to be insulated from traditional expressions of sentiment. Characters like Perley live in quietly shuttered, thickly carpeted, pleasantly cooled, florally scented, and lavishly decorated homes far removed from the loud, hot, and dirty mills. However, living behind shaded windows and heavy mahogany doors renders them potentially unable to feel. Unaccustomed to "feeling at all," Perley insists that "it's never been asked of [her] before" (39). Traditional sentimental moments, like hearing Sip cough from inhaling cotton fibers, fail to invoke compassion in Perley. However, she reconsiders the worth of her three thousand dollar shawl and realizes her "bill for Farina cologne and kid gloves last year would supply a

sick woman with beefsteak” (132). Converting the economic hardships of others into the language of fashion enables cross-class understanding.

Although Phelps was a social reformer herself, she uses scenes in the novel to criticize traditional approaches to social reform. Many nineteenth-century reformers attempted to reconcile differences between the classes through cultural development. In the chapter, *Going into Society*, Perley encourages other elite women to assist the mill workers by sharing their experience of art, music, and refinement with them. In an ironic reversal, appropriate behavior and dress confound her wealthy cohort. One woman vows to wear “nothing gayer than a walking suit” in a glib response to Perley’s description of the workers’ sweltering days in the mills (222). When the wealthy guests are incredulous that the “freaks” could have such impeccable manners, Perley clarifies, “one does not behave till one has a chance” (237, 226).¹⁶ Despite their exposure to luxury goods, the elite women lack the ability to read others based on their dress, and paradoxically, they are the ones behaving badly.

The two classes fail to connect over cultural topics, but the common language of fashion, not traditional types of reform, ameliorates some class differences. The narrator describes the appearance of the working-class guests: Mr. Mell “in decent clothes ... Nynee, in light muslin and bright ribbons ... [and] Catty, closely following the soft flutter of the hostess's, plain white dress” (225).

¹⁶ Caroline Levander persuasively argues, “Perley’s activism, unlike that of other middle-class reformers, acknowledges rather than erases or vilifies wage-earning women’s experience and thereby offers a departure from the labor reform practiced by bourgeois women throughout the 1870s” (116).

The narrator continues, suggesting,

Now there was one very remarkable thing about these thirty people. With the exception of a little plainness about their dress (plainness rather than roughness, since in America we will die of bad drainage, but we will manage to have a 'best suit' when occasion requires) and an air of really enjoying themselves, they did not, after all, leave a very different impression upon the superficial spectator from that of any thirty people" at a musical. (225)

Not only does this passage demonstrate that Perley knows to dress casually and simply while entertaining her guests, but it also aligns Perley with the workers by describing her dress using the same adjective: "plain." This passage returns to the word "rough" to describe the working class but makes certain that readers see them as only plain, not rough. Roughness implies a lack of morals while plainness describes only the surface of the dress and does not imply that the workers are simple-minded or unkempt. The narrator observes, "the same faces at their looms to-morrow you could not identify" (225). Thus, when dressed to go into society, workers will be indistinguishable from the elite guests and indistinguishable from their working selves to which they will return the next day once they are in different clothes. On the other hand, the claim Americans would rather die from plague-spreading sewage than lack a proper suit produces a series of humorous assumptions about the valuation of outward appearance over internal health. The hyperbolic example comparing a choice between grime and fine dress succinctly underscores the role of attractive surfaces. Americans may tolerate filth and injustice as long as it is hidden, but if you are one of the hands covered in factory dirt, a different set of judgments apply.

Phelps closes with another type of reading, the literal reading of periodicals, to question the reliability of this source in the evaluation others. These final scenes also showcase Perley's improved understanding of the hardships of the working class. Sip and she share a knowing smile when they read an article claiming that what has been published about the mill workers in Lorenzo "is sensational and pure nonsense. They are described as an overworked class, dreading to meet their task-masters in those stifling rooms, where they have cultivated breathing as a fine art ... The fact is, sympathy has been offered where it is not needed" (235). The author of the article is correct; sympathy is not needed, but careful surface reading and reform is. Here Phelps may be suggesting that a simple look at mill life, without trying to interpret their experience, would make the impossibility of healthful and fair employment evident. The journalist goes on to assure the reader that, "the mills are high studded, well ventilated, and scrupulously clean. The girls are healthy and well looking, and men and women, who have worked daily for twenty or thirty years, are still in undiminished enjoyment of sound lungs and limbs" (235). Clearly for many of Perley's friends, like some of Phelps' readers, comfort, similar to being wrapped in a silk shawl, comes from believing that the poor are not uncomfortable or ill. However, visibility of the poor, whether through literature or in fine dress, appears to be a tactical means of gaining the prominence to incite reform.

Sip chooses religion as her method of reform but is still being read by others in terms of her dress. The narrator explains,

the little preacher had a wandering style, as most such preachers have. Such a style can no more be caught on the point of a pen than the rustle of crisp leaves or the aroma of dropping nuts. There was a syntax in Sip's brown face and bent hands and poor dress and awkward motions ... The muddy little court was an appeal, the square of sky above her head a peroration. In that little court Sip was eloquent. Here on the parlor sofa, in clean cuffs and your slippers, she harangues you. (296)

Despite the shabby dress and muddy setting, she is effective in her own form of resistance. Her style remains enigmatic but tactical. Merely by reading Sip's surface and without even hearing her words, her message reaches into the sanctity of the quiet parlor where she, although arrayed very differently, affects another person.

Ultimately, like Poe's narrator reads the old man of the crowd and decides to abandon him, Perley too eventually abandons her reform project with Sip. Perhaps exposing the limits of reading others is that the experience of interpersonal connection, like fashion itself, will be both rough and smooth, private and public, and mimetic yet innovative. Yet both Phelps and Fox's texts provide evidence that to participate in structures of power, one must appear a certain way. Just like Karl Marx had to wear a coat in order to access the books in the British Museum Reading Room, so too must upper-class reformers and working-class mill girls dress well in order to influence others.

Chapter Two

Transcendental Makeovers: Margaret Fuller and the Feminism of Fashion

When Timothy Fuller was speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, he moved into Chief Justice Francis Dana's mansion and hosted a ball in honor of President John Quincy Adams in 1826. A favorite child of her father, Margaret Fuller appeared at the ball "gaudily dressed in a badly-cut, muslin-covered pink silk gown" with oddly styled hair; guests described her as looking "ridiculous" (Murray 54). Despite Fuller's eloquence and intellect, pressures to make over her style attest to the importance of physical appearance. Previous scholarship has addressed Fuller's feminism and devoted careful attention to her relationship with Emerson; however, very little has been noted about her views on fashion.¹⁷

Instead of simply asserting that she includes a space for fashionable self-expression while still meeting feminist ideals, I argue that understanding Fuller's relationship to fashion alters our understanding of the feminist potential of Transcendentalism. Fuller, who was deeply invested in aesthetics, viewed beauty, even beauty outside of nature, as integral to developing the higher self. More specifically, I show how she uses fashion tactically to combine the material and immaterial in her writing, defining fashionable expression as pleasurable, spiritual, and political.

¹⁷ See Bean, Judith Mattson, "Texts from Conversation;" Boggs, Colleen Glenney, "Margaret Fuller's American Translation;" Duran, Jane, "Margaret Fuller and Transcendental Feminism;" Elbert, Monika, "Striking a Historical Pose;" Hurst, C. Michael, "Bodies in Transition;" Kolodny, Annette, "Inventing a Feminist Discourse;" Martin, Robert K., and Justin D. Edwards, "Concord Companions;" Shaw, Amber, "Like the Incense of a Bad Heart;" Tuchinsky, Adam-Max, "Her Cause Against Herself;" Zwarg, Christina, "Feminism in Translation"

Whether visiting the frontier, prisons, or European countries, Fuller advocates for fashion's unique capacity for uniting people, which departs from other transcendental accounts of society. By exploring the motif of flowers, which Fuller uses throughout her work and in her own personal style of dress, I argue that due to early horticultural influence from her mother, flowers are a means to characterize the benefit of variation and to redefine Emerson's idea of the Over-soul.

I examine a variety Fuller's publications, such as *Summer on the Lakes* (1843), *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), and her *Tribune* dispatches, both domestic and international (1846-1850) to show a political and spiritual philosophy informed by fashion. I read these texts, published in fairly close succession, in conjunction with her biography to suggest that Fuller used her fashion sense in personal, creative, and political ways. In fact, fashion allows for an unorthodox analysis across genres like fiction and memoir since it, too, informs and expresses the biographical, aspirational, and pragmatic aspects of the life of the wearer.

From Frowsy to Fabulous

Taking my cue from one of her biographers, John Matteson, who traces the "lives" of Fuller, I suggest that understanding fashion provides the key to understanding Fuller's shifting identity.¹⁸ This chapter extends the definition of life

¹⁸ In her biography of Fuller, Madeleine B. Stern collapses the sartorial and the creative to describe Fuller's personal life and inhabiting of her characters. "How many selves there were and what a delight to rediscover them, glorify them, incorporating truth with fiction ... seek not Margaret in Mariana, for she is only Margaret ... a self that steps arrayed in jewels from a drab and homespun cloak, a bright splash of crimson between the pages of a book of travels. Before and after Mariana the Indians stalked ... [she was] *The Dial* critic and then ... the observer of the West ... after the Conversation there was much to be done in the city ... she must dress carefully

beyond the biographical. I suggest that fashion influences each of the lives Fuller inhabits in her journalism, treatises, and creative fiction, enabling a more nuanced appreciation of the world in which she lives while also augmenting the reach and depth of her polemical arguments. Since buying, making, or wearing clothing is an experience with which men and women of all classes can relate, Fuller uses it to provoke sentiment and activism.

Fuller defined herself early in life as a student, then as an observer, and finally as a reformer. At each stage, she exhibits sophisticated levels of personal introspection and consideration of the lives of others. However, her fashion sense and observation of the dress of others took considerable time to develop. Fuller has been described as egotistical, brilliant, aloof, sarcastic, and dramatic. She was tall, overweight, had sharp features, and blemished skin. Her mother was preoccupied and withdrawn, so Margaret wanted to please her domineering father. Although Timothy Fuller was dedicated to developing the intellectual potential of his daughter, he also monitored duties traditionally reserved for mothers, such as screening Margaret's social invitations and selecting her outfits (Marshall 29). Feeling like an outsider in social situations and within her own family most likely contributed to Margaret's lack of awareness of her own lapses in style and decorum. Fuller first attended an elite seminary in Boston, where, according to Frederic Henry Hedge, a fellow Transcendentalist five years Fuller's senior, the "inexperienced country girl was exposed to the petty persecutions

in her lilac satin ... then there were shopping days where she must ... buy bombazine and black gloves ... one must adorn oneself magnificently to hear Beethoven ... or to interpret the utterances of that Oracle in West street (307-8).

from the dashing misses of the city” (*Memoirs* 92). Although Fuller alluded to this harsh treatment in her letters home, gossip of the local community undoubtedly influenced Hedge’s interpretation of the situation. Many who knew the Fullers felt that the dictates of Margaret’s father had caused her awkwardness. Like Hedge, who observes, “it was first revealed to her young heart, and laid up for future reflection, how large a place in woman’s world is given to fashion and frivolity,” many people at this time considered it dangerous to educate a woman like a man (*Memoirs* 93). In fact, there is no indication that Fuller viewed fashion as frivolous, yet it would be unlikely for anyone in her community to deem a woman as being both intellectual and fashionable. After her experiences in Boston, similar events befell Margaret in Groton when she was sent to Miss Prescott’s boarding school. It is in these fictionalized accounts of Groton that Fuller’s interpretation of how the self is understood through dress materializes.

In *Summer on the Lakes*, Fuller “wears” the autobiographical character, Mariana, as an alter ego. As Mariana, Fuller interrogates selfhood through fashion without alienating her feminist readers. According to the narrator, she

had a taste which would have seemed ludicrous to her mates, if they had not felt some awe of her, from a touch of genius and power that never left her, for costume and fancy dresses, always some sash twisted about her, some drapery, something odd in the arrangement of her hair and dress, so that the methodical preceptress dared not let her go out without a careful scrutiny and remodeling. (*Essential* 119)

Taste in this passage is an individual, nearly self-reliant form of style worn with confidence, rather than a top-down Bourdieuan type of insidious conformity. Here Fuller can imagine being admired for her creative, rather than intellectual,

“genius and power” (*Essential* 119). This use of the term “genius” to describe fashion sense allows her to demonstrate that aesthetic genius exists and confers power while also encouraging readers to reconcile the fact that a woman can be both intelligent and well dressed. Although Mariana’s schoolmates find her entertaining, they tire of her oddness and introversion. Fortunately, the “strange bird” finds an outlet for her “wild dances and sudden song, her freaks of passion and of wit” in theatricals (*Essential* 118). After the plays, Mariana keeps her pot of rouge and continues to swipe it on her cheeks each morning.¹⁹ She defuses the taunts of her peers at first by saying, “she thought it made her look prettier; but, after a while, she became quite petulant about it . . . this irritated the girls, as all eccentricity does the world in general, more than vice or malignity” (*Essential* 120). Experimenting with tactical resistance through this alter ego, Fuller locates the tension of aesthetics: that which one finds appealing may not align with the opinions of others. Furthermore, considering the perceived purity of women was essential in the era of true womanhood, Fuller makes a bold statement in asserting that eccentricity was a greater sin than promiscuity. For women in the nineteenth century, being fashionable was often associated with being competitive, insipid, and lacking domestic skills. Eccentricity implies inhabiting an assemblage of identities, ensuring that the person is not easily managed or legible. Fuller provocatively links fashion and eccentricity to suggest that conforming to one surface style alienates the varied nature of self-expression. Eccentricity conjures up fear of the wearer being intelligent but potentially

¹⁹ Although makeup, especially rouge, was associated with prostitutes, or “painted ladies,” Fuller does not make this connection.

unbalanced, simply because their surfaces are polysemous. This idiosyncrasy is problematic since the extra effort required to read the surfaces frustrates the conventional minds.

The schoolgirls' "desire of punishing, once for all, this sometimes amusing, but so often provoking nonconformist" differs only slightly from the Cambridgeport society women who gossip about Margaret's body type and dress. To humiliate Mariana, the other girls all arrive at dinner with identical spots of rouge on their cheeks, grinning at her. Mariana, the consummate actress, eats her meal as if she had not noticed the slight. Afterward, she sobs and then collapses into sleep in her room, awakening as an "altered being" changed in many ways, but most notably; "her dress was uniform, her manner much subdued" (*Essential* 122). Mariana reacts by cutting herself off from the pleasures of dress she exhibited before. Subsequent scenes demonstrate that conformity blights her spirit, turning her into a malicious girl. Mariana follows the traditional path and marries; unfortunately, her husband is an apathetic man who compares her with the "careless shining dames of society" (*Essential* 127). Mariana soon falls ill and dies alone, but her death presents Fuller with the opportunity to address the metaphorical death of her eccentric alter ego when she writes, "Mariana, so full of life, was dead. That form, the most rich in energy and coloring of any I had ever seen, had faded from the earth" (*Essential* 118). Mariana's story reveals the understanding of the self through fashion. Her style gave color to her life, and once she lost this creative outlet, she became a sullen and crafty instigator of feuds. In this example, Fuller inverts the traditional

understanding of a woman of fashion and instead uses Mariana to embody the competitive and amoral woman.

Fuller uses Mariana as a paean to her own colorful eccentricity. She suggests that rather than targeting Mariana, compulsory conformity would punish the potential diversity of society. Fuller may have also killed off Mariana to resolve her psychological trauma from Groton. Fuller continued to talk about her agonizing experiences there for many years, which, I believe, changed the course of her life. Stacey Margolis' analysis of gossip in *Fictions of Mass Democracy* provides a way of thinking about these narratives. She explains, "information networks transform scattered individual opinions into a quasi-official form of public power that looks impossibly unified and coherent" (24). The power of gossip, appearing as a cohesive network, caused Fuller to make over her appearance. In all three situations, at her father's gala, as a girl in Boston, and as an adolescent in Groton, Fuller reconciles what appears to be conformity with a safe extension of the self, an extimacy, through fashion.

In an era replete with social reforms, from abolition to early Transcendentalism, Fuller sought access to the ideal self through clothes. In 1828, after returning from boarding school, Fuller transformed under the tutelage of Eliza Rotch Farrar, the wife of a Harvard professor. A mutual friend of both Fuller and Farrar explained that Eliza intended to "mold [Margaret] externally ... to make her less abrupt, less self-asserting, more *comme il faut* in ideas, manners, and even costume," accomplishing this by accompanying her new student to the dressmaker, hairdresser and even on social calls (qtd. in Chevigny

69). Since developing her fashion sense differed from her autodidactic approach to classical education, Fuller required guidance in improving her appearance.²⁰ Fuller's transformation underscores the fact that reading surfaces is not an innate ability. It is clear from her writing that Fuller viewed fashion both as a means of understanding the self and engaging with the world around her. Extimacy through fashion provided the awkward Fuller with a protective barrier disguised as a stylish persona.

Many scholars have considered the anxieties, not just in the nineteenth century, but also in earlier centuries of the illusory aspects of fashion that could allow for access to a higher social class. Fuller, already in a privileged position, although this changed after her father's death, instead desires acceptance into intellectual circles. Learning to read and perform fashion is an ongoing practice. Unlike Mariana, Fuller finds and inhabits her own sense of style and through it gains recognition and acceptance had she had not considered using the power of fashion tactically. For example, not only did her improved fashion sense advance her companionship with Ralph Waldo Emerson, but also her conversations were successful due, in part, to her appearance. Even in the intellectual circles of nineteenth-century New England, despite the spiritual influence of the Transcendentalists, image mattered. Fuller had a tremendous amount to offer her friends and the public, but I do not think she would have been as successful without being fashionable, nor would her words have reached as many people without the material allusions.

²⁰ Fuller inspired Farrar as well. Eliza published *The Young Lady's Friend* in 1836, and although it is mainly a conduct book, it also championed education for women. Certainly meeting a woman educated in the manner of men, as Fuller was, influenced some of Farrar's later assertions.

Emerson's Dated Designs

When Fuller anticipated meeting Emerson for the first time in 1836, she wrote to her sister of her embarrassment at her faded calico frock (*Letters* I 258).²¹ Fuller now knew how to style her hair and place a shoulder pad on her smaller side for symmetry; ensuring an effectual transformation since Emerson later described her as being “as always, carefully and becomingly dressed, and of ladylike self-possession” (*Memoirs* 202). Emerson was initially “repelled” by her squinting eyes and flat voice, but was soon charmed by her wit and intellect. Fuller’s editorship of *The Dial* and her deep friendship with Emerson reveal opposing constructions of aesthetics between the two Transcendentalist leaders. I suggest that Fuller shared Emerson’s appreciation for nature, but did not advocate an impractical retreat from society or family. Her aesthetic principles included self-reliance in terms of developing one’s personal style, but also in celebrating the material, which, unlike Emerson and Thoreau, she did not see as corrupting but as potentially liberating. In this way, Fuller did not ignore the industrial realities of the nineteenth century and instead used fashion to bridge the natural and the material.

Although the four volumes of *The Dial* did not feature any essays specifically addressing fashion, Emerson’s lecture, “The Comic,” later printed in *The Dial*, provides insight into his construction of matters of dress. Emerson declares that “among the women in the street, you shall see one whose bonnet and dress are one thing, and the lady herself quite another, wearing withal an

²¹ Calico is a fabric of inexpensive printed cotton most often used to make casual dresses; Fuller would not have felt fashionable in this dress.

expression of meek submission to her bonnet and dress; and another whose dress obeys and heightens the expression of her form" (*Collected* 90). This statement provides an interesting corollary to Fuller's fashion sense. Emerson personifies the dress as if it has autonomous power over the wearer. Although Emerson used clothing as a metaphor in his writing, such as his aphorism: "common sense is genius dressed in its working clothes," when he addressed fashion directly, he often framed it as corrupting as other social institutions (*Day's* 111). In *The Conduct of Life's Major Goals*, Emerson advocated learning to "live coarsely, dress plainly, and lie hard. The least habit of dominion over the palate has certain good effects not easily estimated," his rigidity foreclosing sensory pleasures (*Essential* 653). However, in his chapter, "Social Aims," when Emerson discusses American manners, his assertions about dress begin to echo what Fuller espoused years earlier. He assures his readers that

if a man have manners and talent he may dress roughly and carelessly. It is only when the mind and character slumber that the dress can be seen ... if, however, a man has not fine nerves and has keep sensibility, it is perhaps a wise economy to go to a good shop and dress himself irreproachably. (*Letters* 79)

Here Emerson agrees that dress involves performance while he also acknowledges that the bodily surface one projects can both influence the mind and be used tactically.

While Emerson may have had the privilege to "dress plainly," Fuller, as a woman, had to construct her public sense of fashion carefully in order to have her intellectual ideas received by others in the community. Fuller imagines fashion as a space for both self-reliance and public activism. Even though Fuller

struggled with the split between her public and private self, her appearance aided her success. For example, although few transcripts remain of Fuller's conversations, which began in 1839, there are references to what she wore. One attendee commented on Fuller's beauty and praised her "black bombazine or modest alpaca dress with a pointed waist and full pleated skirt, a brightly colored shawl" (qtd. in Murray 126).²² These enduring recollections may suggest that spectators viewed the surface as more important than the message. Fuller's conversations combined the verbal with the visual to create a type of theater. An attendee described the conversations as being "well-performed" and "entertaining," underscoring the fact that Fuller inhabited the role of public woman as much as she did a woman of fashion (qtd. in Murray 125).

Another attendee noted, "so much character, culture, and so much love of truth and beauty ... Margaret, beautifully dressed (don't despise that, for it made a fine picture) presided with more dignity and grace than I would have thought possible" (*Memoirs* 140). Fuller's demeanor and dress challenge the necessity of philosophical queries to be rigid and anti-material. According to a female reporter, Fuller's "thoughts were much illustrated, and all was said with the most captivating address and grace, and with beautiful modesty. The position in which she placed herself with respect to the rest, was entirely ladylike, and companionable" (Howe 109). To be sure, the adjectives "modesty" and "grace" would not be used to describe a man's delivery of lectures, but at this time, many people still needed convincing that women could not only meet intellectual rigors,

²² This was a common mid 1800s outfit for women, and most likely a purposeful cover design image for Megan Marshall's biography of Fuller.

but they also could retain their femininity while doing so. Although Fuller wanted to be read based on her intellect, the tactical use of fashion led to a wider and perhaps more influential dissemination of her ideas.

The “Fashioning Spirit” of the Nation

Fuller’s own fashion sense augments her perception and understanding of new places and people which are especially evident in *Summer on the Lakes*. *Summer* reveals Fuller’s experiments with both her aesthetic and feminist principles in the observations she makes on the Western frontier. After a long digression about a German mesmerist in Chapter V, Fuller assures her reader that she will return to her descriptions of the frontier, but was briefly reminded of the famed Frau H. by the many German immigrants she saw disembarking a boat in Wisconsin. However, the connections Fuller makes in this passage are more profound than she acknowledges. First, Fuller describes in detail the mesmeric abilities of Frau H. Fuller was deeply interested in mesmerism, attributing some her own creative output to moments of magnetism.²³ But as a Transcendentalist, Fuller sought connection to different facets of the self and the body. Although Emerson dismissed these pursuits, Fuller viewed mesmerism as an alternative means of connecting to outside spirit or the higher self. Fuller’s fashion sense complements her interest in mesmerism since both involve connection, communication, and divination. In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin attests to fashion’s oracular elements explaining, “it is well known that art will

²³ In James Freeman Clarke’s posthumous publication of Fuller’s letters, he explains that “to those of her own age she was a sibyl and seer – a prophetess, revealing the future, pointing the path, opening their eyes to the great aims only worthy of pursuit in life” (*Memoirs* 124).

often ... precede the perceptible reality by years" (B1a, 1). For Fuller, both fashion and mesmerism allowed for an experiential understanding of her higher self while also revealing alternate surfaces potentially beyond the material.

To return to Frau H. in *Summer on the Lakes*, her enigmatic biographical sketch introduces the "fashioning spirit" of the nation. Fuller explains,

the fashioning spirit, working upwards from the clod to man, proffers as its last, highest essay, the brain of man ... yet, as gradation is the beautiful secret of nature, and the fashioning spirit, which loves to develop and transcend ... did not mean by thus drawing man onward to the next state of existence, to destroy his fitness for this [state of existence]. (*Essential* 166)

In addition to the term "fashioning" denoting the making or shaping of something, the term can also be understood in sartorial terms. This fashioning spirit propels people to inhabit new regions and to make over themselves through changes in attire. "Spirit," of course can refer to the *zeitgeist*, but considering Fuller's interest in spiritualism, she may be using this term to suggest being in touch with the immaterial and the material at the same time. Fuller's experience with the fashioning spirit in her own life allows her to understand the tactics of others more readily. In her travels and observations, Fuller saw people inhabit different understandings of the self through communing with an immaterial spirit, whether through mesmerism or being in nature, but she extends this connection to comment on how many create a material manifestation of the immaterial through dress. The frontier appeared to have the utopian potential to enable settlers to reinvent themselves and make their fortune. To return to Benjamin briefly, he explains, "for the philosopher, the most interesting thing about fashion is its extraordinary anticipation" (*Arcades* B1a, 1). In a way, those who were moving to

the frontier were in search of a variety of things, but their decisions to move combined philosophical rationalization with hopeful divination.

Fuller also views the West with predictable idealism. Since the atmosphere, daily activities, and inhabitants are new to Fuller, she relies on fashion to structure her reactions to the frontier. In choosing to focus on the material aspects of what the frontier could mean for women, she hopes for the reordering of patriarchal roles. She remarks that if a woman could both make a home and

enjoy plenty of exercise, the woods, the streams, a few studies, music, and the sincere and familiar intercourse, far more easily to be met here than elsewhere, would afford happiness enough. Her eyes would not grow dim, nor her cheeks sunken, in the absence of parties, morning visits, and milliner's shops. (*Essential* 107)

Here Fuller addresses enduring assumptions about the weak bodies and irrational minds of women. She inverts the paradigm, presenting the social and shopping outings as those which enervate young women while insisting nature and conversation will strengthen them. At Lake Geneva, Fuller meets a young girl and hopes that “her looks may retain that sweet, wild beauty, that is soon made to vanish from eyes which look too much on shops and streets, and the vulgarities of city ‘parties’” (*Essential* 92). Among other genres, *Summer on the Lakes* is part travel narrative and part autobiography. The autobiography is similar to fashion; they both entail a form of performance. In these passages, Fuller may be “trying on” this critical persona to critique social obligations and shopping, as she imagines the frontier as an idealized place full of potential for young women that the city does not offer.

Fashion sense includes the objects which would make one a part of fashionable society. Fuller uses these objects to evaluate practices that are inappropriate for their time or place and to critique Anglophilia. For example, “the piano many carry with them, because it is the fashionable instrument in the eastern cities. Even there, it is so merely from the habit of imitating Europe” (*Essential* 107). Fuller notes that the pianos will soon go out of tune and that women lack the time to practice the piano in the new frontier. These Anglo-influenced practices “are as ill suited to the daughter of an Illinois farmer, as satin shoes to climb the Indian mounds” (*Essential* 107). Fashion remains the common factor in each of her examples and her means of accessing these new landscapes and daily routines.

She hopes to see these women “grow up with the strength of body, dexterity, simple tastes, and resources that would fit them to enjoy and refine the western farmer's life, [even if] their mothers mourn over their want of fashionable delicacy” (*Essential* 107). There is a fashion imaginary at work in these passages; Fuller attempts to preserve regional difference even as fashion ties this nation together. Fuller envisions “an elegance she would diffuse around her, if her mind were opened to appreciate elegance ... as different from that of the city belle as that of the prairie torch-flower from the shopworn article that touches the cheek of that lady within her bonnet” (*Essential* 107). In this fantasy, Fuller imagines this new form of rural elegance not as superior or inferior to urban elegance but simply having a different utility.

Similarly, despite noting obvious differences between herself and the exotic Other, she insists on using fashion to unify her observations of the Native Americans. She uses fashion tactically, not only in an effort to understand their reaction to the appropriation of their land by white settlers but also as an entertaining facet of her travel narrative. When she finally sees the “blanketed forms” of Indians, it “gave [her] the first feeling that [she] really approached the West” (*Essential* 80). The authentic experience of the West for Fuller relies on reducing people to the shapes their unfamiliar vestments take. However, New Englanders on the boat “seeking their fortunes” interrupt her reverie as they arrived in the new space with their “habits of calculation, their cautious manners, their love of polemics” (*Essential* 80). Clearly, the “fashioning spirit” of the nation has material, environmental, and political consequences. At Mackinaw Beach, when Fuller encounters “Indian canoe-men in pink calico shirts,” she remains undisturbed by their adopted fashions, explaining, “all looked just as I had fancied, only far prettier” (*Essential* 218). Fuller maintains a more generous opinion of the dress of Native Americans, even if they adopt Anglo-American fashions. Later in Sault St. Marie, Fuller hires two Indian men to take herself and a friend out on a canoe. One of the two Indians is “a fine looking youth of about sixteen, richly dressed in blue broadcloth, scarlet sash and leggins, with a scarf of brighter red than the rest, tied around his head, its ends falling gracefully on one shoulder” (*Essential* 221). This hybrid outfit combines a traditionally placed and dyed headscarf with the wool broadcloth which early settlers traded with Indians since the first encounters. Fuller desires an authentic experience of the

frontier, yet the acculturation of the Indians fails to disturb her, while, paradoxically, the greed and Anglophilia of the new settlers does.

Although many scholars, and even some of her contemporaries, cite Fuller's ability to draw people into conversation, I contend that she uses surfaces to connect to others and those about whom she writes.²⁴ To be sure, there is a language barrier between herself and many of the indigenous people, but in these scenes fashion often replaces the need for dialogue. Many debates about race in the nineteenth century focused on the ineluctable destiny of a marked body; however, in her experiences with other classes and races, Fuller engages in a connectedness through the shared experience of dress. Fuller meets a young Indian woman who "asked [her] by a gesture, to let her take my sunshade, and then to show her how to open it. Then she put it into her baby's hand, and held it over its head, looking at me the while with a sweet, mischievous laugh, as much as to say, 'you carry a thing that is only fit for a baby'" (*Essential* 179). Although Fuller imposes her own assumptions on the woman, she relies on the material to interpret a new situation. These visual and tactile exchanges allow for a more profound experience for Fuller than do scenes of traditional dialogue.

She concludes, "I feel that I have learnt a great deal of the Indians, from observing them even in this broken and degraded condition. There is a language of eye and motion which cannot be put into words, and which teaches what words never can" (*Essential* 221). This passage points to a form of surface reading, albeit without involving fashion, but instead focusing on visual and

²⁴ See Megan Marshall - *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life*; Meg McGavran - *Murray Margaret Fuller, Wandering Pilgrim*; Margaret Vanderhaar Allen - *The Achievement of Margaret Fuller*.

sensory indications. Fuller often attends to the imperceptible her work, and in this case, does not suggest it requires interpretation. For her, and those who know how to read surfaces, the eyes, the clothes, and the gestures provide meaning, and connection. Fuller, however, supplies both sides of her imagined exchange; she translates looks into language without actually finding out what the other intends. As with the constraints of cross-class understanding identified in Chapter One, these scenes of cross-race sympathy also reveal similar limitations.

“Rhetorical Gentlemen and Silken Dames”

In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and her domestic dispatches for the *Tribune*, Fuller continues to include detailed descriptions of dress and sartorial metaphors, while her political discussions expand. Her analysis of the lives of women in these texts allows her to investigate class, age, slavery, and factory work through fashion. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* was originally published as a shorter essay, “The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men, Woman versus Women” in *The Dial* in 1843. The passages I address below did not appear in the “Great Lawsuit.” These additions demonstrate Fuller’s increasing politicization over the two years separating *Women in the Nineteenth Century* and *Summer on the Lakes*.

Fuller does not excoriate fashion for its presumed frivolity, injuriousness, or economic oppression, but instead uses fashion as a rhetorical tool to narrow the gap between working-class and wealthy women. She condemns belles and convicts alike, not for their vain attachment to fashionable dress but for their unwavering adherence to conformity. Fuller constructs “fashionable society” in a

broader sense, using it as a leveling community. From the Indian to the criminal, they are all part of fashionable society, not necessarily in terms of wearing the latest dresses from Paris, but are united in their common interest in fashion. Through their varied endeavors, they are fashionable, both in terms of being fashioned and of fashion in the moment, suggesting as much about growth as it does about their present state. While visiting a popular resort, she observes women “dressed without regard to the season or the demands of the place, in apery ... of European fashions” (*Essential* 328). “Restlessly courting attention ... [they] went to their pillows with their heads full of folly, their hearts of jealousy, or gratified vanity” (*Essential* 328). Fuller contends that their actions confirmed for the men the “low opinion they already entertained of Woman” (*Essential* 328). Fuller draws an implicit correlation between the groups of women by equating the vain vacationers with imprisoned prostitutes. Here her concept of fashionable society expands beyond traditional class borders. However, although access to fashionable clothes is not equal between the two groups, their desire for fashionable clothes is.

Fuller explains that the women in Sing Sing were imprisoned because “they had not dresses like the other ladies, so they stole them; they could not pay for flattery by distinctions, and the dower of a worldly marriage, so they paid by the profanation of their persons” (*Essential* 329). Essentially, it is the commoditized marriage market, not the desire for dresses themselves, which forces the women to sell their bodies. Fuller calls on her “sisters,” wondering “if the women at the fashionable house be not answerable for those women being in

the prison" (*Essential* 329). Fuller makes a similar argument with more vehemence in the *Tribune*, critiquing the idea of a woman's sphere as a space of protection. She critiques instances when "the rhetorical gentlemen and silken dames, who, quite forgetting their washerwomen, their seamstresses, and the poor hirelings for the sensual pleasures of Man ... talk as if women need be fitted for no other chance than that of growing like cherished flowers in the garden of domestic love" (*Critic* 479). The sought-after woman's sphere proves oppressive for those who do attain it. Fuller draws connections between conservative dress and traditional housekeeping explaining, "a woman who wants purity, modesty, and harmony in her dress and manners is insufferable," and she is similarly disagreeable about her house since she "sought a home and found a work-house" (*Critic* 406; 409).

Since neither the elite nor imprisoned women are free, is Fuller suggesting that fashion is a way out? Differing from her transcendental cohort, Fuller views the solutions to these larger issues as the responsibility of the group, not the individual. Considering it difficult to dismantle an oppressive system by retreating from it, Fuller instead imagines a subversive, but internal, form of political action based on accepting the power of surfaces and engaging with society and its shortcomings. In this way, she and others can use fashion, conversation, and aesthetics to counteract oppression and illegibility while Emerson and Thoreau engage in contemplation in the woods.

In *Women in the Nineteenth Century* and the *Tribune* essays, Fuller continues her tactical use of material touchstones with which readers can

associate to address contentious topics such as slavery and factory work. She deftly employs sartorial references to ground the philosophical, creating a form of materialism that other Transcendentalists refused to consider. Fuller's writing focuses on what is visible to bring attention to the invisible, such as the poor, the enslaved, the aging, and the mentally ill. She effectively combines ethical and aesthetic conventions to condemn slavery by reminding women that if they have any power, "it is a moral power;" they should not benefit from slavery and should refuse the "glittering baubles, spacious dwellings, and plentiful service, they mean to offer you through these means" (*Essential* 341). Fashion does not corrupt the women themselves, but the material goods produced by unjust structures replicate oppression. Regardless of the source of the oppression, Fuller's solution seeks a unity between groups rather than isolationism. The sartorial references of her arguments suggest that marginalized groups cannot embark on their own self-reliance until they reach a level, at least, similar to others. She invokes the communal experience of fashion to motivate elite women into action.

Fuller's texts also provide space for a mode of feeling centered on fashion. Fuller does not replicate the stereotypical competitive woman of fashion so often depicted in nineteenth-century texts. Instead, as in Chapter One, affective connections and communities emerge through fashion. Fuller employs the rhetorical strategy of pathos by featuring empathetic stories in which upper-class readers may recognize similar sentiments in their own lives to the ones the underprivileged women describe. When depicting her visit to an asylum for

discharged female convicts, she echoes the sentiment in earlier American novels by observing “little girls huddling in a corner, in neglected dress and hair contrasting with some ribbon of cherished finery” (*Critic* 135). On the one hand, Fuller is attempting to transcend class and assumptions about cleanliness and propriety of the poor by creating a connection between two supposedly dissimilar groups. Fuller describes a poor woman who “had passed through the lowest grades of ignominy,” but did not think all was lost since she said she “would always have good under-clothes’; and, indeed, who could doubt that this denoted the remains of private self-respect in the mind?” (*Essential* 340). In this passage, Fuller is “dressing” up her voice in the subject of a poor woman. She tries to inhabit this alternate experience to gain access to other subject positions but also to critique ideals which circumvent the body. For women, especially those who have been sold, abused, imprisoned or driven insane, the body is definitive. Since it cannot be easily transcended, Fuller locates in it a source of power by focusing on the discovery and emancipation of the body through fashion.

Although Fuller addressed the plight of factory workers in England, otherwise she focuses only tangentially on the production of clothing. Instead of concentrating on the women in the mills and the dangerous working conditions in Manchester, Fuller visits a “magnificent warehouse” and the Mechanic Institute in Liverpool. Consistent with her elite fashion sense, Fuller criticizes the women who walk the streets at night “bare-headed, with [a] coarse, rude and reckless air” (*Sad* 47). Perhaps because this was her first international letter, she reserved her usual censure until she had observed more European cities. By the time she

arrives in Lyon to visit the silk weavers, Fuller's frustration returns when she meets families working and living in one garret chamber. She views their young guide in societal terms, comparing her to the "merchant's daughters of Boston and New York [who] are just making their first experiences of 'society' while she must struggle to pay for food" (*Sad* 127).²⁵ This scene serves as a companion piece to Fuller's earlier observations of improper footwear for the rough frontier in *Summer on the Lakes*. She notes that the "pavement was much easier for [their guide's] feet in their wooden *sabots* than for ours in our Paris shoes" (*Sad* 127). Fuller experiences the tour first in terms of dress and second in terms of sights. She has become the new immigrant, improperly-clad in "satin shoes to climb the Indian mound" (*Essential* 107). Her sense of fashion is out of place with what she has seen, gesturing to the potential outmodedness of her elite sense of fashion among the working-class. These scenes also confirm bottom-up theories of fashion that indicate upper-class fashion is often influenced by the styles of the middle and lower class.

In her *Tribune* essay, "The Wrongs of American Women. The Duty of American Women" published eleven months before her Liverpool letter, Fuller critiques a society in which young women spend their early lives learning sewing and sociability until their "ornamental accomplishments [are] perfected and displayed" in order to find a husband (*Sad* 234). She cites the various reasons why separate spheres are detrimental to women, such as the risk of widowhood and the lack of education that could be used to benefit her children. Fuller

²⁵ Fuller suggests a famous phrenologists' publisher considers the literary labor of the author as having no more to do with the market "than the silk-worm [has] with the lining of one of their coats" (*Sad* 66).

creatively brings attention to working-class women by acknowledging that not even women want to see a “poor woman digging in the mines in her husband’s clothes” (*Essential* 395). She uses the objectionable image of a woman improperly dressed to call for more employment opportunities for women beyond seamstress, vendor, or “wretched slaves of sensuality” (*Essential* 395). Assuming that her readers will have an aesthetic sensibility, she uses fashion as a point of entry into these debates. Fuller hopes for “the approach of a nobler era ... [when] it is natural enough to see ‘Female Physicians,’ and we believe the lace cap and work-bag are as much at home here as the wig and gold-beaded cane” (*Critic* 235). Fashion serves as a descriptive surface onto which she can project larger issues. In this case, she wants people to become as accustomed to seeing a female physician, marked by her implicitly modest lace cap, as they have become accustomed to what previously seemed equally as absurd as a female doctor: the powdered wig and foppish cane.

Whether in Paris, Milwaukee, Chicago, or Rome, Fuller continued commenting on dress and reflecting on events through the lens of fashion. During a period of significant political upheaval, Fuller met and had a child with Giovanni Ossoli.²⁶ After London, but before her pregnancy, Fuller visited Paris. Influenced by the Parisian women, Fuller spent much of her *Tribune* advance money on new dresses. Megan Marshall notes that Fuller remained

²⁶ Noting the high death tolls for both the French and the Italians Fuller goes on to consider the officers’ red tunics as the “natural mark of the enemy ... [seeming to her a] great folly to wear such a dress amid the dark uniforms, but Garibaldi has always done it. He has now been wounded twice here and seventeen times in Ancona” (*Sad* 292). At this time, women’s blouses were white, but Garibaldi influenced women’s fashion. New blouses were made in his signature red color and with black military ornamentation.

“sequestered” until she could be fitted in her new dresses, and only then did she visit the opera, museums, and public debates (282). It was here that she also met George Sand, but was disappointed to find her at home not in her famous masculine style, but in a violet dress with curled hair, exhibiting “lady-like dignity” contrasting with the “vulgar caricature” of Sand which Fuller desired (Marshall 285).

In 1845, Fuller dedicated an entire essay to the tailor whose “the needle is no longer a weapon void of offense ... they hold their heads high and hold their full purses in a firm hand” (*Critic* 220). She develops the factual accounts of an ambitious young tailor, Stultz, who wants to dress the famous dandy, Beau Brummel.²⁷ Since Brummel has no fortune of his own, yet is loyal to his current tailor, Stultz creates a beautiful coat for Brummel and hides a one hundred dollar bribe in the pocket. Through the publicity attached to Brummel, Stultz becomes very successful.²⁸ When Brummel is deposed from “the monarchy of fashion [which] is, no less than the others, subject to revolutions,” Stultz has already gained fame and fortune. Fuller highlights his altruism as he turns down a baronetcy and instead uses his millions to build a hospital for aged tailors (*Critic* 224).²⁹ The phrase “monarchy of fashion” is noteworthy, especially when Fuller

²⁷ "Come to our fete, and bring with thee Thy newest, best embroidery. Come to our fete, and show again That sky-blue coat, thou pink of men, Which charmed all eyes, who last surveyed it, And Brummel's self inquired, ' Who made it ? ' " (Fox 53).

²⁸ "Stultz aims at making gentlemen, not coats; there is a degree of aristocratic pretension in his stitches, which is vulgar to an appalling degree. You can tell a Stultz coat anywhere, which is quite enough to damn it: the moment a man's known by an invariable cut, and that not original, it ought to be all over with him. Give me the man who makes the tailor, not the tailor who makes the man" (from 1891 Bulwer's Novels: Pelham, or, Adventures of a gentleman By Edward Bulwer Lytton Baron Lytton).

²⁹ Undoubtedly, Brummel had a significant influence on fashion. Fuller even cites a painting of her father wearing a Brummel collar and tie in a formal portrait (Murray 12). However, it is curious that

purposefully elides Brummel being deposed in favor of another newer monarch. This omission suggests that fashion can be fickle and elitist, but instead, Fuller proposes a democracy of fashion.

Fuller imagines a democratic philosophy of fashion in which everyone can eventually participate equally. Beauty, imagination, and social advocacy are accessible to all women and men, regardless of class or race. It is helpful to return to Benjamin who explains that in fashion, “each season brings, in its newest creations, various secret signals of things to come. Whoever understands how to read these semaphores would know in advance not only about new currents in the arts but also about new legal codes, wars, and revolutions” (*Arcades* B1a, 1). In her reference to the revolutions of fashion to which Brummel is subjected, Fuller is not simply describing potential solutions for women; she wants to revolutionize, or make over, many of the inequitable structures upon which society is founded. Fuller’s texts describe abstract ideas that may initially appear improper or subversive, but through the point of connection of fashion, makes them familiar to upper-class readers.

Millefleur

Although flowers had many uses and meanings in the nineteenth century, I view them as an accessory and subset of fashion. The motif of flowers that pervades Fuller’s letters, journals, and fiction, originating as a material expression of her connection to nature and her memories of her mother but grows into an understanding of social bonds which revises Emerson’s model of

Fuller celebrates the wealthy tailor while nearly ignoring the plight of seamstresses, milliners, and factory workers involved in the production of cloth upon which the industry of the tailor relies.

the Over-soul.³⁰ Flowers extend beyond Fuller's personal life to denote the varieties of female self-expression and activism that Fuller finds crucial to her feminist project.

Gardens, especially those with blooming flowers, were extremely common in nineteenth-century England and the United States. Many women spent significant time cultivating, picking, and arranging flowers for the home. Flowers were also a practical yet connotative gift.³¹ Floriography presented an opportunity for people to decorate their bodies while signaling information. Both men and women wore fresh flowers, although men could only wear them in a buttonhole; women wore flowers in their hair, around their waists, and even carried small bouquets in metal posy holders.

The family garden was a respite for Fuller's mother, Margaret, especially after the death of one of her children. She advised her daughter that "flowers have the power to soothe almost any irritation" (Murray 8). Margaret transplanted parts of her garden to each of the nine homes she lived in throughout her life. Fuller often described her mother as being "domesticated" by the demands of her husband, seven children, domestic economizing, and social calls. However, she also notes her mother's "fair and flower-like nature" (Chevigny 36). Influenced by her mother's horticultural interest from a young age, Fuller explains, "I loved to gaze upon the roses, the violets, the lilies, the pinks; my mother's hand had planted them, and they bloomed for me ... [I] pressed them to my bosom with passionate emotions, such as I never dared express to

³⁰ See Rhyner, Corinne Kopcik, "Flowers of Rhetoric"

³¹ See *Flora's Interpreter* (1832) – Ed. Sarah Josepha Hale

any human being” (qtd. in Bailey 88).³² Although Fuller was not engaged in symptomatic readings of the language of flowers nor Barthian semiotics, considering the cultural and personal meaning of flowers for Fuller, her self-decoration with flowers may have served as a means of carrying her past with her.

Fuller’s often-noted practice of wearing fresh flowers in her hair was not an unusual antebellum style of ornamentation for women. However, it caught the attention of Nathaniel Hawthorne and inspired the character of Zenobia in *Blithedale Romance*.³³ Fuller’s adornment with flowers facilitated her experimentation with different modes of selfhood while also serving as a cipher for her democracy of fashion. Considering Fuller’s connection to nature and her self-described “unseen powers” of creative energy, it follows that Fuller would combine the natural and the esoteric to create meaning. Knowing one’s self coupled with the means for creative expression that Fuller desires for all women.

The floral metaphors Fullers uses are predictably reminiscent of growth, dormancy, sexual maturity, and maternal nurturing. However, often Fuller references flowers to underscore a type of fashionable variegation. In *Summer on the Lakes*, she observes “culture has too generally been that given to women to make them ‘the ornaments of society.’ They can dance, but not draw; talk French, but know nothing of the language of flowers [and a tendency toward

³² Fuller’s biographers have shown that although Fuller vowed to be as beautiful as her mother’s flowers, she often felt unworthy. The flowers Margaret wrote of and wore may have served as a material homage to her mother, in the same way her changing of her name from Sarah to Margaret may have been.

³³ James Nathan, her suitor and friend who also wore fresh flowers, was Hawthorne’s source for the character Westervelt.

imitation] threatens to blight whatever of original growth might adorn the soil” (*Essential* 107). Above all, Fuller wants to encourage a plurality of self-expression rather than conformity in her democracy of fashion. In a personal letter from 1840, Fuller refers to her new-found independence as “transformation, not alteration” in which “the leaf became a stem, a bud, is now in flower” (Murray 171). Even Fuller’s sense of fashion undergoes a transformation as she considers whether she prefers the natural to the cultivated. In her memoir section titled “First Friend,” she describes an elegant woman she sees at church with whom she later becomes infatuated. Fuller notes her beauty, “her dress, [and] the arrangement of her hair, which had the graceful pliancy of races highly cultivated” (*Essential* 38). But as she grows older and reflects on her first impression, she finds the woman’s beauty to be “distilled result of ages of European culture,” to which she prefers “the wild heath on the lonely hill-side, than such a rose-tree from the daintily clipped garden” (*Essential* 38). Regardless of whether this is another persona that Fuller “wears” in her writing; she effectively connects abstract ideas regarding aesthetics to personal, and perhaps universal, experiences of transformation.

Fuller occasionally turned to her artistic “friends,” Goethe and Beethoven, for guidance. In an 1843 letter to Beethoven, Fuller wonders wondering if being female “prevents the soul from manifesting itself” leaving her envious of the “least flower that came to seed” (*Memoirs* 234). She muses over her identity and future path complaining, “for all the tides that flow within me, I am dumb and ineffectual, when it comes to casting my thoughts into form. No old one suits me” (*Memoirs*

297). Of course, like many of Fuller's reflections, they germinate from a gendered, urban, and privileged position. She concludes, "one should be either public or private, I love best to be a woman; but womanhood is at present too straightly-bound to give me scope" (*Memoirs* 295 -7). Yet, fashion offers a solution to both that is semi-private. Like Fuller's flowers, fashion is a public expression of the private self.

Ellen Rooney's theory of "the semiprivate room" is especially useful when considering how Fuller's work navigates the personal and the political. For example, Fuller's conversations, held in gynocentric semiprivate rooms created a space for Fuller and others to discuss personal, political, and philosophical questions. Rooney explains,

the semiprivate room is emphatically not a room of one's own in the home of one's family. The cadre that gather in the space of the semiprivate is contingent, impermanent, only partially identified with one another ... the semiprivate makes active use of its partialities, accidents, and historical limits in order to generate critical exchange – an interpersonal intimacy. (145)

This exchange between contingent allies augments rather than weakens Fuller's ideal of a democracy of fashion. In fact, the efficacy of the proto-consciousness-raising sessions relies on diverse attendees and responses. This tentative but accepting mode mirrors the affective connections made between seemingly unrelated groups, like Native Americans, wealthy women, and prostitutes, in Fuller's writing. The women she observes are not united in an obvious way beyond their sex, but only through their participation in a broadened fashionable society. Conformity, forced collusion, and defining an artificial split between the public and the private are anathema to her larger project of making over the self.

Although Fuller can be critiqued for imposing her particular fashion sense on others, she still framed it as a device for self-expression, aesthetic appreciation, and political activism. Marshall observes,

Margaret saw aesthetic culture as a means of personal transformation, even transcendence. This was her gospel ... [when contributing to *The Dial* she wanted to] speak on a high plane to those with sophisticated tastes, and educate others to an understanding and appreciation of the life-affirming, soul-uplifting aspects of music, art, and literature. (148)

The effects of these traditional forms of aesthetic culture are readily apparent in Fuller's life and writing, but less obvious forms, like fashion, were unquestionably transformative and inspirational. Just as Fuller improved her appearance and persona, she also learned to welcome the multiple forms in which beauty manifests. In *Summer on the Lakes*, she remarks "gradation is the beautiful secret of nature" (*Essential* 166). Later, in "Dispatch Ten" from Paris, Fuller praises "the French ladies surpassing all other in the art of dress, indeed it gave me much pleasure to see them; certainly there are many ugly ones, but they are so well dressed and have such an air of graceful vivacity, that the general effect was of a flower-garden" (*Sad* 108). In her travels from Cambridgeport to Rome, Fuller refused to imagine beauty as distinct from diversity. In the social tapestry of Fuller's era, women appear unique yet united in the *millefleur* background. Often the pattern they form becomes more beautiful than the larger image in the foreground, and their interconnectedness through stems and leaves creates a network of strength.

Fuller's material and fashionable understanding of social bonds revises Emerson's model of the Over-soul. Like the Over-soul, fashion is also a

generative force that is accessible to everyone. However, while Emerson's ideas underscore the possibility of transcending individuality, individuality remains crucial to Fuller's project. Her democracy of fashion hinges on the allowance for and encouragement of individuality, and it is this generative opportunity that gives rise to the affective communities forming around fashion. Emerson's allusion to the ineffability of the Over-soul parallels the inadequacy of language when reading surfaces of fashion. Emerson consistently privileges the spiritual over the material, finding the experience of the senses lacking. For Fuller, the sensory, especially the visual and tactile experience of clothing, enables the potential for freedom found in the material.

In her various texts and reflections, Fuller moved from a personal appreciation of beauty to using fashion tactically to facilitate her comprehension of the new frontier to employing material examples in her writing as a tool for social advocacy. Fuller struggled not only with nineteenth-century ideals of femininity but also with meeting her father's educational standards. Fuller's transformation of what many think of as fashionable society began as a personal endeavor and became a series of political statements about the role of women in society. Typical of Fuller's aptitude with arrangement, both of words and of ensembles, she takes the symbol of the feminine, delicate, and pastoral flower and converts it into a political, durable, and modern tool of critique. Fuller's short life and tragic death are mediated only by the amount of work, both personal and political, she wrote before her death. For a woman who had finally found a loving family, creative success, and stylish sophistication, it is dreadfully fitting that only

the body of her son and a button from Ossoli's coat could be found in the shipwreck debris.

Chapter Three

Under Construction: Urban Spaces, Public Image, and Time in Wharton and Dreiser

The rapid economic expansion of the late nineteenth century spurred growth and opportunity for many, but it also created anxieties about social mobility. Immigrants and others moving in from rural areas found jobs in prospering factories and businesses. Real wages, Gross Domestic Product, and the nation's population all increased dramatically between 1860 and 1910. These changes gave rise to a larger middle class and an even more prosperous upper class. However, this era was fraught with poverty, social unrest, and racial segregation. Nevertheless, many hoped to realize their own American Dream in an age when stylish dress and publicity, not hard work, often enabled success.

As the social landscape changed, so did the physical landscape. The built environment of American cities now included massive, multi-story buildings, such as skyscrapers and department stores. New buildings were constructed to reflect the prosperity and taste of the city, while hiding the poverty of many who lived in the city from view.³⁴ The shift in the economy toward manufacturing and away from farming led to nearly half of the population living in urban areas. During this historical period, new technologies and forms of transportation proliferated, and ready-made commodities, like clothes, were increasingly made outside the home. The rapid growth of American cities, some reaching a population of over one million by 1900, necessitated urban planning and renewal.

³⁴ In 1889, the same year in which *Sister Carrie* was published, Jacob Riis' images of the squalor and overcrowding of New York City appeared in Scribner's Magazine under the title "How the Other Half Lives."

Architect Daniel Hudson Burnham, Director of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, was known as the "Father of the City Beautiful." Although focused on beautification, Burnham and his cohort undertook their efforts in hopes of encouraging widespread reform in the cities. An often-repeated quotation attributed to Burnham encourages architects to "let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty." They believed that the cityscape would increase civic pride and moral decency. In his book about the movement, William Wilson explains, "when they trumpeted the meliorative power of beauty, they were stating their belief in its capacity to shape human thought and behavior" (79). His sentiments echo those of George Fox who felt one could see fashion's "innate love in its outward surroundings. Good taste is, in fact, like good music — it harmonizes and marks the whole man" (18-19). In many ways, the renovation of the city parallels the physical transformations I have discussed in earlier chapters. Contemporary scholars have noted the connection between fashion and architecture in that they both focus on the way the human body moves in space as well as the similar construction of either a garment or a shell which buffers the user from the outside world.³⁵ I am interested in the way American authors perceived the optimism inherent in philosophies of fashion and municipal improvement.

In 1897, Edith Wharton published *The Decoration of Houses* with Ogden Codman. This "practical handbook" was written in response to existing and emerging aesthetic concerns. Wharton disliked many of results of urbanization

³⁵ See *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* by Brooke Hodge and Patricia Mears

and the City Beautiful Movement, finding that architects relied upon styles which were “merely survivals of earlier social conditions, and have been preserved in obedience to that instinct that makes people cling to so many customs the meaning of which is lost” (*Decoration* 11). Her critique of aesthetics closely resembles the efforts of the elite classes in many of her novels to maintain their established tastes and practices. Wharton was especially concerned with “the indifference to privacy which has sprung up in modern times” (*Decoration* 23). Her point was well taken in cities like New York City where commercial interests dictated the design of the city streets. Often major thoroughfares met at open spaces, like squares, “to monumentalize these central vantage points in the commercial life of the city” (Taylor 288). The layout of the city emphasized commercial spaces while also funneling daily activities into public areas. These larger, more visible spaces challenged earlier notions of privacy; life now happened on the streets.

This chapter examines Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Edith Wharton’s *The Custom of the Country* (1913) to demonstrate the ways in which the changing physical landscape, influenced by the City Beautiful Movement, created spaces for spectatorship and display encouraging the tactical uses of fashion. Writing about the intersection of fashion, architecture, and public space allowed Wharton and Dreiser to respond to the facades, both architectural and physical, which defined the aptly named Gilded Age. Previous scholarship on Wharton and Dreiser focused either on consuming or on representations of

space continues to read both fashion and interiors symptomatically.³⁶ I return to de Certeau in order to reconsider the role of consumer culture and urban space in *Sister Carrie* and *The Custom of the Country*. In his essay “Walking in the City” de Certeau describes how consumers, as *bricoleurs*, “reappropriate the space organised by techniques of sociocultural production” (xviii).³⁷ Although he discusses mobility in terms of walking through the city, I extend his argument to consider the role of resistant practices on social mobility as well. Only those who live in the city “below the thresholds at which visibility begins” can rewrite the “urban text” (93). *Carrie* and *Undine* are below the threshold since they are both outsiders. I read their resistance as occurring through their use of the public spaces of the city and the material architectural components with which they interact such as glass windows and electric lights. I demonstrate how their tactical use of fashion increases the value of their public image, ensuring their financial success but ultimately altering their experience of time.

Frontier of Fashion

Wharton and Dreiser’s novels revise the trope of the unprotected girl falling victim to urban corruption. Instead of representing danger as in earlier sensational novels, cities become spaces for education, consumption, and

³⁶ See Rachel Bowlby- *Just Looking*; Katherine Joslin - *Edith Wharton and the Making of Fashion*; Maureen Montgomery - *Displaying Women*; Jennifer Fleissner - *Women, Compulsion, Modernity*; Gary Totten - *Memorial Boxes and Guarded Interiors: Edith Wharton and Material Culture*; Stephanie Lee – “Framing the City;” Carol Baker Sapora – “Undine Spragg, the Mirror and the Lamp;” Beverly Gordon - “Woman’s Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age;” Blanche Gelfant - “What More Can Carrie Want?;” Tracy Lemaster - “Feminist Thing Theory in *Sister Carrie*.”

³⁷ It is interesting to note that fashion theorist Dick Hebdige, in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, has also used the term *bricolage*. He suggests that consumers can be considered *bricoleurs* through the appropriation of “another range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meanings”(20).

achievement. The opening scenes of *Sister Carrie* and *Custom of the Country* establish the city as the site of education for the protagonists while experimenting with the idea of arrival. For Carrie and Undine the city becomes a new frontier of fashion sense. Dreiser's narrator explains, "to the child, the genius with imagination, or the wholly untravelled, the approach to a great city for the first time is a wonderful thing" (7-8). Carrie, initially full of wonder, does not appreciate that her lack of funds and provincial dress will keep her from taking advantage of many urban opportunities. Her first thoughts are of things. Carrie "realized in a dim way how much the city held--wealth, fashion, ease--every adornment for women, and she longed for dress and beauty with a whole heart" (21). Similarly, the location of the hotels in which the Spaggs have lived indicates that despite being in New York for two years, they remain outside of fashionable circles and have not yet "arrived" socially. Undine's dresses reflect her marginality, hanging "unworn in her wardrobe, like so many derisive points of interrogation ... [seeming] disgustingly common-place, and as familiar as if she had danced them to shreds" (14).

The first glimpse the reader has of Undine is in her hotel suite bedroom with "sea-green panels and old rose carpet" writing a letter on what she thinks is chic "pigeon-blood" stationery (12-13). Wharton invites the reader to assess Undine through her apparent lack of taste. Like Undine's first scenes littered with dresses, gilt armchairs, and stationery, a material description of Carrie's clothing introduces her to the reader. We learn that "her total outfit consisted of a small trunk, a cheap imitation alligator-skin satchel, a small lunch in a paper box, and a

yellow leather snap purse” (1). The reader learns little, if anything, about Carrie’s history, thoughts, or goals. Prioritized over the date, the setting, her disposition, and even her thoughts, Carrie’s things claim primacy. Stanley Corkin explains, “we know Carrie because we know what this imitation alligator-skin satchel means” (608). In other words, the reader is assumed to have their own fashion sense and to be as adept at reading the dress of the character, as they are the narrative itself.

So how are we to read a narrative of things? Bill Brown explains, “Dreiser stands out among American realists and naturalists as the writer most devoted to things: to the detailed rendering of streets, hotels and restaurants and office buildings, magnificent mansions and squalid flats, shoes and scarves and jackets and skirts” (84). The things Dreiser describes in detail work in two ways; we are reading the character through their things, but authors like Dreiser are also modeling surface reading through the character’s evaluations of each other and of themselves. The narrator claims, “women perceive an “indescribably faint line” between “who are worth glancing at and those who are not...there is another line at which the dress of a man will cause her to study her own (4). Carrie proves she can read others, sizing up “the purse, the shiny tan shoes, the smart new suit” of Drouet (6). However, her own tactical use of fashion sense takes time to develop. Comparing herself to Drouet, Carrie, “became conscious of an inequality. Her own plain blue dress, with its black cotton tape trimmings, now seemed to her shabby. She felt the worn state of her shoes” (4-5). Dreiser models a pivotal moment of surface reading in which Carrie reads herself

through the actual haptic feeling of worn shoes, but also through a sense of inadequacy.

Carrie and Undine's unique navigation of the city allows them to reappropriate spaces to develop their fashion sense. The goods, diverse inhabitants, and displays of wealth capture the imagination of Carrie and Undine, allowing them to represent the imagination of any new inhabitant of a large city. They do not use urban spaces in traditional ways, such as traversing the streets to places of employment, but rather they use the city to learn from their neighbors and to observe others in order to imitate their style. Undine possesses an innate perception of fashion, beauty, and illusion, but she lacks refinement or originality. Carrie, on the other hand, demonstrates fashion sense with little money and a less imagination than Undine. While Carrie's "imagination trod a very narrow round, always winding up at points which concerned money, looks, clothes, or enjoyment," Undine's "tender imagination was nurtured on the feats and gestures of Fifth Avenue. She knew all of New York's golden aristocracy by name" (48; 19).

Undine and Carrie excel in different areas of fashion sense initially. Carrie reads other especially well. In comparing suitors, she explains that

what [Hurstwood] wore did not strike the eye so forcibly as that which Drouet had on, but Carrie could see the elegance of the material. Hurstwood's shoes were of soft, black calf, polished only to a dull shine. Drouet wore patent leather, but Carrie could not help feeling that there was a distinction in favour of the soft leather, where all else was so rich. She noticed these things almost unconsciously" (91). Undine shares a similar ability to assess the quality and effect of materials and designs. In choosing between three potential dinner dresses, she feels that two of them "looked old-fashioned already [due to] something about the sleeves. (14)

Described as some ineffable characteristic of the dress, we see that fashion sense fails to translate directly into spoken language. The third dress she had worn recently, revealing “the impossibility of wearing it again within the week” (14). Like the reading of the imitation alligator satchel, the reader is again invited to practice their own sense of fashion before moving on to the deconstruction of more complex social situations.

The move away from private residences and toward more communal living spaces, such as hotels and apartments, provides new opportunities to develop fashion sense. For example, Carrie meets Mrs. Hale in the boarding house where she lives with Drouet. The lonely Carrie is soon absorbed by Mrs. Hale’s “extended harangues upon the subjects of wealth and position [which] taught her to distinguish between degrees of wealth” (107). Learning fashion sense requires comparing one’s self to others. Carrie accompanies Mrs. Hale on drives to see “mansions and lawns which she could not afford,” but which seemed to “satisfy [Mrs. Hale]” (107). However, for Carrie, these drives cause her to consider what she lacks when she returns to her own rooms “she saw their comparative insignificance” (108). Later in the novel, when Carrie is living with Hurstwood in New York, this same cycle of public education and private self-evaluation occurs with Mrs. Vance. Carrie appreciates Mrs. Vance’s analysis of everything from “new gloves with the oval pearl buttons ... [to] serge skirts” (290). Yet, “after walking through the city with Mrs. Vance. [Carrie] also saw that she was not well-

dressed—not nearly as well-dressed as Mrs. Vance. These were not vague ideas any longer. Her situation was cleared up for her” (283).

Undine finds that those who live near her in the hotel are not always the most fashionable set, so she also observes others in public spaces. Walking through the city, Undine was surprised to find the art gallery “even more crowded than Fifth Avenue,” but it soon becomes especially attractive when she sees that the crowd “had the ‘look’ which signified social consecration” (31). Undine’s innate sense of fashion allows her to identify the look easily even if she knows nothing about art. To blend with the crowd, she “flung herself into rapt attitudes before the canvases...in imitation of a tall girl in sables” (31). Interplay between the socially “consecrated” and the new arrival exists in a sort of symbiotic relationship between the observer and the observed. As Undine moves through the crowd, she attracts “almost as much notice as in the street”...as “ripples of self-consciousness played up and down her watchful back” (31). Unlike Carrie, however, Undine lacks humility or awareness of her faults, but in Wharton’s New York, this fails to affect her ultimate success.

The facades of people, just like the facades of houses, do not necessarily indicate the truth of what is inside, but these potential discrepancies are of little consequence in the cities of Dreiser and Wharton. According to Ralph, the society to which she wants to belong is an assemblage of surfaces itself. He explains, “society was just like the house it lived in: a muddle of misapplied ornament over a thin steel shell of utility. The steel shell was built up in Wall Street and the social trimmings were hastily added in Fifth Avenue” (47). Yet

flaws in the construction of society do not make it less desirable. The authors instead suggest that the only danger of attention to surfaces is the risk of misreading. For example, the Fairford party disappoints Undine, and she concludes that she was not at a “real ‘dinner party’” (21). While there, she scans the table and dismisses those who fail to interest her for solely visual reasons such as “having white hair, [or] dowdy black and antiquated ornaments, [or appearing] plain and wearing last year’s ‘model’” (22).

Undine should have listened to the expert at surface reading, Mrs. Heeny. She may be framed as a working class woman dressed awkwardly in a “rusty veil” and carrying a “shabby alligator bag”, but she is responsible for Undine’s first step into elite society. She warns Undine before her introduction to New York society to be cautious because “if you go too fast, you sometimes have to rip out the whole seam” (10). Undine continues to improve her fashion sense especially when she realizes that “she had given herself to the exclusive and the dowdy when the future belonged to the showy and the promiscuous” (121). Ultimately, her fashion sense, like Carrie’s, combines the nuanced reading of surfaces and imitation of others in order to create an alluring public image. Soon Undine leaves her lack of sophistication behind and “all these shades of demeanor were immediately perceptible to Undine, who tried to adapt herself to them by combining in her manner a mixture of Apex dash and New York dignity” (242). Wharton’s novel emphasizes the transatlantic influence of fashion sense, which deserves future study, but for the purposes of this chapter, traveling through their

imagination influences the characters, encouraging them to use what they have in proximity to achieve success.

Bricoleurs

Wide boulevards, multi-story department stores, popular restaurants, and crowded theaters invite both spectacle and observation. This section examines how the basic materials of an urban scene: the streets, glass, mirrors, and department stores, become sites of meaning. Instead of emphasizing the potential for corruption and alienation of the urban space, Wharton and Dreiser consider how anonymity and visibility can be used for social success. In these large cities, fashion sense informs not only which spaces are used, but also the way they are used. The early scenes of these novels demonstrate a marked move away from domesticity. Carrie and Undine's lives unfold in theaters, streets, restaurants, hotels, factories, department stores, open carriages, trains, and steam ships.

The privacy of bourgeois interior spaces has become outdated due to the lack of spectators in this setting.³⁸ Its near invisibility to outsiders renders it unimportant. Most of the action in the texts moves away from secluded spaces, such as the private parlors seen in earlier novels. Dreiser and Wharton illustrate an erasure of a domestic past. The narrator infrequently mentions Columbia City or Apex, and the families of Carrie and Undine are either invisible or only serve a monetary function. In fact, most of the scenes between Undine and her mother occur in her bedroom as she is dressing or undressing. Jill Kress describes this

³⁸ Lauren Berlant, Sharon Marcus, Stacey Margolis, and Michael Warner have addressed the concept that privacy does not exist apart from the public.

as Wharton's challenging "the privacy of any inner realm" (134). The reader is implicated in Undine's follies, plans, and triumphs throughout the text in a very personal way since not even her boudoir is private. The reader anticipates a revelation of Undine's inner self, but there is nothing to be unmasked. Her private moments are spent completely in contemplation of her public image.

City streets in earlier novels are often an unremarkable means of transport for people to get from one place to another. Wharton and Dreiser's texts subvert the traditional use of streets as a place to move someplace geographically, and instead they become a means to arrive someplace socially. At the start of the novel, Undine and Carrie are excluded from elite society. Undine realizes "it was the fashionable hour in Fifth Avenue, but [she] knew none of the ladies who were bowing to each other from interlocked motors. She had to content herself with the gaze of admiration that she left in her wake along the pavement" (31). Carrie, less aware of her lack of fashion sense, soon realizes what she lacks during a trip to Broadway with Mrs. Vance.

Carrie had never heard of this showy parade...it was a familiar thing to Mrs. Vance, who not only knew of it as an entity, but had often been in it, going purposely to see and be seen, to create a stir with her beauty and dispel any tendency to fall short in dressiness by contrasting herself with the beauty and fashion of the town.
(285)

Rachel Bowlby suggests this is one of many moments in which "There is the same division here between access to view and access to possession and participation: Carrie can see but not 'be seen' as 'an equal' to her companion or anyone else" (59). However, watching the parade Carrie gains knowledge of the

effect of being fashionable, seeing that little more than a polished surface is necessary for equal participation.

Carrie and other characters internalize the idea of the public spectator. She is aware not only of being observed but also of what the public at large thinks of her appearance. Carrie sees the way men and women “paraded with the very latest they could afford, ... [and] to stare seemed the proper and natural thing” (285).³⁹ She does not remember particular faces, only the fashionable mass and mostly that “the whole street bore the flavor of riches and show, and Carrie felt that she was not of it” (286). Undine, on the other hand, feels the need for a social education, but believes “*it is better to watch than ask questions*” [emphasis in original] (42). She has internalized awareness of the public eye and molds herself to capitalize on it. The desire to be seen shapes not only Undine’s dress but also her behavior.⁴⁰ For example at the theater, “Undine sat well forward, curving toward him a little, as she had seen the other women do, but holding back sufficiently to let it be visible to the house that she was conversing with no less a person than Mr. Peter Van Degen” (43). Undine invites surface reading, unaware of the nuance of class division.

The surface reading of others can have negative consequences as well.

Early in the novel, as Carrie “contemplated the wide windows and imposing

³⁹ In his project focused on Wharton, spatial dynamics and Newport, Rhode Island, Renee Somers recounts carriage-parades that moved at a very slow pace so that dress could be surveyed and even critiqued by others. He explains that the “*Newport Daily News* instructed naïve newcomers to dress ‘in your best attire’... [And] to ignore this advice was to risk public humiliation and censure – imperfections were detected immediately and seized upon by local enemies” (18). This overlap of fashion and periodical culture exposes the private and public monitoring of women’s conformity to societal norms.

⁴⁰ Jessica McCarthy asserts that “the importance of observation serves as a message both to the character and the reader ... this repeated emphasis on both being seen and seeing reinforces the primacy of visual experience” (97).

signs, she became conscious of being gazed upon and understood for what she was - a wage-seeker" (16). This imagined observer categorizes Carrie based on her exterior alone. However, the streets are potentially ruinous for women engaging in extra-marital relationships. For example, when Undine rides in an open car with Van Degen, he asks if she has "anything [that she] can put over [her] head?" so that no one sees them together (126). The men in the novel are aware of the potential for discovery, and even if they do not feel they being watched, the threat of the observing public is always there. Hurstwood appears in public with his family on Sundays, but when he is with Carrie, he "could not help feeling nervous over the publicity of it, ... [so] he would take her to drive along the new Boulevard ... [which] was little more than a country road ... where there was scarcely a house" (118). Despite the public visibility on the streets, judgments of others have less of a moral dimension than they did in Chapters One and Two.

Architects and builders began to use large plate-glass windows in the structural renovations of city buildings in the 1880s. In Chicago, the narrator points out, "the large plates of window glass, now so common, were then rapidly coming into use, and gave to the ground floor offices a distinguished and prosperous look" (14). The massive windows invited shoppers in by disrupting divisions between the interior and exterior. Women could gaze into store windows, imagining themselves in the clothes or peer into glass cases at miles of laces, hats, and gloves. Jennifer Shepherd explains, "windows contained not just the commodities but whole narratives of social potential, women [were] being

interpolated into the theatre of the feminine ideal not only as spectators of display but as potential spectacles themselves, as they walked in and around store displays” (146-7). Windows create a transitional space between public and private. Even if a woman does not enter the store, she participates in the speculative fantasy from the street as she gazes in the shop window. L. Frank Baum, with a theater background, published *The Show Window* magazine in 1899 and would set the stage of his window not only to sell goods but also to imbue the objects in the window with the power of fantasy. These microperformances in the shop windows allow the passerby to imagine the effect of her own public performance if she were to buy the items displayed.

Windows also influenced communal social activities. In *Displaying Women*, Maureen Montgomery explains, “from the mid-1890s on, New York’s high society had begun experimenting with a different kind of nightlife ... with a keen eye for opportunities for display” prompting both restaurants and hotels to use mirrors and glass so that patrons could see other diners, as well as be seen by those on the street looking in (32). Those outside the windows can see in to survey goods or patrons while shoppers and diners can see out and still have a sense of quasi-privacy in a public space. The experience of dining out came to include the sense of being seen by others, in addition to knowing one is in a venue that warrants observation due to its own notoriety. For example, Drouet, comfortable in elegant restaurants, “selected a table close by the window, where the busy rout of the street could be seen. He loved the changing panorama of the street—to see and be seen as he dined” (54). During this first meal together, he

convinces Carrie to accept money for new clothes. The narrator explains, “that little soldier of fortune took her good turn in an easy way. She felt a little out of place, but the great room soothed her, and the view of the well-dressed throng outside seemed a splendid thing” (56). Elegant physical spaces, like the Windsor Hotel and Lord & Taylor’s, have a pronounced effect on Carrie. However, by the time she and Drouet dine at the Waldorf, where Carrie now lives, she has become desensitized to extravagance and celebrity. Carrie gazes out of windows in her apartments longingly, but that is not what ultimately motivates her into action.

While Carrie uses glass most effectively to gain social visibility, Undine uses sources of light to enhance her value. In nearly every scene in which a male is gazing at Undine, she is always described for her beauty and her relationship to the light. Ralph observes that the air “brightened her cheek and struck new lights from her hair” (99). She is also associated with light early in the novel when she turns on the electric lights in “blazing wall-brackets” to examine herself (15). Her beauty is described as “almost as crude” as the harsh lights “brightly suffusing it” (15). At this time, not everyone was enamored with the change from gas to electric light. This scene provides Wharton with the opportunity to correlate the harsh glow of electric lighting with the garish surface of the *nouveau riche*. Wharton emphasizes Undine’s ethereal name by describing her as “some fabled creature whose home was in a beam of light” (15). The beam is indicative of a spotlight, alluding to Undine’s craving for attention. When she enters her box at the opera she could see “below her to the culminating blaze of the central

chandelier; and she herself was the core of that vast illumination” (39). In Paris, “her senses luxuriated in all its material details: the thronging motors, the brilliant shops, the novelty and daring of the women’s dresses...all the surface-sparkle and variety of the inexhaustible streets of Paris” (176-7). For Undine, this represents abundance and movement, two things that she requires in her life as they distance her from the mundane and the practical.

References to light and dark circulate throughout the novel, and often images of bright lights represent the gaze of the real or imagined public. Early in the novel, the reader learns of The Spragg’s humble roots when “it was one of Mrs. Spragg’s chief occupations to watch the nightly lighting of New York” (34). Later, when Undine is in Paris, “The City of Light,” Charles Bowen “had always thought her beauty too obvious, too bathed in the bright publicity of the American air” (174). However that particular night, she was “more simply dressed than usual, and under pink lights” she was transformed. Undine uses her sense of fashion to interpret the atmosphere of the room, and “as she became conscious of his friend’s observation, she isolated herself in a kind of soft abstraction; and he admired the adaptability which enabled her to draw from such surroundings the contrasting grace of reserve” (175). Although Wharton uses Undine to satirize the *nouveau riche*, she gains social and financial success through her adaptability and her nearly martial application of her fashion sense.

Dreiser and Wharton use mirrors throughout their texts not as sites of vanity or introspection, but as reflections of the new surfaces characters create through dress and imitation. With Drouet’s money, Carrie “purchased the little

necessaries of toilet, until at last she looked quite another maiden. The mirror convinced her of a few things which she had long believed ... She caught her little red lip with her teeth and felt her first thrill of power" (73). Previously, Carrie had felt like an outsider marked by her worn dress and need of employment. However, similar to George Fox's assertions in his etiquette manual, fashion is power. Her tactical use of dress and mannerisms increase her public visibility and lead to her successes as her clothes improve. Soon, "she began to get the hang of those little things which the pretty woman who has vanity invariably adopts. In short, her knowledge of grace doubled, and with it, her appearance changed" (98). These scenes suggest that Carrie's transition from wage-seeker to fashionable ingénue is easily attainable, and even her moral compromises appear casual. After a minimal amount of equivocation about Drouet's money, Carrie spends it and "turned before the glass. She could not help feeling pleased as she looked at herself. A warm glow crept into her cheeks" (67). For both Carrie and Undine, looking at their own reflections does not solidify their innate sense of self. Instead, they rely on the image projected, which is the image the public sees, to tell them who they are. The image reflected is not permanent, and Carrie must consistently recheck the mirror to ensure she remains desirable and fashionable: "she looked into her glass and saw a prettier Carrie than she had seen before; she looked into her mind, a mirror prepared of her own and the world's opinions, and saw a worse. Between these two images she wavered, hesitating which to believe" (87). During moments in which Carrie confronts her

reflection, she wonders at what cost she has gained the attention on the streets and in theaters but soon returns to thoughts of things.

Yet, few characters in the novel seem disturbed by artifice. When Drouet points out the graceful walk of a woman on the street to Carrie this “little suggestion of possible defect in herself [awoke] in her mind. If that was so fine, she must look at it more closely. Instinctively, she felt a desire to imitate it. Surely she could do that too” (95). She has confidence in her ability to imitate but not to originate. In 1905, fashion theorist Georg Simmel suggested that “the charm of imitation in the first place is to be found in the fact that it makes possible an expedient test of power, which, however, requires not great personal and creative application... imitation, furthermore, gives to the individual the satisfaction of not standing alone in his actions” (132). For marginalized characters like Carrie, imitation proves much safer than originating one’s own style.

Fashion sense goes beyond dress to encompass carriage, gestures, and intonation. Carrie understood “the nature and value of those little modish ways which women adopt when they would presume to be something. She looked in the mirror and pursed up her lips ... as she had seen the railroad treasurer's daughter do” (95). Through recognizing the economic “value” in adopting traits in order to “presume to be something” assumes that without these, society thinks you are nothing. Blanche Gelfant suggests “the possibility of being or becoming nothing – a fear of anomie – haunts Dreiser’s characters...they seek to fashion a distinctive self in the only way they can conceive – by wearing the latest fashion”

(558). In a way, Carrie, Drouet, and Hurstwood are producing themselves, but a fair amount of imitation is involved, underscoring an ironic rush to escape obscurity through copying others.

Undine's capacity for imitation ensures not only her aptitude for surface reading but also her success in marrying wealthy men. Wharton describes Undine as "fiercely independent and yet passionately imitative. She wanted to surprise everyone by her dash and originality, but she could not help modeling herself on the last person she met" (13). Undine thinks she is the unique, but she only reflects what she sees around her and what she imagines refined society wants.⁴¹ When Undine was young, her "chief delight was to 'dress up' in her mother's Sunday skirt and 'play lady' before the wardrobe mirror" (15). As she grew older, "she still practiced the same secret pantomime, gliding in, settling her skirts, swaying her fan, moving her lips in soundless talk and laughter ... [and] within a few days, she would be enacting the scene she was now mimicking" at Mrs. Fairford's (15). Although she is received politely by the other guests, they find her vapid because of her simplistic notion of what it takes to be a lady and her lack of knowledge about the latest art, literature, or theatrical events. Wearing Van Degen's gift of a pearl necklace, "she had dropped her cloak and stood before the wardrobe mirror studying her reflection when [her father] came up behind her and she saw that he was looking at it too" (235). Undine's father

⁴¹ Carol Sapora in "Undine Spragg, the Mirror, and The Lamp, in *The Custom of the Country*" asserts that, "like a mirror, Undine reflects only the surface image: the dresses, gestures, even the desires ... she does not imitate the spirit, the intellect, or the sensitivity of the ideal woman, only her appearance" (274). Sapora accurately notes that Undine reflects only surfaces, but perhaps Wharton is suggesting this woman of surfaces has become the ideal woman.

reads they pearls as clearly as the relationship Undine engaged in to get them, but shame is not something Undine feels for long. After Moffatt and she finally obtain the Marquise de Chelles' tapestries, "her glance rested on the great tapestries ... as complacently as though they had been mirrors reflecting her own image" (331). Undine and others like her with "pioneer blood" define themselves in terms of conquest and resources (35).

Wharton frames the novel with scenes in which Undine studies herself in the mirror. Early in the novel, Undine found "joy [in] dramatizing her beauty [but eventually] ceased to twist and sparkle at her image and sinking into her chair gave herself up to retrospection" (15). Since Wharton describes her as "giving in" to retrospection, not introspection, this shows that Undine creates fantasies of herself to avoid reflection on past mistakes. She wants to "mirror" others, but with all reflections, what she is seeing is reversed, and is not reality. Since she is characterized by hollowness, if her façade crumbles she will become a waxen figure like her mother, wearing "an air of detachment as if she had been a wax figure in a show-case" (3). In the final scenes of the novel, Undine also gazes at herself, and what her life has become, in the mirror. When Undine reflects on what Moffatt has provided for her in addition to his "capturing" of the tapestries, this "disposed her favorably toward her husband, and deepened her sense of well being with which – according to her invariable habit – she walked up to the mirror above the mantelpiece and studied the image it reflected" (371). Wharton here may be using Undine's compulsive examination of herself to suggest that

the crafting of a fashionable surface requires constant upkeep much like the maintenance necessary on an opulent building.

The department store holds a prominent place in these novels, and represents the intersection of the material elements of streets, glass windows, and mirrors which Carrie and Undine have been using to their advantage. Not only had the scale of stores changed, but also had the design and contents. Innovative storeowners considered shoppers' needs and habits by including resting rooms, climate control, wide doorways, and multiple salespeople.⁴² Gail McDonald explains,

the department store invites drift: solid walls having been replaced by columns, the divisions between one department and the next are vague; wide aisles, like generous avenues, encourage movement along the lines of horizontal display cases and arouse flaneurlike observation of other shoppers; mirrored columns make self-scrutiny easier and, at the same time, multiply one's focus and desire. (233)

Like the city streets designed for movement or spectacle, the open plan of the department stores combined aesthetic entertainment with orderly flow. The seduction of goods is evident as "Carrie passed along the busy aisles, much affected by the remarkable displays of trinkets, dress goods, stationery, and jewelry. Each separate counter was a show place of dazzling interest and attraction" (20). Dreiser himself was enamored with the energy of the department stores and wrote in 1902 of the "stinging, quivering zest they display, stirring up in onlookers the desire to secure but a minor part of what they see, the taste of a

⁴² In *Counter Cultures*, Sharon Benson remarks department stores used the "ensemble technique – displaying whole outfits of clothing down to the last accessory, or rooms fully decorated from carpets to ash trays" (102). These pre-imagined ensembles suggest another space for learning the practical applications of fashion sense.

vibrating presence, and the picture that it makes” (qtd. in Leach “Strategists” 99). The narrator excitedly describes the “handsome, bustling, successful affairs, with a host of clerks and a swarm of patrons” (20). These scenes convey the excitement and drama of these massive stores produced.

However, stores also represent site of unfulfilled desire. The more fashion sense Carrie gains in Chicago, and later in New York, the more her longing increases. The narrator explains,

Not only did Carrie feel the drag of desire for all which was new and pleasing in apparel for women, but she noticed too, with a touch at the heart, the fine ladies who elbowed and ignored her, brushing past in utter disregard of her presence, themselves eagerly enlisted in the materials which the store contained. (20)

The well-dressed shoppers have honed their fashion sense to discern at a glance that Carrie lacked elegance and only represented an impediment to their acquisition. When Hurstwood must begin to conserve money in New York, he stands outside a shop looking longingly at the “fall patterns for suits displayed in a Broadway tailor’s window. For the first time in years he felt an inclination to halt and examine them on the outside without going in—without putting himself in a position where he would have to buy” (276). Even though Undine has the wealth to purchase what Hurstwood and Carrie cannot, these items can also represent unsatisfied desire. In the emotional desert of Saint Desert, “dresses were more than ever her chief preoccupation...but there was more bitterness than joy in the unpacking, and the dresses hung in her wardrobe like so many unfulfilled promises of pleasure, reminding her of her days at the Stentorian when she had reviewed other finery with the same cheated eyes” (326). Ultimately, the

reflection of others on the streets and of oneself in mirrors and shop windows increases the stakes of social progress due to competition from others who are equally as ambitious.

Desire for the New

Population growth and increased literacy, in addition to a rise in disposable income and leisure time, contributed to the massive circulation of magazines and newspapers in the late nineteenth century. Immigrants and other newcomers to large cities were especially interested in the local and national news. Although the early 1900s brought in the muckrakers, newspapers, especially those in New York, relied on yellow journalism to increase readership. These sensational stories, the real-life successors to popular novels, became a means for readers to experience risk voyeuristically and safely. The daily newspapers became an especially effective conduit for public image. They could reify the elite's existing popularity, introduce a new star, or act as an omniscient observer for scandalous behavior. Periodicals were disposable but produced a residual effect. The featured news and social columns served to expand one's public image. However, due to the time-sensitive nature of news, those featured could not rely on the perpetual motion of their public image and instead must continue to be seen in fashionable spaces in order to be newsworthy.

Carrie and Undine resist established notions of social classes not in only in using public spaces as I have shown, but also in using newspapers to create a marketable public image. Early in the texts, periodicals serve as ways of reading about the upper classes and their types of consumption, but they later become a

way to increase one's visibility. Public perception, imagined or real, shapes the experiences of the characters. Undine withers in spaces of privacy; "her conception of enjoyment was publicity, promiscuity--the band, the banners, the crowd, [and] the close contact of covetous impulses" (21). For Undine, the public life is the only life worth living. Carrie, on the other hand, is surprised when she is asked to live at a new hotel simply because her "name is worth something to [them]" (411). Carrie's relocations between residences demonstrate the fashion sense of building owners who use her status tactically to increase the public image of their own building. In other words, those who are inside the building make the surface worth more.

The newspapers publicized the lives of socialites, capitalists, and stars. The popularity of the periodicals does not signal a move away from the visual and toward the written; rather, these news items personalize the visual. For example, Undine's life, like those of many in the public eye, is most easily communicated through her commodities and her social column mentions. Mrs. Heeny represents the average reader of the papers who is accordingly impressed by "the fascinating Mrs. Ralph Marvell," toting scraps of press clippings in her worn, but tasteful alligator bag which describe Undine's gowns and social pursuits (197-198).

Newspapers also provided a new form of knowledge based on the social and the fashionable. When Carrie finally dines at Sherry's she has already "seen notices of dances, parties, balls, and suppers at Sherry's ... in the 'Morning' and 'Evening World'" (293). For Carrie, "the perfunctory notices of the doings of

society, which she could scarcely refrain from scanning each day, had given her a distinct idea of the gorgeousness and luxury of this wonderful temple of gastronomy. Now, at last, she was really in it" (293-294). Those who never will get to interact with the elite or the famous can partake in associated glamour by shopping in the same shops and dining in the same restaurants as they do. Reading about the fashionable places through the papers and then visiting themselves creates a feedback loop of knowing one is being seen at the right place.

In *The Custom of the Country*, having a recognizable public image is of greater consequence than the actual content of one's reputation. Negative publicity only hurts Undine by temporarily preventing her participation in society until she can be "bathed again in the bright air of publicity" (349). However, Carrie, and, even more, Hurstwood, keenly feel the pressures of public image. The risk of being consumed inheres in the desire to be seen. Dreiser's narrator explains, "so peculiar, indeed, was [Carrie's] lonely, self-withdrawing temper, that she was becoming an interesting figure in the public eye" (439). In this visually focused society, her reclusiveness only amplifies her popularity. On the other hand, "loitering in the warm lobby of the hotel, "taking a chair here was a painful thing to him. To think he should come to this! ... But here he was, despite the possibility of meeting someone who knew him," Hurstwood becomes what he often ridiculed by being visibly shabby and unsuccessful (316).

The repeated search for something new and better, whether a personal style of dress or a marriage, drives the characters toward forms of renovation.

The *nouveau riche* found a sense of belonging, in a time of shifting values, through the renovation of objects, buildings, and of themselves. Undine only “wanted a few old things reset,” but to Ralph, the refashioning of his family’s jewels also erases the heritage that he hoped to share with his wife (107). These texts suggest that the newly moneyed, once they become established, will still favor diversion over nostalgia. Undine imports her fashion sense to Europe, where it is met with opposition. Raymond de Chelles reproaches Undine and other Americans who “come from hotels as big as towns, and from towns as flimsy as paper, where the streets haven’t had time to be named, and the buildings are demolished before they’re dry!” (341-342). To be sure, in these novels both people and buildings undergo incessant renovation, and this imagining of an improved surface defines the pursuits of many Americans.

Those with new wealth continue to build on the cultural capital of spaces and objects of the urban elite in order to create their own modern success. After Carrie starts to see the effect of her improved exterior, the power in it confounded her. Although she knew she wanted some form of happiness and success, “every hour the kaleidoscope of human affairs threw a new lustre upon something, and therewith it became for her the desired—the all. Another shift of the box, and some other had become the beautiful, the perfect (134). Of course, the visual imagery of a kaleidoscope and a gleaming lustre underscore that the source of desire is often what is seen. Undine remakes herself both in appearance and marriage to suit her newest aspiration. Due to Undine’s intended annulment, Clare recognizes that she will remake herself once again since “when she has

another name...she's a different person altogether" (270). Yet when the dull space of Saint Desert "seemed to have passed into her blood" and affected her looks, Undine "scanned the fashion magazines for new scents and powders and experimented with facial bandaging, electric massage and other processes or renovation" (327). There are consequences for the repetitious acts of disposing, renewing, and gilding as it begins to affect the characters sense of time.

Fashioning Time

Although the characters are not stealing time in a direct de Certeauian sense of an employee stealing from his boss, they do use their marginal position as women to shape time in order to aid their desires for fame and beauty. At a fundamental level, time is reallocated to include more public activities as well as personal preparation for these outings. Women in the nineteenth century spent considerable time dressing each day since there was an outfit for each type of social situation. Carrie knows not only which restaurants held "position in society," but also how to dress for them due to the influence of Drouet, and later, the "dashing Mrs. Vance," so she "began to dress at three o'clock for her departure at half-past five for the noted dining-room" (289).

Public balls and private dinners each have particular dress codes depending on the season and time of day. This convention cannot be attributed to social customs as much as it can be to the avoidance of being seen improperly dressed. Visiting hours in which a society woman was to be "at home" set guidelines both for callers and for the matron herself. The observance of these practices trickles down into the middle class. For example, Mrs. Vance and

Carrie are both self-conscious and “smile shamefacedly” at being caught in the apartment hallway in their dressing gowns. However, their wardrobe errors are not nearly as egregious as Hurstwood’s when Mrs. Vance finds him at home unshaven and in old, threadbare clothes (281). The social calendar dictates the schedules of the fashionable. They entertain, dine, and travel at precise times to specific places. Their movements have less to do with the calendar or weather, than with appropriate times to be visible or absent. Undine complains about being in sultry Italy with Ralph while the elite are in Switzerland. She whines, “if you’d told me we were going everywhere at the wrong time of course I could have arranged about my clothes” (91). Readers can identify with the universality of the fashion *faux pas* whether the author depicts them in a satirical or realist mode.

The consumer-driven economy greatly influences the apportioning of time, encouraging lingering at store windows, taking care with dressing, and spending earnings on new things. The department stores, full of mass-produced clothing, are “bustling,” “busy,” and “dazzling” but are also places that suspend time (20). As Carrie enters the store, time outside seems to stop as she makes her selections. The narrator explains, “there is nothing in this world more delightful than that middle state in which we mentally balance at times, possessed of the means, lured by desire, and yet deterred by conscience or want of decision” (64). The seemingly endless choices splinter time as shoppers, bolstered by a new jacket or gloves, envision various possibilities for themselves. Hurstwood experiences a similarly suspended moment of fantasy and indecision as he

stands in front of his employer's safe debating over taking the money: "He scarcely noticed that the time was passing. He went over his situation once again, his eye always seeing the money in a lump, his mind always seeing what it would do ... Surely no harm could come from looking at it!" (242). The harm is not in the looking; it is in the longing and in the means of obtaining. Although greed ruins Hurstwood, desire moves Carrie and Moffatt into action. Framing Moffatt as a collector, Jackson Lears suggests, "if the consumer looked toward the future, the collector aimed to arrest or even reverse the flow of time through contemplation of the thing itself" (395-396). Undine, the consumer, remains puzzled and almost jealous of his attachment to his "rare and sensitive object[s]," but Moffatt and she both dedicate their time to possessions (355).

Fashion sense affects the rites of passage of birth, marriage, and death. Marriage still figures heavily in these texts, as it did in the novels in first two chapters, but suitors have become interchangeable. Wharton and Dreiser submerge the traditional storylines for female characters of coming out, marriage, and motherhood under social climbing and career. Carrie lives with one man for money and allows another to kidnap her and lie to her about their marriage. When Undine marries Ralph, her father "met their wishes with all possible liberality, bestowing on them a wedding in conformity with Mrs. Spragg's ideals and up to the highest standard of Mrs. Heeny's clippings" (93). Undine's first marriage was not "what you'd call a society wedding," and her third marriage to de Chelles is not described at all (293).

In a distinctive break from domestic novels, neither Undine's nor Carrie's relationships are described in terms of romance or the compatibility of the couple. Undine applies this same lack of sentiment to motherhood. In the first moments she acknowledges she is pregnant, Undine demands, "look at me – see how I look – how I'm going to look!" (116). Her thoughts project into the horrifying future where she will be too large for fashionable clothes and will hate herself "more and more every morning" (116). She even goes so far as to distance herself from her clothes and the potential pleasure they represent, "loath[ing] the very sight" of her new dresses (116). Needless to say, Undine fails to respect the dead by altering her wardrobe appropriately. After Ralph's suicide, "she had worn black for a few weeks—not quite mourning, but something decently regretful (the dress-makers were beginning to provide a special garb for such cases)" (305). Undine considers time spent unfashionably as valueless. Her comment about the dressmakers points not only to the practical accommodations which modify fashion for life events, but also signal the ability of clothing to indicate the state of the wearer and their place in the timeline of life.

After taking "a whole year out of life" to carry and give birth to her son Undine views Paul as an accessory (115). She lacks an emotional bond with her son and instead relates to him in purely material terms. When Undine hears Paul cannot recognize her in a picture because she has been absent so long "two tears rose to her eyes" as she imagines it is a tragedy he is growing up away from her, "perhaps dressed in clothes she would have hated" (255). His wearing of "a manly reefer" and long pants indicates his growing into a young man (262).

Her only thoughts of Paul when she is abroad consist of the need to remind Ralph to dress him in warmer clothes for winter. When he is nine and Moffatt and she return from traveling, the first thing she notices about her son is “‘how they’ve cut his hair’ before she bent to kiss him” (368). When Paul begins to tell her of a prize he won, she cuts him off because she “must really run off now and dress” (368). He remains an accessory for her, and she views her only son as a reflection of her. When passing her son off to be carried by Moffatt, the narrator explains, “Undine was glad to be relieved of the burden, for she was unused to the child’s weight, and disliked to feel that her skirt was dragging on the pavement” (168). She views her child as literally and figuratively dragging her down.

According to Walter Benjamin “fashions are a collective medicament for the ravages of oblivion. The more short-lived a period, the more susceptible it is to fashion” (80). In this case, the newness of the Spragg’s wealth and the truncated span in which Undine remains a valuable commodity on the marriage market may explain the emphasis on fashion for Undine. Implicit in her new knowledge of time, people, like dresses, only remain fashionable for an instant. Change dominates the new aesthetic. Disruption, a rapid tempo, and impermanence characterize modernity. To make sense of the new era many, like Undine, utilized fashion to move with, pause, and even escape time.

Written at a time when the Woman Question frequently appeared in periodicals, Wharton weighs in on this debate via material objects. Undine’s fashions speaks to where she emerges in the social strata, but also where she

appears in navigating the patriarchal strictures that bind women at each station of life. In a way, Undine collapses time in order to combine the freedoms of being an unmarried woman with the financial freedom of a wealthy married woman. She refuses to give one up when she gains another. Martha Banta explains that Wharton “viewed women’s fashions as one of the more important markers which traced shifts in social habits the clothes with which her female protagonists adorn themselves *speak...to where they are*” (52).⁴³ Their location is not purely geographic, or social, but generational as well. In other words, what they wear represents who they are at that moment, but also who they came from. Undine mimics fashionable styles of dress in hopes of becoming recognized and accepted by those who represent New York’s elite.

These texts disrupt the notions of order and predictability of time. Although public perception dictates the allocation of time, much of the heterogeneous, urban world cannot be closely controlled. Almost anyone with money, or invited by someone with money, could dine at Sherry’s, travel to Europe, or visit the theater. Since part of the attraction was seeing who else frequented these public spaces, newcomers could have their place in society confirmed if they looked and dressed appropriately. Different streams of wealth and countries of origin collide on the streets, leading to the potential for cross-class redistributing of money. Adapting to a life of fashion and its temporalities ensures a basic level of accessibility, but it is up to the characters to improve their options from there. The

⁴³ In her book, *Sentimental Materialism*, Lori Merish suggests, “The social significance of fashion was not lost on those excluded by its codes. Working-class women, for example, saw in...fashionable dress an arena of social recognition and an arena of political contestation” (235).

Frusks, Winchers, Spraggs and Moffatts all remake themselves, often repeatedly while navigating indeterminate social positions. They consume and adapt, embracing the new “modern tendencies” and the “chaos of indiscriminate appetites,” unlike the “aboriginal” families attached to their dated traditions, mentalities, and objects. (47-8). Carrie and Drouet, like Undine and Moffatt, capitalize on opportunity and elements of change. Their willingness to discard the past and continually rework the present ensures their material, although not their emotional, success.

Access to wealth alters the characters’ experience of time. As her finances improve, Carrie moves further away from her connection to her past. When she collects her first “convenient roll” of one hundred and fifty dollars, “it took her back to the few weeks in which she had collected – or rather received – almost with the air of a domestic, four-fifty per week from a lordly foreman in a shoe factory” (417). She realizes though time has passed for her, the “same factory chamber...[was] full of poor homely-clad girls” (417). Her sympathy lies with their lack of fashionable clothes, not necessarily with their other economic struggles. Correspondingly, Carrie’s life speeds up when her wealth increases. For example, “There were days when they went carriage riding, nights when after the show they dined, afternoons when they strolled along Broadway, tastefully dressed. She was getting in the metropolitan whirl of pleasure” (404). Eventually, time feels irrelevant to Carrie when she realizes that “it does not take money long to make plain its impotence ... [soon she] could think of nothing particularly to do” (417). Carrie shares the final chapter “The Way of the Beaten” with Hurstwood,

suggesting that despite vast material differences, they have both been beaten. On his descent into poverty and depression, Hurstwood tries to participate in the daily routines of life, but time “seemed to go very slowly. An hour was a long, long time in passing” as he sits unemployed in the hotel lobby (319). He eventually accepts when his time has reached an end, admitting, “it is all up with me. I’ll quit this” (451). Carrie does not accept defeat but experiences what Jennifer Fleissner describes as “stuckness in place,” rocking endlessly in her chair (9). As her hope dissipates, so do rich descriptions of her desires. Carrie has fine things, but the reader is not privy to their characterization because, for her, they lack significance. This withdrawal of the material leaves the reader with a sense of loss, perhaps echoing the emptiness Carrie and Hurstwood feel.

Undine also marks time by the material, rather than the familial: “her sentimental memories went back no further than the beginning of her New York career” (301). Even so, “sentimental” fails to describe her detached emotions accurately; although Undine was “so malleable outwardly, she had remained insensible to the touch of the heart” (21). She partitions memories based on social standing, blithely discarding large chunks of time, such as the “ineffectual summers of her girlhood” (226). Undine experiences a pleasurable urgency when she is visible and a slow drag when she is not. Seeking publicity and newness, Undine travels to Paris which “symbolized the glare and movement of her life” (177). While there, without her husband Ralph, she delights in “long hours bargaining,” “crowded lunches,” “the perfunctory dash through a picture show,” a “lingering visit” to the milliner, an “afternoon motor-rush to some leafy sunbird” to

“hastily absorb” the sunset, a “whirl home” to start “evening diversions,” and then a “breathless flight” back (177). Nearly each word conveys motion and speed suggesting conventional definitions of time do not apply to Undine. Upon being summoned home, Undine projects herself forward in time and with “aching clearness of vision” she saw “hurried preparations, the long tedious voyage on a steamer chosen at haphazard, the arrival in the deadly July heat, and the relapse” into a routine of “nursery and kitchen” (187).⁴⁴ These descriptions stand in stark contrast to the vibrancy of Paris showing the stultifying effects of unfashionable experiences. Later, when she is married to de Chelles and must leave Paris again, time creeps slowly and colorlessly at Saint Desert. The “life of the vivid streets faded to a shadow as soon as the black and white horizon of Saint Desert closed in on her again” (324). Unlike Carrie, Undine never admits defeat, experiencing a sense of limitless time, hindered, perhaps only temporarily, by public attitudes toward divorced women.

Like the cycles of fashion in which trends repeat periodically, the desire for the new causes a repetition of time. Past and present often meet on the city streets. Dressed in the new clothes Drouet’s money bought, Carrie recognizes a girl with whom she used to work at the factory and “felt as if some great tide had rolled between them. The old dress and the old machine came back” (74). The fantasy of newness, which motivates the efforts of the characters, engenders an uncanny sense of familiarity. After seeing a play featuring a beautifully dressed

⁴⁴ In her article “Wharton, Travel, and Modernity,” Nancy Bentley suggests, “Undine’s restlessness represents an appetite for sheer novelty, for change in everything from dresses to husbands, the novel identifies as characteristically American” (164). Although Bentley makes a valid point, in light of the laden references to the visible in the text, novelty remains only a small part of Undine’s pleasure. Her restlessness shadows her search for publicity.

actress, Carrie thinks that, if “she could only have such a part, how broad would be her life!” (288). Lola, who thinks she has seen Carrie before in another play, mistakes her for a more seasoned actress. While dining at Sherry’s with Mrs. Vance, Carrie travels

back to that other bill of fare and far different occasion when, for the first time, she sat with Drouet in a good restaurant in Chicago. It was only momentary—a sad note as out of an old song—and then it was gone. But in that flash was seen the other Carrie—poor, hungry, drifting at her wits' ends, and all Chicago a cold and closed world. (295)

Her flashback almost becomes a premonition of the end of the novel, when despite her fame, Carrie realizes “the metropolis is a cold place socially, and [she] soon found that a little money brought her nothing” (404). Both too much and too little money yield the same results. In the midst of her growing desire, Carrie makes assumptions based on these glowing surfaces, determining that grieving “upon a gilded chair” would be poetic (287). She remains incredulous that one could be disconsolate among “rich, elegant dresses,” “knick-knacks of silver and gold,” “elaborate tapestries” and “loaded boudoirs and tables” (287). However, once surrounded by luxury, she does grieve upon a chair, rocking and “dream[ing] such happiness as [she] may never feel” (460). Carrie’s life comes full circle, while Undine’s undulates between high and low poles, similar in pattern to the eponymous hair-waver.

Wharton layers time and cross-references scenes, especially in relation to marriage.⁴⁵ Newly engaged to Ralph, Undine is asked by Mrs. Heeny if she has

⁴⁵ In *Edith Wharton and the Making of Fashion*, Katherine Joslin notes “Wharton fastens every detail of her satire as even the smartness of the pigeon-blood notepaper returns in the rubies” (115).

“ever been engaged before?” causing Undine to blush (56). While she is still married to Ralph, her clandestine travels with Van Degan from “one obscure corner of Europe to another...gave their journey an odd resemblance to her melancholy wedding-tour” (230). After her conquest of the French aristocracy, Undine finds de Chelles “again developed a disturbing resemblance to his predecessor” (317). Unhappy in her marriage to the frugal de Chelles, she fantasizes about the material things Moffatt could provide for her. Suddenly, “the thought sent her memory flying back to things she had turned it from for years,” like her courtship with Moffatt (343). The novel ends with another instance of layered time, where the beginning meets the end and time folds in on itself, as Undine and Moffatt are husband and wife once again. However, and perhaps predictably, “now and then she caught herself thinking that his two predecessors – who were gradually becoming merged in her memory,” when compared to Moffatt, came out superior in her mind (371). Her recurring dissatisfaction resembles the same stuckness in place that Carrie experiences.

Ostensibly, their tactics are successful; Undine achieves multiple high-status marriages, and Carrie achieves fame. However, I do not find either Dreiser or Wharton to be focused on the teleological in these novels. They appear to be more interested in depicting the imagined experience of social mobility for their readers. To be sure, Dreiser approaches this process from a perspective of curiosity while Wharton does so with some condemnation. Yet they are both responding to the tremendous amount of anxiety that existed at this time surrounding inauthenticity. These concerns are evident in both texts, but the

tension between the natural and the artificial also exists in City Beautiful Movement whose aesthetic practices placed city parks between busy streets in an effort to incorporate nature into the built environment. The relentless search for the new through renovation could point to the publishing process itself. Although Wharton's early work like *The House of Mirth* (1905) was popular, Dreiser's was relatively unknown. They both faced pressures of earning or maintaining their popularity that relied on public perception of not just their work, but their public image as well.

Chapter Four

That Old Negro is Out of Style: Re-Dressing the New Negro in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*

In addition to having obvious political dimensions, the New Negro movement was primarily an aesthetic movement that focused on art, literature, film, and music. African American writers, publishers, and artists used magazines, photography, painting, and literature to create fresh images of themselves and their race as a whole. Although scholars of the Harlem Renaissance have emphasized the ways in which African Americans achieved selfhood through these traditional forms of art, the redefinition of the racial self through fashion has not been addressed in depth.⁴⁶ Prior scholarship has connected Helga's search for identity in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* with her inability to find the "something else" to which she often refers (45). Ann Hostetler notes the lack of a "cultural mirror" for Helga, Chip Rhodes argues that Helga avoids stereotyped identities of primitivism and hypersexuality despite the "absence of a viable alternative," while Cheryl Wall considers Helga's search even more fruitless, determining that false identities are the only solution to "the impossibility of self-definition" (36; 189; 98).⁴⁷ I contend that fashion is an additional form of artistic expression in which many African Americans participated, and Larsen attends to the potential for subjecthood, even if only temporarily, through dress.

⁴⁶ See Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood*

⁴⁷ See Ann Hostetler's "The Aesthetics of Race and Gender in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*," Chip Rhodes' *Structures of the Jazz Age*; Cheryl Wall's "Passing for What?"

I argue that Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) maps the familiar conflict between the Old and New Negro onto the new terrain of fashion. Larsen's novel shows that the mode of reading others through fashion provides a means to counteract oppression and introduce dimensionality into stereotypical models of black identity. By embracing what Daphne Brooks calls a "spectacular opacity" that contests forced transparency, I show how through the figure of Helga, Larsen imagines a mode of surface reading which accepts the clothed black body as the site of meaning, allowing for tactical deployment of fashion (8).⁴⁸ Although the performances Brooks analyzes are more traditional ones based on "gestures and speech," I find Helga's series of sartorial performances also reject transparency while seeking legibility. I examine the relationship of subjectivity to fashion through Helga's movement through Naxos, Harlem, Chicago, and Denmark as her micro-endeavor of self-fashioning parallels the macro-movement of racial self-definition.

The New Negro Movement promised followers that physical appearance was the means to wider acceptance in society and used periodicals as a public relations tool. I highlight connections between the reading of periodicals and the reading of others by examining advertising in popular periodicals. This form of visual culture deploys New and Old Negro through the language of commodities. More mainstream presses advertised skin lightener and hair straightener while progressive papers like *The Messenger* marketed self-improvement through beauty products, vocational schools, clothes, and books. To properly examine

⁴⁸ Those whom Brooks analyzes in her book, "experiment with ways of 'doing' their bodies differently in public spaces. We can think of their acts as opaque, as dark points of possibility that create figurative sites for the reconfiguration of black and female bodies on display" (8).

the intersection of race and fashion, the definition of fashion is expanded to include not only dress and accessories, but also hair styling and cosmetics.

Since appearance and visual cues had aided in the enslavement, oppression, and marginalization of African Americans in the past, great attention was paid to the potential influence images could have on assumptions about the character and potential of the race. The mutability of fashion makes it an especially useful tool for racial ideologies that insisted on a monolithic and static type of black body. However, despite the political opportunities many saw in fashion and cosmetics, everyone in the New Negro Movement did not unanimously sanction consumer culture.⁴⁹ The long-held belief that cosmetics and elegant dress could corrupt people, especially women, persisted even in reformist political movements.

Although Henry Louis Gates, Jr. aptly asserts, “to manipulate the image of the black was, in a sense, to manipulate reality. The Public Negro Self, therefore, was an entity to be crafted,” African American women were in a double bind based on the intersection of their racial and gender oppressions (327).⁵⁰ Even though their male counterparts were earning doctorates, being widely published, and delivering speeches, black women were denied open access to these types of activities. I suggest that since black and mulatto women lacked the wider

⁴⁹ Davarian Baldwin explains “notions of ‘natural’ black beauty were directly tied to emerging leadership struggles over Victorian versus modern definitions and images of black female respectability” (56). Also, In his book *Commerce in Color: Race, Consumer Culture, and American Literature, 1893-1933*, James Davis surveys “refashioning” of “the Negro as consumer who was accused of ‘pretending to be something they were not’” by both whites and lower class African-Americans when participating in middle-class consumer practices (10-11).

⁵⁰ Cherene Sherrard-Johnson explains “the idealization of black women as mulattas, madonnas, teachers or socialites in Harlem Renaissance literature, visual art, periodicals, and aesthetic discourses established parameters that restricted artistic expression and agency for women” (11).

access to jobs that black men had, they expressed their identity through clothing. Larsen addresses the tactical uses of fashion for African-American women as they moved into new cities, jobs, and relationships while questioning the limits of extimacy. Although Helga is an outsider like Carrie, Undine, Margaret, and Sip, the stakes of extimacy are significantly higher for her than for the white characters.

Afro-Saxons

The scenes in *Naxos*, a fictional school based on the Tuskegee Institute, open with a sartorial metaphor describing the school as “a big knife with cruelly sharp edges ruthlessly cutting all to a pattern, the white man’s pattern” (39). This telling quotation implies that the replication of black bodies into acceptable forms involves violence and dehumanization but also remains focused on appearance. Supervisors heavily police the hair and dress of the female teachers, and even a visiting preacher praises them for knowing “enough to stay in their places, and that ... showed good taste” (37). This odd conflation of aesthetic taste and limited knowledge contrasts with the type of informed, yet creative fashion sense to which Helga aspires. Helga feels her peers’ acceptance of the dominant white ideology was most notable in their dull clothing. Dr. Anderson, the President of the school, was based on Booker T. Washington. Washington was criticized by many black people for his relationships with white benefactors and his policies of assimilationist coexistence with other races.

Larsen's meticulous descriptions of clothing, but not of actions or dialogue, force the reader to engage with the narrative in non-traditional ways.⁵¹ In previous novels discussed, the narrator's voice is omnipresent, but this text relies on free indirect discourse forcing readers to augment the narration based on their observation of material goods. For example, the highly descriptive opening scene of *Quicksand* reveals little about Helga's personality, emphasizing the sufficiency of surfaces to "read" a person. Helga sits in her room, "furnished with rare and intensely personal taste," perfectly matched to her décor, dressed in a "vivid green and gold negligee and glistening brocade mules" (36). She spends most of her teacher's salary on clothes, books, and furnishings to sate her "long[ing] for nice things" (41). Helga remains at odds with the leadership in Naxos, who feel her "urge for beauty" is mere "vanity" (41). Ann Hostetler suggests Helga "reflects and extends her surroundings without changing them in any way. Like the text in which she appears, she is first seen as an aesthetically self-conscious surface, carefully crafted and controlled" (37). Her crafted and controlled surface can be attributed to her fashion sense, which in Naxos is a form of protest.

In a climate of racial intolerance, blacks and mulattoes, especially in the South, were supposed to blend in among the whites so as to not appear as a threat to the hegemony. Many whites viewed the behavior of the black community as a reflection of their vaguely inclusive efforts. However, this paternalism provoked anxiety about their own shifting place in society. They encouraged some of the educational, professional, and aesthetic pursuits of the

⁵¹ Larsen treasured beautiful clothes and material goods. She learned dressmaking from her mother, but her love of fashion went beyond artistic creativity to signify achievement and autonomy.

black community, but refuse them an equal place in society. This double-layered racism encouraged both achievement and segregation while further distancing educated blacks from the rest of their community.

In the microcosm of Naxos, the Dean instructs her employees “‘bright colors are vulgar’ – ‘black, gray, brown and navy blue are the most becoming colors for colored people’” (51). Lifeless, subservient, and dull automatons appear to be the preferred design for the Dean and other whites in power in the South. Helga’s discomfort with this idea and her refusal to deaden her wardrobe and ultimately herself, leads her to leave her position at the school. The school’s discipline of black bodies goes beyond aphorisms to ruthless measures against aesthetic self-expression when “sooty black girl decked out in a flaming orange dress” caused a “horrified matron” to have the dress re-dyed the very next day. The tensions between the Old and the New Negro are acted out on the bodies of the employees at the school, many of whom comply for lack of other choices.

Helga is especially anomalous in Naxos in contrast to both the white Dean and the other African American employees at the school. Although she attributes the desire for beauty and even glamour to her race, she recognizes the self-denial that occurs with many people of color. Helga has determined that “bright colors *were* fitting, and dark-complexioned people *should* wear yellow, black and green,” since she is convinced that darker colors are “ruinous” to the “luminous tones lurking in their dusky skins” (51). The literal erasure of color in Naxos involves a metaphorical erasure as the language of fashion is used to “naturalize” the black workers (42). As a solution to the religious doctrines and codes of racial

integration at the school, Helga wishes someone would write “A Plea for Color” (51). *Quicksand* represents Larsen’s own Plea for Color in which she proposes that the emulation of whiteness is not the problem; rather it is the dulling of her characters’ blackness.

This etiolation at the school was a major part of Progressive Era politics against which Larsen and Ralph Ellison worked. In his novel, *Invisible Man*, “Liberty” Paints with its symbol of a “screaming eagle” supplies paint as white as George Washington’s wig for the government, including national monuments (196-202). These loaded and hyperbolic images of freedom and American democracy underscore the disenfranchisement and abuse of the nameless protagonist. Ellison’s novel, which is also critical of Booker T. Washington’s politics, presents democracy and freedom as only available to some, as clearly evidenced by the Jim Crow Laws. The “right” and the “pure” people control politics, cultural aesthetics, and the means of production. Blackness is subsumed into the bright whiteness of the paint and dominant society “that’ll cover just about anything” (202). This metaphor is an inversion of the one-drop rule in which one drop of black blood “taints” the whole person, defining them as black. At Liberty Paints, ten drops of black base magically brightens the Optic White paint to the whitest shade. This scene suggests that white looks even whiter in contrast to blackness and that many white people have hidden black blood, but all that matters is the appearance of the surface.

Highly scrutinized both as a woman and as a person of color, Helga recognizes that urban spaces may create opportunities for self-redefinition, but

the inherent anonymity of these spaces also implies that she must rely on her appearance to address racial and gendered assumptions. The desire for and possession of commodities leads to a new language that can be read both in the novels and on the city streets. Like some of their enslaved ancestors before them, free-born blacks, too, have to become literate in order to exert their own power. In *Slaves to Fashion*, Monica Miller explains, “newly visible to the world and each other, African Americans discovered their own class, ethnic, and gender diversity, began both to show off themselves and to convert their visibility into social and cultural regard” (181). Following Miller, I see Larsen’s novel as imagining a space free from double-consciousness, where African Americans dress up for themselves and for each other, rather than for white people, as they constitute subjectivities based on fashion.⁵²

Deeply intertwined with assumptions about gender, clothing in the novels moves beyond a form of creative expression. Notwithstanding her “intensely personal taste,” Helga’s engagement with fashion includes careful consideration of her marked place in society (36). She “loved clothes, elaborate ones. Nevertheless, she had tried not to offend” (51). Helga experiences the pressures exerted on black women to adhere to standards of white, female propriety. Despite Helga’s efforts to conform, the school matrons find her “luxurious” and “clinging” fabrics “queer” and her “old laces ... [and] strange embroideries” provocative (52). They interpret her flourishes as indicators of sexual impropriety, or simply sexuality in general; even her “small plain hats seemed to them

⁵² Fashion theorists agree that frequently, and particularly in spaces of unrest and volatility, marginalized groups incorporate alternative forms of dress as a means to resist dominant power structures.

positively indecent” (52). The nineteenth-century notion that black women were inherently unchaste informs these assumptions.

Similar to Helga’s assertion that “pride” and “consciousness” lay in “love of color, joy of rhythmic motion, naïve, spontaneous laughter,” Zora Neale Hurston’s “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” written five years after *Quicksand* was published, notes, “the will to adorn is the second most notable characteristic in Negro expression. Perhaps his idea of ornament does not attempt to meet conventional standards, but it satisfies the soul of its creator” (51; 831). Here Hurston echoes George Fox’s celebration of fashion but embraces a non-traditional fashion sense. Helga, too, despite being a “despised mulatto,” she still feels an “intuitive...driving spirit of loyalty to the inherent racial need for gorgeousness” (51). Using essentializing arguments, Larsen excuses and even encourages the expression of subjectivity through clothing by suggesting it is natural and inherent to the race. Hurston suggests,

the Negro is a very original being. While he lives and moves in the midst of a white civilization, everything that he touches is re-interpreted for his own use...The Negro, the world over, is famous as a mimic. But this in no way damages his standing as an original. Mimicry is an art itself. (838)⁵³

Hurston anticipates Brooks’ assertion that caricatured performances have subversive potential. Were Helga not so focused on her “intensely personal taste” she could accept the performative aspect of fashion as well as the safety in conformity, especially when the stakes are as high as racial and gender equality

⁵³ Hurston explains that many do not mimic out of inferiority since the greatest potential for self-hate lies in the middle class negro who “wears drab clothing, sits through a boresome church service, pretends to have not interest in the community, hold beauty contests, and otherwise apes all the mediocrities of the white brother” (839).

(36). Others would accept the surface she presents, whether mimicked or not, allowing her to experiment with sources of power without, as Hurston claims, “damag[ing her] standing as an original (838).

Cycles of Fashion

Helga’s dissatisfaction with racial and gendered strictures manifests itself not only in her dress but also in her syncopated movement from space to space in search of the fulfillment she ultimately never finds. She wonders, “just what did she want? Barring a desire for material security, a gracious way of living, a profusion of lovely clothes [she] didn’t know, couldn’t tell. But there was, she knew, something else” (45).⁵⁴ Relationships pivot around clothing and goods, creating a temporary sense of belonging. Through surfaces, Helga finds connections. For example, she is comforted by the fact that she and Anne share a similar “aesthetic sense” (76). Even though Helga often narrates her own story, she disallows familiarity with the reader. This distance from the protagonist, as well as the prominence of objects in the narrative, requires a new practice of reading. This method seems to be a type of narratological “spectacular opacity” which may frustrate the reader but also underscores the ability of surfaces to convey all the necessary information. In a similar way, Larsen does not encourage empathetic identification with Helga through traditional devices.

⁵⁴ In *Modernism and the Marketplace*, Alissa Karl remarks that for Helga, “when the elusiveness of happiness is assuaged by the material tangibility of ‘lovely’ clothes, taste becomes not only a strategy of dissent and differentiation but a surrogate for negotiations of identity and aspiration” (123). Helga’s refined taste does grant her certain privileges and types of access. However, it remains important to emphasize that although her clothes do lead to differentiation, they are not surrogates for identity and aspiration; they *are* her identity and aspiration.

Instead, Larsen insists that the reader follows Helga from place to place as she echoes the cycles of fashion, reading her clothing choices as cues.

Helga chooses her clothes carefully and tactically to conform to the rules of dominant white society while also obtaining what she thinks she wants. When she quits her job in Naxos, she was “for once uncaring whether the frock she wore roused disapproval or envy” as she waits in the ante-room under the scrutiny of the clerical workers (51). However, in more vulnerable moments, she knows she must conform to gender and class-bound norms. Lonely and beginning to get financially desperate, “she dressed herself carefully, in the plainest garments she possessed” to search for a job in Chicago (63). However, even from the pocket of this “faultlessly tailored” blue suit “peeped a gay kerchief” paralleling Helga’s own flamboyant sense of self peeping from behind the compliant camouflage of her conservative suit (63). Unable to find a job easily, Helga soothes herself by spending “too much money” on a book and an unusual tapestry purse. For this brief moment, Helga embodies the figure of the *flâneur* as she strolls around Chicago observing the sights and buying a few beautiful items. (68). However, her unemployment and lack of enough money to eat pull her back to reality.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Jeanne Schepers suggests that, Helga “does not have the privilege to stroll in the modern streets and department stores unencumbered like the Parisian male *flâneur*. She must claim membership in a group and prove her worth by adhering to the external values of that group ... As a woman on the move, Helga Crane represents something at times imagined to be impossible, a modern *flâneuse* or female *flâneur*. By writing of the experience of black female *flânerie*, Larsen’s work holds out the promise and possibilities of moving away from, into, and between communities and location (679). Although Schepers’s claim is provocative, I am not certain that Helga desires belonging to a group since it implies being static and lacking the innovation she requires.

The introduction of each character, whether by Helga or the narrator, describes their clothing in detail. Larsen demonstrates how this mode of reading others is highly productive. Mrs. Hayes-Rore wears “five-years-behind-the-mode garments ... which even in their youth could hardly have fitted or suited her” (74; 68). Hayes-Rore and her plagiarized ideas lack the attunement with society that is necessary in a visually oriented age. She fails to have an intuitive understanding of her own style, which is akin to not knowing one’s self. Helga believes her aesthetics focus is superior to the intangible platitudes of those who “yapped loudly of race,” and this estimation is evident in her descriptions of Hayes-Rore (51). On the other hand, Anne is a “tall slim creature beautifully dressed in a cool green tailored frock” whom Helga admires. Larsen again privileges the aesthetic over the political since Anne despised white people, but still “aped their clothes, their manners and their gracious ways of living” (48). Anne’s fashion sense outweighs any criticism Helga has of her while Mrs. Hayes-Rore, who offers the impoverished and friendless Helga a job continues to be subject to Helga’s critique. When she sees Dr. Anderson dancing with the “alabaster” toned and “apricot” clad Audrey Denney, Helga becomes aware of and then disgusted by her own sexual desire, “a more primitive emotion” (92). Audrey Denney and her “shivering apricot frock,” taunt Helga through their overt expression of sexual independence that she lacks. Helga uses fashion tactically to ameliorate her outsider status in various spaces. Her use of fashion allows her to find employment, make friends, and express herself emotionally.

Home to Harlem

Unable to subscribe to the Old Negro assimilationist projects in Naxos and Chicago, Helga moves to Harlem with a “magic sense of having come home” (75). However, the Old Negro ideals hang in her closet like a prim dress that she ignores due to its cheap fabric and fussy sleeves. Helga does not discard the Old Negro dress because it is a part of her, despite it being three seasons out of style. Although Helga finds a community of friends and employment in Harlem, she continues to focus on things, thinking of the “alluring brown or yellow men” who may be able to provide her with “cars of expensive makes...clothes and furs..., servants, and leisure” (77).

Although Harlem was a hub for multiple forms of black creative expression during this dynamic period, Larsen chooses to set most of her Harlem scenes in nightclubs rather than focusing on other areas of social interaction or artistic production. I suggest that she uses the club spaces to question the forms and limits of performativity. The experiences of the audience, as told through Helga, blur boundaries between observer and participant, white and black, and low and high culture. Although the performers are not subject to the forms of slavery to which Saidiya Hartman refers in *Scenes of Subjection*, her analysis of the division between witness and spectator still provides insight (4). Harlem became a place where club performances were designed to thrill the “slumming” white spectators.⁵⁶ The white spectators find beauty in the club performances, not seeing the violence and erasure it enacts. As Helga studies the club, she fails to

⁵⁶ The scenes in Harlem do not differ considerably from the minstrel show in Denmark; both are packaging a type of blackness to be consumed. In both situations whiteness is privileged through positioning blackness as primitive.

realize that some performances are exaggerated in order to make blackness exotic, so that whites can safely consume it.

Helga identifies with the performers, becoming aroused, but also disgusted by what she sees and experiences as she slips between empathetic witness and thrilled spectator. In the club: “a glare of light struck her eyes, a blare of jazz split her ears...even she felt she was spinning aimlessly...drugged, lifted, sustained, by the extraordinary music ... and when suddenly the music died, she dragged herself back to the present” (89). Unlike her easy indulgence in fashion, Helga fears any other pleasurable experience, whether food, music, or sex, because she views them as unrefined. Almost as quickly as she drifted into the “jungle,” she rips herself out; the reader can nearly see her sit up taller in the booth and smooth her tasteful outfit in superiority over “these darkly segregated people” (86). Repulsed by the spectacle, and by herself, Helga decides to travel to Denmark. On the eve of her departure, Helga wears a “cobwebby black net touched with orange dress” which Anne thought looked like it was “about to fly” (87).⁵⁷ Believing she was about to find independence from the oppression of her race, Helga states the dress “for her would be a symbol” (87). On the other hand, Larsen uses the juxtaposition of these two scenes to consider the slippage between spectacle and objectification. Helga craves attention and moves to Denmark to experiment with being objectified, like the performers, but away from the shameful site of her fellow objects in Harlem.

From Peacock to Preacher’s Wife

⁵⁷ Considering the description of this dress, it is possible that Helga does not have good fashion sense, and this, not her aloofness, account for her inability to fit in.

Denmark for Helga, “was the realization of a dream that she had dreamed persistently” because “always she had wanted not money, but the things which money could give, leisure, attention, beautiful surroundings. Things. Things. Things” (97). When met at the ship, perhaps Fru Dahl’s “carelessly trailing purple scarf and correct black hat” should have warned Helga that her dream would not be realized in Denmark either (96). Fashion, dresses, and accessories become the focus of Helga’s first few days in Denmark as her Aunt adorns her as if she were an extraordinary doll from an unknown world, which “must have bright things to set off the color of [her] lovely brown skin. Striking things, exotic things” (98). Her parallel self-doubt and desire for indulgence emerge as Helga admits that she “loved color with a passion that perhaps only Negroes and Gypsies know,” but also had “no mind to be bedecked in flaunting flashy things” (99). Although Helga loved to play dress-up with her formerly estranged Aunt, she still felt apprehensive about the spectacle she was about to make but goes along with it because for a woman who felt invisible in America, here “she enjoyed her prominence” (100). While being adorned with jewelry in preparation for her debut, Helga makes a prescient allusion to slavery, relieved to “escape the bracelets for the moment” due to her long-sleeved dress (99). Helga soon tires of feeling like a “veritable savage ... [and] a decoration. A curio. A peacock” despite having all that she thought she wanted in terms of material things (99; 103).

The extravagant purchases directed by Olsen and paid for by her Aunt included “dresses of velvet and chiffon in screaming colors,...a leopard skin coat, a glittering opera cape, turbanlike hats of metallic silks,...strange jewelry,a

nauseous Eastern perfume, ...and dangerously high heels” (103). Her new wardrobe represents not cosmopolitan taste, but garish exoticism. At this point the clothes begin to tailor Helga; she no longer selects them, and they serve as a prelude to her muteness as she is stared at throughout Copenhagen as a “queer dark creature” (99).⁵⁸ Her adoration of things and a desire for visibility quickly morph into objectification and assumed sexual availability. Her tactical use of fashion has been turned against her. Helga “had a feeling of nakedness. Outrage” when she was asked her opinion of Herr Olsen as a potential suitor (109). A few scenes later, when Olsen confronts Helga over the indecent suggestion he had made earlier, she “had a stripped, naked feeling under his direct glance” (116). In her book on Josephine Baker, *Second Skin*, to which I will return later, Anne Cheng explains, “objectification can be a kind of clothing, too” (14). However, Helga needs her clothes in a way Baker does not. Helga’s spectacular opacity has holes; her identity is never fully mediated through fashion. Helga feels naked being the racialized and sexualized Other while Baker’s nakedness is a “sheath” (1).

Ultimately, in Alabama, she is stripped of her sartorial identity as her “relic ... [of a] filmy crepe” nightgown turns to rags because “there was no time for the pursuit of beauty” (156, 150). The other women in the community interpret her emphasis on appearance as wasteful and selfish when she cannot keep her own children or house clean. Helga fails to embody domesticity, ironically thought to be inherent in females, especially those of color. Before she marries, Helga

⁵⁸ George Hutchinson explains, “a woman's ability to dress herself in garments of her own choosing would always signify, in Larsen's fiction, her freedom and personal agency” (41).

thinks it is “sinful [to] ... add any more unwanted, tortured Negroes to America” (132). Later, when she is pregnant, Helga recognizes her body as more than “something on which to hang lovely fabrics,” only to admit after giving birth to three boys that the “children used her up” (150). The corporeality of pregnancy stands at odds with the capricious and creative essence of fashion. Helga oscillates between refined New Negro and passionate Old Negro identities thinking of “freedom and cities, about clothes and books, about the sweet mingled smell of Houbigant and cigarettes in softly lighted rooms” (161). Defined by a ceaseless desire for the new, because “it didn’t last, this happiness of Helga Crane,” with each successive move and re-fashioning, Helga retreats further away from a coherent identity (78). While in Harlem, the space in which Helga feels most at home, “the essence of life seemed bodily motion” (89). Helga’s search for the new generates optimistic anticipation, even to the last pages of the novel leaving the reader unsure if she will recover and leave Alabama, or die among her dirty children dreaming of things.

New Images of Optimism

Larsen uses fashion in the novel as a way to make sense of modernity, often defined by its sensations of fragmentation, individualism, urbanism, and disenchantment, especially after World War I. Her text was published during a time when authority and tradition are rejected and replaced by commodification. This wider cultural phenomenon mirrors the transition undertaken by the black community to reject outmoded customs as they move toward new identity formations. Of course for Benjamin, “fashion is the eternal recurrence of the new”

("Central Park" 46). Just as Helga seeks to renew herself continually through fashion, many blacks in the early twentieth-century felt re-dressing their public identity would lead to greater success, both socially and economically. In *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman describes modernity in capitalist societies as contributing to the loss of certainties, allowing for the upending of social stability. He suggests that

modern men and women must learn to yearn for change ... [and] not to long nostalgically for the 'fixed, fast-frozen relationships' of the real or fantasized past, but to delight in mobility, to thrive on renewal, to look forward to future developments in their conditions of life and their relations with their fellow men. (95-96)

The New Negro movement capitalizes on these conditions of modernity, emphasizing the value of new fashions, cities, friends, and occupations.

The lively yet nearly anonymous urban spaces of the early twentieth century coupled with an explosion in mass production and advertising allowed for new images and manifestations of black identity.⁵⁹ Many black Americans, from a variety of geographic and class backgrounds, looked to magazines and newspapers for examples of New Negro social achievements and literary works, but also for tools that could help them constitute their public image. Although trials of distinctive identities stemmed from a desire for personal self-expression as well as wider social inclusion, these endeavors remain focused on the visual surface rather than emotional depth. Larsen's text and the advertisements in many black periodicals emphasize the development of fashion sense specific to the era, characterized by tensions between Old and New Negro ideologies.

⁵⁹ Harlem was only one space in which racial self-fashioning was occurring. Simultaneously in London, Paris, Havana, and Chicago, other artistic movements worked to reimagine race.

The purchasing power of African Americans was often underestimated in the early twentieth century. A contributor to the trade magazine, *Advertising and Selling*, noted that although many shoppers in Harlem bought luxury goods, advertising campaigns should focus on the visual since African Americans were “short on abstract thinking” (qtd. in Walker 15). As I compared advertising between black- and white-oriented periodicals from 1910 to 1930, I noticed a lag in the production value and scale of the companies advertising between the two types of magazines. Despite the lack of full-color advertising, I find that the focus on smaller and more local companies advertised in these periodicals provides a more nuanced view of African American consumer trends. I focused on periodicals published between 1910 and 1930 because this span leads up to the publication of *Quicksand* and allows me to examine advertisements to which Larsen may have been exposed as she wrote her novel. This period was replete with change not only in the rise of mass advertising, but also in terms of the numbers of blacks, over 1.5 million, who moved north during the First Great Migration (1910-1930). Accustomed to being physical laborers, sharecroppers, or domestic servants, moving north presented industrial and clerical job opportunities to southern migrants. Of course, with these higher wages, they were able to buy more clothes and other goods.

I look at advertising in *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, *The Messenger*, and *The Chicago Defender*. *The Crisis* was started in 1910 by the NAACP and is still in circulation today. W. E. B. Du Bois edited the magazine, and by 1918, it had 100,000 readers per month. Some scholars and historians

criticize *The Crisis* for its partially white leadership and its focus on the Talented Tenth. *The Messenger* was only published from 1917-1928 and was considered very radical in its early days. As with the former two periodicals, both editorship and perceived audience influenced the writing and advertising content of *The Chicago Defender*. It was a political newspaper that covered racial inequity from a variety of sources often by using sensationalist tactics. They had a large circulation, 230,000 per week in 1920, and over half of the readership lived outside of Chicago. *The Chicago Defender* played a large role in encouraging southern blacks to move north during the Great Migration mainly through their articles, nightclub advertisements, and job postings.

I note a significant difference between advertisements in *The Chicago Defender* when compared to those in *The Crisis* and *The Messenger*. A theme of self-improvement emerges in the latter two magazines, which correlates directly to the images and articles of racial uplift in the body of the magazine. However, advertising in *The Chicago Defender* unflinchingly touts hair straightener and skin lightener. Editors and advertisers were not simply playing an altruistic role in encouraging black southerners to move north. By having more black consumers in the North, most of whom would be earning an income, they would be creating more readers of their paper and purchasers of their beauty products. Thus, they sold them on the idea that they must change their appearance in order to be accepted and successful.

The authors of the book *In Behalf of Advertising: A Series of Essays Published in National Periodicals From 1919 to 1928* [sic] surmise, “[white

women] visualize the ideal ... before they consider economies. But they watch for economies as few businessmen do. By aptitude and training they are excellent shoppers ... addressing the women of America on the printed page is an art, but an art that can be applied with almost the exactitude of a science” (51). The combination of art and science sounds similar to the analysis of fashion sense in early advice manuals. Of course, these essays are meant to encourage advertising in the papers in which they appeared, and are essentially a sales device about sales devices. The authors warn “competition for their attention, the courting of their favor, is tremendous. The way to their hearts and their purses is not easy, but it is clear” (51). Uses of the language of romance in “courting” the “heart” of the female buyer, who still has the shrewdness of a businessman, do not appear in the pages of black periodicals. Instead, I contend that they are selling an idealized image of themselves and their race, regardless of price. In contrast to white-oriented advertising, words like “savings,” “value,” and “economy” rarely appear in black advertising at this time. Often presented as problematic corruptors of society, periodicals like *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*, according to Anne Carroll, may have “drawn in African American readers who wanted to find positive images of themselves” (65). Although I agree with Carroll, I would extend her argument to suggest that advertising taps into the language of the New Negro by creating a space where they can imagine themselves as being both professionally and physically admired.

Although white periodicals often featured advertisements for shoes or dresses, Figure 4.1 represents one of the few advertisements for clothing in the black publications I surveyed. This advertisement, from the February 1913 issue of *The Crisis* shows a refined, although light-skinned, black woman wearing a dress designed by Odessa Warren Grey. The dress is very elegant and highly detailed in its embroidery. The fabrics are fine, most likely silk and chiffon, suggesting the dress would be for a woman who has opportunities to dress formally. Although this could be considered an aspirational



ODESSA MILLINERY
 Exclusive Parisian Creations for the
 Smartly Dressed Woman.
 41 West 135th Street New York
 Phone 624 Harlem.

Figure 4.1

advertisement, Robin Kelley explains that for the working class especially, "seeing oneself and others 'dressed up' was enormously important in terms of constructing a collective identity based on something other than wage work" (60). The advertisements in the magazines suggest that like many working-class white women in the nineteenth-century who spent a large portion of their wages of on clothing and accessories, the same is true for consumers in Harlem as well.

The Odessa model's eyes are cast down, not in a subservient way, but one that reflects modesty. Her three-quarter-profile position shows the most



angles of the headdress. Other advertisements for milliners, like the one for Gage Brothers from 1912, also use the three-quarter profile. However, most of the Gage Brothers advertisements feature an illustrated woman looking directly at the viewer. The use of a photograph, rather than an illustration, in the Odessa advertisement contributes to the idea that the reader can be as stylish as the model if she gets a hat made by

Figure 4.2

Odessa. Verisimilitude is less pronounced

in the Gage Brothers' advertisements. For example, the hat features exotic plumage and a wide brim presumably made with more expensive materials than the Odessa headpiece. However, the Odessa headpiece anticipates 1920s flapper headdresses while the Gage Brothers hat gestures back to older nineteenth-century styles. The differences between these two advertisements may suggest that the marginalized position of black women allows for more creativity in their dress.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Sociologist Diane Crane explains that because women lacked "other forms of power," their self-expression was relegated to non-verbal forms such as fashionable dress (337). I assume this to be especially true for women of color.

It is important to note that black-owned companies and salespeople posed competition to white-owned shops and beauty products, especially when the life of the black female entrepreneur became a part of the mythology of the brand. This is true for Odessa Warren Grey and especially for Madam C. J. Walker, whom I address below. In addition to being a seamstress and milliner, Odessa Warren Grey was a performer in minstrel and musical shows in Harlem. The year this advertisement appeared in *The Crisis*, she was the star of the innovative film, *Lime Kiln Field Day*. She retired from show business and became a very successful business owner, opening a larger shop on Seventh Avenue in 1921. Her shop employed many women and carried an expansive selection of fabrics for Harlem consumers. As readers sought ideal images of their race in the pages of the periodicals, I contend that performances of success boosted optimism for more successful lives in black communities.

Madam C. J. Walker was the first freeborn child of six to her newly emancipated parents. She was orphaned at six, married at fourteen, a mother at eighteen, and widowed at twenty. Through her hair empire, she employed thousands of women as agents and opened a beauty school. Walker was worth over a million dollars when she died in 1919. She used her public image to and wealth to draw attention to causes and organizations by donating huge sums to anti-lynching efforts and the YMCA. Walker also incorporated her rise to wealth and elegance into her advertising. Her daughter and she, both part of Harlem's elite, dressed elegantly and decorated their homes lavishly.

I expand the definition of fashion to include hair and beauty products, especially since hair “quality” and skin color were and continue to be important and often controversial aspects of blacks aesthetics and identity. Advertisements for hair products were abundant, especially those of Madam Walker. In *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women*, Susannah Walker explains that “African-American beauty culturists continually insisted that their products and methods were not about accepting a white beauty idea, but about treating damaged hair, healing scalp disease, and helping hair grow” (9).⁶¹ This attitude was especially true of Madam Walker, whose personal taste defined the company, and who sought an aesthetic sense between the Old and New Negro. Madam Walker advocated a style of hair that embraced natural curls. Although she never advocated the “correction” of black hair, she claimed that “in the next ten years it will be a rare thing to see a kinky head of hair, and it will not be straight either” (Bundles 269). However, *The Chicago Defender* features multiple examples of advertisements for hair straightening products. These products were often directed toward those who lived in the South, like the teachers at the fictional Naxos school. Helga wondered “what form of vanity it was that had induced [her friend] to turn what was probably nice live crinkly hair...into a dead straight, greasy, ugly mass” (48). Probably using a product like the ones widely advertised in periodicals, her friend straightened her hair, like a proper Old Negro, in order to assimilate.

⁶¹ Susannah Walker notes that “beauty culturist” was the accepted term for a hairdresser in the early twentieth century, but the etymological stem of culture is interesting, perhaps implying a culture of beauty akin to fashion sense.

The earlier Madam C. J. Walker advertisement appeared in a 1917 issue of *The Messenger*. This advertisement focuses on the personal success of Madam Walker through the juxtaposition of images of her childhood shanty cabin and her elegant Harlem mansion. The copy encourages the reader to become an entrepreneur while insisting that “there’s no excuse” for not being beautiful too. Although this advertisement appears two years before Walker’s death, her daughter appears in the advertisement as well. The advertisement features dissimilar pairs, such as poverty and wealth, slave to society leader to suggest growth. This play on words gestures to the growth of hair which Walker’s products promise. The advertisement also pairs similar but not equal things such as beauty and success, mother and daughter, lovely complexion and beautiful hair to insist that an entrepreneurial black woman can have it all.

The second advertisement, appearing in a 1925 issue of *The Messenger*, uses the language of both feminism and racial uplift to describe her products. The bold headline equates the glorification of womanhood with being beautiful. However, unlike the advertisements which appear in the *Chicago Defender*, Walker’s advertisements do not dictate a particular type of beauty and instead advocate vague ideas of preserving and enhancing one’s appearance. Presumably, if a reader uses Walker’s products she, too, will attend the theater and be “admired by men and the envy of women.” This advertisement, similar to the earlier one, focuses more on the quality of the company than on the efficacy of the products. At this point, her company was so successful, she did not even need to have a clear image of the product.

Beauty and Success!

Both May be Yours ~ So Easily
There's No Excuse for Not Having Them



America should be proud of the achievements of her colored citizens. In the short span of sixty years we have accomplished more than any race beginning with similar handicaps. "Freedom" in 1866, we were still enslaved by poverty and illiteracy. Now, everywhere are to be seen negro businessmen, skilled negro workmen, professional men and women in ever-growing numbers. During the past sixty years the following stupendous changes have taken place:

- ...from only a few negroes who could read and write, the thirst for education now enables nine-tenths of us to do so.
- ...from 700 black churches of 200 churches have arisen, valued at twenty-eight millions dollars.
- ...800 colored teachers have increased to 40,000 in five hundred colleges, normal and public schools.
- ...12,000 negroes who owned their own homes have increased to 700,000.
- ...the gross wealth of negroes has increased from twenty million dollars to over billion dollars.
- ...from manual labor we have evolved into the arts, sciences, literature, education, and other phases of American civilization in no small way.
- ...70,000 of us conduct our own business, while many other thousands are working into the waste and work of American communities.
- ...we have our Towner, DuBois, Roland Hayes, Ernest Joy, Booker Washington, and many others.

From Cabin to Mansion ~ from Slave to Society Leader ~ from Poverty to The Greatest Benefactress of Her Race



Cabin Where Madam Walker Was Born



You Too Can Enjoy a Lovely Complexion

Dark charms is a clear, lovely complexion and a velvety skin are now within the reach of every one. All women crave beauty as the flowers seek the sunlight. There is no need for ugly, pimply skins or short harsh hair when Madam Walker's preparations are so easy to use and so reasonable in price.

It is often said that "a woman's appearance is an index to her character." Don't let it be said of you that your appearance indicates carelessness, uncleanliness, or ignorance.

Beautiful Hair ~ a Woman's Crowning Glory

Money could not buy the luxurious beauty of hair possessed by most women who stand out as leaders in their respective communities, or who would the most admired, get the best positions, best of society, etc.

These women properly value and appreciate the tremendous advantage given to any member of the colored race by a beautiful

stream of hair. If you have this advantage naturally, then by all means cultivate and keep it.

If your hair is not naturally pleasing, then profit by Madam C. J. Walker's assistance and let her world-renowned hair preparations do for you what they have done for thousands of others.

Rare of these parents in the little cabin shown at left (Delia, Louisiana), Madam C. J. Walker (right) stood to success and influence.

At the age of seven years she was left an orphan by the death of her parents, at fourteen, alone and helpless, she married in order that she might have a home.

When she was twenty years of age and had one child, a little girl, her husband died and left her on her own resources. She reared and educated her daughter and developed the line of Walker Hair and Toilet Preparations now as famous all over the world.

Improve Your Position!

Consider this woman who started with absolutely nothing and left a great factory and thriving business in all parts of the world; a beautiful home in Indianapolis, a mansion on 15th Street in New York City and a residence in Paris for a long at Livingston-on-the-Hudson.

Scarcely this is a fair example of the latent ability to be found in the colored race. Madam Walker applied herself to the task at hand, persevered in the face of obstacles and reached enviable achievements.

Let her life be an inspiring lesson, a beacon light to point the way to bigger and better things for you. For that, after all, was Madam Walker's main desire—to see her own race prosper and attain its proper status.

Make More Money!

Having for her motto, "The Improvement of the Outward Appearance of Her Race," Madam Walker passed herself its greatest beneficiaries by developing righteous preparations that have helped in the remarkable progress of negroes everywhere.

Furthermore, she arranged her affairs so that it would be wisely administered, and two-thirds of the profits should always go towards helping colored education, religion and charity.



Villa La Warr, Livingston-on-the-Hudson
The half-million dollar grand residence of America's foremost colored woman

Figure 4.3

A Madam C. J. Walker Booster

GLORIFYING - OUR WOMANHOOD

No greater force is working to glorify the womanhood of our Race than Madam C. J. Walker's Wonderful Hair and Skin Preparations. Our eighteen world renowned articles, made and sold by members of our own Race, are daily relieving stubborn scalp diseases, stimulating the growth, increasing the length, softening and thickening short, stubborn, thin, unsightly hair; clearing complexions, smoothing, softening and preserving skin. We tell you, Madam C. J. Walker through her preparations, if for no other reason, remains yet, the greatest benefactress of our race. ¶ Women throughout this and in twenty-nine foreign countries know the merits of Madam C. J. Walker's Preparations and are loud in their praise of them. You too may learn how they can preserve and enhance your beauty, make you admired by men and the envy of women. Visit the nearest Madam C. J. Walker agent today, now. She has a message of hope, cheer, of the way she is glorifying our womanhood and how you too may have long, luxurious hair and a beauty-kissed complexion. Visit her, "There's one near you."

NOTE!

For cleansing the scalp use Madam C. J. Walker's Vegetable Shampoo, for tetter, eczema, dandruff, etc.—Tetter Solve. Thin, short, falling hair.—Wonderful Hair Grower. To soften, gloss, silken the hair.—Glossine. For freckles, pimples, tan, etc.—TAN-O-E. To clear, smooth, soften the skin—Face Creams. A youthful complexion—Face Powder and Rouge.

*For Sale By
WALKER AGENTS
DRUG STORES & MAIL*

The Madam C. J. Walker Mfg. Co. Inc.
640 N West St.—Indianapolis, Ind.

Madam C. J. Walker advertisement, 1925: "Glorifying Our Womanhood" (Madam C. J. Walker Collection, Indiana Historical Society)

Figure 4.4

The Pluko Company used Josephine Baker as their spokesperson in this 1926 advertisement from *The Chicago Defender*. Famous performers were often used in place of black models, of which there were few. Baker tells readers how to get “soft, straight, and beautiful” hair. Unlike Walker’s hair products that

promote a healthy scalp, Pluko’s hair dressing overtly signals their ability to keep hair straight. It is odd that in this

advertisement for a versatile hair product, a turban covers most of Baker’s hair. Although Baker is clothed in this image, I think Cheng’s

assertion that “the process of objectification – even as it takes subjectivity from her – *also* invests the

objects around her with subjectivity which in turn provides a kind of cloak for her nakedness” (116). I suggest that the gaze of the consumer objectifies her, but imbues her public image with subjectivity, which in turn invests the hair product

Miss Josephine Baker is the dearest friend of the "No. 10. Borealis" Company, the most generous and really most lovely one known to the people of our group. The company is recommending a new of the famous Borealis product, No. 8, C. White.

BEAUTIFUL Josephine Baker
Tells how You can make YOUR Hair
Straight, Soft and Beautiful, too

Miss Josephine Baker says: "I was so delighted with the way the improved Pluko Hair Dressing smoothed out and strengthened my hair, and made it easy to dress any way I wished, that I kept right on using it! In just a little while my hair began to grow. Now I have an abundance of straight, glossy hair, and it is all due to the use of the Improved Pluko Hair Dressing."

The experience of Miss Baker and thousands of other men and women of our group proves that YOU can make your hair just as long, straight and glossy as you wish, if you will follow their example and use the Improved Pluko Hair Dressing.

This delicately fragrant, soft, fine textured preparation melts at the temperature of the scalp, and goes deep into the pores, nourishing and invigorating the hair roots and making the hair straight, smooth, glossy and easy to dress any way you wish.

IMPROVED
Pluko
"Always the Finest
Hair Dressing Now
the Easiest to Use"

Snow White 50¢
Amber 25¢

If your dealer can't supply you with the Improved Pluko Hair Dressing, write us the name along with the price of the Pluko you want, and we will send it to you through mail, (enclosing price list of postage.)

Plough's advertisement, 1926: "Beautiful Josephine Baker" (*Chicago Defender*) **Figure 4.5**

with subjectivity tinted by Baker's own (metaphorical) nakedness in being used to sell a product.

This 1929 Dr. Palmer's skin whitening advertisement, also from *The Chicago Defender* invites readers to "chose [their] own complexion." The copy cleverly invokes the language of emancipation. By telling readers they can choose their skin color, they are implicitly suggesting that they can choose their level of societal integration. "It's so easy," for the target consumer to "transform" the skin and themselves. The product is not euphemistically named as a "brightener," as they often were in other periodicals, but still avoids extended allusions to lightening black skin. Only one sentence claims that the product "lightens the darkest skin, giving it a loveliness that gets more fascinating every day." Otherwise, the copy touts the abilities of the suite of products to "remove pimples, blackheads, and blotches" while "smoothing away roughness" and keeping skin "velvety." Similar to the vexed messages of hair "beautifier," Palmer's advertisement requires a specialized type of reading practice. Although the skin tone of the model is difficult to discern in the digital reproduction of the image, her hair appears unstraightened and even resembles a short afro. Readers would not doubt that she is a woman of fashion since her hair resembles the stylish, but transgressive, flapper bob. Black readers of *The Defender*, perhaps newly arrived in the North, would believe that "the famous Hair Dresser is a toilet necessity that no woman now-a-days can well be without." Even though skin lightening remains a contentious issue, Dr. Fred Palmer's skin whiteners are still sold today in major drugstores.

Choose YOUR OWN COMPLEXION

*... make it like you want it with
these beauty preparations*

Its So Easy

now to have a lovely, fascinating complexion ... lighter, clearer and more beautiful than you ever dreamed of. A few moments each night with Dr. Fred Palmer's famous Skin Whitener Beauty Preparations revives dull, sallow and lifeless skin and transforms it into a soft, smooth, exquisite complexion, removing pimples, blackheads and blotches.

Dr. Fred Palmer's Skin Whitener Ointment lightens the darkest skin, giving it a loveliness that gets more fascinating every day. The dairy Skin Whitener Soap cleanses the skin, smoothing away the roughness and puts an end to that "shiny" appearance. The Face Powder, in addition to keeping the skin soft, smooth and velvety, lasts so long that constant powdering is unnecessary, one application frequently lasting all day. The famous Hair Dresser is a toilet necessity that no woman now-a-days can well be without. It is famous as a dandruff remover and a hair beautifier ... and one application keeps the hair in place for hours at a time.

HID—A new scientific treatment that is one of the most amazing preparations ever discovered. It banishes all perspiration and body odors instantly, will not injure or stain the most delicate undergarment and is harmless to the most tender skin. A touch of HID keeps you dainty and fresh all day.



Any of the above Dr. Fred Palmer's Skin Whitener Preparations can be purchased at any drug store for 25c. each, or sent prepaid upon receipt of price—four for \$1.00. A generous trial sample of the Skin Whitener Soap and Face Powder sent for 4c. in stamps.

DR. FRED PALMER'S LABORATORIES
Dept. 5 ATLANTA, GA.

**DR. FRED PALMER'S
SKIN
WHITENER
Preparations**

"keeps your complexion youthful"

Dr. Fred Palmer advertisement, ca. 1929: "Choose Your Own Complexion" (Chicago Defender)

Figure 4.6

These advertisements perform a similar function to the etiquette manuals from the nineteenth century. Both provide tactical ways of modifying one's appearance, whether through clothes or cosmetics, to gain wider access to socioeconomic structures. Through the figure of Helga, Larsen explores the mode of seeing the world through fashion while continually seeking the new. Helga is neither wandering aimlessly like the *flâneur* nor driven by compulsion like Carrie Meeber. Instead, Helga's actions embody the optimism many black Americans felt at this time. Much more accessible than high-paying jobs or elite social classes, fashion enabled many in marginalized communities to experiment with public personas, and the New Negro Movement encouraged this aesthetic approach to inclusion.

Afterword

After the shooting of unarmed teen, Trayvon Martin, in Florida in 2012, thousands of people, from senators to NBA players, wore hooded sweatshirts in protest. Martin's iconic hoodie represents not only how young, black men are often read by others, but also how a piece of clothing can become a site of resistance. From George Fox's etiquette manual to Nella Larsen's *Plea for Color*, I have shown how fashion, especially when used tactically, is power. Although the characters I discuss are outsiders contending with different challenges of marginality, be it racial, gendered, or class-based, they each seek visibility as a form of protest. These forms of resistance through aesthetics are especially suited to urban spaces, like Dreiser's Chicago or Larsen's Harlem, due to the heterogeneous crowds, masses of commodities, brief interpersonal connections, and numerous venues for public display. Yet these same elements of diversity, commercialism, ephemerality, and public spectacle are also found in new media.

This afterword utilizes Rita Raley's concept of tactical media to suggest that the legacy of nineteenth-century fashion sense can be found in social media and ecommerce. Raley explains, "in its most expansive articulation, tactical media signifies the intervention and disruption of a dominant semiotic regime, the temporary creation of a situation in which signs, messages, and narratives are set into play and critical thinking becomes possible" (6). I see the reemerging role of fashion working in two ways: as a site of resistance and a place for connection through extimacy. Like Raley and de Certeau, I am not analyzing efforts to dismantle the system but instead am concerned with dissent within existing

structures of power. I am especially interested in the way disillusionment with neoliberal policies provokes fear and anger, but rather than these reactions leading to mobilization efforts to overthrow them, the existing structures themselves are used to criticize capitalism.

From critiquing the misogyny of American Apparel advertising to promoting makeup-free selfies, there are many recent examples of the ways in which fashion and feminism exert their power tactically. Efforts have been made, although met with great resistance, to dismantle the fashion industry's requirements for pubescent, underweight, and primarily white runway models. Print fashion, fortunately, has seen major changes in the past decade, becoming much more inclusive of diverse races, body shapes, physical abilities, and gender presentations. Skeptics would suggest that this, too, remains in the interest of the capitalist system to sell more goods to more people. In the nineteenth century, only *couturier* Charles Frederick Worth had the transatlantic power to influence others through fashion. Now, independent designers have a chance to sell their handmade, limited-production, or vintage goods globally through "shared success" business models used by sites like Etsy, ModCloth or StyleWe. Established designers, like Stella McCartney and Vivienne Westwood, use their fame to bring awareness to causes such as veganism or climate change.

Recent trends invite consumers to wear tee shirts emblazoned with pop culture references or aphorisms attesting to who they are and what they think. However, similar to the surfeit of sympathy on which Phelps comments, has the

literal reading of statements on clothes reached its limits of effectiveness? I find Young's "mundane shared fantasy," which I described in the Introduction, to be what perpetuates the tactical, yet quotidian use of fashion. Opposition through the ordinary has become especially simple due to cheap custom shirt sites and fast fashion supply chains. As a result of these innovations in manufacture, social advocacy groups such as Black Lives Matter could have tee shirts printed, sold, and donned in a few days time. This material production coupled with the virtual reproduction of tweets, hashtags, YouTube videos, and Facebook likes, increases the prominence of a message. Perhaps it is fitting that what could be considered, in Raley's terms, an "intervention [toward] critical thinking," is communicated on the uniquely American invention of the tee shirt.

The legacy of Phelps' "beautiful moving corpses" of cotton-weavers can be seen today in the oppression, greed, and harm still inherent in the production of clothes. The fashion and beauty industries kill and test on millions of animals each year. Textile production requires vast amounts of natural resources. Walmart, H&M, Forever 21, Zara, Nike, Uniqlo and countless other major brands have been excoriated for their exploitation of overseas laborers, yet millions of people still buy their products despite having this knowledge. These examples are not presented to suggest that activism cannot work within existing systems, but to achieve sweeping change in the long run, to paraphrase Audre Lorde, the master's tools might not be the most effective in dismantling his house.

I have suggested that fashion in nineteenth-century novels was a means of extending a cultivated sense of self. This phenomenon could be seen as a

precursor to social media. Whether through Instagram, Twitter, Facebook or any of the other innumerable platforms for public spectacle, people use aesthetic strategies to be read in a certain way. New media also influences how people form impressions of the world and start to explore virtual communities. Like the characters Helga, Margaret, Carrie, and Sip, many people today seek to alleviate their own marginality by discovering affinity groups online.

It is the idea of connectivity, not only in terms of computer networks, but also in relation to affective communities encourages extimacy through new media. Furthermore, the etymology of connectivity aligns well with Raley's definition of tactical media since the -ity suffix is used with abstract nouns to express a state. Thus, this state of being connected is temporary. The Internet has become a visual version of Benjamin's *Arcades Project*: an assemblage of quotations, polemics, fragments, theories, and imagery. The light drawn into the arcades through its glass ceilings resembles the glow from our screens and machines, while the labyrinth of web pages invites *flânerie* through exploration and idleness.

Contemporary shopping practices repeat nineteenth-century tropes conflating public and private. I note a paradoxical move toward private shopping in online stores, coupled with a desire for public recognition through pinning, tagging, and 'gramming what one wears or wants to buy. This type of commercialism resembles Dreiser's description of the parade of fashion on Broadway where "a tailor might have secured hints on suit measurements, a shoemaker on proper lasts and colors, a hatter on hats. It was literally true that if

a lover of fine clothes secured a new suit, it was sure to have its first airing on Broadway” (285). These practices are tactical in creating an instant version of self, but also in documenting potential desires for future selves through imagined purchases.

A return to nineteenth-century aesthetics has emerged in a pastiche of trends including waistcoats, corsets, facial hair, and steampunk designs. Although we are in a different moment from the early nineteenth century when fabric and clothes were expensive enough to be passed down in wills, remade, or pawned in secondhand shops, vestiges of these practices can be seen in the DIY movement. There has been a resurgence of traditional sartorial practices such as knitting, sewing, and upcycling. Descendants of etiquette manuals can be seen in fashion blogs, lifestyle brands, and taste communities. Anticipated by William James and George Fox in their concern with the dress of diplomatic and government officers, that which Hillary Clinton or Michelle Obama wears continues to be a source of fascination.

Tactical fashion and the reproduction of visual images on the Internet resemble Fuller’s democracy of fashion. Resistance through multiplicity appears in groups such as Japanese Lolitas who invite spectatorship in a culture that favors conformity. Even the hijab, often read as a statement of faith or oppression, depending on one’s perspective, is also deployed as a site of protest or an expression of high-fashion taste, contingent on the wearer’s intent. M.A.C. Cosmetics provides makeup options for men and companies like Saint Harridan designs suits for butch women and transmen.

Quoting French writer and photographer Maxime Du Camp, Benjamin reminds us that “history is like Janus: it has two faces. Whether it looks to the past or to the present, it sees the same things” [S1,1]. In many ways, continuities between the nineteenth- and twenty-first centuries, both in literature and aesthetics, are similar to how fashion “stirs in the thicket of what has been” bringing together disparate parts to arrive at the same conclusions (“Theses” 261). Considering this, I see many directions for future study using surface reading through tactical fashion. During my research, I was often reminded of Donna Haraway’s cyborg manifesto and speculate that her analysis could be extended to draw connections between feminist fashion, wearable tech, and equitable means of production through innovations such as 3-D printers.

As with any project, too much had to be excluded. Primarily, I had hoped to correct the overemphasis on women in readings of fashion but was unsuccessful. Fashion sense could also contribute to wider debates in ecocriticism, critical race theory, fat studies, and disability studies. However, the most interesting place for expanding scholarship using surface reading and fashion would be in queer theory. I think there are multiple applications for further analysis of transgender, cross-dressing, genderqueer, and other non-binary expressions of dress in literature.

A wedding gown remains the traditional finale piece in many *prêt-à-porter* Fashion Week shows. Even though in the United States the right to be married is gradually becoming available to everyone, it is still bound up with antiquated notions reminiscent of nineteenth-century ideals of chastity, piety, and the

economic value of women. Thus, I return to Benjamin one final time to stitch together a conclusion more representative of the *tigersprung* of fashion between the two centuries. Benjamin explains,

For fashion was never anything other than the parody of the motley cadaver, provocation of death through the woman and bitter colloquy with decay whispered between shrill bursts of mechanical laughter. That is fashion. And that is why she changes so quickly; she titillates death and is already something different, something new, as he casts about to crush her. [B1,4]

I find this tempo of constant change and the eternal search for the new applies to both fashion and academia.

Kaja Silverman and others advocate buying clothes secondhand as a means to circumvent oppressive capitalist structures, promote individualization, and avoid propagating the desire for fast fashion. This solution works in two ways. Not only can it be a tactical form of resistance, but it also demonstrates how extimacy works in the moment and across temporalities. Silverman suggests that this practice establishes a dialogue between wearers while also “provid[ing] a means of salvaging the images that have traditionally sustained feminine subjectivity, images that have been consigned to the wastebasket, not only by fashion but by ‘orthodox’ feminism” (195). I extend her argument to salvage other things that have been consigned to the wastebasket, or worse, the coffin. Here I am thinking of discussions regarding the death of the humanities and the inevitable demise of literature. How can we as cultural and literary critics be more like fashion, innovative, nimble, and practical, while the profitization of education “casts about to crush” us? We already are.

Silverman's account of vintage fashion echoes the study of literature as both are a method of revisiting history and connecting with others. Literature, like fashion, maintains a dialogue across time about universal experiences, like desire and the struggle for human rights, while dressing it all in an aesthetically provocative design. Expanded forms of aesthetic activism engender a way to participate in what is beautiful while having an enduring effect after one's own death. For many scholars, through our teaching, research, and tactical uses of fashion, we hope to mitigate injustice by dressing ourselves in hoodies of change.

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