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WOMEN OF THE FUTURE: THE PERFORMATIVE PERSONHOOD OF ELIZABETH
ROBINS, DJUNA BARNES, AND THE BARONESS ELSA VON FREYTAG-
LORINGHOVEN

MICHELLE FEDA

67 Pages

The New Woman is the term used to describe the idea of a woman who embodied the changing social norms around her involvement in public life during the *fin-de-siècle*. New Women were bold and brash, educated and independent, and, importantly young; the term encapsulated any particular woman who stepped outside of her mother's Victorian social norms. The New Woman was as much a construct of the time as it was a description. The playwright and suffragette Elizabeth Robins performs “new womanhood” on the stage, and her play *Votes for Women!* enacts this struggle between New Women and the older generation. Djuna Barnes started her career as a journalist in New York City, embodying the role of the New Woman in her writing and willingness participate in her own journalism. The Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Dada performance artist and poet, performed a womanist Dadaism, one largely forgotten today. While none of these women identified themselves as New Women, an outside observer can, not unfairly, apply the term to them. In disparate yet connected ways, they each managed to construct the identity of the New Woman through the ways they performed themselves in public.

KEYWORDS: dada, modernism, new woman, stunt journalism, suffrage

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ROBINS, DJUNA BARNES, AND THE BARONESS ELSA VON FREYTAG-
LORINGHOVEN

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for the Degree of

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2018

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M.F.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The New Woman is the term used to describe idea of a woman who embodied the changing social norms around her involvement in public life during the *fin-de-siècle*. The term itself encompasses a number of identities, but the most basic understanding has the New Woman rejecting her Victorian parents' ideas of what is “proper” for a young woman. She may be politically active; cut her hair; wear pants; educate herself; ride a bicycle; wear makeup; expose her ankles; pursue a career... the list goes on. In short, her identity is less about who she is and more about who, or what, she is not. The phrase was used as much, if not more, to anxiously identify young women's societal failings than it was used as positive marker of identity. Her identity is inseparable from other *fin-de-siècle* cultural obsessions, such as socialism, imperialism, decadence, and sexual identity, notes Kathleen Luckhurst (4). She stodgy Victorian elders' fears about what was wrong with their present day, and the manifestation of the future, as imagined by counterculture youths. These characterizations paint the issue with too broad a brush, of course, but generalize an identity which was as fictional as it was real. Certainly, New Women existed, but it was not a label that women of the time seemed to adopt for themselves; rather, it was a label applied to a collection of characteristics. Some women certainly possessed these characteristics and traits – women who identified themselves as suffragists, women who worked outside of the home, women who pursued educational degrees – but the “New Woman” herself is a constructed figure, and as such, the boundaries of what comprises “New Womanhood” have shifted over time.

Today, we think of the “New Woman” in very different terms than *fin-de-siècle* writers did. Today, while gender parity is far from achieved, women operate on a much more level playing field than they did a hundred years ago. Now, the phrase “New Woman” as it is

colloquially understood, means a young woman who defied her parent's expectations in radical ways we would appreciate today. While there were certainly women who did so in the early 20th century, much of the work of creating the New Woman happened by women who didn't necessarily use that phrase to identify themselves or explicitly align themselves with that movement. In this thesis, I explore the construction of the New Woman through the work of three women working around the *fin-de-siècle*. Elizabeth Robins, an English suffragette, is likely the closest person to our conception of the New Woman. Djuna Barnes was certainly doing the *work* of a New Woman, but never explicitly aligned herself with the movement. And the Baroness Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven was much older than many imagine the archetypal New Woman to be, a powerhouse in her time who is largely forgotten today, surpassed by the men she worked closely with and around.

In my first chapter, I define the New Woman and her relationship to public spectacle. The New Woman, as she has been characterized by numerous other theorists, rejects the ideals of womanhood that had been the defining female identity of the late Victorian era. As every generation rebels against the norms of their parents, so did the New Women of the early twentieth century push back against their accepted societal role. Where the true woman confined herself to the domestic sphere, her daughter the New Woman explored the city streets. Where her mother focused her energies on raising her children, her children advocated for universal suffrage.

Central to a concept of the New Woman is a concept of the public sphere. Initially defined by Jürgen Habermas, it has been substantially revised and tweaked since it was initially published in German in 1962 (the English translation in 1989). Habermas defines the public sphere as a figurative space between private citizens and the government where open discourse

about policy can occur; this public sphere, Habermas argues, is not given but must be taken, and is specifically tied to notions of commodity exchange and labor (Habermas 27). I am grounding my work in David M. Henkin's revision of Habermas's theory, which considers more fully than Habermas does the actual physical space that the public sphere occupies. Henkin's definition is relevant because, while Habermas's allows for a theoretical public sphere to occur anywhere, Henkin grounds it in the physical space of the city streets – an accessible space that is used by citizens to converse, discuss, and protest.

All three of the women I explore in this work use the public streets to their advantage: the suffragettes, with their willingness to take up space in the streets, altering the topography as they did so; the public spectacles of Djuna Barnes's stunt journalism, which frequently found her performing for a crowd; and the body art of the Baroness Elsa, observed as she passed through the streets of Williamsburg. It is repeated public appearance of New Women that sparked others to follow, and the repetition *en masse* made it palatable.

In Chapter One, I focus my analysis of the New Woman and her public sphere on Elizabeth Robins the American expatriate suffragette, actress, playwright. After the death of her husband by suicide in 1888, she moved to London, quickly becoming a prominent actress of Henrik Ibsen's work (newly translated from Norwegian) and a savvy businesswoman and producer. Here, she joined the Women's Social and Political Union in 1906, London's most militant suffragette group headed by Emmaline Pankhurst and her daughters. In working as an actress, Robins was accustomed to occupying a far more public place in society than many women at the time, and so she was a sensation at suffragette rallies, drawing large crowds each time she spoke.

Elizabeth Robins's career and suffragette activism serves as a useful starting point for my exploration of the New Woman, activism, and identity, as she was a significant public figure in the English suffragette movement in the early part of the twentieth century. While theatre has long been a tool for social change, Robins's play *Votes for Women!* was groundbreaking as the first full-length play written by a woman to be staged in London, and it does so with a revision of the forms used by Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw. Her structure, which sets the second act at an outside suffragette rally, is uncommon, and the rally staged takes its dialogue directly from Robins's experience at rallies herself, allowing it to occupy the space between fiction and nonfiction. One of theatre's greatest abilities allows attendees to vicarious experience, or to safely experience that which may be dangerous or taxing in one's own life. By staging a suffragette rally, Robins provides the audience with the experience of attending one, albeit from a distance, allowing them to "practice" or to consider what a rally may be like. Furthermore, creating the spectacle of a rally onstage allows for its image to be disseminated and normalized.

In my second chapter, I explore the idea of spectacle more deeply. Using the early newspaper work of Djuna Barnes, I delve into the particularities of stunt journalism, and its relationship to the suffragette movement. Barnes would later become somewhat famous for her novel *Nightwood*, as it was "rediscovered" in an effort to make high modernism more female-friendly, but in 1913 she was 19 and starting her career by writing for nearly every publication in New York City at the time. Starting with her newspaper publications, she would publish in nearly every genre, including (but not limited to) interviews, short stories, plays, poems, drawings, interviews, and novels.

Journalism, at the start of the twentieth century, was considered a man's profession, like so many other jobs. Stunt journalism was one of the few avenues a woman could pursue in the

profession, apart from writing “women’s features” about garden parties and adoptable children. (Djuna Barnes was a bit of an exception in this regard; although she wrote a fair number of what she termed “stunt stories,” she also wrote in many different genres, though even her interviews and crime stories took a more “feminine” human interest perspective than those of her male peers). Key to stunt journalism is a reporter’s willingness to submit their own body to an experience for the sake of the story, which centers the story on its impact on the journalist's body. For a woman writer working for male bosses, it presents a complicated relationship between freedom and subjection: Barnes's ability to live independently, support herself, and build a career was partially dependent on her willingness to offer up her body in service to those male editors who would find another woman if she was unwilling.

In Chapter Three, I focus on The Baroness Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven. The Baroness Elsa, for her part, centered her art on her body in a fashion that, in some ways gave her the agency that Barnes lacked in her stunts but which subjugated her even more to the whims of outside male artists. She was widely known during the Dada movement for creating “corporeal art” or “art to wear” – elaborate ensembles that mixed traditional clothing with objects both ordinary and rare. She turned herself into the aesthetic object, centering her art in her body, for a feminist Dada – a Dada that rejects the masculinist and war-centric art of her compatriots. Rather, the Baroness Elsa turns to nature and humans' relationship with the natural world, creating art that challenges presumptions of humans as anti-nature.

While the Baroness Elsa worked in many mediums – sculpture, poetry, live performance – it is her corporeal art that most strongly demonstrates the tensions between her work and her relationship to the canon. Largely forgotten today, her success waned as her body aged and she became less desirable to the men who formed the core of the Dada movement. She is much older

than the imagined New Woman is – she was born in 1874 and died in 1926 at the age of 52 – and not politically aligned with feminist causes. However, her relationship to her male peers in the Dada world, the body-centric art she created, and her disdain for general societal norms all make her a compelling figure in a study of the New Woman.

It is one of the burdens of exploring the (wrongly) unexplored that there is little existing scholarship on large amounts of these women's work. Irene Gammel is the foremost writer on the Baroness Elsa, and it is her scholarship that I lean on for an analysis of the Baroness's ecopoetics and her relationship with the world at large. While Djuna Barnes's later writing, especially her obliquely autobiographical *Nightwood* has been “discovered” by the scholars looking to pursue a more inclusive canon, there is little scholarship on her early career journalism. Katherine Biers presents intelligent analysis of Barnes's relationship with violence and her readers, and Barbara Green explores Barnes's use of spectacle; however, but with the exception of these two scholars, Barnes's journalism has been largely ignored. Of the three, Elizabeth Robins is the figure with the biggest spotlight. Her play *Votes for Women!* is anthologized, and her official relationship with one of the most well-known suffragette organizations gives her work a level of recognition and scaffolding lacked by Barnes and the Baroness. The exploration of the role of the suffragette and political speech, including the suffragette's relationship to the New Woman, is well-trodden territory; here I lean heavily on Habermas to explore the use of spectacle weaponized by the Women's Social and Political Union, especially through Robins's play *Votes for Women!*

The New Woman was not created in a day, and she will not be unpacked in a day. This thesis aims to explore the relationship between three unique women and the social construct of the New Woman. The women chosen here all address different facets of what it mean to be a New Woman of the period, and how we conceive of New Womanhood today. Elizabeth Robins,

a suffragist, likely hews closest to the idea of the New Woman. However, each of the women here address various concepts of New Womanhood, and share connections that are not immediately obvious. Elizabeth Robins and Djuna Barnes are connected via Emmaline Pankhurst at the WSPU: Robins, because of her direct involvement in the organization, and Barnes, because of the ways in which she adapted WSPU techniques into her journalism. Djuna Barnes and the Baroness Elsa shared a close relationship with each other. While the Baroness Elsa is not directly connected to Elizabeth Robins, they can be thought of as different sides of the spectrum. Elizabeth Robins was vocal about her fight for women's suffrage and the necessity of equal rights; the Baroness's art, while less explicitly political, simply created a more feminist Dada than that of her male peers. They trafficked different circles – Elizabeth Robins a more respectable figure, despite her status as a public woman; and the Baroness Elsa, a poor artist who eschewed societal norms of dress for wearable art. Djuna Barnes is the joining figure between them, the woman who splits the difference between radicalism and respectability. Each of these women is a New Woman; they simply display different facets of what it means to be her.

CHAPTER II: THE SUFFRAGETTE SPECTACLE: ELIZABETH ROBINS'S *VOTES FOR WOMEN!* AND THE MILITANT SUFFRAGETTE MOVEMENT

The New Woman emerged out of a late Victorian femininity, a rebellion against the traditional role of women. Standards of the Victorian era held that “good” women were the stabilizing, moral center of their family’s home. This ideal of the “good” woman held that women were pure and pious, above temptation and weaknesses of the flesh. They kept themselves reserved, even when they were in public spaces, because public spaces were men’s spaces. Women were defined by their participation within the domestic sphere, concerned with the raising of children and not with external events. In early nineteenth century United States, a woman held no legal authority or property; their earnings (if she worked outside the home) belonged to her husband or her father – the head of her household. Furthermore, she was not sanctioned even to speak aloud in public – her father or her husband spoke for her (Royster 16-7).

The daughter of the “good” woman was the New Woman. As technology advanced, women’s ability to leave the private sphere increased – rail lines enabled women to travel more freely; the Industrial Revolution increased jobs for women in factories. The New Woman was a woman who participated in the public sphere. Furthermore, she claimed the word “woman” for herself. An anonymous male writer published a “Character Note” of the New Woman in 1894: “She is young, of course. She looks older than she really is. And she calls herself a woman. Her mother is content to be called a lady, and is naturally of small account. Novissima’s chief characteristic is her unbounded self-satisfaction” (80). The New Woman’s pride in herself, her belief in herself as a member of public society, was one of the greatest critiques of her existence. Furthermore, the New Woman – both American and abroad – was often a suffragette. There

could be no greater transgression of the “true woman’s” place in the home than groups of women congregating in public, using their voices in the open air to demand a voice in government as well.

Actors have always been public figures. The very nature of their profession requires it. Elizabeth Robins, noted Ibsen actress, used her stage presence and organizational acuity to align herself with the suffragette cause and strengthen the movement. In January of 1891, Robins secured her first big Ibsen role, playing Mrs. Linde in *A Doll House*. Quick upon the heels of that performance, she played Hedda in the first English production of *Hedda Gabler*, from April to May of that same year. Two years later, she co-produced the first English production of *The Master Builder*, playing Hilda in that production. That same year, she acted in a series of Ibsen plays which were financed through private subscription, the performance of which caused Oscar Wilde to write her, numbering himself among “her warmest admirers” (Joannou 179).

While Ibsen himself spoke out against the co-opting of his characters for the suffragette cause, they were nonetheless appropriated as such. Furthermore, it had a significant impact on the actors who played his heroines, including Robins. John Stokes contends that the “consistently dominating heroines offered these actresses images of themselves which intensified their series of personal involvement” (14-15). By taking the stage as a character who was independent, radical, and self-actualized, Robins was able to participate in a world where this was the case. Maroula Joannou finds that “Robins regarded Ibsen as a standard bearer for her own dreams of a future in which equality between the sexes would be achieved”. It was through Robins’s frequent embodiment of New Woman-type characters, who challenged traditional Victorian femininity (even if Ibsen disavowed that interpretation) that she found an identification with that movement (Joannou 180).

An American expatriate working in England, Robins aligned herself with the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), headed by Emmaline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. Founded in 1903, The WSPU is known today for its militant tactics, (declared proudly by their motto "Deeds not words"). According to Jad Adams, it was 1908 before the first stone was thrown (43). Historians generally, however, date the start of the militant period to 1905, when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney interrupted a public meeting lead by Winston Churchill and demanded to know when women would be granted the vote (Joannou 184). Once militancy was embraced, it was embraced wholeheartedly. Christabel Pankhurst wrote on the topic,

Perhaps the government will realize now that we mean to fight to the bitter end
[.] If men use explosives and bombs for their own purpose, they call it war, and
the throwing of a bomb that destroys other people is then a glorious and heroic
deed. Why should a woman not make use of the same weapons as men. It is not
only war we have declared. We are fighting for a revolution. (Riddell 24)

Trained in public speaking, with a dedicated following and a charismatic personality, Elizabeth Robins was an ideal candidate to lead a revolution. Joining the national WSPU committee in 1906, she attended eight public rallies between July and October, and in November traveled with WSPU organizer Mary Gawthorpe to see the results of a WSPU by-election in the north (Joannou 183). With its remarkable cross-class support and wide-reaching tactics, their rallies, processions, and demonstrations were designed to get women into the street, ultimately displaying an embodied support on a scale never seen before. With a speaker such as Elizabeth Robins, who was able to win over even uncertain attendees, the suffragette cause seemed near success. Veteran suffragette Millicent Garrett Fawcett wrote to the *London Times* in October

1906 that the WSPU had “done more during the last twelve months to bring (women’s suffrage) within the region of practical politics than we have been able to accomplish in the same number of years” (Joannou 183).

In a very anti-Victorian way, both actors and suffragettes placed themselves in the public sphere. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas describes the idea of “public” as it existed for the ancient Greeks. He writes that “in Greek self-interpretation, the public sphere [functioned] as a realm of freedom and permanence. Only in the light of the public sphere did that which existed become revealed, did everything become visible to all” (3-4). This understanding of the public sphere functions in contrast to an understanding of the private – impermanent, unfree, necessarily shadowed and obscure. By bringing issues out into the public sphere, they are allowed to interact with each other in order to form a complete truth.

John Stuart Mill writes about “the particular evil of silencing the expression of an opinion [...] If the opinion is right, [those who dissent] are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clear perception and livelier expression of truth produced by its collision with error” (*Liberty* 31). Mill argues for a sort of proto-Habermasian public sphere through the importance of expressing belief and opinions. Regardless of the veracity of the opinion, there is always benefit to its expression: in an ideal world, it privileges truth and allows those opinions which are true to be honed. There is also an ethical component to openness: “We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavoring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still” (*Liberty* 31). Mill argues for a society with free speech; and a condition of free speech is the public sphere.

In the ancient Athenian public sphere that Habermas references, women were, of course, not included. Mill, for his part, opposed the exclusion of women from society. As an English Member of Parliament and the president of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, he actively campaigned for women's rights. In *The Subjection of Women*, a book he began co-writing with his wife and finished after her death, Mill writes,

If the authority of men over women, when first established, had been the result of a conscientious comparison [...]; if, after trying various other modes of social organization—the government of women over men, equality between the two, and such mixed and divided modes of government as might be invented—it had been decided, on the testimony of experience, that the mode in which women are wholly under the rule of men, having no share at all in public concerns [...] was the arrangement most conducive to the happiness and well being of both [women and men]; its general adoption might then be fairly thought to be some evidence that, at the time when it was adopted, it was the best [...] But the state of the case is in every respect the reverse of this. (*Subjection* 7-8).

Mill's pro-suffragist views went against the grain in late Victorian England, especially coming from a man. Arguing from a Utilitarian point of view, however, he saw no reason that women should be denied any right; if something was beyond a woman's capabilities, there was no sense in forbidding it, as she would simply be unable to *do* the activity in question. Furthermore, having an open public sphere would benefit all members of society, and Mill recognizes that the current form of government was detrimental to women, as they had never had an opportunity to participate in its shaping.

Habermas's public sphere witnessed a transition from a royal public which displayed itself to its subjects to a public in which subjects themselves participated, and where broadly available discourse subjugated the upper class to reason. According to Habermas, citizens who had once been private came together to claim a "public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves to engage in a debate over the rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor" (Habermas 27). This, however, limits the public to the kinds of people who were allowed to participate in Habermas's public sphere. David M. Henkin revises and expands Habermas's definition of the public sphere to reflect a new sort of public that emerged in New York in the eighteenth century. According to Henkin, Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere ignores the physical *place* of the public. He writes that

Habermas's public sphere [...] is decidedly abstract and dispersed, not simply in its construction, but in its day-to-day existence. Far from emphasizing the physical congregation and confrontation of people in open spaces, current discussions of the public often turn public space into a metaphor for a set of physically placeless encounters, an aspatial context for political dialogue and debate (9-10)

By rooting his theory in commercial life, treating publicity as subjectivity, rather than an institution of its own, and linking publicity specifically to print culture, Habermas's abstraction of the public space "excludes many of the primary sites in which authority is elaborated and contested" (Henkin 9). Henkin reconceptualizes Habermas's public sphere in order ground it in a physical, experiential reality (focusing on print culture in the public sphere), and Joannou notes that this reconceptualization allows for greater understanding of women's participation in the

public sphere (69). As an actress, playwright, and public speaker, Elizabeth Robins was an active participant in the public sphere. Commanding attention in both the literal public streets as well as the inside of theatres, she demanded notice and recognition.

The early part of the twentieth century was marked by women's increasing involvement in the public sphere. The New Woman was a veritable presence in the streets, "seated astride a bicycle, dressed in knickerbockers and peaked cap, [shooting past her detractors] on the public road" (Eastwood 91). To those opposed to the New Woman, these actions cause "those tender and endearing charms which ought to distinguish her [...] to be entirely wanting" (Eastwood 91). Eastwood's defense of the New Woman, of course, argues that

Her brow is serious, for the brain behind it is crammed as full of high projects as is the satchel she carries of pamphlets on the missions, rights, grievances, and demands of her sex. [...] if she assumes certain articles of masculine garb on occasion, it is solely on account of their superior utility; if she rides out on a bicycle it is for the purpose of strengthening her muscles and expanding her lungs for the great work she has before her. (91)

Eastwood's defense of the New Woman identifies her as a political figure, young and ready for the fight. The increased entrance of women into the public sphere is political; by being in the public sphere and challenging previously held conceptions of what a woman should be, women become naturally political beings. Activists for women's rights capitalized on this by using the public to their advantage: already defying expectations by simply leaving the domestic sphere, they further challenged notions of respectability through marches, demonstrations, and (in the case of the WSPU), militancy. Images of suffragettes were circulated, on brooches and posters, providing a public face to the movement. While women were allowed to exist within the public

sphere – that is, to move about in the world outside of the home – for her to create a spectacle or draw any attention to herself was unladylike. Suffragettes, through demonstrations, marches, and militancy, claimed the public sphere for themselves through their increasing participation in it, although it should be noted that their self-inclusion into the public sphere was protested by many.

These public suffrage demonstrations frequently created spectacle within the streets of London. In *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord defines spectacle as “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (12). Debord critiques society’s reliance on images as an organizational concept. He sees society degrading from “*being* into *having*,” and from there from “*having* to appearing” reliant on images to facilitate this transition (16; emphasis in original). Debord writes, “The present stage, in which social life is completely taken over by the accumulated products of the economy, entails a generalized shift from *having* to appearing: all effective “having” must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate raison d’être from appearances” (16; emphasis in original). For Debord, this is wholly negative. The image dictates that something is worth having, and *having* is the most important thing. This then alienates from society those who cannot *have* a particular item, and restructures society on a fundamental level to become shallow and unthinking.

While I do not wish to engage in a detailed unpacking of Debord’s theory, I argue that the spectacle does allow for political movement. The images of suffragettes – both produced by them and about them – infiltrate society and make their presence known. Just as images and commodity are tightly linked, the image of a suffragette becomes, in a way, a commodity. Supporters could purchase pins or banners or make their own, using this visual rhetoric as a way to spread their ideas. Detractors were still giving the cause publicity by producing their own images related to the cause of women’s suffrage.

The WSPU was politically savvy. Frequent rallies and marches put their bodies into the public space and put their image into the public imagination. The suffragette platform – raised above the crowd, a space both individuating and communal – made the woman speaking into a symbol. Maia Joseph notes that, for suffragettes speaking from the platform, it involved

the highly visible transgression of deeply rooted social codes; moreover, public speaking could contribute to further feelings of individuation because it made a woman *leader* of a social cause. However, the female orator also remained in intrinsic relation to the crowds to whom she spoke, especially in a symbolic sense: as a representative member of the marginalized “masses [...] who were increasingly making their presence felt in the public sphere during the period, the female orator served as a symbol of growing mass empowerment” (70-1).

The suffragette platform allowed for individual women to become the face of a cause, and as each woman moved on and off the platform, they formed a group of women together. The image of the suffragette woman – the spectacle of the suffragette woman – was transmittable. As images in commodity culture produce a need to *have*, the frequent images of suffragettes pervading the public sphere pervaded the culture as well. If spectacle is a social relationship mediated by images, and if images of the WSPU and other suffragettes are pervasive, then they will naturally change the social relationships between people, normalizing the idea of women's suffrage and converting the populace to the cause, in numbers great enough to make it a reality.

Before joining the WSPU, Elizabeth Robins was a public figure. As discussed above, she had a loyal following in the theatre, and quickly gained a loyal following in the WSPU. Robins, as well as the WSPU in general, knew how to use spectacle to their advantage. Joannou notes that, while suffragette drama was often ignored by critics, suffragettes saw it to be of vital

importance to their movement. Suffragette drama caused little risk to actors (while suffragettes in the public sphere often faced threats or worse), and could raise awareness, lift spirits, and identify suffragettes (186). Robins's 1907 play *Votes for Women!*, the first full-length suffragette drama to be staged in England. Drama was popular with the suffragettes, but prior to this point, most suffragette drama was short. Much of it was never intended for the public stage, but rather for private readings in one's living room, if it was to be read aloud at all. Using many of the conventions of Ibsen's drama, Robins subverts them (and his unwillingness to publicly align with the suffragette cause).

Votes for Women! is a truly modern piece of drama, adopting the practices of Robins's contemporaries while foregrounding women's issues in a radical way. What begins to distinguish modern drama from that which came before, according to cultural theorist Raymond Williams, is the presence of five characteristics: an acceptance of and focus on contemporary events as dramatic material; on indigenous settings rather than far-away or fantasy; an emphasis on everyday speech; socially extensive characters, rather than wholly elevated ones; and a secularism, excluding divine, supernatural, or metaphysical intervention into the action of the play (84-5). Each of these characteristics are present in *Votes for Women!*: its subject was contemporary, the setting recognizable, the characters of varied social class, the language drawn directly from the streets, and characters' actions are presented as wholly their own, rather than as influenced by metaphysical or spiritual forces.

Acts One and Three are set in a large country house while Act Two is set outside, at a reproduction of a suffragette rally in Trafalgar Square. In the rally, Robins stages an incredibly realistic depiction of a suffragette rally, down to the language used by the demonstrators. Maia Joseph notes that in *The Convert* (Robins's later novel based on her play *Votes for Women!*) the

dialogue of the suffragettes is based “on [Robins’s] own word-for-word transcriptions of suffrage meetings and Trafalgar Square demonstrations, including voices of the crowd” (78). Joseph cites Jane Marcus in noting that *The Convert* is “a fine example of the documentary novel” (Marcus viii). It is likely that the suffragettes’ dialogue in *Votes for Women!* stems from Robins’s direct experience as well.

The easy way in which Robins’s transposition of suffragette marches transfer to engaging theatre is a demonstration of the theatricality present in suffragette marches to begin with. Voices emerge from the crowd (some described, some not) to shout questions Vida Levering, the protagonist of the play (and who may have been based on Emmaline Pankhurst). Vida’s responses are measured and thought out, and there is a gradual transition over the course of the act from opposition to stirrings of agreement. Here, we see one such response to an antagonist:

VOICE: Would you have women magistrates?

([Levering] is stumped by the suddenness of the demand.)

VOICES: Haw! Haw! Magistrates!

ANOTHER: Women! Let ‘em prove first they deserve –

A SHABBY ART STUDENT *(His hair longish, soft hat, and flowing tie)*: They study music by the thousands, where’s their Beethoven? Where’s their Plato?

Where’s the woman Shakespeare?

ANOTHER: Yes – what a’ they ever *done*?

(The speaker clenches her hands and is recovering her presence of mind, so that by the time the CHAIRMAN can make himself heard with ‘Now men, give this lady a fair hearing – don’t interrupt’ – she, with the slightest of gestures waves him a side with a low ‘It’s all right’)

MISS LEVERING (*Steadying and raising her voice*): These questions are quite proper! They are often asked elsewhere; and I would like to ask in return since when was human society held to exist for its handful of geniuses? How many Platos are there in this crowd?

VOICE (*Very loud and shrill*): Divil a wan!

(A roar of laughter)

MISS LEVERING: Not one. Yet that doesn't keep you men of the register. How many Shakespeares are there in England today? That is the question. Not one. Yet the State doesn't tumble to pieces. Railroads and ships are built – homes are kept going, and babies are born. The world goes on – (*Bending over the crowd*) – it goes on by *virtue of its common people*.

VOICES (*Subdued*): Hear, Hear! (Robins 134).

In this short exchange, Robins establishes several things. Firstly, the deindividuating of each speaker allows them to speak as representatives of a whole. Each anonymous speaker represents both themselves and a multitude of public anti-suffragist opinion. WSPU rallies were notably cross-class, with the female suffragettes as icons of oppression for people of many different classes. Robins, in particular, was strongly in favor of a varied crowd. The inclusion of the “shabby art student” may represent some of this sentiment – that speaker is clearly both a part of and separate from the other voices. Secondly, the ambiguous genders of the speakers reinforce their position as representational of larger societal opposition to the suffragette cause. With the exception of the first speaker, it may be likely that the voices in opposition are male, since they refer to women in the third person rather than the first, but it is not clear. Many women were opposed to the suffragette movement, and so may have differentiated themselves from the

women on the platform – although for a woman in opposition to the suffrage movement and women’s inclusion in the public sphere to then *participate* in the public sphere by raising her voice at a suffrage rally, even in opposition, would be surprising.

The first speaker’s gender seems more ambiguous than the others; the question about female magistrates may be genuine or may be sarcastic. Vida’s stumped reaction can be read both ways – either she is stumped at the demand because the answer seems obvious – of course she supports female magistrates, or she is stumped at the demand because of the audacity of the speaker. It may be the first; Vida later argues that “Men make boast that an English citizen is tried by his peers. What woman is tried by hers? [...] What man has the knowledge that makes him a fit judge of woman’s deeds [...]?” (Robins 135). Here, Vida effectively argues for women in the judiciary as a direct response to the patriarchal oppression that women face when tried before the law.

Finally, this excerpt establishes Vida’s rhetorical ability. Initially taken aback, the crowd takes advantage of her hesitation, and the Chairman moderating the rally attempts to regain control. But Vida regains control herself, without the help of a man, and so effectively wins the crowd’s agreement. The ironic reversal she uses – asking how many members of the crowd are Platos, allowing that moment of humor to penetrate, and then sharply pivoting to remind the crowd that everyday life runs perfectly smoothly without geniuses at every station – demonstrates a sophisticated knowledge of rhetoric and public speaking.

Beyond simply portraying a suffragette rally – an accomplishment in and of itself, a significant break from the traditional structure of Ibsenian and Shavian drawing room dramas – what Robins does here is display a *successful* suffragette rally. Unlike the traditional drawing room drama, which, as the name suggests, take place inside, Robins shifts outside, moving from

the private sphere to the public one as she shifts from a place identified with women to a place identified with men.

The outdoor setting is a forceful representation of the issues and ideas dealt with in the play, in a way not uncommon to modernist writers: Moscow, for example, in Chekhov's *Three Sisters* is the space outside of the house that can never be reached. Chekhov's cherry orchard, as well, represents, among other things, a freedom from the restrictions of the house. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* holds Nora inside until the final moments of the play. Here, however, Robins shifts outside, depicting the rally in its entirety, and showing Vida at its helm.

By portraying Vida regaining control of the crowd, and successfully subverting her heckler's objections, she introduces the image of the successful suffragette into the public lexicon. Vida's arguments are reasonable. "I don't mean to say it wouldn't be better if men and women did this work together – shoulder to shoulder. But the mass of men won't have it so. I only hope they'll realize in time the good they've renounced and the spirit they've aroused," Vida says to conclude her speech (136). While presenting her argument, she acknowledges that the best result is one in which women are accepted to work alongside men, but that those in power – men – "won't have it so." The solution to this, of course, is the expansion of the public sphere. Women must claim it from those in power, and once women are installed in the public sphere, it will stretch to accommodate them.

Throughout, Vida represents the New Woman. She enters the public space and takes control of it, leading a suffragette rally and changing an angry crowd to one in which, at the very least, the "Hear, Hear!" of the supporters drowns out her opposition. Just as Robins herself was a member of the WSPU and advocated for women's suffrage in her writing, just as Robins herself took the platform to deliver speeches about women's rights, so does her fictional heroine. By

showing an audience Vida Levering onstage, taking control of the situation and advocating for women's rights, Robins encourages these ideas to take hold in the world at large. Indeed, the staging of this drama in a theatre – its own public sphere – allows for its ideas to populate in the world at large. Much of suffragette drama up to this point was intended to be read, not performed, or to be performed in living rooms for circles of close friends – so the placement of *Votes for Women!* into the public sphere enables the Habermasian idea of intellectual and commodity exchange, as well as the Debordian spectacle. By forcing women's dialogue into the public sphere, sometimes forcefully, Elizabeth Robins and the WSPU made great strides towards their suffragist goals.

CHAPTER III: “I HAVE BEEN FORCIBLY FED!”: DJUNA BARNES’S SELF AS SPECTACLE

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States was in the swing of the Progressive Era, and new ideas of reform and social justice pervaded mass culture. As newspapers became cheap and readily accessible, one of the ways they drew in an audience was by publishing articles that appealed to this new wave of interest. Muckraking journalism became prevalent, as investigative journalists sought to expose social ills and corporate corruption.

Founded in June 1883, *McClure's Magazine* quickly became one of the more prominent muckraking magazines at the time. Publishing on a number of topics from politics to literature, it featured writing from novelists such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling – as well as the investigative journalism for which it is better known today. Readers who were interested in the next chapter in a gripping novel needed to flip past articles exposing the dirty underbelly of corporate behavior and political scandals. Ida Tarbell’s exposé of the Standard Oil Company, published in 19 gripping serial installments, revealed the brutal tactics which the company utilized to remove any entity in its path, eventually lead to the Supreme Court to break up the company into 36 separate parts – many of which continued on to be the major players in American oil industry today.

In addition to corporate muckraking, *McClure's Magazine* also published articles on social interest issues. Emmaline Pankhurst's article describing how she was jailed after a suffrage rally and her subsequent hunger strike and force-feeding was published in August of 1913, as the movement was going strong in England. Through this combination of literature, politics, and social interest articles, *McClure's Magazine* had a major impact on the tenor of the culture during the fin de siècle.

On the other side of the spectrum from magazines like *McClure's Magazine* were sensationalist newspapers, such as the Joseph Pulitzer-owned *New York World*. While Pulitzer had noble ideas of what a newspaper owed to society, he had bought the struggling *World* in 1883 and was determined to make it a success, despite its sensationalist, popular audience. Thus, the form of “social reform” present in the *World* often included sensational headlines rather than the serious, in-depth reporting favored by older publications and, as a result, was often criticized. Stunt journalism, a form of journalism where the journalist undergoes an experience in order to write about it, was prevalent at the time and found a strong home in the *World's* pages. One of these such pieces, titled “How it Feels to be Forcibly Fed,” was written by a young Djuna Barnes.

One of the few scholars to explore Barnes's journalism, Katherine Biers, finds that Barnes's writing style directly engages with contemporary feelings about sensationalism and the new accessibility of print media to a reading public (Ardis 237). By exploring Barnes's writings, particularly the articles she wrote about crime and boxing, two inherently violent subjects, Biers finds that Barnes uses tension and violence to explore and critique sensational media, media which Barnes herself participated in creating. With articles designed to appeal to the eye, including her own sketches, Barnes draws the reader in. Spectacle itself intimates violence, Biers argues: “The object, person, or even cityscape arrested in the public's view always suggests the possibility of a break or rupture in its precarious stillness” (Ardis 245). Capturing scenes in writing and sketches, as Barnes does, creates a spectacle of the live event as well as of the print version. Throughout her writing, Barnes is often fixated on the things that might break out of the mundane into the spectacular, and yet in her writing, they never do: her writing often blurs the line between reporting and personal story, her inner monologue frequently provoking an anxiety

towards abnormality which is resolved by the facts of the scene she is surrounded by.

Throughout her career, Barnes wrote a wildly diverse pantheon of articles, many of which center her as the writer within the experience of her subject.

Stunt journalism was originally the purview of men, however, publishers William Randolph Hearst and Pulitzer found that placing women in these roles intrigued the audience more: it presented women acting of their own accord, placing themselves in danger, when society at large considered women in need of being sheltered (Bradley 122). Women stunt journalists, however, would routinely put themselves into danger for the sake of the story. Patricia Bradley shares the story of former stunt reporter Elizabeth Jordan, who wrote of the “dark side” of stunt reporting: “It is a peculiarity of the work that its slaves are willing slaves, who would not throw off their shackles if they could. Even the failures, and there are many of them, feel the fascination of the life and cling to it with pathetic determination long after hope has departed” (125). The idea of the stunt journalist – brave, capable, strong – was an alluring image to female journalists when female journalists were a significant rarity in the workforce. Elizabeth Cochran’s famous expose on the Blackwell’s Island Insane Asylum (written under the pseudonym Nellie Bly) was one of the first examples, where she got herself committed to the asylum in order to write about and expose the dangerous and inhumane conditions within it.

Rheta Childe Dorr, a journalist at the *New York Evening Post* in the 1890s, wrote in her autobiography

It was a mark of ability to be asked to join the staff, a mark of special ability if you were a woman, because in those days very few women could get a job on a newspaper anywhere. Yet because of my sex I had to accept a salary hardly more than half that of any of my male colleagues. Moreover, I was given to understand

that I could never hope for a raise. Women, the managing editor explained to me, were accidents in industry. They were tolerated because they were temporarily needed, but some day the *status quo ante* (women's place in the home) would be restored and the jobs would go back to where they belonged, to the men." (qtd. in Bradley 126-7)

Female journalists faced significant discrimination in a hostile workforce, and frequently adopted what were considered masculine tendencies in order to fit in. This tension between masculine and feminine tendencies underscores the difficult situations women were expected to navigate – while they needed to assert themselves in the newsroom, their livelihood often depended on the melodramatic appeal of the woman in danger. At the very least (since not all pieces of stunt journalism placed women in active danger) they foregrounded their feminine qualities in their writing, drawing readers in with the spectacle of themselves as public woman.

Even female journalists were somewhat reserved about women in the field, cautioning them that the editorial room is a man's world, and women must adapt, rather than the other way around. A survey done by a male reporter of the period, Edward Bok, asked 50 newspaper editors (both male and female) the question: "Is the Newspaper Office the Place for a Girl?" The answers were mixed, but a female reporter answered that "Reserve and dignity form the armor of the successful newspaper woman;" a male reporter responded that he was removing female journalists because they "disorganized" the men (qtd. in Bradley 127). Navigating these identities – member of the newsroom, woman among men, damsel in distress – was as much a part of the job as the fact of writing.

Women's very existence in the field was considered an anomaly, as Dorr describes. Furthermore, there was little chance for the female journalist's advancement. Haryot Holt

Cahoon, a writer of the period, predicted – at most – a three year career for stunt journalists. She wrote disparagingly of the practice, referring to stunt journalism as “gutter journalism” (Bradley 125-6). For women who did perform stunt journalism, the pay was often poor, the assignments dangerous, and fame not guaranteed. While the work that stunt journalists produced made them seem to be enviable celebrities, the reality was less rosy. They frequently had short careers, as Cahoon predicts, and there was little opportunity for advancement in terms of the kind of work they were assigned or in terms of salary.

In November of 1889, Elizabeth Cochran began her most far-reaching assignment. Her goal was to travel – by any means necessary – around the world in fewer than 80 days, racing Jules Verne’s protagonist in *Around the World in 80 Days*. Cochran was working for the *New York World* and Joseph Pulitzer. When her trip was announced, it caught the ear of John Brisben Walker, the editor of *Cosmopolitan*. Walker gave book editor Elizabeth Bisland a single day to prepare for her competing trip around the world in the opposite direction. Bisland might have won, but a missed connection cost her four days. Even so, it was a significant feat. However, Bisland received almost no attention upon returning to the United States, while Pulitzer made Cochran into a celebrity (Bradley 124). Bisland’s experience demonstrates the little agency which stunt journalists had over their own assignments. To Walker, she was largely a tool, a way for him to make *Cosmopolitan* more popular. When she proved to be less alluring than Cochran, her sensational story published as a book of travel memoir, rather than the front page newspaper story she expected, she became largely forgotten.

Even for journalists who did not practice stunt journalism, their advancement was strongly limited. Dorr, who had been hired to provide a women’s perspective to the *New York Evening Post* (a conservative magazine with a largely male readership), did so by aligning

herself with political, suffragist aims. However, while her writing advocated for things like an 8-hour day, a minimum wage, and equal pay for women, she found herself unable to attain these things for herself. Female journalists were under pressure to write articles which agreed with the ideology of their publishers, and often this led to anti-feminist articles. Bradley shares the story of Winifred Black Bonfils, a journalist, who in 1909 interviewed Upton Sinclair. In an interview allegedly about promoting Sinclair's theatre, Bonfils's headline read: "Upton Sinclair Sorry He Wed. Says Ceremony is a Farce." While Sinclair was "appalled" to read this, however, Bradley contends that Bonfils would have lost her job should she have written openly about Sinclair's socialism (122). The liberation attained by female journalists through their work went only so far as they were willing to uphold the status quo which oppressed them. Bonfils's interview with Sinclair focused on his theatre, but she was forced by her editor to redirect the article toward a focus considered more suitable for a woman to be writing about. Bonfils's case is only one example of a pervasive culture; women were never allowed to write articles of serious "news," but only given articles about "women's interests." Female journalists such as Djuna Barnes fought for the right to do stunts, as they were more interesting than articles on fashion or socialite parties.

The sensationalist stories that covered the pages of newspapers of the time created a genre of writing where the style of the writing was as important as the content. While both men and women wrote in this style, women who did so were given the derogatory moniker "sob sisters," a term with no male counterpart. This distinguished female writers as specifically *female* – able to appeal only to a female audience, and able to write only in a way which incorporated their emotions into the story. Furthermore, as Jean-Marie Lutes notes, the phrase is intentionally hypocritical, implying that newswomen "manufactured tears for profit" (505). The implication

here, of course, is that women make their own trouble: that any negative experience a woman undergoes is her own fault, and her writing about it is simply for her own capitalist gain. (While the term “sob sister” is not especially common today, the legacy certainly remains.)

While some critics have found this article to be subversive, complicating the idea of the woman as spectacle, it ultimately cannot help but to reinforce the anti-suffragette sentiment and patriarchal structures Pankhurst was using her hunger strike to try and overthrow.

As women journalists of the period go, Djuna Barnes was eminently successful. She worked for nearly every publication in New York, publishing interviews, pieces of fiction, plays, poems, drawings, crime reports, sports journalism, and “stunt stories.” She routinely wrote multiple articles per day, earning about fifteen dollars per article, at a time when that was a very good fee. By 1917, she was making five thousand dollars a year (Levine 28). In September of 1921, having recently returned from assignments in Europe, *McCall's* commissioned her to write twelve articles on “swank New York cuisines” for which she earned seven thousand dollars. Immediately after this, *McCall's* sent her back to Europe to write twelve articles at a thousand dollars a piece on European royals’ favorite recipes. Unfortunately, only the King of Italy granted her an interview (Herring 98).

Barnes earned her success and name recognition through a combination of factors. Her varied skill set enabled her to be flexible and create articles and drawings in many different styles. Her tenacity and work ethic saw her producing large quantities of work. As Cheryl Plumb correctly notes, her writing clearly partakes in the decadent and symbolist traditions, dripping with irony, satire, and a world-weary bohemian attitude (qtd. in Herring 77) Barnes referred to her articles as “newspaper fictions,” and the line between straight interview and fictionalized retelling is often hard to discern. She frequently imagines the thoughts in her interviewees’

minds and notes small details of the experience, the tone of her writing echoing the caricature style of her illustrations. When she met James Joyce, he told her “the extraordinary event was the subject of journalism, while the commonplace was for literature.” Barnes described this in advice in a letter to Emily Coleman, writing that Joyce advised to “Never write about an unusual subject, make the common unusual” (Herring 77). Nothing in Barnes’s writing is common, and she often gravitates towards unusual subjects to begin with. Throughout her writing, however, even ordinary experience is given weight, even the ordinary is magnified to extraordinary size.

Despite her success, Barnes’s career was somewhat constrained by the field of journalism itself. Although she wrote on an extremely wide variety of topics, she was still required to write articles that supported the political position of the newspapers she worked for and to violate her own ethical standards. Early on in her career, she was fired from working on Hearst’s publication for refusing to write a story about a young girl who had been raped by ten men. While she lied about being a friend in order to gain access to the girls’ hospital room, the invasion of privacy bothered her so much she would not complete the article (Herring 76). Barnes’s refusal to write a sensationalist story of a rape survivor and her subsequent firing demonstrates the ways in which she opposed using other women for sensationalist profit.

Djuna Barnes is famous today largely for her 1936 novel *Nightwood*, which has been rediscovered lately in modernist studies, part of the effort to recontextualize modernist history as not wholly male. Written somewhat in a Joycean style, part of *Nightwood*’s appeal is its focus on surface-level, performative text – text where the style and symbol is as important (if not more so) than the actual details of what happens. Barnes’s last, obliquely autobiographical play *The Antiphon* has also seen a recent revival of interest, as critics mine it for biographical details. *The Antiphon*, however, is autobiographical in the same way that *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young*

Man is understood to be autobiographical – a fictionalized retelling of true events. While there are many parallels between Barnes’s life and the events of *The Antiphon*, reading it as truth diminishes our understanding of Barnes’s command of fiction. Much of the criticism of Barnes so far has been biographical in nature –Phillip Herring’s famous biography of Barnes leans heavily on *The Antiphon* – but reading Barnes as an autobiographer sells her short.

Barnes was a prolific writer, writing in a wide variety of genres over her lifetime. Her career began in about 1913, when she was 21, and walked into the offices of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. As Barnes tells it, she told them “she could draw and write and they would be foolish not to hire her” (Herring 75). This story may or not be apocryphal – accounts vary – but it demonstrates the tenacity she had, even as a young writer. Whether the story is true or not, it was certainly believable at the time, speaking to (at least the public perception) of Barnes's character.

As a woman journalist at the time, especially at the start of her career, she often did not have much say in her assignments, and often wrote what she called “stunt stories.” Stunt journalism is, at its heart, a performative act, one in which the body is placed into a situation for the entertainment of others. While Barnes may have refused to exploit another woman, she frequently put herself at the center of her articles, repeatedly placing herself into danger. In “The Girl and the Gorilla,” she enters the cage of Dinah, the first gorilla to be brought to New York. Barnes notes that Dinah derives from “Dynamite,” the name given to the gorilla “on account of her violent temper” (“The Girl and the Gorilla”). Barnes enters the cage with Dinah’s keeper and a professor; the keeper expresses trepidation as no woman had ever been within “caressing or battling distance” of Dinah. In another article, “My Adventures Being Rescued” Barnes jumps out of a window – multiple times – to demonstrate firefighters’ rescue techniques.

In “My Adventures Being Rescued,” the performative nature of both stunt journalism and Barnes’s writing is foregrounded. Describing what she sees before she jumps – “The blue shirts, blue trousers, belts, and caps, the formidable yet kindly faces” – as “my stage settings,” Barnes explicitly telegraphs the performance to her reader (185-86). She is a reporter, not a firefighter, and a reporter who is playing the role of damsel in distress in front of a large audience: the firefighter recruits and citizens below, the car which slows down to look, the “free-amusement-loving public” (188). But the performance also strips Barnes of some inherent humanity. Her first rescue, where she swings down a hundred feet by rope, is the rescue given the most detail and the one in which the difficult tensions between journalist and actor and actor and audience are played out. Barnes writes:

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

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

I was a “movie,” flashing transient pictures upon a receptive sky.

As I dangled and sprawled against the horizon, I realized that it was no family inheritance of courage nor yet any individual bravery of the soul that kept me from becoming horribly sick. What prevented it was the perhaps ridiculous

sentence that I kept repeating to myself: “There is one act that must be committed beautifully—suicide!”

Needless to state, I reached the ground quite safely. (186-7)

As Barnes swings down the rope, she gets clear images of those below her. The writing mimics the feelings she describes, of a quick physical fall but an extended emotional experience. She has the time to picture in detail those watching, time to realize her own bravery, time to repeat a mantra to herself. Barnes describes herself as “[dangling] and [sprawling]” throughout the sky. Her actions are somewhat deliberate, if awkward. Her writing performs this feeling – an extended meditation on the fall, detailed descriptions of those watching, a flash inside as she examines her own bravery. She reaches the ground in a single, short sentence – terse and matter-of-fact, devoid of the introspection that governed her previous paragraphs.

Barnes reaches the ground in the same manner that those watching her see her. As she slides down the rope, she realizes she “was a ‘movie,’ flashing pictures upon a receptive sky.” She is as she is seen to those below. Unlike the previous reference she made to the theatricality of this experience – that of “stage settings,” her reference here is to “a ‘movie.’” To the onlookers, she is not a person, only flashing images. While Barnes can capture detailed descriptions of the onlookers, they cannot do the same for her. Their comparative safety as they stand on the ground and look up prevents them from experiencing the same revelations that Barnes does. Furthermore, Barnes admits to the readers that, while her stunts are dangerous and affecting to her, she is little more than entertainment to her readers. The firefighters’ suggestion that she perform this stunt “every morning [...] for the benefit of the free-amusement-loving public” makes clear that, although this article purports to inform readers of the dangers of fires and the various types of rescues, it does so in only a marginal way, choosing instead to

foreground sensationalism and entertainment. She has made a spectacle of herself, both in the action and in the writing of it. Her emotional inner world provides the tension of the moment, the sense that things are about to break, yet this is not borne out by the outside actions. She reaches the ground safely.

Barnes repeatedly makes this choice in her writing, especially the articles written for the *New York World*, articles which straddle the boundary between real news and sensationalism. Often, while the *World* did publish investigative journalism, it was couched in sensationalist terms. In September of 1913, Djuna Barnes published a piece in the *World* titled “How it Feels to be Forcibly Fed.” This article likely responds to a piece published by Emmaline Pankhurst in *McClure’s Magazine* only a month prior.

Pankhurst’s article “Forcibly Fed: The Story of My Four Weeks in Holloway Gaol” details her experience being arrested at a suffragette rally and her hunger strike and subsequent force-feedings. While Pankhurst’s article shares some of the hallmarks of sensationalist journalism – vivid, graphic descriptions, a call to emotional response – its purpose is far different. She does not provide these details for the reader’s entertainment, not to amuse or titillate them, not to create a sort of voyeuristic horror for the reader to be appropriately appalled by. Pankhurst’s goal is to incite in her readers a moral horror, to awake an instinct for social reform. Through a combination of narrative, personal connections, and descriptions of the trauma she endured, Pankhurst educates her readers as to what is *really* happening and appeals to a reformist agenda.

It is not an easy piece to read. It details Pankhurst’s experience going on hunger strike, beginning with the suffragist rally at which she throws a rock through a window. Arrested, as she expected to be, she is jailed and refuses to eat. On the third day of her hunger strike, she is force-

fed. Six women wardens enter her cell and hold her down, while the male doctors force a rubber tube down her throat. She resists, but is overcome. She does not spare her reader the details of either her physical or emotional trauma, and it is often the descriptions of the emotional havoc she feels that are most poignant. Pankhurst writes that “infinitely worse than any pain was the sense of degradation, the sense that the very fight that one made against the repeated outrage was shattering one’s nerves and breaking down one’s self-control” (Pankhurst 90). What stands out among the repeated descriptions of the physical pain Pankhurst endures are her frequent descriptions of emotional trauma.

Key to Pankhurst’s depiction of her force-feeding is control – or rather, her lack of it. Each time she resists, she is overpowered. She describes in great detail the physical pain inflicted by the doctors as the force-feeding is underway; she describes the mental and emotional trauma left afterwards, and she describes the physical toil that the repeated experience ultimately takes upon her. She writes, “[m]y mouth got more and more hurt; my gums, where they prised them open, were always bleeding, and other parts of my mouth got pinched and bruised” (90). Three weeks pass; her eyes begin to pain her; she notices officers staring when they enter her cell. When she manages to see her reflection, she finds her face “quite white, with lips cracked and dark, and [her] eyes horrible, like cups of blood” (93). She discovers the physical toll that the experience has taken upon her body at the same time the reader does, forging an empathetic connection through this discovery.

In September of 1913, only a month after Pankhurst’s article was published, Djuna Barnes published her own story, titled “How it Feels to be Forcibly Fed.” It is likely that both Barnes and her readers would have been familiar with *McClure’s Magazine* and Pankhurst’s

recent essay. Barnes's sensational headline would have drawn them in, and throughout Barnes's piece, she often makes comparisons between her experience and that of "[her] English sisters".

Barnes's "English sisters" were the more radical of the bunch. The WSPU was virulently militant, and Pankhurst was a master of using spectacle to attract media attention and publicity to the cause. When American Alice Paul traveled to Britain in 1907, she saw the militant tactics used by the WSPU and brought them back to the States upon her return in 1910. From that point on, the American and British suffrage movements progressed in parallel, each using the active and interested press to foreground their concerns and relying on cross-Atlantic communication.

At the start of Barnes's article, she admits that, due to the voluntary nature of her experience, she is only an actor, and "other women have suffered it in acute reality" (Barnes 5). Because she is volunteering for a force-feeding rather than being subjected to many against her will, Barnes qualifies her experience as less than Pankhurst's, preemptively placating both radical suffragette readers as well as staid institutionalists who might object to a direct comparison. However, despite making these distinctions, the line between "acute reality" and Barnes's own "playacting" is a difficult one to draw. She writes, partway through the experience, "If I, playacting, felt my being burning with revolt at this brutal usurpation of my own functions, how they who actually suffered the ordeal in its acutest horror must have flamed at the violation of the sanctuaries of their spirits" (*New York* 178). Thanks to Pankhurst's vivid descriptions, there is no doubt how Pankhurst felt about her own experience. Barnes however, tactfully, places herself in context, reminds herself that this is not real – not *really* – and her own trauma pales in comparison to that suffered by Pankhurst and other suffragettes.

And yet the trauma *is* real for Barnes. Despite her recognition that her experience is voluntary, she experiences the same bodily violation that Pankhurst does. Despite the doctor's

kindness towards her, she still feels agony when the milk runs down her throat. The distance that she habitually maintains in her journalism – even in her other “stunt stories,” where she is her own subject – is present in the initial paragraphs of “How it Feels to be Forcibly Fed,” but collapses when the red rubber tube is inserted through her nostrils. She writes:

He sprayed both nostrils with a mixture of cocaine and disinfectant. As it reached my throat, it burned and burned.

There is no progress on this pilgrimage. Now I abandoned myself. I was in the valley, and it seemed years that I lay there watching the pitcher as it rose in the hand of the doctor and hung, a devilish inhuman menace. In it was the liquid food I was to have. It was milk, but I could not tell what it was, for all things are alike when they reach the stomach by a rubber tube.

He had inserted the red tubing, with the funnel at the end, through my nose into the passages of the throat. It is utterly impossible to describe the anguish of it. (5)

Her writing here alternates between short, terse descriptions of the facts of the situation, and longer, metaphorical wanderings as she struggles to describe what is happening to her. Where Pankhurst held on to every violent detail, Barnes seems to slip away, admitting an inability to transcribe the experience in a way that does it justice. In effect, Barnes renders the emotional trauma of the experience less violently than Pankhurst does, which in turn distances the reader from as strong of an empathetic connection. It fits neatly into the kind of stunt journalism the *New York World* published – sensational, current, and political – without asking action of the reader in the way that Pankhurst’s article for *McClure’s* does.

Whatever the trauma inflicted on Barnes, her recording of the experience distills it into a spectacle, allowing the reader to gape at her experience, perhaps feel some form of shock,

disgust, disappointment, and then turn away. It is a sanitized telling of the experience, one that bundles women's pain into a neat package for mass readership, and which allows the reader to feel like they've done their part for having read the article, without inciting further action. At the same time, in similar fashion to the way in which much of Barnes's writing functions, it interrogates the relationship between spectator and spectacle, between spectacle and consumption, between an individual writer and the mass reading public.

While the effect of Pankhurst's article is to present the suffragette as spectacle for the purpose of political movement, the effect of Barnes's is much more complicated. The trauma she suffers is real, but its purpose is entertainment. Any activism Barnes herself might have wanted to incite in the reader is limited by the forum in which she presents her work. Barbara Green calls this the "spectacular confession," and finds that Barnes's article "[attempts] to locate a spectacular feminism by bringing together the spectacle of woman and the problem of the woman who looks" (77). I do not wish to construct Barnes's authorial intent, nor do I find, as Green does, that Barnes's article critiques a collective experience. Rather, I find that Barnes's article enacts the tension between the suffragette and the patriarchal hegemony: an independent woman's voice stifled by the forum in which she is allowed to speak. Ultimately, she was a victim of the very structures which gave her independence. For her to publish in the *New York World*, her writing had to fit within the sensationalist, antiradical confines of the paper's stance, fundamentally cutting her off from the kind of direct political address that *McClure's* offered.

This is most obvious in another piece about the suffrage movement Barnes wrote, also in September of 1913, though this was for *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*: a less sensational publication, to be sure, though certainly not one as radical as *McClure's Magazine*. In "70 Trained Suffragettes Turned Loose on City," Barnes attends a class in suffragism in which women are

taught in the ways of the suffragettes by a suffragist promising “a presidency within two weeks”. Beginning from a skeptic's point of view, she positions herself firmly amongst the anti-suffrage (or at least, the not-pro-suffrage) camp, attempting to do her reporting by phone for fear “that the presidential chair might be thrust upon one who was at that moment unprepared.” When this proves unsuccessful, Barnes is forced to actually attend the suffrage class, remarking “It had to be done at close range!”

By beginning her article with an impossible goal – a presidency in two weeks nearly a decade before suffrage was ratified – Barnes alerts her readers that she is not threatening. She is like them; she is not a suffragette; rather, she maintains a slightly amused, outsider's view of them. She does not *want* to attend the meeting of the suffragettes but endures it for the sake of her reporting and her readers. From this beginning comes a remarkable trick of rhetoric.

“How shall we get the crowd?” asks a “timid student.” Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, the instructor, responds with a series of commands. Never wear a dress that shows your shoes. Never raise your fist in a militant fashion. Never wear polka-dots, nor a hat nor gloves.

Another nervous student interrupts, asking what to say to the crowd, since “Everything for suffrage has been said.” Barnes describes the way Mrs. Catt invites her to the platform and instructs her to say, aloud, her reasoning for suffrage.

We want the vote—because we no longer want to be the clinging vine. You know the tighter the vine clings the deader is the oak. You see the best thing to do is to attend to your garden—If I should die before I wake—I couldn't possibly be more frightened—”oh,” a swift hand to the breast and a would-be future ruler dodged to her seat.

By characterizing the woman as an anxious, “unfortunate victim,” and then printing her response in full, Barnes achieves a dual purpose. Firstly, she cements her position as an outsider gawking at the spectacle of the suffragettes. This enables her to print the information that would-be suffragettes need to know: how to appear respectable on the suffrage platform, and a justification for why suffrage is vital. While she must represent the conservative paper's interests – and she does so on the surface level – at a subterranean level she alerts her readers to the existence of a suffrage school and to the information covered within it. She is only able to do so, however, by repeatedly reminding her readers that she is *not* one of them.

Djuna Barnes ends her article on force-feeding here:

It was over. I stood up, swaying in the returning light; I had shared the greatest experience of the bravest of my sex. The torture and outrage of it burned in my mind; a dull, shapeless, wordless anger arose to my lips, but I only smiled. The doctor had removed the towel about his face. The little, red mustache upon his upper lip was drawn out in a line of pleasant understanding. He had forgotten all but the play. The four men, having finished their minor roles in one minor tragedy, were already filing out at the door.

“Isn’t there any other way of tying a person up?” I asked. That thing looks like—”

“Yes, I know,” he said, gently. (*New York* 179)

She moves back, again, reinstates the distance that she tries to maintain. From the outside, her persona is in place, and she smiles. The doctor pleasantly understands her. He has forgotten. Or, more likely, he was never aware of the depth to which the experience disturbed her. To him, as it was to Barnes at the beginning, it was an article for a newspaper, that was all. For Barnes,

though, we see the immediate impact of the helplessness she felt. The “dull, wordless anger” seethes inside her. Her final question – “Isn’t there any other way of tying a person up? [...] That thing looks like—” wonders at the possibility of force-feeding more humanely (*New York* 179). The doctor agrees to her unfinished statement, but offers no redress, no promise of change.

Pankhurst’s article ends in a much different place:

Months must pass before the effects of these experiences can pass away. In some cases the effects last for life.

How long will it go on? How many more women will be broken and destroyed?
(93).

Pankhurst calls for action, an immediate change. The stakes are high. Barnes, then, numbering herself among “the bravest of [her] sex,” consequently numbers herself as well among the women Pankhurst fears “will be broken and destroyed.” Barnes cannot directly advocate for suffrage in the outlets she writes for. But by putting her trauma on display, in a mass-media outlet drawing a more generalized crowd than *McClure’s*, she was able to do so in a subtler way, although it was not without cost.

M. Eastwood argues in “The New Woman in Fiction and Fact” that “[...] Since she knows the worst her soaring ambition will be content with nothing less than the reformation of the entire male sex” (92). Perhaps Barnes’s article helped readers to “know the worst.”

CHAPTER IV: “THE COLORS WILL FADE”: THE FIRST AMERICAN DADA’S BODY- FOCUSED ART

The Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, or the Baroness Elsa (as she was more commonly known), was a New York Dada artist and poet. Often called the “first American Dada,” her engagement with the Dadaist adoration of play and the non-sequitur led her to surround herself with artists such as Marcel Duchamp (to whom she would tell at parties, “Marcel, Marcel, I love you like hell”) and William Carlos Williams, to whom she offered the gift of syphilis so that he could “free his mind for art” (Herring 114-5). There is no record of whether Williams accepted such a generous offer, although she did once punch him in the neck when he refused her advances. In romance, as in the rest of her life, the Baroness Elsa was bold and unforgiving, not so much ignoring gender norms as forgetting they ever existed. At a period when women wearing pants or makeup in public was cause for scorn and derision, the Baroness Elsa walked through the streets nearly naked, her face painted and her hair dyed. While she created art in many mediums, her body was her most intimate and most affecting canvas. What she termed “art to wear” or “corporeal art” was an early form of performance art, in which she collapsed boundaries and forged new ground. (Lappin 308). Specifically, she enacted tensions between environmentalism and industrialization through her body-centric ecopoetics, which allowed her to create a feminist understanding of the world and of Dada.

The Baroness Elsa was born in Germany, on the Baltic Sea, in 1874, and named Else Hildegard Ploetz. Her father was abusive, though to use that word reduces even the Baroness Elsa’s conception of him; in her autobiography, she writes that he was “violent-tempered, intemperate, generous, bighearted, meanly cruel, revengeful—traditionally honest in business—inclined to be so in family but breaking down herein through his choice of my mother [...]” (41).

She refuses to reduce him to the abuse he wreaked upon her, however, his abuse was severe. Elsa's mother died of cancer when she was 16, and she blamed her father for her mother's illness. He remarried two years later. Although the Baroness Elsa did not care for her stepmother, she recalls an incident where, having been caught smoking in her bedroom, she was summoned down to "a family council of two" in the kitchen. Her father choked her, and it was the interference of her stepmother that saved her father "from becoming my murderer—since otherwise, with his deathclutch choking my throat, there would have been no help" (42-3). A week after this incident she ran away to Berlin.

Her first experience as artist's model came when she answered an ad calling for "girls with good figures." She describes the experience of being told to strip, then putting on tights, as a miraculous moment. She was called away to model for sculpture (which required girls with the best figures) and although she "had to be upholstered considerably with card board breasts and cotton hips" she had great pride and great fun (44-5). In this period, she traveled, contracted syphilis, lived on the streets, met artists and lovers, studied art, had affairs, and got married. Unhappy with her husband, she eloped to Italy with his friend; after a stint in prison in Bonn he faked his suicide, brought them both to Kentucky, and abandoned Elsa there in 1909. She made her way to New York, finding a home in Greenwich Village amongst the degenerates, bohemians, and artists (Herring 113).

Her life was marked by an extreme commitment to her work. There was little to no separation between the Baroness Elsa's self and her art. She was published frequently in *The Little Review*, where she likely met Djuna Barnes. Barnes and the Baroness Elsa would go on to be close friends, lovers, and artistic collaborators. At the time, the Baroness Elsa was recognized as one of the foremost artists, art critics, and creative types. Her total commitment to her art

signified a value system unlike many others. Her daily dress was a significant part of her art, perhaps the most famous – stories of her varying pieces of corporeal art abound. Her art was totally serious, with no irony present in it. Steven Watson contends that “Unlike other artists associated with New York Dada, the Baroness did not keep herself at one remove from her art, and nothing she did was mediated by irony” (261). Because of this, her art consumed her. Much of her life was spent in extreme poverty, living on nothing but charity and the occasional modeling job. She frequently turned to Djuna Barnes for whatever little charity the younger woman could offer her – money, socks, underwear – anything at all (Herring 116). The Baroness Elsa died in Paris in 1926, at the age of fifty-two, a possible suicide by gas fumes from the oven. She had left an indelible mark on the New York Dada scene – a movement that could not have existed without her – and yet she is largely unremembered today. Today, Dada is credited to a pantheon of male artists – Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray. While it would be inappropriate to discount these artists' major contributions to the movement, it is equally inappropriate to forget women artists who were fundamental as well.

At the start of her career, Djuna Barnes was a newspaper journalist living and working in New York City. Barnes wrote for nearly every publication in New York during her tenure as a journalist, writing for both high-brow and low-brow publications. In November of 1916, she wrote a set of three articles about Greenwich Village for the *New York Daily World Sunday Magazine*; a fourth preceded it in *Pearson's Magazine* the previous month. In these articles, Barnes characterizes Greenwich Village through the people who lived there, the art they created, and the particular beauty that comes from a community populated by degenerates, bohemians, artists. Her first article, “Greenwich Village As It Is,” characterizes Greenwich Village by

demarcating its borders. Quoting (or imagining the thoughts of) onlookers, Barnes describes them

Murmuring in pitying tones, “It is not permanent, the colors will fade. It is not based on good judgment. It is not of that sturdy and healthy material from which, thank providence, we of the real Manhattan have been fashioned.” There are a few who sigh, “It is beautiful in places!” while others add, “That is only an accident” (224).

Barnes lived in Greenwich at the time, as did the Baroness Elsa. She describes Greenwich Village initially through the eyes of those onlookers, who are not part of it, and then moves to a passionate defense of her community. Through Barnes’s eyes, it is a community of immigrants – a place where “no Americans are to be discovered anywhere. New York is the meeting place of the peoples, the only city where you can hardly find a typical American” (226). The heavily immigrant community Barnes describes, and the lack of “true” Americans characterizes Greenwich Village as the kind of community well-heeled people of “the real Manhattan” ought best to avoid. Barnes is careful, however, to warn against the very work she is doing in describing the Village. “To have to tell the truth about a place immediately puts that place on its defense,” she writes. “Localities and atmospheres should be let alone” (226). The very act of characterizing Greenwich Village draws artificial borders; there is no truth about a location except the experience itself.

Barnes continues her series describing Greenwich Village, however, and in her article “How the Villagers Amuse Themselves,” she draws a (slightly acerbic) characterization of the Villager as someone who lives a “hard life” and needs to “live up to [...] their sullied reputations.” Amusing oneself is “sordid and hard, but it must be done,” achievable via “beastly

early, taxing breakfasts in bed,” among other things. This Villager may be hypothetical; a constructed Idea of a person, the kind of person they “of the real Manhattan” would expect to find in Greenwich Village and would summarily look down upon, as Barnes enacts her readers’ expectations. Many of the characters described in “How the Villagers Amuse Themselves,” however, are real people – some identifiable, some not – and one of those people is the Baroness Elsa.

Barnes phrases it as a possibility, the specter of action in the Village. One may encounter many things, many people. One may be anywhere. One may even

[see] the Baroness leap lightly from one of those new white taxis with seventy black and purple anklets clanking about her secular feet, a foreign postage stamp—cancelled—perched upon her cheek; a wing of purple and gold caught roguishly up with strands from a cable once used to moor importations from far Cathay; red trousers—and catch the subtle, dusty perfume blown back from her—an ancient human notebook on which has been written all the follies of a past generation.

Barnes spends much longer on her description of the Baroness Elsa than on anyone else. She is described in visual, olfactory, and emotional or spiritual terms. Visually, the Baroness Elsa clearly belongs with the bohemians; Barnes captures an instance of her “corporeal art,” which in turn informs the descriptions of her that reside in a more emotional location. Barnes sees her as exotic, recalling ancient and faraway cultures, surrounded in a sort of Orientalist exoticism that still centers itself in Europe.

The purple and gold she wears suggests a connection to European royalty, as does her self-granted title, yet the red pants might conjure up exoticized images of China, especially in light of Barnes's reference to “Cathay,” which was an antiquated name for China even in the

nineteenth century. Her “subtle, dusty perfume” again seems to imply a general sense of unspecified foreignness.

It is this unspecified foreignness that seems to surround the Baroness here. Even her (self-granted) title suggests history, lineage, and place, yet it is only a suggestion. She is not a Baroness, unless calling yourself a Baroness makes you one.. It is in the new, Modern New York City that she can be a Baroness. She exists in contrast to the urban environment, grasping for references to times past and places elsewhere. Yet she does not belong to these places. The cancelled postage stamp on her cheek indicates a modern severance from those cultures. The cancelled postage stamp cannot be used; indeed, it is only identified as “foreign,” without a specific locality. The actuality of those places cannot be reached; perhaps they never could have been. Despite this, however, Barnes and the Baroness Elsa are still able to transport the reader to some exotic, Orientalist location – an indeterminate, hazy past, constructed out of the idea of the romantic East, some key words, and her “subtle, dusty perfume.”

Furthermore, Barnes’s description of the Baroness Elsa captures something greater – a tension between the ancient exoticism she evokes and the modern world she engages with. The first image of the Baroness Elsa shows her “[leaping] lightly from one of those new white taxis.” Not only does she engage with modern culture – the newest of modern culture – but she is familiar and comfortable within it. She performs this contradiction, and the ultimate effect is something that captures, perhaps “all the follies of a past generation.” Within the juxtaposition of mechanization and ancient history is born something new. The Baroness Elsa is something new – ahead of her time even as a Dadaist, challenging even their norms and mixing even their metaphors.

Dada was an early 20th century art movement existing from about 1916-1923, though its seeds were planted several years earlier when Marcel Duchamp coined the term “anti-art” to describe his readymades – pieces of found art. At its heart, it was playful nihilism, reveling in the meaninglessness of life in a wartime society. Dada artists had political ties to many movements, but there was large overlap between anti-war movements, anti-capitalist movements and the radical left. Beginning in 1916 at Zurich’s Cabaret Voltaire, it quickly spread across Europe and overseas to New York. Artists such as Tristan Tzara, Man Ray, and Marcel Duchamp were at the center of the Dada movement. Dada was strongly regional; while the movement existed in many different places, each location had specific characteristics which distinguished it from the Dada of anywhere else. Dada, as Amelia Jones notes, exists because of the war: Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia both came to New York to avoid the war; Man Ray, as an American, likely never imagined needing to enlist, and conscription was not enacted until May of 1917 in the States. There is no record of whether Man Ray was drafted or, if so, how he managed to avoid it (164). The artists in New York at the time largely worked against the war, embracing meaninglessness and randomness, undercut with a sense of nihilism and anger. But there is someone that Jones leaves out, and that is the Baroness Elsa. Often referred to as “the first American Dada,” (despite her German heritage) she was at the forefront of the movement, creating it and shaping it.

Dada, for the Dadaists, was more than a movement. Tristan Tzara, one of the founders of the movement, wrote that “Dada is a state of mind. You can be happy, sad, melancholy, or Dada” (qtd. in Sommer 43). Moreover in his Dada manifesto, Tzara proclaims “DADA DOES NOT MEAN ANYTHING.” One of its fundamental rules – its only rules – was the celebration of meaninglessness. It was a new form of art, a form of art where the experience was all that mattered. Its meaninglessness was shocking. And, as many of the movements sweeping through

the art communities at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was a largely male-dominated movement. Art and creation were largely conflated with masculinity. And so, despite her significant influence on the movement, and the recognition by many artists during the period that she was a verifiable artistic genius, the Baroness Elsa is largely forgotten by history. In part, this may be due to her focus on performance and performance art, rather than on more tangible items – Hugo Ball, founder of the Cabaret Voltaire, is also overshadowed by other artists, likely due to his focus on performance – but the Baroness Elsa was also a prolific sculptor and poet, and many descriptions of her “art to wear” exist.

Jones posits the argument that the Baroness Elsa was such an influence on the New York Dada scene because of her unique ability to point out and disrupt structures of masculinity at that period. Jones links an analysis of Duchamp’s *The Fountain* to an analysis of World War I, analogizing the drain at the center of *The Fountain* to the War’s “draining” effect on nationalism and identity (167). *The Fountain*, one of Duchamp’s most famous pieces, has recently found its author critiqued; Irene Gammel argues that it was in fact a creation of the Baroness Elsa’s. Her argument is compelling; she points to other scatological artwork by the Baroness, such as a piece titled *The God* which was produced at precisely the same time; contemporary attribution of the piece to Philadelphia (where the Baroness was living in that period), and Duchamp’s admission in a letter to his sister that the piece was initially submitted *to* him under a pseudonym. The object of the urinal, a distinctly masculine object, is transformed through its presentation into a “womb-like opening” (Jones 167-8). The question of authorship – and the compelling likelihood of its creation at the hands of the Baroness Elsa – refigures the masculine anxieties felt during this period. If we believe that the Baroness Elsa did, in fact, create *The Fountain* and submit it under the name R. Mutt to Duchamp, then she has beat the male Dadaists at their own game. The

Baroness – a subversive woman – can do Dada better than the men, refiguring quotidian masculinity into something slyly feminine.

Largely, the Baroness Elsa’s art aesthetic used the same principles as those of the male Dada artists she spent time with, but with those principles she creates an aesthetic which challenges, repudiates, and reinvents the masculine, machinist aesthetic which dominated much of New York Dada. Instead, her art holds at its center the body – abject, erotic, individual, and natural. Rather than see humanity as separated from nature, she sees humanity as part of it. Her art enacts an aesthetic that functions in opposition to many of the value systems held by other Dada artists. Irene Gammel and John Wrighton examine the ways in which her art constitutes an “ecopoetics” – defined by Jonathan Skinner as a combination of the word “eco” (“the house we share with several million other species”) and the word “poetics” (“as *poiesis* or making”) (796). The Baroness centers her body in her art, decorating it with both natural and unnatural objects. Even “The Fountain,” if we believe that she created it, combines the idea of the natural body with new technology – what is a urinal, after all, but an unnatural device created to aid and alter a natural act?

A study by Kate MacDonald examining short stories depicting disabled people published in five fiction magazines during World War I found that, between 1914 and 1918, about 20 stories per year were published depicting disabled people in civilian settings. In contrast, at the start of the way in 1914, about five stories depicted disabled people in military settings; that number doubled in 1915, and more than tripled from 1916-1918 (355). Missing arms and/or legs were the most common disability depicted (359). This is only a small sample of what must be thousands of pieces of art produced in response to the war, and a sample of significantly more traditional, mass-market forms of art, but it demonstrates the significant way in which the war

pervaded art culture. “Blood and Iron,” a one-act play published in *The Strand* magazine in 1917, depicts a cyborg serviceman and promotes anti-war propaganda. The mechanization of Soldier 241’s disabled body, and the frequent “reward” of a woman present in much of this literature, reconstitutes the masculinity of disabled, returning servicemen. The increase of literature featuring disabled men during the years of the war, and the ways in which the literature “gives back” strength, masculinity, and beauty to these disabled characters demonstrates the fear of lost masculinity during this period.

The Baroness Elsa, for her part, worked against male anxiety and created a feminist Dada aesthetic. In response to World War I’s desecration of the body, her art fights against this, placing the body at the center of art and creation. One of the fundamental tenets of this feminist aesthetic is a way of reading and incorporating the environment into her work. The New York of the early 20th century was dirty, smoggy, and noisy. Traditional, Romantic constructions of nature were wistful and nostalgic, yearning for an “untouched” nature. Jim McKusick, in his introduction to “Romanticism and Ecology,” claims that “much Romantic writing emerges from a desperate sense of alienation from the natural world and expresses an anxious endeavor to re-establish a vital, sustainable relationship between mankind and the planet on which [we] dwell” (123).

Kate MacDonald’s study demonstrates the ways in which anti-war anxiety was specifically attached to questions of the body and environment. The “natural” body – that is, the unharmed, pre-war body – is destroyed over the course of the story. In “Blood and Iron,” Soldier 241 is eventually restored – not to his pre-war state, but to a reasonable approximation of it. Masculinity is “given back” to them, despite their disabled bodies. The weapons of war are clearly anathema to the natural body; the body can never be as good as it was before it was

injured. In the readings of these texts that MacDonald applies, disabled bodies are shown in this literature to only ever approximate the worth of a non-disabled body. The best result that can be attained is a sort of uneasy compromise.

A July 1917 article by Djuna Barnes titled “The Hem of Manhattan” demonstrates even more explicitly these tensions between nature and culture. In this piece, Barnes was assigned to take a leisure cruise around the coast of Manhattan and report on the experience. It is one of the calmest pieces of stunt journalism she produced, and yet it still contains significant insights about the state of the world. As she arrives on the boat, Barnes takes note of the people aboard: “stiff-backed Middle West school teachers and others, most of whom were bearded gentlemen with gold nuggets mounted and used as tie pins,” sitting “in uncompromising rows” and occasionally turning to look at the water “with determination,” “because they were there to see, and they would see” (“The Hem of Manhattan”).

The people that Barnes sees upon this leisure boat trip seem to be fundamentally at odds with nature. The bearded gentlemen with tie pins of mounted gold nuggets – an effect, likely, of the recent Alaskan gold rushes – represent the capitalist culture which mines the land, taking from it without giving back. The fact that they are described as “nuggets” – that is, in their original form – indicates, perhaps, a desire to maintain the “natural” effect of the gold. These are men who got rich off the land (or at least want to appear as though they did). Perhaps they are on this leisure cruise attempting to connect with the wild nature from whence their tie pins originated. Regardless, their presence signifies a disconnect with nature itself. Similarly, the “stiff-backed Middle West school teachers” sitting “in uncompromising rows,” “stiffly and conventionally and unemotionally” are similarly at odds with nature. The rigidity with which they hold themselves, the rows they sit in – all of this belies an unfamiliarity with the ocean,

which is neither stiff nor linear, but flows to fit the space it has. For all of the passengers, Barnes's note of their determination demonstrates this Romantic anxiety of alienation from the natural world – in the city, nature in its unbound state is difficult to find. Here, they gaze on it as though it is captive in the zoo, determined to learn from it what they can, because that is what they are there for. The industrialized city traps, confines, and bounds nature, restricting access to scheduled trips and preventing it from being experienced on its own terms. Nature is contrasted with culture, with the industrialized city holding nature back, confining it, and trapping it. In Barnes's writing, as in much of the previous ecological writing, human culture and the natural earth are at odds with one another, unable to exist side-by-side. This is at its most prominent when she describes what she actually *sees* on this pleasure trip: Dividing the city and the water is a border constructed of refuse and waste. The increasing mechanization and industrialization leads to an increasing disregard for objects' repair, and a significant increase in trash and pollution.

This dichotomy is not present in the Baroness Elsa's art. While her work often deals with nature, she places humanity at the center of that ecological study. Irene Gammel and John Wrighton find that her treatment of nature significantly precedes and anticipates contemporary posthumanism. As much of modern (and by extension, Dadaist) art and writing is concerned with and consumed by anxieties about the impact of increasing mechanization on society and war, the Baroness Elsa's radical centering of art in the body that creates it creates a new way of understanding. This, which Gammel and Wrighton term her "ecopoetics," fights against traditional notions of nature and culture as it collapses the boundary between mankind/the city and nature/untouched earth (798).

Much of her art relies on the body as either medium or delivery mechanism. As discussed above, her art to wear is entirely reliant on her body in order to present it. In a memoir, the Baroness Elsa describes her attire for the occasion of meeting a French consulate; she was wearing a large wide, sugarcoated birthday cake upon my head with 50 flaming candles lit—I felt *just so* spunky and affluent [*sic*]! In my ears I wore sugar plums or match boxes—I forget wich [*sic*]. Also I had put on several stamps as beauty marks on my emerald painted cheeks and my eyelashes were made of gilded porcupine quills—rustling coquettishly—at the consul—with several ropes of dried figs dangling round my neck to give him a suck once and again-to entrance him. (Herring 114).

Her costume is wildly out of place for the occasion of meeting a French consulate, and yet that was part of the effect. By dressing outlandishly, she calls attention to her body as spectacle. Her feeling affluence is directly opposed to that of traditional affluence. Stamps are a frequent decoration upon her cheeks, perhaps representing worldliness or connectedness, or perhaps impotence, as the stamps never did reach their final destinations. Eroticism is a frequent thread through the Baroness Elsa's art to wear; here the figs around her neck carry an explicitly erotic meaning, and her porcupine quill eyelashes combine flirtatiousness and danger. To be associated with the Baroness Elsa is dangerous; arrested often for theft or violent behavior, she had no independent source of income and lived off of charity; her existence fell so wildly outside of the social norms held by those of "the real Manhattan" that to be associated with her is to be associated with the degenerates, the bohemians, those on the fringe of society ("Greenwich Village" 226).

One more important story about the Baroness Elsa's corporeal art is shared by artist George Biddle, a painter, muralist, and lithographer. While Biddle himself was not part of the Dada movement, he had studied and been a part of many movements, including early Cubism. He was also a member of the American Ashcan School, an artistic movement during the early 20th century best known for portraying scenes of New York's daily life, especially as it was lived in poorer neighborhoods (Jeansonne 4). In 1917, the Baroness Elsa approached him to ask if he needed a model for his art. He recalls that

With a royal gesture she swept apart the folds of a scarlet raincoat. She stood before me quite naked—or nearly so. Over the nipples of her breasts were two tin tomato cans, fastened with a green string about her back. Between the tomato cans hung a very small birdcage and within a crestfallen canary. One arm was covered from wrist to shoulder with celluloid curtain rings, which later she admitted to have pilfered from a furniture display in Wanamaker's. She removed her hat, which had been tastefully but inconspicuously trimmed with gilded carrots, beets and other vegetables. Her hair was close cropped and dyed vermilion (Herring 115-6).

She presents herself to the painter, but she is the work of art. She comes to him as muse, but an active muse. The performance of herself begins in a place that creates an equality between herself and Biddle. In contrast to more traditional forms of modeling, where a natural body is turned into art through the painter's skill and discretion, the Baroness presents a body preformed as art. If Biddle takes her on as muse, his painting will be a mimetic reproduction of her corporeal art. Art that was meant to be worn would not survive with the same vitality in paint on canvas. A visual reproduction of her body and art to wear, even if it is captured in exquisite,

precise detail, will never be able to create the same effect as her presence in the room, or even in the oft-told stories of her costuming. In the same way that memory shifts in time, a story is alive. A verbal story will change with each telling; a written story necessarily leaves details to the imagination. Both of these methods of reproducing her art to wear are more fitting than a painting, as they allow room for movement and shifting images that complement her corporeal art's reliance on the body.

The corporeal art she wears to meet Biddle, furthermore, underscores her use of natural and man-made materials in order to create her eco-poetics. Her nearly-naked body is covered by a raincoat, a garment designed to mitigate interaction with the weather. Tomato cans parse the meaning of tomato: no longer a seasonal delicacy, they can be preserved through technology at the peak of summer ripeness. The gilded vegetables "inconspicuously" trimming her hat are vegetables made inedible and holy. The canary around her neck is tightly caged and appears "crestfallen." Throughout her corporeal art, the Baroness Elsa stages the tensions between nature and culture. But rather than take sides (either by attempting to return to a nostalgic, prehuman construction of nature, or by constructing a vehement anger around mechanization and technology), in the Baroness Elsa's art, nature and culture live side-by-side, albeit in a slightly strained way. The interaction between them is clearly tense, but there is no rejection of either in favor of the other. Rather, her eco-poetics constructs them as working in tandem and mutual influence.

Gammel and Wrighton note that what the Baroness Elsa constructs in her art is the "organic sublime," which is "defined by Paul Outka as the individual's recognition of the 'radical equivalence between self, body, and environment'" (800). For Outka, the state of the organic sublime is experienced when an individual experiences "an often profoundly

disconcerting awareness of the radical material identity between his or her embodied self and the natural world” (qtd. in Gammel and Wrighton 800). The Baroness Elsa, through her art, exhibits this. She reclaims nature as something that is related to the city, and related to humanity, not that which is distinctly separate. Furthermore, much of what she created came from rubbish. She takes trash – that which is created by humans and which has a negative impact on the environment – and reconstitutes it into art. The canceled postage stamps on her cheeks; her tomato can bra – all of these are symbols of reuse, of traditionally useless objects reconstituted with new life. Through this, she counteracts the masculine Dadaist which focuses on war, mechanization, and destruction, and forges an aesthetic which holds all things in one.

One thing, however, is important to note. Her reconciliation of these threads into one art, an acceptance of industrialization as part of the natural world, the centering of her art on and around her body, her inability to separate herself from her art – all of these things conclude in an all-consuming passion. As her body was integral to her art, as she aged, she found both herself and her art becoming less and less desirable. Unable to work – because that would mean taking time away from her art, or playing a role in the capitalist bourgeois machine – she relied on charity to survive. As she aged, this charity became harder and harder to obtain. Her death – a possible suicide – at fifty-two cut her life much shorter than it needed to have been.

Inga Muscio, in her 1998 feminist manifesto *Cunt*, writes about the age-old tradition of Whoredom. She argues that Whoredom as a construct covers not only women who sell sex in order to make a living, as is commonly thought of today, but that Whoredom itself covers “a much broader cultural-financial order that women participate in for survival” (80). Whores sell themselves for an improved place in society, in whatever way that is necessary. In the past, Whores were revered and respected, teaching about the physical body as conduit of energy,

imbuing power and love to those who visited them (81-2). Today, however, a conception of the Whore is significantly emptier, referring negatively to a woman who sells sex.

Whoredom is today, and was in the Baroness Elsa's time, vilified. Her experience as a sexually liberated, nonworking, artistic genius fundamentally disrupted women's place in society. People didn't know where to *put* her. She was recognized as a degenerate and a genius. She influenced New York Dada perhaps more than anyone else, but has subsequently been largely forgotten from the canon. Female sexuality has long been feared, stigmatized, vilified, ignored, and as her eroticism was central to her body art, she has not been given her rightful due as an artist and a visionary. Her radical acceptance of the world – embracing industrialism and ecology in one – is a fundamentally feminist kind of Dada, a kind of Dada which can only be read by interpreting its own signs. Reading it through the work of the male Dada artists who have later been acclaimed does her a disservice, as it places her work as secondary, mimetic. They were imitating *her*.

Muscio describes the Whore's place in society:

Whores were in business back before the Red Sea ever thought about parting.

Whores have no labor unions, no health insurance, no retirement fund, no unemployment insurance, and no legal rights. [...]

Without honoring Whores, we cannot truly understand and transcend the dynamics of violence, destruction, and ignorance fostered in our cuntfearing society. (91).

She writes, of course, decades after the Baroness Elsa lead the Dadaists in New York. But her argument – that women who sell their bodies inhabit one of the most fundamental roles in society – is relevant to an understanding of why the Baroness Elsa has not been remembered by

history. At the time, she was revered, respected as one of the best and brightest artists and critics. Today, she is largely forgotten.

She was, in Muscio's definition, the epitome of the Whore. Her body was the center of her art, her only reliable asset, her goldmine. In our past, during her time, she was respected and admired; the power she had has largely been forgotten today. Now, except by a handful of scholars, her work has been subsumed by that of more prominent male artists. Not even the story of the *Fountain's* dubious authorship is well known. Because the Baroness Elsa was so dedicated to her art, since there was so little room in between "her" and "her art," because of her unwillingness to subscribe to traditional roles – even those roles which are avant-garde, but more traditionally so – she has been difficult to categorize and subsequently abandoned. In this chapter I have hardly touched the many, varied media she worked in, choosing to focus on her performative art to wear. And yet, she was far more than someone who wore costumes; she could also be described as a sculptor or a painter or a poet...

Like the refuse described in Barnes's "Hem of Manhattan," the Baroness Elsa has been too long relegated to the unfinished edges of Dada, and by extension, modernism. Her radical gender-bending bodily performance art created a new possibility of womanhood far beyond what was being ascribed to the New Woman of the period. Her care for the environment and her focus on a female erotic body constitute a new form of Dada, one which is feminine, powerful, and brand new.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The New Woman is as much a constructed ideal as she is a person. None of the women identified in this thesis publicly identified themselves with the term – and yet, from a modern perspective, it is difficult to think of them as anything but. Modern writings on the New Woman describe her in many different ways, many of which are recognizable to us today. In 1894, M. Eastwood wrote a description of the New Woman. I have quoted sections of it at earlier points in this thesis. Here, I quote it at length because I find Eastwood's hope for the future to be striking, powerful, and deeply familiar. She writes:

The New Woman of today will be the woman of the future. Only more so. At present she is passing through the ugly duckling stage. Like a growing girl, she has too many elbows. [...] Her detractors would have us believe that those tender and endearing charms which ought to distinguish her gentler sex will be entirely wanting in her. [...]

The abiding New Woman wears a very different aspect. Her brow is serious, for the brain behind is crammed as full of high projects as is the satchel she carries of pamphlets on the missions, rights, grievances and demands of her sex. She has neither the heart nor has she the time for fooling, and if she assumes certain articles of masculine garb on occasion, it is solely on account of their superior utility; if she rides out on a bicycle it is for the purpose of strengthening her muscles and expanding her lungs for the great work she has before her. Young as she is she talks fearlessly and authoritatively on all and every subject of social depravity, for there is nothing which was hitherto hidden from her which she has not revealed. And since she knows the worst her soaring ambition will be content

with nothing less than the reformation of the entire male sex. [...] Her scheme of reform extends also beyond the fathers of the coming race and includes the weak and foolish sisters who have obstinately remained behind in their crumbling reserves.

Here has begun the radical change which is to effect the future generations. She is fortifying its walls against the unworthy invader and has sworn to surrender only at the instance of disinterested love. Upon the strength of her purpose depends the degree of her success. (Eastwood 91-2)

I quote Eastwood's writing in length for a reason. Writing today, as a Woman of the Future, I am struck by how much Eastwood predicted has come to pass. As I write this conclusion, it is March 8, International Women's Day, 2018, 134 years later. Today, women and men have been posting to their social networks images of women they know and women they admire, and quotes, affirmations, challenges. Corporations and brands have posted advertisements for products for “the empowered woman in YOUR life!;” McDonalds became WcDonalds for a day, flipping its golden arches to approximate a W (for “women”); and generally, women's rights and the lack thereof is an everyday topic. As I write, we are in what is being called the #MeToo era, having transcended the temporal limitations of a “movement.” The phrase Me Too was created by Tarana Burke in 1997, long before hashtags and social media, and recently adopted by women's activists in order to claim their space and speak out against the people, largely men, who have assaulted, harassed, and intimidated them. Powerful men have lost their jobs, leaving power vacuums in Hollywood and elsewhere that will likely be largely filled with other men – but perhaps one or two other women will make their way to the top.

A little over a year ago, more than 500,000 women and allies marched in Washington to protest the inauguration of Donald Trump as president of the United States; another three to four million joined them across the country, and thousands more across the globe. They marched for a number of reasons, but chief among them was the Republican Party's willingness to elect a uniquely unqualified candidate who has, as of this writing, been accused of sexual assault by 19 women, over a highly qualified woman who had dedicated her life to public service. This was the largest march in American history, but women's marches have long been able to draw crowds. In February of 1907, what is today nicknamed the "Mud March" saw 3,000 women trekking their way through London's streets. Organized by the WSPU, marchers wove their way through the city despite the elements. Rain and mud soaked through long dresses and corsets, but the marchers persisted. In doing so, they left their mark on history as well as the city itself. By placing their bodies into the world, they were able to create the image of a woman's world, one in which those with female bodies were not confined within the walls of the domestic but rather claimed space in the streets.

Elizabeth Robins, Djuna Barnes, and the Baroness Elsa share a public physicality shocking for the time and still groundbreaking today. By placing their bodies at the center of a spectacle of their own creation, they as individuals helped to shift public consciousness towards a more woman-centered world. Robins's tactics are, at first glance, the least surprising; the suffragette movement is known of, and theatre for social change has been a part of the theatre as long as the medium has existed. Yet her skill as an actress and her business acumen gave her the credibility, skills, and resources to create and stage the first full-length play by a woman to ever be performed on the English stage. Djuna Barnes, despite writing the "stunt stories" expected of daring women of the time, promoted social awareness through her stunt journalism as well as

pursuing a career in writing—first through her prolific career as a journalist, not simply a stunt journalist, and later with her novels, poems, and plays. And the Baroness Elsa remains a figure of radical revolution today, a genius of Dada who is just now beginning to be “rediscovered” by scholars, whose eccentricity and dedication to her craft made her a cultural touchstone for New York artists of the period.

The New Woman that M. Eastwood writes about is a character, a construction. The women in this thesis never identify themselves by that name, yet we see them in that space today: Women who challenged the world they were given, women who subverted the norms expected of them, women who suffered, sometimes greatly, to live the lives they wanted.

Eastwood's *Woman of the Future* owes much to the New Woman. Now, we of the future are living the future that she dreamt of. And we are still fighting. The *Woman of the Future* includes not only cisgendered women, but also femmes, trans women, nonbinary, genderqueer and genderfluid people – the list goes on. It took work to get to where we are today, took the actions of not only Elizabeth Robins and Emmaline Pankhurst and Djuna Barnes and the Baroness Elsa, but of thousands more, some known, some unknown, some who fought publicly and some who simply did what they could, quietly, in whatever small way was possible. Where would we be today if not for them? And what will the women of *our* future be fighting for?

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