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Nancy Cunard:
Collector, Cosmopolitan

by Jenny Greenshields

Dissertation submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature
University of Sussex
February 2015

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted
in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree.

Signed

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Summary of Thesis

Part One of my thesis reads Nancy Cunard (1896-1965) as a modernist collector, situating her material and literary collections in relation to the *vogue nègre* of the 1920s and 30s, when European fascination with black expressive culture reached unprecedented heights. It also looks at how Cunard's collecting practices translate into an 'aesthetic of assemblage' in her work as an anthologist, and shows how the African sculpture section of her *Negro* anthology (1934) reflects the collecting cultures of early twentieth-century Europe.

Part Two of my thesis reads Cunard in relation to cosmopolitan identity formations in the early twentieth century through an analysis of her poetry and private correspondence, and the fictional representations of Cunard that appeared in the novels of the period. It also examines her efforts to foster transnational networks between writers and artists across America, Europe and Africa, and the role her Communist politics played in forging these connections.

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Abbreviations & Citations

Citations from the Nancy Cunard Collection at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas have been abbreviated to HRC NCC in my footnotes.

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Nancy Cunard's *Negro* anthology are taken from the 1934 first edition, published by Wishart & Co. Where it is clear I am quoting from this book, citation references are given parenthetically within the text.

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Introduction

Nancy Cunard (1896-1965): An Alternative Modernist

Nancy Cunard was kind and good and catholic and cosmopolitan and sophisticated and simple all at the same time and a poet of no mean abilities and an appreciator of the rare and the off-beat from jazz to ivory bracelets to Cocteau. [...] [S]he had a body like sculpture in the thinnest of wire and a face made of a million mosaics in a gauze-web of cubes lighter than air.

Langston Hughes¹

Nancy Cunard was a poet, a publisher, an anthologist, a muse, a translator, a collector, a campaigner, and a journalist. The only child of the American heiress Maud Cunard, and Sir Bache Cunard of the famous English shipping line family, Nancy Cunard spent much of her life resisting her privileged background. Reporters were sent demands for retractions when they gave her titles in their articles ('My name is NOT the Hon. Nancy, it is Nancy Cunard'²) or referred to her as a shipping heiress, the company by then having passed out of the hands of the Cunard family. When she and Langston Hughes first met in Paris in the 1930s at the beginning of their long friendship, he told her he had come to France on a Cunard ship 'thinking it would please her', to which she responded that she had never set foot on a Cunard vessel, and never would, because of the company's racial segregation policy.³

Her childhood was spent in rural England and her teenage years with her socialite mother in London, after Maud (now calling herself 'Emerald') had left her husband for the famous conductor Sir Thomas Beecham. In January 1920, Cunard moved to Paris where she was quickly drawn into the circles of some of the most important figures of European modernism, and it was also around this time that she began assembling her famous collection of African ivory bracelets. Among those writers and artists she formed close

¹ 'Nancy: A Piñata in Memoriam – If one could break it in her honor', printed in *Brave Poet, Indomitable Rebel 1896-1965*, ed. Hugh Ford, (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1968), p.1.

² Nancy Cunard, Letter to the Press, 2nd May 1932, New York, HRC NCC, Box 10, Folder 6.

³ Langston Hughes, *Autobiography: I Wonder As I Wander*, Vol. 14 of *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, ed. Joseph McLaren, (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 311.

relationships with were the Dadaist Tristan Tzara, Louis Aragon and others of the surrealist movement, Solita Solano, Wyndham Lewis, Michael Arlen, Janet Flanner, Ezra Pound and Aldous Huxley. She also inspired sculptures by Constantin Brancusi, drawings by Wyndham Lewis, paintings by Oskar Kokoschka, John Banting and Eugene McCown, and was photographed by some of the most celebrated photographers of the day, including Cecil Beaton, Curtis Moffat and Man Ray. In 1928, she set up her own printing press, The Hours Press, at her farmhouse in Réanville in Normandy, purchasing the equipment from Bill Bird's Three Mountains Press. Collaborating with George Sadoul, Louis Aragon, Henry Crowder and others, Cunard hand-printed beautiful editions of works by famous writers such as Richard Aldington, Ezra Pound, Harold Acton, Laura Riding and Robert Graves, often bound in surrealist-inspired covers, which were produced by artists such as Man Ray, Len Lye and Yves Tanguy. The Hours also printed Samuel Beckett's first individual publication, *Whoroscope*, in 1930.

Cunard had little early success as a poet and devoted her later efforts to her dynamic work as a publisher, journalist, anthologist, and antiracist campaigner. As Susan Stanford Friedman has written, Nancy Cunard's name is one that 'crisscrosses the map of modernism—not so much as a poet but more as a tireless advocate, a progressive spirit, a charismatic dynamo, a woman who fascinated and frightened people with her passions.'⁴ These passions took her to 1930s Harlem as a political travel writer; to civil war Spain as an eyewitness correspondent, Republican activist and publisher; and to the Caribbean as a researcher and journalist. It was initially through the Surrealists in 1920s Paris that Cunard became interested in race, Leftist politics, ethnography and imperialism, but it was her meeting with Henry Crowder, the black American jazz pianist, that consolidated her interest in racial politics and inspired her to begin work on her *Negro* anthology, which she dedicated 'to Henry Crowder my first Negro friend.'⁵ Crowder played an important role in educating her about racist injustices the United States, but their relationship also gave her first-hand experience of racial prejudice: in London they were turned away from hotels because of the 'colour bar', in rural France (with echoes of Fanon's 'The Fact of Blackness') they were met with cries of '*Té! Ils ne sont pas de la même couleur!*'.⁶ Their relationship gave

⁴ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Nancy Cunard', *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 63.

⁵ Cunard, *Negro*, (London: Wishart & Co., 1934), unpaginated.

⁶ Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 148.

Fanon writes in this essay of the constructedness of race and his 'crushing' sense of objectification when a girl points at him and cries, 'Look, a Negro!' *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, ed. Les Back & John Solomos, (London: Routledge, 2000), 257.

her a political energy and purpose until then lacking from her intellectual life; when she heard of Crowder's death in the 1950s, she wrote: 'Henry made me—and so be it...'⁷

Alain Locke wrote to Cunard soon after the *Negro* anthology was published in 1934 to commend the comprehensiveness and detail of its content and her editorial skill in bringing together such an ambitiously broad and extensive range of materials: 'I congratulate you, almost enviously, on the finest anthology in every sense of the word ever compiled on the Negro. [...] [Y]ou have built up a unity of effect and a subtle accumulative force of enlightenment that is beyond all contradiction and evasion.'⁸ While Locke's anthology of the Harlem Renaissance *The New Negro* (1925) remains in print and is seen as the definitive black anthology of the period, *Negro* sold few copies when published, partly because of the book's cost, and those remaining were destroyed during the Blitz. While Hugh Ford's 1970 abridged edition set out to introduce a new generation to what remains an extremely rare text, Tory Young has argued that his celebration of Cunard's life and work in his introduction served only to further marginalise and diminish her antiracist, anticolonial project.⁹ Cunard herself was resistant towards the idea of an official biography of her life, which was coupled with what Ford has described as her 'ironic tendency towards self-revelation in her own work.'¹⁰ This manifested throughout her writing, noticeably in the refracted autobiographies that emerge through her memoirs of Norman Douglas and George Moore; her deeply personal and scathing broadside against imperialism, slavery and her mother's racist hypocrisy, *Black Man, White Ladyship* (1931); her politically partisan and often biographical eyewitness journalism; and the frequent personal interventions she makes throughout the *Negro* anthology, which incorporates her private correspondence and dozens of examples from her private collection of African sculpture and jewellery. Given the extent to which Cunard used her public image and biographical details from her life in her work, often for the advancement of political causes, it is difficult to separate her writing and activism from her biography. She was, as Jane Marcus has described her, 'a living network, a one-woman permanent walking

⁷ Cunard, letter to Charles Burkhart, Lamothe-Fénelon, France, April 24 1955. Special Collections Research Centre Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

⁸ Locke, letter to Cunard, April 14th 1934, HRC NCC Box 20, Folder 10.

⁹ Tory Young, 'The Reception of Nancy Cunard's Negro Anthology', *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History*, ed. Maroula Joannou, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 114.

¹⁰ Hugh Ford, 'Foreword', *Nancy Cunard: Brave Poet, Indomitable Rebel*, (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1968), viii.

demonstration against racism, and a celebrant of black culture in all its forms,¹¹ who used her fame and intellectual network for the benefit of various social and political causes.

Notes for an unfinished autobiographical work, *You, Me and Yesterday*, which she began late in her life, show Cunard setting out what she saw then as the three major guiding principles of her life and work:

When of SELF writing: Re. the 3 main things.

- 1) Eq. of races — equal opportunities, equity between.
- 2) Of sexes
- 3) Of classes

I am in accord with all countries and individuals who feel, and act, as I do on this score.¹²

Cunard's second entry here appears surprising given that she never publicly engaged with women's issues; Renata Morresi also rightly notes that she often deliberately employed a 'sexless' voice in order to speak "beyond" her gender.¹³ She occasionally wrote under the male pseudonym 'Ray Holt', and used this *nom de plume* for what appears to be the only purposefully feminist text in her archive, a broadcast for the Italian section of the BBC titled 'About Women's Activities in England Today'.¹⁴ In this wartime broadcast, Cunard/Holt sends a message of solidarity to the women of Italy, reporting on improvements to social equalities between the sexes in Britain in terms of women's increasing role in public and military roles as part of the war effort: 'They take men's places,' she writes, 'freeing them for the war effort.'¹⁵ Also mentioned are women who had taken up prominent public positions in society, such as Storm Jameson, who was serving as the president of English PEN, and Una Marson, who was working in broadcasting for the BBC and gaining increasing recognition for her poetry. Although never made explicit in the piece, in focusing on employment rights and roles for women in public life, Cunard was likely working to challenge Mussolini's regime of strengthening traditional patriarchal authority in Italy by

¹¹ Jane Marcus, 'Bonding and Bondage: Nancy Cunard and the Making of the Negro Anthology', *Hearts of Darkness*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 123.

¹² Cunard, notes for *You, Me and Yesterday*, 1956, HRC NCC Box 9, Folder 7.

¹³ Renata Morresi, 'Negotiating Identity: Nancy Cunard's Otherness' in *Resisting Alterities: Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*, Marco Fazzini ed., (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 157.

¹⁴ Ray Holt, 'About Women's Activities in England Today': For BBC Italian Section', 30th November 1941, HRC NCC Box 1, Folder 9. Cunard's name has been struck out at the top of the page of the typescript and replaced with Ray Holt in her hand; it is not clear if this was ever broadcast and if so under which name.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

confining women to 'home and hearth' and the responsibility of childrearing.¹⁶ But it also tells us something about Cunard's broader gender politics as well. What is apparent from the examples given here is that she saw sexual inequality primarily in terms of a struggle against occupational gender hierarchies, rather than as an ideological battle against sexism. As Morresi has observed, Cunard seemed to see 'men's 'place' as the site of freedom and considered action and activism the best strategies for women to reach it.¹⁷ This was a stance characteristic of many first-wave feminists, but in spite of Cunard's sexual emancipation and bold female modernity, she appeared indifferent to issues of feminism in her work. Some critics have therefore noted a certain irony in her being written out of histories of modernism or consigned to the footnotes of more prominent male contemporaries partly because of her gender.¹⁸ Cunard's contributions to modernist literary culture were also for a long time obscured by her notoriety as a sexually predatory socialite—a reputation encouraged by fictional representations of her from the 1920s, such as Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, and Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat*, both of which cast her as a privileged *femme fatale*.

This thesis is broadly divided into two parts, 'Collector' and 'Cosmopolitan', reflecting two major modernist identity formations I will present as having shaped Cunard's work on politics, race, colonialism and identity. In *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston Baker writes of the eclectic lists and catalogues used to bring a sense of unified purpose and 'definitional certainty' to modernism's 'teasing semantics' and 'seemingly discontinuous objects'.¹⁹ The genre of modernism, he suggests, exists as a kind of collection, a generic version of the Victorian curiosity cabinet that must accommodate figures as disparate as 'Picasso and Pound, Joyce and Kandinsky, Stravinsky and Klee, Brancusi and H.D.' and techniques and forms as assorted as 'collage, primitivism, montage, allusion, 'dehumanisation,' and leitmotifs'.²⁰ Collecting appears here as a signifier for the heterogeneous category of modernism itself, but it has also been identified as a constitutive model for modernist forms and aesthetics. In Jeremy Braddock's recent book, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, he suggests that 'what might be broadly named a 'collecting

¹⁶ See Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1, *passim*.

¹⁷ Morresi, 'Two Examples of Women's 'Hidden' Cultural Network', in *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links, Europe – America: Towards a Re-Writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939*, ed. Marina Camboni, (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 2004), 381.

¹⁸ Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*, 122; Morresi, 'Two Examples', 380.

¹⁹ Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

aesthetic' can be identified as a paradigmatic form of modernist art,' from the formation of visual and literary modernist art, and the artistic influence of folklore and ethnographic collections; to thematic engagement with collecting in the novels and poetry of the period, and the rise of the modernist anthology form.²¹

Modernism's turn towards collecting has often been presented as a calculated withdrawal from contemporary culture. In *Institutions of Modernism*, Lawrence Rainey describes collecting as 'a tactical retreat' or an 'institutional counterspace' which provided modernism with an escape from a 'public realm increasingly degraded' by mass commodification.²² Walter Benjamin writes similarly of how collecting represents a retreat into a private object-world and a desire to withdraw objects from commodity circulation, replacing objects' use-value with a new 'connoisseur value'.²³ It is this private, phenomenological shift in the object from usefulness to a freedom of signification that brings so much satisfaction to the activities of Benjamin's collector: '[t]he collector dreams his way not only into a distant or bygone world but also into a better one—one in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the everyday world, but in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful.'²⁴

Cunard's collecting practices by contrast appear outward-looking and interpolative. She is perhaps best known for two collections, one material, the other literary: her vast collection of African ivory and wooden bracelets, and the *Negro* anthology she worked on between 1931 and 1934. Although her desire to collect was driven partly by private concerns, as I sketch out in Chapter 1, her collections also had clear political motivations. There was a distinct collecting dimension to her political *modus operandi*, which manifested both in the numerous collective literary and political anthologies she edited, and in her use of objects from her private collection to make public political and cultural statements. Cunard's collections, material and literary, were also both essential to her project to construct an alternative account of modernism that recognised African and African diasporic cultures as important participants in modernist cultural production.

Cosmopolitanism is a broad and heterogeneous concept with both positive and negative connotations. Following its etymological routes, it represents an idea of global politics or citizenship among world citizens, founded on the concepts of the *cosmos* (world

²¹ Jeremy Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 1-2.

²² Laurence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

²³ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 9, 'Unpacking My Library' (1931), 492.

²⁴ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.9.

order) and the *polis* (political community).²⁵ But the term has also taken on wider significations to do with freedom of mobility and travel, a global sense of belonging, and transnational networks between peoples and cultures: as Robert Holton observes, 'cosmopolitanism has recently become seen as a way of life as much as a sense of political or ethical obligation to the world as a whole.'²⁶ It is in this broader sense, as what Mica Nava has termed a 'structure of feeling' and an 'empathetic and inclusive set of identifications'²⁷, that I use the term cosmopolitanism in this project. Nava's work shows how early twentieth-century cosmopolitanism emerges as a 'positive engagement with difference' and 'a countercultural revolt against 'traditional' cultural forms and regimes of belief'.²⁸ Cunard's cosmopolitan identifications led her to participate in transnational antiracist and anticolonial networks that help us chart modernism's 'alternative genealogies' and rewrite the imperial binaries of metropole/ periphery.²⁹ She epitomised the cosmopolitan itinerancy of the modernist intellectual, travelling to North Africa, North and South America, the Caribbean and throughout Europe, embracing difference as part of her rebellion against traditional mores and cultural forms: as she wrote in *These Were the Hours*, 'do not all those who cruise the seas develop a sort of supra-national identity?'³⁰ Yet this cosmopolitan/ supranational identification, while democratic, empathetic and inclusive, was at the same time a privileged identity formation open only to a wealthy few, just as Cunard's collecting activities too were the preserve of only those who could afford them. I will return to this issue in the conclusion to this project.

Chapter 1 of my thesis presents an analysis of Cunard's material collections, from her scrapbooks and early affinity for *objets trouvés*, to her collection of African and Oceanic jewellery, sculpture and other objects. I begin by situating her collecting practices in relation to contemporary theories of collecting, particularly ideas around the collector's identification with material objects, and their role in producing what Susan Pearce has

²⁵ See Robert J. Holton, *Cosmopolitanisms: New Thinking and New Directions*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2-4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Mica Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanisms: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference*, (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁹ These ideas of a global/transnational/alternative model of modernism are discussed in Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel's introduction to their anthology *Geomodernisms*. 'Introduction: The Global Horizons of Modernism', *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*. (Chesham: Indiana University Press, 2005), 7-8.

³⁰ Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 48.

termed 'material autobiography'.³¹ I am particularly interested here in the cultural politics of appropriating so-called 'primitive' or 'exotic' objects from other cultures into the private collection, and how this interacted with Cunard's antiracist, anticolonial activism. In the later part of this chapter, I situate Cunard's collecting practices in relation to surrealist avant-gardism and the *vogue nègre* of the 1920s and 1930s, analysing Cunard's writing about and contributions to the major reclassification of non-Western objects that took place during this period in the West.

Cunard's *Negro* anthology (1934) is a text that reflects Cunard's avant-garde collecting practices in both its form and content. In the first half of Chapter 2 of my thesis, I focus on the *Negro* anthology's fragmented format, connecting it with other famous anthologies of the period, including Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925), and George Bataille's surrealist ethnographic collection, *Documents* magazine (1929-1930). The anthology is framed here as a modernist documentary collection that requires the reader to negotiate its formally and politically dissonant entries. The second half of Chapter 2 analyses the presentation of African sculpture in the *Negro* anthology, with a specific focus on how it reflects the collecting cultures (both private and institutional) of the early twentieth century. Dependent as many of these collections were on the violence and exploitation of European imperialism, I am here interested in how the arrangement and discussion of these objects in *Negro* interacts with the anthology's anticolonial stance.

Chapter 3 of my thesis presents an analysis of travel, gender and cosmopolitan identity formations in the early twentieth century through an analysis of Cunard's poetry and critical writing, her correspondence files, and the fictional representations of her that appeared in the novels of the period. I begin this chapter with an analysis of the figure of the *flâneur* in her long poem *Parallax* (1925) and her characterisation as the cosmopolitan modern woman (or the 'mobile woman'³² to use Maroula Joannou's term) in Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat* (1924) and other popular contemporary fiction. In the later part of this chapter I analyse her political travelogue written for the *Negro* anthology, 'Harlem Reviewed' (1934), through which Cunard attempts to subvert the spatial and subjective binaries of home/abroad and self/other. At the end of Chapter 3, I look at the New York press scandal that exploded during this research trip to Harlem, with a focus on the file of hate-mail it produced, now held among Cunard's papers. Jane Marcus observed that this file requires

³¹ Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 272.

³² Maroula Joannou, *Women's Writing, Englishness, and National and Cultural Identity: The Mobile Woman and the Migrant Voice, 1938-1962*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1, *passim*.

further study and merits discussion in the context of hate-mail as a specific genre.³³ In my examination of these letters, I situate them in relation to a sociological study of hate-mail, which identifies the popular targets of such letters as those who, like Cunard, are deemed a threat to social and cultural boundaries. I also connect the language used by her correspondents to the prevalence of eugenicist thinking in public discourse in 1930s America, in spite of the credibility of these theories already having been called into question by prominent members of the scientific community.

Chapter 4 of my thesis looks at Cunard's influential work as a political writer, campaigner and publisher in the context of modernism's 'transnational turn'.³⁴ The three examples I focus on here—Cunard's writing and campaign work on behalf of the Scottsboro campaign, her work as a journalist, poet and anthologist during the Spanish Civil War, and the anticolonial tract she co-wrote with the influential pan-Africanist George Padmore, titled *The White Man's Duty* (1942)—are all episodes of transnational collectivism that connect modernism with worldwide struggles against racism, fascism and imperialism in the interwar period. Challenging the distinctions that are usually drawn between 'high' aesthetic modernism and the more politically engaged writing of the 1930s, these examples from Cunard's writing, publishing and campaign work also help counter what Patricia Clavin has identified as a prevalent characterisation of this decade as 'a period of ultra-nationalism in which no spirit of internationalism could survive'.³⁵

³³ Jane Marcus, 'Bonding and Bondage: Nancy Cunard and the Making of the Negro Anthology', *Borders, Boundaries, and Frames: Essays in Cultural Criticism and Cultural Studies*, ed. Mae Henderson, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 63.

³⁴ Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA*, Volume 123, Number 3, May 2008, 738.

³⁵ Patricia Clavin, 'Conceptualising Internationalism Between the World Wars', *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars*, ed. Daniel Laqua, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 3.

Note on terminology

Many of the materials and debates I examine in this project are related to issues of race and racism in the early twentieth century and as such present difficulties in terms of how to use and engage with racial terminology. For the sake of historical accuracy, I have preserved the terminology of the period in direct citations from contemporary sources, although racial identifiers once widely used by black and white commentators alike such as 'coloured' or 'Negro' (the title of Cunard's major work) have now passed out of use and are seen as racially and culturally pejorative. Following the work of other recent scholars and wider contemporary use, in my own commentary I use the general terms 'black', 'black diasporic' or 'African diasporic' to describe people and cultures of African descent.

Part One:
Collector

1 Collecting Selves, Collecting Others

For a collector [...] ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to things. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.

Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library'¹

At the beginning of the last century, the collection and classification of so-called 'primitive' objects underwent a period of major transformation in the West. African and Oceanic objects once found in curiosity shops and flea markets, relocated to fashionable galleries and avant-garde studios, began to be auctioned for unprecedented sums, and it has been estimated that by the beginning of the 1930s there were at least 147 private collections of African art in Paris alone.² In *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art*, Shelly Errington observes that 'one of the most common ways to tell the story of how primitive art entered the mainstream of art is thoroughly celebratory,' a narrative which customarily begins with the myth-like 'discovery narratives' of Picasso and others of his generation in the Parisian *marchés aux puces* and at the Trocadéro Museum, as a preface to a subsequent history of ever-increasing public and institutional appreciation, which comes about thanks to the vision, labours and discerning judgement of various progressive collectors and curators.³ This triumphalist enlightenment narrative of course occludes the particularities, regressions, disagreements and historical specificities of public and institutional engagement with these objects, as well as the appropriative relationship many modernist artists had with them. Yet both Errington and the historian James Clifford have argued that the major taxonomic shifts that took place in the definition of non-Western artefacts in the early twentieth century still require historical and critical discussion, providing analysis does not fall prey to a

¹ Walter Benjamin 'Unpacking My Library' (1931), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings* Volume 2, Part 2 1931-1934, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 492.

² Jean-Louis Paudrat, 'Primitive Arts in Paris on the Threshold of the Thirties,' cited by John Warne Monroe in 'Surface Tensions: Empire, Parisian Modernism, and "Authenticity" in African Sculpture, 1917-1939,' *American Historical Review*, April 2012, 468.

³ Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 49.

celebratory structure of engagement.⁴ As Clifford stresses in *The Predicament of Culture*, the encounter between modernism and non-Western artefacts should be told as a story of 'reclassification,' rather than one of 'redemption' or 'discovery', particularly given that this occurred at a time when Europe's colonial powers massively expanded their political, economic and religious domination over the world's tribal peoples.⁵

Nancy Cunard began collecting African bracelets around 1919, initially under the guidance of her friend Jacob Epstein, the modernist sculptor and African art collector. By the start of the Second World War, she had acquired a large number of African and Oceanic objects, including hundreds of items of jewellery, sculptures and masks, which were displayed at her house in Normandy and her Hours Press shop in Paris. Sarah Frioux-Salgas, archivist and curator at the *Musée du Quai Branly*, recently observed that while Cunard's collection contained few exceptional pieces, particularly when compared with other important collections of the period, it was nonetheless significant because of its specificity—the focus of Cunard's collection being African ivory, and particularly ivory bracelets and anklets, of which she owned around 500.⁶ (See figs. 1, 2 & 3) Otherwise eclectic in nature, her collection also included examples of Pacific, South and Central American material, although a significant proportion of the pieces originated from areas of former French and British colonial rule in West Africa. Although she owned few rare works, the small number of photographs of her collections that remain in her archives show a number of ancient or significant pieces, including a Nomoli steatite figure she inherited from her father and a number of Sande/Bundu secret society masks from Sierra Leone.⁷

This collection features prominently in iconography of Cunard; in 1926, she modelled for a series of now iconic photographs taken by the famous modernist visual artist Man Ray, later published in *Vogue* magazine: a set of glamorous, exoticised, surrealist images in which she appears with thickly kohl-rimmed eyes in a leopard print dress and a selection of her trademark wrist-to-elbow African bangles. Cunard's bracelets take centre-stage in these compositions, her association with African material culture signalling her status as one of the era's 'ultra moderns'; forty years after taking these photographs, Ray

⁴ Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art*, 49; James Clifford, 'Histories of the Tribal and the Modern', *The Predicament of Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 196.

⁵ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 196.

⁶ Sarah Frioux-Salgas, 'Introduction,' « *L'Atlantique noir* » de Nancy Cunard, *Negro Anthology, 1931-1934*, (Paris: Gradhiva, 2014), 11.

⁷ Although Nomoli steatite (soapstone) figures are not uncommon, most date from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries or earlier. Most sande/bundu masks date from the late nineteenth to twentieth centuries.



Figs. 1, 2 & 3 Cunard's African ivory bracelets, displayed on racks.
Harry Ransom Center, Nancy Cunard Collection.

even stated that their 'principal object [...] was to display her collection of African ivories.'⁸ A primitivist notion of Africa is here emblazoned across the body of a wealthy white cosmopolitan subject in the form of exotic cultural accessories, and along with Cecil Beaton's 1929 portraits—similar in composition and style—these images would help define her in the public imagination as the 'princess of primitivism.'⁹ Magazines and newspapers of the period often credit her with having started the trend for what *Vogue* called her 'barbaric bracelets,'¹⁰ and her cultivated exotic image, well-publicised in the fashion and high-society pages, helped popularise a fashionable African aesthetic among metropolitan white elites on both sides of the Atlantic.

This chapter is composed of three parts, examining the personal, cultural and political motivations that informed Cunard's collecting practice and their inherent tensions and contradictions. For while Cunard dedicated her life to promoting the art and culture of the African diaspora, and to writing and campaigning against racism and imperialism, the collection of non-Western objects she acquired was dependent on expeditions backed by Europe's colonialists and the physical and economic exploitation of the ivory trade—a fact with which her writing never fully comes to terms. Her writing also often expresses the essentialist, primitivist ideologies that she tried to critique, and appears inflected by what Mary Louise Pratt has called the 'imperial eyes' of the colonial traveller, the authoritative gaze of eyes that 'look out and possess.'¹¹

From Benjamin to Baudrillard, many theorists of collecting have focused on the collector's private or psychological motivations, often formed in adolescence or childhood, as well as the particular pleasure taken in sequestering objects into the 'magic circle'¹² of the private collection. The first part of this chapter situates Cunard's own personal motivations as a collector in relation to some of these theories, particularly the imaginative

⁸ A term often used in the press to describe Cunard and her contemporaries. See, for example, Constance Eaton, 'When the Ultra Moderns Confess: Women's Thought-Provoking Revelations in a Piquant Symposium,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 26th September 1929. From Cunard's newspaper clippings, Scrapbook 1921-1927 [sic.] NCC HRC Box 26.

Man Ray, cited in *Man Ray's Celebrity Portraits*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), trans. Stanley Appelbaum, note for plate 10 (unpaginated). Original German edition published by Sigbert Mohn Verlag, Gütersloh, in 1963.

⁹ Jane Marcus, 'Bonding and Bondage: Nancy Cunard and the Making of *The Negro Anthology*,' *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 127.

¹⁰ *Vogue*, London, September 1929, cited in *Beaton in Vogue*, ed. Josephine Ross, (New York: C. N. Potter, 1986), 42.

¹¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 9.

¹² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 2002), 205.

identification with collected objects (or object fetishism) and their role in constructing a 'material autobiography'.¹³ I am particularly interested here in how these constructions of 'self' through collected objects are problematised by the appropriation of materials from non-Western cultures into the private collection, and whether this identification with and symbolic appropriation of the other reproduces the structures of colonial arrogation Cunard's work intended to critique. The second part looks at how Cunard's position on African art influenced and was influenced by the avant-garde intellectual climate of 1920s and 30s Paris, a context in which strong connections were forged between leftist politics, surrealist experimentalism and new ideas from the emerging social sciences. It also addresses the role Cunard and other modernist collectors, both private and institutional, played in shaping contemporary and future engagement with African sculpture as critics and arbiters of taste in what Clifford terms the 'art-culture system',¹⁴ in which so-called 'primitive' objects have been reclassified as either art or artefacts. The final section looks at Cunard's use of African objects from her private collection on the covers of *Henry-Music* (1930) in the form of a photomontage created by Man Ray. A book of modernist poems set to music by Cunard's lover, the black American jazz pianist Henry Crowder, and bound in a surrealist collage of images of her bracelets and sculptures, this little-known work is an important visual, textual and musical document of the early connections between literary modernism, surrealist aesthetics and African diasporic culture. This document, I suggest, more than any other in Cunard's archive, also powerfully illustrates how she simultaneously resisted and participated in contemporary discourses of primitivism and exoticism.

Modernist primitivist thinking was a complex and heterogeneous set of ideas and imaginings with manifold cultural and political implications; as Jack Flam has argued, when we look back over writing about 'primitive' art, we see that '[d]ifferent issues come to the fore, contradictory ideas are sometimes held by the same people, and the nature of the discourse keeps changing in relation to contemporary events.'¹⁵ Although Cunard helped bring a chic primitivist aesthetic into mainstream fashion, she was herself highly critical of an exoticist approach to the art and culture of the African diaspora, writing in an article for Du Bois's *Crisis* magazine of her belief that this constituted an inverse form of racism:

¹³ Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 272.

¹⁴ James Clifford, 'On Collecting Art and Culture,' *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 224.

¹⁵ Jack Flam, 'Introduction', *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art, A Documentary History*, ed. Jack Flam with Miriam Deutch, (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 5.

Race prejudice is a very excellent touchstone of the individual. There is something palpably wrong about those who have it [...] The other side of this picture is the hysteria in the devotees of the black 'exoticism' who as soon as the word Negro is pronounced burst out with Ah! Harlem... but know little else of the Negro.¹⁶

Cunard's comment here mirrors the positioning of contemporary postcolonial critics of the exotic such as Graham Huggan, who analyses the systematic appropriation and commodification of cultural difference in the West.¹⁷ Huggan's *Postcolonial Exotic* is concerned principally with the consumption of specifically textual/literary difference, but his arguments are clearly relevant to the collecting cultures of the period discussed in this chapter. His work explores how postcolonial studies and literary publishers can be said to have helped 'turn marginality itself into a valuable intellectual commodity'¹⁸, just as collectors and art dealers of the early twentieth century promoted the exotic difference of non-Western artefacts, turning them into valuable *artistic* commodities. Huggan also notes that 'sympathetic identification [...] often comes at the expense of *knowledge* of cultures/cultural groups other than one's own' and 'at its most extreme, exoticism's aesthetics of decontextualisation can end up sanctioning cultural ignorance.'¹⁹ In Cunard's comment cited above, as elsewhere in her writing, she differentiates herself from 'devotees of [black] exoticism' precisely through her criticism of their ignorance of black history and culture. The specific exoticisation of Harlem culture to which she refers here is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Although, as I will argue, Cunard often expressed exoticist ideas in her writing about African material culture, her interest in these objects was deep and sustained and she often brought an antiracist/anticolonial dimension to her analysis. The role she played in raising awareness of these objects was also not insignificant. She petitioned a number of English museums to purchase and display African sculpture and campaigned alongside Henry Moore for the restoration of the ethnography collection at the Liverpool Museums. She also worked to increase appreciation for African art through her *Negro* anthology (1934) and in her writing as a journalist for Associated Negro Press, the *Manchester Guardian* and other news outlets and periodicals, in which she described the influence of African sculpture on

¹⁶ Nancy Cunard, 'Concerning "Does Anyone Know Any Negroes?"' [an article by Cunard published in *The Crisis*, September 1931, 300-301], typed manuscript, HRC NCC, Box 10, Folder 11, 2.

¹⁷ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, viii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

European modernist art.²⁰ In the 1950s, she began work on a history of African ivory, amassing hundreds of pages of research on European ethnographic museums and private collections, although this project outgrew her and was never completed.

Much of Cunard's collection was destroyed or looted from her house in occupied France during the Second World War, but she went on collecting throughout her life and had rebuilt a significant collection by the time of her death in 1965, with well over 500 of her bracelets, masks, sculptures and other objects auctioned off at a posthumous sale in Paris the following year. Cunard remained a dedicated student, collector and promoter of African art throughout her life, a passion I will argue in Chapters 1 & 2 was inextricably bound up with her commitment to anti-colonialism and racial equality. It is in this sense in particular that Cunard attempts to move beyond an appropriative relationship with these objects. Her aim to increase recognition for African material culture and wider black artistic and cultural production was, for her, indivisible from 'the whole colour question of [the] day,' being part of what Paul Gilroy describes in *The Black Atlantic* as 'the struggle to have blacks perceived as agents, as people with cognitive capacities and even with an intellectual history—attributes denied by modern racism.'²¹

²⁰ In May 1926, for example, she contributed an article on avant-garde Parisian culture to London *Vogue* magazine, 'Letter from Paris,' in which she reviewed a Josephine Baker performance at the *Folies Bergères* music hall and wrote of the now indisputable African influence in modernist painting. Cunard, 'Letter from Paris', May 1926, reprinted in *The Twenties in Vogue*, ed. Carolyn Hall, (London: Octopus, 1983), 48-49.

Her promotion of African art through the *Negro* anthology (1934) is discussed in Chapter 2.

²¹ Nancy Cunard, 'Works of the 'Ignorant Savage'', written for *Opportunity* February 1935. Typescript held in Cunard's papers, HRC NCC, Box 5, Folder 6. *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* was an important Harlem Renaissance magazine.

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (London: Verso, 1993), 6.

1.1 Material Biographies: Cunard as Collector

Although the collection may speak to other people,
it is always first and foremost a discourse directed towards oneself.

Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting'²²

Maybe I was an African one time.

Nancy Cunard, Poem 'To Alfred Cruickshank', 1941²³

In 'Collecting Reconsidered' Susan Pearce identifies three distinct types of object accumulation, each defining a particular relationship between subject and object: '*souvenirs*,' '*fetish objects*' and '*systematic collections*.'²⁴ Souvenir collections are repositories of hopes, memories, experiences and feelings; as material narratives of personal histories, they serve as a bridge between past and present. Fetishistic collections are extensions of the collector's person and are generally 'formed by people whose imaginations identify with the objects which they desire to gather.'²⁵ (As I will later expand on, Pearce's use of term 'fetish' here derives largely from its application in the psychoanalytic tradition and refers to the various symbolic or psychological significances collected objects can take on, although the term was coined by Portuguese colonial traders in Africa and popularised in anthropology by Charles de Brosses's *Le Culte des Dieux Fétiches* (1760)—a source for Marx's later socio-economic description of commodity fetishism in capitalist societies.) Whereas in the case of souvenirs, objects are subordinate to the subject, in the fetishistic collection, objects are dominant, the collector maintaining 'a possessive but worshipful attitude towards his objects'²⁶ in which his or her identity is formed and sustained by the collection. While souvenir collections can function as a form of self-representation, for the fetishist, objects define the self. What fetishistic collections and souvenirs share, however, is the motivation

²² Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner & Roger Cardinal, (London: Reaktion, 1994), 22.

²³ Cunard, 'To Alfred Cruickshank; (1941), *Poems of Nancy Cunard from the Bodleian Library*, ed. John Lucas, (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2005), 74.

²⁴ Susan Pearce, 'Collecting Reconsidered,' in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan Pearce, (Oxford: Routledge, 1994), 193-204.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

to withdraw objects from the world and enter them into a private discourse/relationship with the individual collector. Adhering to a broadly intellectual rationale, the systematic collection, by contrast, is a public statement, often with an ideological agenda, intending to persuade or impose meaning; it is 'a positive intellectual act designed to demonstrate a point.'²⁷ Although each driven by particular motivations, Pearce stresses that these three collecting modes are not mutually exclusive and can operate either simultaneously or in successive stages of a collection's existence. This section presents an analysis of Cunard's collecting practices in relation to each of these three formations.

Souvenirs: One of the most lyrical interpreters of the relationship between collectors and their possessions, Walter Benjamin describes the powerful mnemonic properties of collections and the chaotic accumulation of memories they can contain. In 'Unpacking My Library', subtitled 'A Talk About Book-Collecting,' Benjamin writes of how there exists suspended in every collection a 'spring tide of memories,' which surges towards the owner in the act of contemplation: the life-history of each item; the time, place and circumstances of its discovery and procurement; and the memory of each prior situation or space in which it has been displayed.²⁸ To collect then, becomes an act of remembrance, a way to substantiate one's own identity through the act of assembling, arranging and contemplating material objects—to create a personal narrative by piecing together the disordered fragments of the past. In terms that resonate with Benjamin's description, Pearce suggests in her monograph *On Collecting* that collections represent a kind of 'material autobiography [...] written as we go along and left behind us as our monument.'²⁹ Objects are for Pearce a kind of 'material language,' as collections are 'a narrative of experience'; they exist as a kind of 'reified self'³⁰: a tangible, enduring and—crucially—*edible* mode of identity.

Scrapbooks and other commonplace books are perhaps the most straightforward example of collecting as autobiography, and Cunard's archives contain many such composite texts. As Benjamin writes, '[t]here is no living library that does not harbor a number of booklike creations from fringe areas': items such as scrapbooks, lists, portfolios of pamphlets, family albums, and hand- or typewritten copies of unavailable texts, all of which 'form the prismatic fringes of a library.'³¹ Many of Cunard's early diaries, beginning in

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

²⁸ Benjamin 'Unpacking My Library', *Selected Writings*, 486 & 491.

²⁹ Pearce, *On Collecting*, 272. My emphasis.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 412, 248.

³¹ Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library', *Selected Writings*, 491.

1909, incorporate photographs and other pasted-in items, and her commonplace books include volumes of poems handwritten by friends, cut out of newspapers, or retyped by Cunard, including works by international modernist writers such as Langston Hughes, T. S. Eliot and Louis Aragon and others.

Cunard was also an assiduous keeper of scrapbooks³², and those from the 1910s to 1930s paint a particularly vivid picture of her tastes, movements, relationships, and cultural interests at the time, portrayed through postcards, letters, poems, press cuttings, publishers' circulars and photographs of literary and artist friends. Other ephemeral documents include book dust-jackets, invitations to exhibitions, and a menu from Bloomsbury's fashionable *Tour Eiffel* restaurant (which featured a Vorticist Room co-designed by Wyndham Lewis) once described by Cunard as the 'carnal spiritual home' of her generation.³³ Also collected were items relating to Surrealism, Dada and Cubism, contemporary theatre, modernist music and black Parisian culture, as well as reviews of works by modernist author friends like Lewis, Pound and Eliot. She also saved articles on her brief marriage to Lieutenant Sydney Fairbairn, reviews of her early poetry collections and contributions to Edith Sitwell's *Wheels* anthology, clippings of published articles she wrote for magazines and newspapers, and photographs, sketches and paintings of her created by artists such as Wyndham Lewis, Man Ray and Ortiz de Zárate, as reproduced in various publications. A subscription to the International Press-Cuttings Bureau provided her with many of these clippings.

A whole scrapbook is dedicated to her Hours Press, and includes proofs of Pound's *XXX Cantos*, reviews of published works, and photographs of Aragon typesetting in the garden of her house in La Chapelle-Réanville. Her '*Cosas de España*' scrapbook (1936-1946) records through items such as postcards, maps and clippings the period during which she worked as a campaigner and war correspondent in the Spanish Civil War—a note added to the inside cover attributes the lack of materials and poor state of many items to the German occupation of her house, explaining that most of the documents relating to the period were lost, destroyed or trampled under the soldiers' boots. In the aftermath of the looting, Cunard gathered together the surviving photographs of the African sculptures and items of jewellery lost or destroyed during this 'dark time' and began the process of

³² The scrapbooks described below are from HRC NCC Boxes 22-23 (Diaries) & Boxes 26-27 (Scrapbooks); Photography Collections: Nancy Cunard Literary File, Album 3 (Paperbound journal, 1957).

³³ Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 29.

'regrouping and cleaning and sticking together.'³⁴ Some she pasted onto sheets of card and others later into a scrapbook (1957) with brief captions about their origins—a recreation of her lost material collection in a new textual-visual form.

Although she began work on an autobiographical composition in the 1950s, this project never progressed and her rough notes are filled with statements about her general disinclination towards the work and her frustration at the mosaic or scrapbook-like quality of the project. Along with the autobiographical sketches she wove into her memoirs of Norman Douglas and George Moore, Cunard's scrapbooks and other 'booklike creations' are perhaps the closest she came to producing an autobiography.³⁵

As I have already noted, collections can function as editable versions of identity. One example of this is the use of collected objects to indicate associations or affiliations with desirable groups or cultural forms.³⁶ This manifests in Cunard's early scrapbooks, which place her own life and work at the centre of the era's vanguard artistic and literary culture. In the case of her African collection, her collecting habits again signal her association with Paris's cosmopolitan avant-garde, in whose apartments and salons African objects were displayed alongside modernist artworks as markers of 'authenticity', modernity and a fashionable alterity. Cunard's collection of African art was in this sense an essential component of her conscious efforts to construct a stylish and modern public persona. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, her African collection connects her to the ontological richness and vitality her primitivist thinking assigned to African diasporic culture more broadly. The avant-garde's admiration for the so-called 'primitive' marked a

³⁴ Notes for *Ivories of Ancient Africa*, Notebook, HRC NCC Box 5, Folder 6.

³⁵ When Cunard tried to write an autobiography in the 1950s, she felt that the disorganization of the writing she produced made it appear like a mosaic or scrapbook. In the rough notes for the provisionally titled *You, Me and Yesterday*, Cunard writes 'Mosaic or Scrapbook? The pen hovers a second, the mind answering immediately "Either will do, although "Both" is the truer word for this. What else can it be but both—slung together as it will seem (but not be), fished out of memory—*really alone*, this time—Not a letter and not a note anywhere [...] All this seems to be "a compromise" between that preposterously unthinkable Autobiography and some scattered "scrap-bookeries".' 'Possible First Words', November 24th 1956, St Cézaire HRC NCC Box 9, Folder 7.

³⁶ As Werner Muensterberger writes in his study of collecting, '[t]rends always involve competition and imitation because they become a vehicle for self-definition. There is both a desire for some form of expression of an individual kind and at the same time there is a propensity for sharing in a current drift and identification with others.' *Collecting: An Unruly Passion*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 199. Maurice Rheims too writes of how collections can function as 'a mirror constructed in such a way as to throw back images not of the real, but of the desirable.' Cited by Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. Elsner & Cardinal, 10.

repudiation of a lifeless, decadent, white bourgeois culture, as is made apparent in Cunard's comment in 1934 that the white man is '*dim* [while] the Negro is very real; he is *there*.'³⁷

If collecting can signal desirable cultural affiliations, it can also function as a form of differentiation or a rebellious act of non-conformity. Elsner and Cardinal's introduction to *The Cultures of Collecting* looks at the idea of a subversive collection: the dream 'to resist the criteria inculcated by one's generation and class, and to collect against the grain—to wriggle out of belonging to an established set.' They suggest that '[s]ometimes one collects so as *not* to submit to social expectation, or to 'belong.'³⁸ In 1938, Cunard's African collection (See fig. 4) was sketched out room-by-room by the NAACP activist, writer and educator William Pickens (also a contributor to the *Negro* anthology) in an article for Associated Negro Press titled 'The House of Nancy Cunard.' In this paean to Cunard, Pickens itemises Cunard's vast collection of African masks, statues and jewellery; her modernist paintings; and her famous bracelet collection: 'a great rack of bracelets and anklets of Africa, perhaps the largest number ever seen together, over 450, of the ivory of the elephant and of the rhinoceros, and of bones'.³⁹ Pickens frames Cunard's collection at Le Puits-Carré as a form of political rebellion against the racism and social prejudices of her class:

In many homes and dwellings I have been, in many places, but Nancy Cunard's house at Chappelle, one hour from Paris, is a place in a class of its own. It is really a small museum of African Art. [...] Small wonder that her American mother, Lady Cunard, could not get on with this independent-minded girl, who has (perhaps from her English father who loved art) a mania for the common people of all races and nations, especially for those that are despised by the snobs of her "class."

Her grandfather founded the CUNARD LINE of British steamships, whose highest product to date is QUEEN MARY, the blue ribbon ship [...] Nancy's father married an American, and this American mother, who is still enormously wealthy, would have been happy if her daughter had married a count or something and given mother the opportunity to hold her nose high among the other English families. But Nancy was born a rebel, and will die a rebel. Rarely do we know of any person to give up

³⁷ Cunard, *Negro*, 69. Cunard's statement is also bound up with her refusal to be identified with whites 'slumming' in Harlem, as is signified by her use of the derogatory term '*ofay*'. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

³⁸ Elsner and Cardinal, 'Introduction', *The Cultures of Collecting*, 3.

³⁹ William Pickens, 'The House of Nancy Cunard', for Associated Negro Press, printed in various news publications, including *The Carolina Times* and *The Afro-American*, Saturday October 1st 1938. See Appendix.



Fig. 4: African objects on display at Nancy Cunard's farmhouse,
Le Puits-Carré, in La Chapelle-Réanville.
Harry Ransom Center, Nancy Cunard Collection.

ease and wealth and “position” and [...] choose the company of humble fighters for freedom.⁴⁰

For Pickens, Cunard’s collection was the physical manifestation of this class rebellion and her sympathy with black political causes. This rebellion had culminated with Cunard’s publication of *Black Man, White Ladyship* (1931), a cutting broadside which denounced her mother’s racism and class prejudice, defended her relationship with the black American jazz musician Henry Crowder, and presented a historical account of the suffering of Africans at the hands of European colonial powers. An act of symbolic matricide, later described by the poet Claude McKay as a ‘Negro stick to beat the Cunard mother,’⁴¹ the publication of this pamphlet ultimately led to her disinheritance and estrangement from her mother. Tory Young positions it also as an act of ‘patricide’, since Cunard ‘broke with her mother to break with empire.’⁴² Pickens frames Cunard’s collection as a testament to this rejection of her white privileged background, but this itself might be read as a form of cultural appropriation, and is further problematised by the fact that much of her early collection of African objects would have been acquired using the imperial inheritance of the Cunard shipping lines.

There are a number of stories of Cunard laying out and describing her collections for others, most memorably in Crowder’s memoir of his relationship with Cunard, *As Wonderful As All That?*, in which he describes how after their first dinner together she had ‘proposed to show me some trinkets and treasures’ in her bedroom—‘some African bracelets, beads and one or two objects of gold [...] some of which she was wearing’ and how ‘[i]n the inspection of these articles I often found myself quite close to her [...] and] could feel my blood excitedly racing to my head.’⁴³ Cunard was aware of the cultural significance of her ivory bracelets, citing in the *Negro* anthology a passage from G. T.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home: An Autobiography*, from an extract printed in *Essays on Race and Empire*, ed. Maureen Moynagh, (Toronto: Broadview, 2002), 302.

⁴² Tory Young, ‘Nancy Cunard’s *Black Man, White Ladyship* as Surrealist Tract’, *At Home and Abroad in the Empire: British Women Write the 1930s*, ed. Robin Hackett, Freda Hauser & Gay Wachman, (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont, 2009), 168.

⁴³ Henry Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That? Henry Crowder’s Memoir of His Affair with Nancy Cunard, 1928-1935* with Hugo Speck, (Navarro, California: Wild Tree Press, 1987), 65-66.

Benjamin’s friend Gershom Scholem writes of ‘Benjamin’s deep, inner relationship to the things he owned’ and how ‘[f]or as long as I knew him, even during my last visit with him in Paris, he loved to display such objects, to put them into his visitor’s hands, as he mused over them aloud like a pianist improvising at the keyboard.’ Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, cited in *Walter Benjamin’s Archive: Images, Texts, Signs*, ed. Ursula Marx, Gudrun Schwarz, Michael Schwarz, Erdmut Wizisla, trans. Esther Leslie, (London: Verso, 2007), 47.

Basden's *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, in which he notes that such items 'can only be worn by rich women or by such as are of high rank.'⁴⁴ In this part-public, part-private display of her collections, Cunard uses these symbols of female wealth and power as part of what Crowder presents as a kind of seduction ritual. Almost all of the entries in Ford's book of memoirs of Cunard comment on her collections, and her friend the poet Iris Tree even connects her impassioned temperament to her collecting practices, describing how she 'accumulated' each new experience 'with collector's zeal.'⁴⁵ Whenever she travelled, she would carry with her a selection of items from her collection, and Sylvia Townsend Warner describes in her diaries one of the visits Cunard paid to the house Warner shared with her partner Valentine Ackland:

Nancy came on the 4 train, a slender support to her corals, and after dinner, out of a variety of handbags and paper bags and coloured handkerchiefs, she unpacked the treasures of Africa, quantities of amber, her Ladyship's pearls, and some very pretty Cartier jewels of his pre-USA period: an inch-long mat of turquoise matrix, rather rough, its natural outlines, clasped in minute bands of black enamel and small diamonds. The effect was very Nancy.⁴⁶

She became so closely associated with the objects she collected that the British poet Laura Riding (whose work was published by Cunard's Hours Press) gave her the nickname "Ivory."⁴⁷

Most of Cunard's African collection was looted or destroyed during the German occupation of her house in Normandy, with many of her wooden sculptures and masks burnt by the soldiers as fuel. The local mayor, a fascist collaborator, had opened up the house in Cunard's absence and invited German troops and local villagers to pillage freely. Countless important documents and early letters were lost or destroyed, including three-

⁴⁴ G. T. Basden, cited by Cunard, *Negro*, 731.

⁴⁵ Iris Tree, 'We Shall Not Forget,' published in *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 22.

⁴⁶ December 10th 1953, *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner*, ed. Claire Harman, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), 204. Ackland, Warner and Cunard held shared political interests, collaborating in the resistance against the spread of Fascism and in sending aid and campaigning for refugees during the Spanish Civil War. In addition to her work as a writer, Ackland ran a struggling antique shop from their home in Dorchester. A long, excited and tender series of correspondence with Cunard running from 1943 to 1964 catalogues the objects they exchanged between them as both gifts and purchases (fish-shaped items, a gentleman's soap container, Marseilles Tarot cards, fans, candlesticks...), Cunard often sending objects from abroad to be sold in Ackland's shop. Ackland's letters are held in the HRC NCC. Some of Cunard's later letters to Ackland are held in the Sylvia Townsend Warner archives at Dorset County Museum.

⁴⁷ Robert Graves, letter to Cunard, 1943 (undated), HRC NCC Box 14, Folder 6.

quarters of the materials used in the compilation of the *Negro* anthology. Much of her book collection, including first editions of important modernist texts and a rare 1598 edition of the works of Chaucer, was stolen, burned or thrown into her well together with 'a small sheep [...] excrement, an old chintz cover from the sofa and two rifles.'⁴⁸ The covers of her copy of Rodker's edition of Pound's *Cantos* were found nailed to a window frame. Most of her collection of paintings and sketches had disappeared, and eleven bullet holes had been shot through Yves Tanguy's painting *La Création du Monde*. A sketch by Wyndham Lewis lay under a tree in the garden, 'all mashed and earth-trodden'; a Moroccan chest containing the African beads that had once decorated her Hours Press shop in Paris had disappeared—a few fragments of beads remaining in the passage, crushed under the soldiers' boots.⁴⁹

In her 1945 poem, 'Réanville,' Cunard wrote of the aftermath of the looting:

I, in French, savage village-cot
 Am aureoled with dust and dung
 Imbuing now the shining words
 Of poets – laid, now cold, now hot
 On print, MSS, and letter-love
 And twenty years of paper there.
 Here is a bead, a mask, a hair
 I wore, before the men were shot
 In Badajoz, Guernica bombed,
 And later thousands felled, entombed
 All in a day, now here, now there,
 Throughout the world, the roaring world...⁵⁰

The destruction of her documents and collections represented to her all the violence and stupidity of war—"Death to the intellect!" was roared⁵¹—the remaining fragments painful reminders of a time before the thousands of deaths at the massacre of Badajoz and the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, when she had worked as an eyewitness correspondent for Associated Negro Press, the *Manchester Guardian* and many other publications (See Chapter 4). She appealed to the French authorities and tried to sue the

⁴⁸ Cunard, *These Were The Hours*, (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 205.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 203-205.

⁵⁰ Cunard, 'Réanville,' July 15th 1945, HRC NCC Box 8, Folder 6, ll.12-23.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, l.32.

local mayor but was accused of being a foreign subversive and received no financial compensation.

If, for the collector, objects are a form of self-definition, of self-fashioning, then the loss or destruction of collected objects can signify a rupture in identity, as well as the loss of memories and experiences.⁵² In *These Were the Hours*, her memoirs of the Hours Press (to which Le Puits-Carré had once been home), Cunard reflected on the experience as 'a discovery of something entirely new, bound up with something entirely past.'⁵³ It was, for her, 'a sort of voyage of discovery—of the *discovery of destruction*, and within it [...] an element of "return after death."⁵⁴ Cunard was haunted by the destruction of her collections, now dispatched, as she later wrote, 'into the domain of what one now calls 'Before'.⁵⁵ In a letter to Charles Burkhart in 1952, she imagined the life her collection may have gone on to have without her, writing of her enduring wish to trace her lost African objects and to 'know JUST WHAT they had/have been through and where, and with whom, and why, and when.'⁵⁶ She even fantasised about a work of detective fiction about the search, a 'psychological imbroglio,' which she named "WHERE ARE MY IVORIES?"⁵⁷

In *The Social Life of Things*, Arjun Appadurai observes that the loss or destruction of an object represents a rupture in the life of the thing itself, and not only in the life of the collector. For Appadurai, objects (or 'things-in-motion' as he describes them) have their own biographies or 'careers,' and radical transformations in meaning and value can occur during acts of exchange or transference of ownership because of differences in cultural assumptions between parties.⁵⁸ Any diversion from an object's 'proper path'—caused by gifting, theft, sale, inheritance, plunder or any other means—is what Appadurai terms a 'crisis' in the life of the object, the 'anthropological challenge' being to identify its 'relevant and customary paths.'⁵⁹ Cunard reflects throughout her published writing and private correspondence on the crisis that withdrew these objects from her ownership, but not on

⁵² As Pearce observes in *On Collecting*, '[a]ttention to collecting is matched, as we ought to expect, by suffering caused by its loss. Such possessions are part of self, and therefore their loss is felt as a lessening of self.' (175) Benjamin makes a similar observation in 'Unpacking My Library', where he writes, '[y]ou have all heard of people whom the loss of their books has turned into invalids.' (487).

⁵³ Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 201.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁵⁶ Nancy Cunard, Letter to Charles Burkhart, Lamothe Fénelon, 2nd January 1952, Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Appadurai, (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 5, 41, 26.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 26, 29.

the originary crises that would have brought them into her possession—that is, the economic exploitation and violence often involved in trafficking African and Oceanic sculpture into Europe in order to gratify the Western taste for ‘exotic’ objects. Non-Western artefacts that found their way into collectors’ rooms had often been stolen or bought on unfair terms by colonial civil servants, sailors, anthropologists, missionaries or explorers, and even when fashioned explicitly as ‘tourist art’ by entrepreneurial locals, Appadurai suggests that this too represents a form of diversion, since the objects have been ‘transformed culturally, economically, and socially by the tastes, markets, and ideologies of larger economies.’⁶⁰

Susan Stewart (1984), Susan Pearce (1994, 1995, 1998), Jean Baudrillard (1968) and others have all shown collecting to be an essential component of Western identity formation, and what James Clifford terms the West’s ‘strategy for the deployment of a possessive self.’⁶¹ What then are the cultural politics of using non-Western objects in this process, particularly when the practices of collecting and conservation would have been antithetical to many of the cultures from which these objects were removed?⁶² I examine the cultural and political ramifications of Cunard’s collections in the second and third parts of this chapter and in Chapter 2, but in this context I want to note how collecting and reading objects solely as autobiographies or narratives of experience can occlude the cultural history and material biographies of the objects themselves.

Fetish objects: Pearce uses the term ‘fetish’ in her work on collections in a specifically psychoanalytic sense, which I want to begin by differentiating from its origins in colonial responses to African objects. The word ‘fetish’ originated among Portuguese traders who travelled to Africa in the 16th century and stems from the word *feitiço*, meaning charm or sorcery. The use of this word can be read as an attempt to use object relations to differentiate Europeans from the new societies they were encountering, but it soon became

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶¹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham and London: Duke university Press, 1993); Susan Pearce, *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (1994), *On Collecting* (1995), *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* (1998); Baudrillard, ‘The System of Collecting’ (1968); Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 218.

⁶² As Chinua Achebe writes on Igbo art: ‘once made, art emerges from privacy into the public domain. There are no private collections among the Igbo beyond personal ritual objects like the *Ikenga*. Indeed, the very concept of collections would be antithetical to the Igbo artistic intention. Collections by their nature will impose rigid, artistic attitudes and conventions on creativity which the Igbo sensitivity goes out of the way to avoid.’ Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays, 1965-1987*, (London: Heinemann, 1998), 43.

widely used by Africans in their own efforts to explain local customs to Europeans.⁶³ It was not only the new aesthetic forms that later attracted modernists to these objects but also these apparent 'magical' qualities, celebrated particularly by the Dadaists and Surrealists, who believed in the power of the non-rational to liberate and rejuvenate European society and culture. Pearce's use of the term in the context of her work on collecting, however, refers specifically to the symbolic significance objects can take on and the psychological power they can hold over their owners (or the potential 'subordination of the subject to romanticized objects'⁶⁴ as she phrases it).

Many theorists have noted how the origins of collecting can often be found in childhood.⁶⁵ Cunard's own interest in collecting began at an early age, when she began gathering and classifying wild flowers, *naturalia* and other found objects—reminiscent of the kinds of collections assembled by 19th Century natural historians.⁶⁶ In Walter Strachan's memoir of Cunard, he stated his belief that this anticipated her later collecting passions:

Her collecting of "*objets trouvés*" foreshadowed her more specialized feeling for African ivories, pre-Columbian carvings and enthusiasm for the sculpture of her contemporary in age, Henry Moore.⁶⁷

⁶³ See Robert Bernasconi, 'Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti', *Hegel After Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett, (London: Routledge, 2002), 53.

William Pietz argues that, as such, the term 'not only originated from, but remains specific to, the problematic of the social value of material objects as revealed in situations formed by the encounter of radically heterogeneous social systems.' Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish', I, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 9 (Spring, 1985), 7.

⁶⁴ Pearce, *Interpreting Objects*, 202.

⁶⁵ Muensterberger, for example, writes of how the 'roots of [a collector's] passion can almost always be traced back to their formative years,' when gathering and assembling objects can provide a remedy for childhood anxiety, loneliness and feelings of vulnerability. Inspired by Winnicott's work on the impact of childhood traumata on adult life, Muensterberger considers collecting as 'an almost magical means for undoing the strains and stresses of early life.' *Collecting*, 13 & 15.

⁶⁶ Daphne Fielding, *Emerald and Nancy: Lady Cunard and her Daughter*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968), 17.

⁶⁷ Walter Strachan, *Brave Poet*, 271.

Sylvia Townsend Warner also writes about Cunard's appreciation for found objects: 'She was thin as a wraith and had a tormenting neuritis in her shoulder. This did not prevent her from walking back with great speed and energy over the downs, nor from coming back with such loads of flint in her coat pockets that silhouetted on a skyline her slender person gave the impression that panniers had been fastened on a cheetah. During the next hour or so, Nancy would be in the bathroom, working on the flints with a nailbrush. Then a towel would be spread over her bed and the flints laid out—to be admired, examined graded: some for polishing, others to be rejected. This capacity for magpie delighting was one of her prettiest charms. She used to collect beads (and sewed little bags exactly to contain them), shells, small nonsenses.' *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 228.

In his psychoanalytic study of collecting, Werner Muensterberger includes a case-study of a prominent collector of African masks and sculptures, who herself acknowledged the 'essential link' between her traumatic childhood and her later collecting practices; in response to this, Muensterberger observes that collecting may function for some as a replacement 'for the love and tenderness they may have lacked during their early years.'⁶⁸ Similar arguments have been made by other theorists of collecting, including Baudrillard, who suggests that collecting represents for children 'the most rudimentary way to exercise control over the outer world: by laying things out, grouping them, handling them.'⁶⁹ In response to feelings of alienation and powerlessness, the child imposes order on a system of objects in what Baudrillard terms 'an enterprise of abstract mastery.'⁷⁰ A recent exhibition at the Barbican Centre in London, *Magnificent Obsessions: The Artist as Collector*, also touched on the childhood origins of collecting. The curators of this exhibition presented Andy Warhol's restless acquisitions as compensation for an early life that had been relatively lacking in possessions, his preoccupation with toys and juvenile ephemera produced by his nostalgia for a particular kind of idealised childhood domesticity. The artist Arman's collecting obsession was similarly presented as a response to the Second World War deprivation he had experienced as a child.⁷¹ (Like Cunard, Arman was particularly drawn to African sculpture and produced a number of paintings depicting a collage-like arrangement of printed African objects.)

It is difficult to speculate on Cunard's own early, unconscious motivations for collecting, but her biographer notes that her early years were lonely and isolated, her parents seldom spending time with her, and her mother professing a deep aversion to motherhood, which she called 'a low thing—the lowest.'⁷² Clearly, Cunard never experienced the kinds of early material depravation described in relation to Warhol and Arman, but it is apparent from comments she makes about her own childhood that she saw in African culture an escapist, primitivist exoticism that represented everything her own strict aristocratic upbringing was not. An early unpublished poem she wrote at the end of the summer of 1919, the same period during which she began collecting African bracelets,

⁶⁸ Muensterberger, *Collecting*, 17-18.

⁶⁹ Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting,' *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. Elsner & Cardinal, 9. Freud also suggests that fetish objects can function as 'a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it,' "Fetishism", *Complete Psychological Works*, 21, 153.

⁷⁰ Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting,' *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. Elsner & Cardinal, 9.

⁷¹ *Magnificent Obsessions: The Artist as Collector*, Barbican, London, 12th February – 25th May 2015.

⁷² Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 12.

reveals a conscious imaginative identification with Africa in response to feelings of alienation from her own culture:

The garden is full of green apples
That I shall never pick. In the evening
I lie in a large field and think of Africa
Teeming with animals, dream of its spaces and mysteries,
Later return unhaunted
By the day into the creaking, haunted house.⁷³

The exoticist mystification of Africa in this poem reveals her early fetishisation of cultural otherness. Written during a period of anxiety and depression, the antagonisms she perceives in the environment around her—the forbidden fruit, the haunted house—are alleviated by an imaginative retreat into an essentialist and naively conceived African landscape. Thirty-five years later, in her biography of Norman Douglas, she wrote of how this sense of identification had begun around six years old, when she dreamed of 'Africa [...] 'The Dark Continent'—with Africans dancing and drumming around me, and I one of them, though still white, knowing, mysteriously enough, how to dance in their own manner [...] And all of it was a mixture of apprehension and sometimes turned into joy, and even rapture.'⁷⁴

A number of critics of Cunard's work, her collaborators, her biographers, and she herself have suggested that her later interest in African material cultures and in black political causes was initiated by an imaginative identification with racial difference. Maureen Moynagh characterises Cunard's primitivism as one that 'fluctuates between identification and appropriation,' while her most recent biographer, Lois Gordon, speculates that her strict and isolated upbringing may have been a source for her later sympathetic identification with racial oppression and social injustice.⁷⁵ The Jamaican writer and political leader Marcus Garvey, who went on to contribute to Cunard's *Negro* anthology, wrote in his essay 'An Apostrophe to Miss Nancy Cunard' (1932) of his belief that she thought 'sympathetically black', and when the Trinidadian poet Alfred Cruickshank asked Cunard,

⁷³ Nancy Cunard, 'Myself', Turks Croft, August 1919. NCC HRC Box 6, Folder 8.

Gordon observes that Cunard's bracelets were some of the few material possessions she took with her during this summer at Turks Croft. *Nancy Cunard*, 86.

⁷⁴ Nancy Cunard, *Grand Man: Memories of Norman Douglas*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954), 140.

⁷⁵ Moynagh, *Essays on Race and Empire*, 25.

Lois Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 7.

'What was it moved you to enlist / In our sad cause your all of heart and soul?'—she replied, 'Maybe I was an African one time.'⁷⁶

Cultural theorists have long been critical of the politics of such cross-cultural imaginings and sceptical of their progressive or revolutionary potential, suggesting that they lead inevitably to a subordination of the other.⁷⁷ It is clear, as Diana Fuss argues, that this kind of imaginative identification with difference can involve 'a degree of symbolic violence [and] a measure of temporary mastery and possession'⁷⁸ since identification can in some forms represent as an attempt to appropriate the place and identity of the other. Dependent as they are on ownership, the identification with and collecting of 'exotic' objects appears then as a manifestation of this imaginative possession of or mastery over the other. It is possible to read Cunard's acts of identification with Africa and her representation of the 'self' through 'other' objects as part of an empathetic and inclusive engagement with cultural difference and the basis for her later interventions against racism and colonialism. But this 'fetishistic' relationship, as Pearce terms it, can also be interpreted as replicating the structures of colonial appropriation and exploitation that much of her work intended to critique.⁷⁹

In 'The Eloquence of Objects,' Roger Cardinal explains how fetishistic relationships with objects are bound up with the sensory experience of the collector:

⁷⁶ Marcus Garvey, 'An Apostrophe to Nancy Cunard' (1932), *More Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, (London: Frank Cass, 1977), 40. Emphasis in original.

Alfred Cruickshank / Nancy Cunard, 'To Alfred Cruickshank', *Poems of Nancy Cunard*, (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2005), 74.

⁷⁷ Spivak, for example, writes that '[n]o perspective critical of imperialism can turn the other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been an incommensurable and discontinuous other into a domesticated other that consolidates the imperialist self.' *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 130.

bell hooks has argued that, 'Whether or not desire for contact with the Other, for connection rooted in the longing for pleasure, can act as a critical intervention challenging and subverting racist domination, inviting and enabling critical resistance, is un-realized political possibility.' bell hooks, 'Eating the Other', *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 22. First published 1992.

See also Gubar, *Racechanges: Black Skin, White Face in American Culture*, (New York: OUP, 1997), 244-245, *passim*.

⁷⁸ Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 9.

⁷⁹ As Huggan observes, '[a]s a technology of representation, exoticism is self-empowering; self-referential even, insofar as the objects of its gaze are not supposed to look back [...] For this reason, among others, exoticism has proved over time to be a highly effective instrument of imperial power.' *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 14.

If fetishists are people who derive a stimulus from the material presence and sensory textures of the objects they hold dear [...] then collectors are indeed fetishists, for they love to gaze at, stroke and even whisper to the things they have come to possess [...] The patina on a much-handled ceremonial carving, [...] the densely dappled surface of an Impressionist painting – there is never an end to the sensations which collectors can draw and draw again from their trophies, and which afford a marvellous finger-tip hold upon a contextual reality to which those objects bear witness.⁸⁰

The relationship sketched out here by Cardinal is one of metonymy, the collected object providing a tangible, material connection with the culture or context it represents. Cunard's friend, the American writer Charles Burkhart, described an occasion in the days before her death when they looked together through a trunk containing some of the material fragments of her past, the 'musty sad debris of all that famous and brilliant and energetic life.'⁸¹ Burkhart observed a moment 'when she held a favourite ancient bracelet to her cheek [...] crooned something I could not hear and gave me a look of dim, remote ecstasy, as if I would understand.'⁸² There is something of the souvenir collection in Burkhart's account, with its nostalgic longing for a past represented through objects, but Cunard's friend and collaborator on the *Negro* anthology, Raymond Michelet, also described how it had come to her in these final days of her life 'to think of herself as African, and to think that her true life was no longer here in Europe,' which hints at a possible fetishistic or metonymic structure of engagement with these object.⁸³ As I have already noted, following Pearce's formation, fetishistic collections are generally assembled by people who identify with the objects they collect, but in Cunard's case, her African collection also provided her with a tangible, sensory, metonymic link to a culture with which she felt a strong imaginative connection. As Benjamin has written, '[t]he true method of making things present, is to represent them in our space.'⁸⁴

'Fetishistic' collecting is often presented as an inferior, appropriative, even deviant structure of relations with objects, in sharp contrast with the proper, scholarly, more rational taxonomy of the systematic collection, which is typically associated with public

⁸⁰ Roger Cardinal, 'The Eloquence of Objects', *Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other*, ed. Anthony Shelton, (London: Horniman Museum, 2001), 28. These markers of 'authenticity' in African sculpture are discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁸¹ Burkhart, *Herman and Nancy and Ivy: Three Lives in Art*, (London: Gollancz, 1977), 114.

⁸² *Ibid.* This account calls to mind Benjamin's description of the collector handling his objects: 'No sooner does he hold them in his hand than he appears inspired by them and seems to look through them into the distance, like an augur.' Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 207.

⁸³ Raymond Michelet, 'Nancy Cunard,' *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 131. My translation.

⁸⁴ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 206.

collecting institutions like museums and galleries. Clifford makes an interesting and provocative suggestion, however, that rather than engaging with non-Western objects only as cultural and artistic signifiers, a more intimate, imaginative, even fetishistic relation with these objects 'can return to them [...] their lost status as fetishes—not specimens of a deviant or exotic 'fetishism' but *our own* fetishes.'⁸⁵ In this sense, they regain their status as 'sources of fascination with the power to disconcert [and] fixate rather than simply the capacity to edify or inform.'⁸⁶ A fetishistic relationship with these objects appears in this sense as the basis for a more progressive form of collecting—one which depends on the intensity of object fixation to resist Western hegemonic forms of classification and to change the relationship between both self and culture, and between self and cultural others.

Systematic collections: As souvenir collections are concerned with memory, and fetishistic collections with identification or longing, the systematic collection can be said to be connected to knowledge production. While the first two formations of collecting are often defined as a form of retreat or withdrawal, removed from the realities of historical and economic processes, the systematic collection represents an active attempt to intervene in these processes. Pearce thus defines the systematic collection as dependent upon principles of organization which are 'perceived to have an external reality beyond the specific material under consideration,'⁸⁷ the intention being to assemble groups or sets so as to demonstrate understanding and to make a personal, public statement about, or intervention into, current knowledge systems. Although a systematic form of collecting attempts to draw the viewer into the collector's frame of reference, it is not intended to produce a private reflection of the internal life of the collector, rather a public statement about the world beyond the limits of the collection.

Since the cultural and political motivations for Cunard's collections will be the focus of the second and third sections of this chapter, and also Chapter 2, I will just briefly observe here that in Cunard's collecting practices and in her writing on African material culture, this manifests in a number of important ways: in her use of the Surrealists' juxtapositional logic in the arrangement of her collections, which drew deliberate stylistic parallels between European modernist art and African sculpture; in her observations on new forms of collecting and display, and the transition of non-Western objects from specimens to artworks, as expressed in her commentaries on various museums and

⁸⁵ Clifford, 'On Collecting Art and Culture', *The Predicament of Culture*, 229.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Pearce, *On Collecting*, 228.

galleries; in the dramatic staging of her bracelets in the iconography of the period, which Jane Marcus suggests 'bound her like shackles to the history of slavery'⁸⁸; and through her use of African objects from various public and private collections, including her own, to advance the antiracist, anticolonial aims of the *Negro* anthology, which may in fact be read in its entirety as a kind of systematic, interventionist collection, as I discuss in Chapter 2.

1.2 Narratives of Discovery: Paris and Primitivism

In a 1926 article for the *New York Herald Tribune*, John F. Hanscom reports on 'a new collector's craze' sweeping through avant-garde circles.⁸⁹ 'Queer tribal carvings,' he writes, 'long gatherers of dust in curio shops, have suddenly soared in value,' following pronouncements from European art connoisseurs that modernism takes its inspiration entirely from Africa.⁹⁰ Writing in the idiom of Europe's imperialists, Hanscom explains for his readers and would-be collectors that 'African statues, Negro carvings and the other morbidly curious fetish relics of the mystical religions of the Dark Continent are now the most prized trophies of the collector who prides himself on keeping abreast of these hectic times in art.'⁹¹

The racist exoticism of Hanscom's language characterises precisely the representation of African sculpture Cunard attempted to counter with the 'Sculpture and Ethnology' section of the *Negro* anthology, as I discuss in Chapter 2. But it also shows the heights to which collectors' interest in these objects had grown, and the consequent newfound marketability of African material culture on the global art market, which had been brought about by European artists' interest in and appropriation of African forms. Announcements of this new collecting trend recur throughout the art reviews of the period, the critic Marya Mannes writing in 1929 that 'the interest in old African art has reached the proportions of a craze,' intensified by a belief that the fashion for these objects may be

⁸⁸ Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*, 136.

⁸⁹ John F. Hanscom, 'The Newest Art Craze is Black African', *New York Herald Tribune*, 31st January 1926, 9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.* The phrase 'Dark Continent' came into use in the late nineteenth century, having been used by the Welsh explorer Henry Morton Stanley in his 1878 book *Through the Dark Continent*.

soon to pass.⁹² Like Hanscom, Mannes too is quick to speculate on the specious and likely commercial motives of the trend: '[c]ollectors realise,' she suggests, 'that here is a new and probably limited field to be exploited and enjoyed before it sinks into the inevitable [...] oblivion of all collecting fads.'⁹³ These two commentaries on the collecting cultures of the 1920s both reveal how the art market had capitalised on the perceived exoticism of these objects, 'helping turn marginality itself into a valuable [...] commodity',⁹⁴ to return to Graham Huggan's phrase.

Although Mannes and Hanscom represent the collecting of African sculpture in the West as a recent phenomenon, it had in fact been collected by European artists since around 1905, moving into wider public consciousness from roughly 1919 onwards.⁹⁵ The collecting of African and other non-Western objects in fact extends at least as far back as the *Wunderkammer* or *theatrum mundi* of the European Renaissance: miniature representations of world culture in which individual objects served as metonyms of entire countries or regions. What the early decades of the twentieth century marked was a redefinition of how and why these objects were collected and displayed, with items once exhibited as curios redefined as either ethnographic specimens or artistic masterpieces. What Mannes and Hanscom characterised as a passing trend was in fact a critical period of transformation in the status of these objects in the West, not only among artists and collectors but also in the emerging social sciences, public art institutions and museums.

The stylistic influence of '*l'art nègre*' (the indiscriminate term used to describe African, Oceanic and Native American sculpture, popularised by the French collector, dealer and critic, Paul Guillaume) became so prevalent in European visual art that by 1920 Jean Cocteau had scornfully declared that the art world's '*crise nègre*' had become 'as boring as

⁹² Marya Mannes, 'African Art in the Rubenstein Collection,' *International Studio* (May 1929), 55. Cited by Christopher B. Steiner in 'The Tradition of African Art,' *Questions of Tradition*, eds. Mark Salber Phillips & Gordon Schochet, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 101.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, viii.

⁹⁵ It is generally thought that the uptake was slower in America, but the avant-garde trendsetter Alfred Stieglitz had staged the exhibition unfortunately titled 'Statuary in Wood by African Savages: The Root of Modern Art' in New York as early as 1914, an exhibition which Stieglitz envisioned would display ethnographic materials 'solely from the point of view of art.' As if the title for this show were not enough, the show's curator Maurice de Zayas described the works on show for the catalogue as the 'product of the 'Land of Fright,' created by a mentality full of fear, and completely devoid of the faculties of observation and analysis,' illustrating the racist, condescending views that often accompanied even projects to promote African sculpture at the time. Stieglitz and de Zayas both cited in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 70.

Mallarméan Japonisme.⁹⁶ As a powerful imperial centre and site of diasporic contact, and the city in which modernist artists claimed to have first 'discovered' and redesignated African masks and fetishes as so-called 'primitive art,' the French capital became an important international marketplace for collectors hoping to acquire objects in the style of those that had influenced the work of artists like Picasso, Vlaminck and Matisse. This collecting craze formed part of the wider *vogue nègre* that had taken post-war Paris by storm: an exoticist fashion that combined non-Western artefacts, Montmartre's American-influenced jazz scene, Josephine Baker's playfully exoticist dance performances, and African-inspired clothing, jewellery and interior design.

It was during this period, as James Clifford writes, that 'a series of stereotypes long associated with backwardness and inferiority came to stand for liberation and spontaneity, for a simultaneous recovery of ancient sources and an access to true modernity.'⁹⁷ Although it helped bring about positive re-evaluations of black expressive culture, the *vogue nègre* was, as Brent Hayes Edwards notes, definitively 'acquisition-minded.'⁹⁸ Both artistically and commercially appropriative, elements of African and African-American cultures were absorbed indiscriminately into the same cultural trend. Among Parisian avant-garde artists, not least the Surrealists, African sculpture came to represent a means to revolutionise artistic forms and rejuvenate contemporary culture, exotic others perceived to be 'pure', 'authentic' and 'free of that culturally corrosive *anomie*' afflicting the modern West.⁹⁹ By the mid-1930s, however, what had once been used by artists in their resistance against the dominant culture was becoming a firm part of high art culture and a determining force in the popular fashions of the time, with African and Oceanic masks and other objects integrated seamlessly into chic, modern décor.¹⁰⁰

Cunard was portrayed by number of modernist artists, working in various media, who incorporated primitivist aesthetics into their work. She was sculpted a number of times by Constantin Brancusi, whose work had brought abstraction and primitivism into European sculpture for the first time. She was unaware of these sculptures until 1956, when

⁹⁶ Jean Cocteau, 'Opinions on Negro Art · 1920', reprinted in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 129.

⁹⁷ James Clifford, 'Negrophilia', in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Dennis Hollier, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 901.

⁹⁸ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 44.

⁹⁹ Glenn Willmott, *Modernist Goods: Primitivism, the Market and the Gift*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 5.

¹⁰⁰ See Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), 291. First published 1938.



Figs. 5 & 6

Jeune Fille Sophistiquée (Portrait of N.C.) in polished bronze, Constantin Brancusi, 1928

Jeune Fille Sophistiquée (Portrait of N.C.) in wood, Constantin Brancusi, 1928

Images taken at the Guggenheim Museum, 1955

Harry Ransom Center, Nancy Cunard Collection.



she received two photoreproductions from the Guggenheim (figs. 5 & 6): 'One in wood, the other in bronze, and both utterly unlike what I take to be my 'line,' but exquisite things.'¹⁰¹ Brancusi was known to destroy pieces that displayed too much of an African influence, but his abstracted sculptures of Cunard, inspired by his earlier piece, *The White Negress* (1923), clearly reference her interest in Africa and African objects with their geometric, ovoid forms. It is Cecil Beaton and Man Ray's iconic photographs, however, showing Cunard posing with her collection of ivory bracelets that have dominated readings of her relationship with African material culture. Published in London *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, the connection between Cunard's collecting practices and her self-fashioned, avant-garde public persona is represented starkly by these images—as Wendy Grossman rightly observes, 'Cunard's multitude of ivory bangles acted as signifiers for a new kind of modernity' and by the time Beaton's shots were taken in 1930, 'the now well-known socialite's savvy promotion of her image and self-branding as trendsetter were well established.'¹⁰²

Yet if this had been true of Cunard in the 1920s, by the time she began work on compiling the *Negro* anthology her interest had become about more than just appropriating African objects in order to present herself as an avant-garde tastemaker on the pages of *Vogue* magazine. Where once her interest in African material cultures had been purely aesthetic, it had by this time taken a profoundly political and anti-imperial turn. Her preface to *Negro* makes clear the role that African sculpture would play in her critique of Europe's 'imperialist masters' and their civilising mission: 'At one time labelled en bloc 'cannibals,' 'savages,' who have never produced anything, etc., it is now the fashion to say that the white man is in Africa for the black man's good. Reader, had you never heard of or seen any African sculpture I think the reproductions in this [anthology] would suggest to you that the Negro has a superb and individual sense of form and equal genius in his execution.' (iv) The Surrealists' interest in anticolonial politics and ethnography, her attraction towards Communist politics, and her awakening to racist oppression of African Americans through her relationship with Henry Crowder all gave Cunard's interest in African diasporic culture

¹⁰¹ Letter to Charles Burkhart, August 10th 1956, Lamothe-Fénelon. Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

¹⁰² Wendy Grossman, *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 137.

Cunard's public image undoubtedly helped bring African jewellery and sculpture into the mainstream and in doing so would have contributed to increasing demand for these objects. As Clifford observes, 'Modernist primitivism, with its claims to deeper humanist sympathies and a wider aesthetic sense, goes hand-in-hand with a developed market in tribal art.' *Predicament of Culture*, 198.

new political urgency. And if her later writing as an amateur ethnographer never fully escaped the exoticist primitivism of the period, it is for all of its contradictions and idiosyncrasies a nonetheless valuable portrait of an era of major transformation in the reception and presentation of African sculpture that still informs contemporary engagement with these objects in the West.

The British Foreign Office prevented Cunard's attempts to visit sub-Saharan Africa in the 1930s by refusing to provide her with the necessary papers, but she travelled extensively throughout Europe to research African sculpture and jewellery, both in preparation for the publication of *Negro* and while researching her later unfinished *Ivory Road* project in the 1950s.¹⁰³ Wartime damage and temporary closure of a number of museums across Europe had hindered this second project—'ever since the end stages of my *Negro* [anthology] in 1933-1934. A promise to self—in which she planned to print photographic illustrations of African ivory sculptures and carvings from various private and public collections, along with an editorial essay that would collate limited previous art historical studies and mentions in travellers' and explorers' chronicles.¹⁰⁴

In 1954 she launched a campaign to rebuild the interior of the Liverpool Museum (a casualty of the Liverpool Blitz) from where she had hoped to gather materials for the ivory project. Previously, she had obtained from the museum several photographs of African sculpture for the *Negro* anthology; in a notebook she records how, on a 1931 research trip there with Kwesi Oku, contributor to the anthology from what was then the British Gold Coast, they were turned away from a dozen hotels because of the 'Colour Bar' (racial segregation), finally finding a 'disgusting lodging house' in which they were provided with 'a sort of closet' with a broken door.¹⁰⁵ In early 1954, on Cunard's initiative, a letter calling for the rebuilding of the museum's interior, signed by Augustus John, Henry Moore, the publisher Roger Senhouse and William King, who had recently retired from the British Museum, was sent to the Mayor of Liverpool, the MP for the Liverpool Exchange District (the museum's constituency), the *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, prompting a public

¹⁰³ Correspondence with George Padmore's widow in 1959 reveals she was still thinking about making a trip to sub-Saharan Africa late in her life, but for unknown reasons (perhaps due to her worsening health) this did not come to pass. See Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 325. She visited North Africa in the late 1930s and wrote reports criticising the colonial occupation of Tunisia for Associated Negro Press. See Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 239.

¹⁰⁴ Quotation from Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 303. Information on the *Ivory Road* project taken from a diary entry, October 27th 1955, HRC NCC Box 23, Folder 2. This book interweaves a personal diary of her trip with factual notes on the various museums and private collections she visited.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

protest. Of particular concern for her was the potential damage being done to works in storage, as well as the losses for public educational benefit, with 'the innumerable carvings and sculptures [...] stacked up in cupboards, inaccessible to students and public.'¹⁰⁶ In 1956, she attended the re-opening of its renovated Lower Horseshoe gallery, which included selections from most of the museum's collections, but not the African collection, to her disappointment. At the opening, however, the museum's director Harry Iliffe invited her to come and catalogue the African collections at the museum, an offer she immediately accepted, including a donation to have some of the African pieces photographed and printed on postcards for sale in the museum shop. By the 1950s, Cunard was considered an authority on ivory among British curators and collectors: the British Museum too had earlier asked for her assistance in classifying and cataloguing its collection of African ivory and she was elected as a fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1956.¹⁰⁷ I have sketched out these details in order to give a sense of the kind of interventions Cunard made into public collecting cultures.

In 1946, Cunard wrote an article for *Burlington Magazine* on the Trocadéro Ethnographic Museum in Paris after its complete remodelling and rebirth as the Musée de l'Homme in 1938:

The old Musée du Trocadéro, Ethnographical Section — who does not remember this with a shudder in the years that preceded the entire remodelling of the interior that accompanied the reconstruction of the great building at the time of the Paris Exhibition in 1937? This section was open on Thursday mornings, and if one knew the profundity of the darkness within one brought one's electric torch. [...] A Cinderella of museums, a forgotten, unconsidered, despised limbo, in which, it was known, were "some good pieces" — such was the Primitive Peoples section of the old Trocadéro. Gods great and small, a whole mythology of stone, wood, bronze and ivory, had slept for ages in dust, ignorance and darkness. And although the "Primitive Peoples" and their work were already held in high esteem by such artists as Matisse, Picasso, Braque and Zadkine, and the writers and painters of the Surrealist Gallery in the middle twenties, and by dozens of connoisseurs and collectors, the Trocadérian vault was a tomb, its hidden riches not to be enjoyed save by the most persistent, very incompletely and disappointingly so at that. Today all of this is radically changed. [...] Though not as large as the British Museum, the judicious and sensitively-handled juxtaposition and display, the showing of each piece to its best advantage, make the Musée de l'Homme an

¹⁰⁶ Cunard, letter to the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, 3rd March 1954, HRC NCC Box 10, Folder 4.

¹⁰⁷ Diary, HRC, NCC, Box 23, Folder 6; Letter from the Royal Anthropological Institute, HRC, NCC, Letter, Box 17, Folder 6.

example of what a museum should be. That great luxury, space, is to be found here, and what is more, this asset has been very well understood.¹⁰⁸

This account of the Trocadéro is characteristic of the descriptions of darkness, dustiness and mystery that pervade contemporary recollections of the old museum prior to its restoration. Described by Guillaume Apollinaire in the 1910s as the 'most sacrificed' of museums, objects could be found covered in dust and 'piled up pell-mell in the vitrines,' and access to the collections was limited to just one day a week. Picasso described in 1937 the effect the old Trocadéro had had on his work in 1905/6 as he began to compose *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, generally referred to as 'the first cubist picture': 'When I went to the Trocadéro it was disgusting. The flea market. The smell. I was all alone. I wanted to get away. But I didn't leave. I stayed. I stayed. I understood something very important: something was happening to me, wasn't it? [...] The Negroes' sculptures were intercessors, I've known the French word ever since.'¹⁰⁹ Julia Kelly observes that a number of these reminiscences carry with them a degree of nostalgia for the Musée de l'Homme's previous, more exotic incarnation, citing a review for the *Nouvelle revue française*, in which the poet René Daumal recalled the museum's 'heroic days' when 'in this chaotic and dusty place, you could make sensational searches and discoveries.'¹¹⁰ There is something of this kind of nostalgia in Cunard's account of the former museum's 'hidden riches,' but she stresses that in spite of its archaic charms, the Trocadéro was 'a museum-piece' rather than a museum,¹¹¹ and is full of praise for the arrangement and spaciousness of the new Musée de l'Homme.

She observed that during the first round of modernisation completed by Georges Henri Rivière in the early 1930s, '[w]hat can be described only as 'a clinical sterilised purity' invested [the] plan for proportions, background, lighting, etc.'¹¹² These changes were not merely about being better able to view the objects; they also signalled a shift in what James Clifford terms the 'art-culture system,'¹¹³ through which non-Western objects have been classified and contextualised as either art or artefact since the late nineteenth century.

¹⁰⁸ Cunard, 'The Musée de L'Homme,' *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 88, No. 516, March 1946, 66, 69

¹⁰⁹ Alfred J Barr, Jr. cited by Sieglinde Lemke in *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism*, (Oxford, OUP, 1998), 38.

Picasso, 'Discovery of African Art, 1906-1907,' from André Malraux, *La Tête d'obsidienne*, reprinted in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 33.

¹¹⁰ Julia Kelly, *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects: Paris, c. 1925-1935*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 16.

¹¹¹ Cunard, 'The Musée de L'Homme,' 66.

¹¹² Cunard, 'The Musée de L'Homme,' 69.

¹¹³ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 224.

What had once been a disorganised miscellany of curios, a place of exotic encounter and discovery, now reflected the emergent scholarly discipline of ethnography through scientific labels and more austere forms of display. As we will see in Chapter 2, these forms of arrangement would be replicated in Cunard's minimalist presentation of African sculpture in the *Negro* anthology. The transformations that took place at the Trocadéro/Musée de L'Homme were overseen by a number of curators with strong ties to the Surrealist movement, who were in a sense following the lead of avant-garde galleries in introducing this new minimalist presentation of objects, although in the gallery space this had signalled their newfound status as artworks, where in the ethnographic collection this indicated their position as objects of scientific study. The Surrealist and ethnographer Michel Leiris, curator at the Musée de l'Homme, recalled in his diaries seeing Cunard at the museum as she researched her article for *Burlington Magazine*—an 'astonishing and ageless spectre' and 'one of those quasi-mythological personalities of the heroic epoch of Dada and the beginnings of Surrealism'—writing of his admiration for her Communist politics and progressive views on race.¹¹⁴

The Surrealists were instrumental in generating a wider interest in collecting, particularly the African and Oceanic objects found in the flea markets of Paris and other so-called 'abandoned' or 'forgotten' objects, or what Cunard described in another context as '*les dessous de l'histoire*—the underneath of history'.¹¹⁵ Louis Aragon, with whom Cunard lived in Paris between 1926 and 1928, is often credited with having initiated Cunard's interest in ethnography and in collecting African and Oceanic art, and although her interest in fact predates her move to France in 1920, he did seem to encourage and develop this interest, which came in part to reflect the Surrealists' anticolonialism, radical politics and taste for aesthetic subversion. In her memoirs of the Hours Press, *These Were the Hours*, it is the anticolonial and ethnographic dimensions of their work that she draws attention to: 'colonialism was consistently denounced', as she writes, and 'several of the surrealists eventually became expert ethnographers from their sheer love of such things'.¹¹⁶ Cunard employed experimental artists such as Len Lye, Yves Tanguy and Man Ray to produce the covers of many of the Hours Press publications, many of which reflect surrealist aesthetics

¹¹⁴ Michel Leiris, *Journal 1922-1989*, ed. J. Jamin, (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 420. My translation.

¹¹⁵ Cunard, *Negro*, 21

¹¹⁶ Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 41, 42.

through their use of exotic imagery, typographic experiments, found objects and the technique of photomontage.¹¹⁷

In 1926, Cunard wrote in a letter to her friend Janet Flanner, Paris correspondent for *The New Yorker*, that she was travelling from Paris to Southampton with Aragon 'to look for African and Oceanic things—because that is the most recent and now very large interest in my life—ivory, gods, masks, fetishes.'¹¹⁸ She was also interested in the Surrealists' innovation in exhibiting pieces by modernist artists alongside non-Western artworks, writing in *These Were the Hours* that 'Breton, Aragon, Eluard, and most of the other Surrealists had seen the affinity [...] between such fetish figures and carvings from Africa and Oceania and avant-garde painting' and 'respect is due to them for having been the first to create this juxtaposition between abstract painting and the often equally abstract or geometrical designs which sprang from the minds of the pre-Columbian and other tribal artificers.'¹¹⁹ The Surrealists were fascinated by what Roger Cardinal calls 'amazing conjunctions'; they often experimented with different combinations and different ways of presenting the objects in a collection, using an 'alchemical principle [...] to form a union of contraries'.¹²⁰ This was a curatorial technique Cunard emulated both at her house in Réanville and at her Hours Press shop in Paris, where new modernists artworks and African, South American and Oceanic sculptures were displayed alongside the latest books and pamphlets she was publishing by major modernist authors like Laura Riding, Samuel Beckett and Ezra Pound:

In the front of the place was a small shop, its walls garnished with books already produced, and on display a few modern abstract paintings, particularly by Miró, Malkine and Tanguy, painted shields, fetish figures and sculptures from Africa, New Guinea and the South Seas stood on top of the long line of bookshelves done in a neutral grey, which stood against the lighter walls [...] Good lighting shone on the rich assembly of bright African beading here and there and the splendour of Brazilian tribal head-dresses in parrot feathers. This little place could be brought to a blaze.¹²¹ (See fig. 7)

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Laura Riding's *Four Unposted Letters to Catherine* (1930) and *Twenty Poems Less* (1930), Robert Grave's *Ten Poems More* (1930), and Henry Crowder's *Henry-Music* (1931).

¹¹⁸ Cited by Chisholm, 101.

¹¹⁹ Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 79-80.

¹²⁰ Cardinal, interviewed in *The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer* (1984), Visions, Channel 4 (UK), Dir. Keith Griffiths & The Quay Brothers.

¹²¹ Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 76.



Fig. 7 Cunard at the Hours Press shop, 15 Rue Guénégaud, Paris, with Joan Miró painting, African sculptures and Hours Press publications. Spring 1930.
Harry Ransom Center, Nancy Cunard Collection.

The art critic Robert Goldwater observed in 1938 how African sculpture (particularly the 'smooth polished surfaces' of Dan and Baule objects from the Ivory Coast, and Fang objects from the region covering Cameroon, Gabon and equatorial Guinea) had 'fitted in with distinction into eclectic surroundings with a reserve that did not demand interpretation.'¹²² There is certainly a sense from Cunard's comments here of these objects being used to create a fashionable avant-garde milieu, but this aesthetic of juxtaposition—a familiar feature of Surrealist visual collage translated into the arrangement of material objects—had a political as well as aesthetic purpose.

Cunard believed that raising the cultural status of African sculpture and exhibiting it 'on a plane with the other art treasures of the world'¹²³ played a significant part of the global fight against racist oppression. In displaying these works side by side, and thus staging an aesthetic and cultural equilibrium, Cunard and the Surrealists attempted to counter the perception of African and Oceanic carvings as curiosities and evidence of the savagery of the cultures in which they had been produced. As Elsa Adamowicz notes, 'through the deliberate staging of incongruous encounters the surrealists create [...] a levelling process which constitutes a radical re-evaluation of orthodox values and hierarchies.'¹²⁴ For Cunard, the technical skill and artistic subtleties of African sculpture were proof that 'the Negro had a highly developed conception of aesthetics before the white invaders dubbed him an 'ignorant savage', the better to colonize and oppress, [a lie] they have so well succeeded in putting over [...] that many descendants of Africa have come to believe it.'¹²⁵ This was a direct challenge to the essentialist ideologies of fixed and 'natural' conceptions of race set out by Arthur de Gobineau and other racial theorists, in which 'primitive' cultures figured as less advanced versions of Western societies. Biologist turned ethnographer Alfred Haddon, for example, had in his 1895 *Evolution in Art* interpreted non-representational forms in African sculpture as a kind of aesthetic 'degeneration'¹²⁶ that had arisen from repeated stylistic imitation.

¹²² Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, 288.

¹²³ Cunard, 'Works of the 'Ignorant Savage'', written for *Opportunity*, February 1935. Typescript, HRC NCC Box 5, Folder 6.

¹²⁴ Elsa Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 44.

¹²⁵ Cunard, 'Works of the 'Ignorant Savage'', HRC NCC Box 5, Folder 6.

¹²⁶ Alfred C. Haddon, *Evolution in Art: As Illustrated by the Life-History of Designs*, (London: Walter Scott, 1895), 8, passim.

The Surrealists' challenge to such evolutionary accounts of 'primitive' art was manifest in many of the visual collages and *Galerie Surréaliste* exhibitions they produced combining non-Western and Western materials, but most conspicuously in their riposte to the propagandistic 1931 Paris International Colonial Exposition, which they felt had conspicuously censored the abuses committed under Western imperialism—or what they described in their essay for Cunard's *Negro* anthology as Europe's 'murderous humanitarianism.' (574) Their exhibition '*La Vérité sur les Colonies*', of which Aragon was one of the chief curators, featured photo-documentation of exploited peoples in Europe's colonies, as well as African and Oceanic sculptures and masks juxtaposed with Christian iconography as a subversive illumination of the West's own *objets du fétichisme*.¹²⁷ By the 1930s, this practice had also spread well beyond the limits of the Parisian avant-garde. In her introduction to Raymond Michelet's study of African culture, Cunard writes that '[i]n many a Paris gallery, in those of Belgium, Germany, Scandinavia, you would see the most recent Dali painting or Brancusi sculpture placed alongside of some great war-shield from Equatorial Africa, some delicate, stylised gazelle-mask from the Ivory Coast, and all of it was indeed in tune.'¹²⁸

Although this juxtaposition of Western and non-Western materials was used as a politically and aesthetically radical gesture at the time, the cultural politics of this method have since been called into question. It has been read by some recent critics as reproducing the binary between self and other it was often attempting to critique, and as being dependent on a universalising Western artistic rhetoric that erased the cultural specificity of the objects on display. In the winter of 1984-85, the MoMA in New York staged the major exhibition '*Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, which had replicated the juxtapositional arrangements used by the Surrealists, Cunard and others of that generation more than half a century beforehand. While the 'History' section of the exhibition posited the direct influences of non-Western art on modernism, presenting specific objects known to have been familiar to particular artists at the time, the 'Affinities' section represented universal, cross-cultural aesthetic 'affinities' thought to be independent of direct influence, by exhibiting unrelated yet formally comparable 'tribal' and 'modern'

¹²⁷ See, for example, *Tableaux de Man Ray at objets des îles*, Galerie Surréaliste, 1926, in which Man Ray's work was juxtaposed with Oceanic artefacts, or Benjamin Péret, *Untitled Collage* (1929). Reprinted in Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage*, 44, 71.

¹²⁸ Cunard, 'A Note on the Author' [Raymond Michelet], September 1944, HRC NCC Box 7, Folder 1.

works alongside each other.¹²⁹ The second of these was particularly controversial, attracting strong criticism from Clifford, Thomas McEvilley, Hal Foster and others.¹³⁰ Clifford questioned the preference of 'modern'-appearing objects over naturalistic Benin sculptures in order to press the connection of these objects with modernist art, and argued that the exhibition had done little to interrogate the 'aesthetic appropriation of non-Western others.'¹³¹ The word 'affinity' chosen for the title was also much maligned, particularly by Simon Gikandi, who has argued that it demonstrated the West's unwillingness to admit the formal as well as psychological influence of African sculpture on modernism, with the other only permitted into the modernist canon through the artist's unconscious. There is a marked difference, for Gikandi, between a vague, passive 'affinity' and a direct, participatory 'influence.'¹³²

Although Cunard praised the Surrealists for having seen the 'affinity' between non-Western and modernist visual culture, she argues in a number of articles that the formalist advances in modernism were made possible only with the influence of African sculpture: 'the pictures of Picasso, of Braque, Matisse, Léger, Tanguy, Arp, Klee, Miró and of how many others who made Paris the centre of creative activity in the period between the two wars are beholden to the anonymous African artist.'¹³³ There is a sense, however, that Cunard saw these debates about comparative aesthetics as a distraction from what she perceived as the real issue at stake in the promotion of African sculpture: the struggle against colonialism and racial oppression. She had thus praised the collector Charles Ratton's position: '[his is] not that of a connoisseur narrowed down to a perspective of the comparative aesthetics of the universe, but sensitive, sincere and eager for more knowledge of [...] the whole colour question of this day.'¹³⁴

Cunard made purchases for her collection from friends, dealers and at auctions, but also from English junk shops and ports, from where she and Aragon brought back items for display in the Surrealist Gallery and at the Hours Press, as well as for her expanding private collection at Le Puits Carré in Réanville. In her account of these collecting excursions, the

¹²⁹ Press Release, *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, August 1984, Accessed online via the MoMA website, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared//pdfs/docs/press_archives/6081/releases/MOMA_1984_00_17_17.pdf?2010

¹³⁰ See, *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 335-368, 384-395.

¹³¹ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 197.

¹³² Gikandi, 'Picasso, Africa and the Schemata of Difference', *Modernism/modernity*, Vol.10, No.3, 468.

¹³³ Cunard, 'A Note on the Author', Introduction to Raymond Michelet's *African Empires and Civilisations* (1945), September 1944, HRC NCC Box 7, Folder 1.

¹³⁴ Cunard, 'Works of the 'Ignorant Savage'', HRC NCC, Box 5, Folder 6.

relocation of objects from the curiosity shop into the gallery space gives them new meaning: 'Sadly dirty or battered, such objects reacquired their primitive gloss once in the Galerie Surréaliste.'¹³⁵ She also recounts one of the many legendary tales of the 'discovery' of African art, the story of Matisse purchasing a large, painted Congolese mask 'for almost nothing' on the banks of the Seine, a story she says has been 'quoted many a time as the entry of primitive art into the realm of advanced modern painting.'¹³⁶ This she designates as the encounter that brought about the dramatic reinvention of "*objets des colonies*," or 'the stuff the sailors bring back', or 'native curios' as sought-after works of art.¹³⁷ These moments of primary encounter between modernism and the 'primitive'—Matisse on the banks of the Seine, Cunard and the Surrealists in the junk shops and flea markets of Paris or in the old Trocadéro—are what Hal Foster calls modernism's 'primal scenes' or 'original myths': the 'fantas[ies] of rebirth' or moments of epiphany when the modernists believed they became truly modern.¹³⁸

They are also the first stage in the many 'discovery narratives' in the history of primitive art, redemptive accounts that replicate the enlightenment narratives of imperial conquest. Benjamin details the particular pleasure taken by the collector in rescuing the disregarded object from obscurity: 'I have made my most memorable purchases on trips, as a transient. Property and possession belong to the tactical sphere. Collectors are people with tactical instinct [...] one of the finest memories of a collector is the moment when he rescued a book to which he might never have given a thought, much less a wistful look, because he found it lonely and abandoned on the market place and bought it to give it its freedom—the way the prince bought a beautiful slave girl in *The Arabian Nights*.'¹³⁹ There is also a particular pleasure taken here, as Pierre Bourdieu would say, in 'identifying what is worth being seen', that is, in exercising the privileged gaze of the connoisseur of artworks and antiquities.¹⁴⁰ As what Cunard terms 'the mecca of *avant-gardisme*'¹⁴¹, the Surrealists' gallery represents an elevated institution within hierarchies of taste. In both of her accounts of an excursion to acquire so-called 'primitive' objects, the touch of the artist or collector and the space of the artistic institution have the power to change what Bourdieu calls the

¹³⁵ Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 80.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ Hal Foster, "'Primitive' Scenes", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Autumn, 1993), 86.

¹³⁹ Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library', *Selected Writings*, 489-490.

¹⁴⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, (London: Routledge, 2006), first published 1979, 28.

¹⁴¹ Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 79.

'essence' of these objects, to effect a '[c]ultural consecration' or 'ontological promotion' of these objects from curiosities into works of art.¹⁴² African and Oceanic material cultures had long been present in the flea markets and curiosity shops of Europe, but it is problematically the eye of the artist/connoisseur and the act of relocation that resignify them as works of art. There is also, of course, an unspoken financial element at work here, as items bought for a fraction of their price in England acquired an inflated value once on display in the Hours Press or the Surrealist Gallery because of the 'primitive gloss' gained in their new avant-garde setting.

The ideas, value judgements and curatorial practices that emerged during this period still have a significant bearing on the ways in which African and other non-Western artefacts are interpreted and displayed in the West today. One example of this is how this logic of the redemptive 'discovery narrative' is perpetuated in many contemporary reviews of African exhibitions. In 1935, Cunard wrote a review piece for the Harlem Renaissance journal *Opportunity* on the MoMA's influential exhibition *African Negro Art*, a major exhibition of over 600 sculptures loaned from 73 private collections and museums from across Europe and America, which helped raise the profile of African art in the United States and shape its interpretation for years to come.¹⁴³ There had already been several exhibitions of African sculpture in the United States, but the MoMA surpassed antecedents in scope and was the first of the major museums there to choose aesthetics over ethnography in design: using monochrome pedestals, open spacing and bright lighting, objects were displayed with all the clean lines and minimalist presentation of the contemporary art museum. By singling out particular works on the basis of artistic distinction, Sweeney hoped to stage a critical equilibrium between African and Euro-American painting and sculpture: as he stated in the preface to the programme, he had envisioned an exhibition that would show that 'today the art of Negro Africa has its place of respect among the aesthetic traditions of the world.'¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 6.

¹⁴³ Cunard, 'Works of the "Ignorant Savage"', written for *Opportunity*, February 1935. Typescript, HRC NCC Box 5, Folder 6. See also Cunard, 'New York's Coming Exhibition of African Art', written for the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *New York Age*, March 1935. Typescript, HRC NCC Box 5, Folder 6.

¹⁴⁴ Picasso would claim that the objects in the Trocadéro were inspiring 'not because of the forms' but as his 'first canvas of exorcism'. (Picasso, interview with André Malraux, reprinted as 'Discovery of African Art, 1906-1907' in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 33.)

Challenging the view that African art had been assimilated to free the unconscious mind of the Western artist, Sweeney reads Africanist traits in Western artforms as 'attempts at interpretation, or expressions of critical appreciation.' (Cited by Locke, *African Art • 1935'*, *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 247.)

Like Cunard, Alain Locke also wrote a review of the exhibition for the *American Magazine of Art*—and both stressed its groundbreaking, progressive approach to African sculpture.¹⁴⁵ In Cunard's review, 'Works of the 'Ignorant Savage'', she applauds the wider shift in attitudes towards these objects as demonstrated by the new exhibition: 'Acquired originally and mainly in 'punitive expeditions' and as 'curios' a generation or two ago, African plastic is now gaining its full due line of recognition.'¹⁴⁶ In Locke's review, he writes that 'aside from being the finest showing of African art,' the exhibition 'reveals it for the first time in its own right as a mature and classic expression.'¹⁴⁷ Both reviews speak of a new awakening to the merits of African art, particularly within Western art institutions—as Cunard writes, it is now rightly being made 'available to public appreciation on a plane with the other art treasures of the world.'¹⁴⁸

What is particularly interesting here is how this narrative of discovery and cultural validation is recycled across twentieth-century reviews of exhibitions of African art. As Christopher Steiner observes, there is a persistent repetition of the claim amongst curators and critics that African sculpture has finally 'made it' in the art world on account of being exhibited at some cultural institution in the West.¹⁴⁹ He cites a review of the 1996 show 'Africa: The Art of a Continent' about which one commentator writes that '[t]he most important aspect about the arrival of 'Africa' at the Guggenheim [is] the fact that African art is actually appearing *as art* in a major museum'¹⁵⁰—an observation made over sixty years after Cunard and Locke made equivalent claims of the *African Negro Art* exhibition at the MOMA. Steiner summarises the convenient logic of this kind of observation: 'Until this exhibition, the argument goes, African art remained unappreciated (or event worse, maligned) by Westerners – an art form relegated to the 'dusty bins' of ethnographic storerooms; but now through great personal insight, exceptional conviction of taste, and leaps of cultural relativity, the art of Africa has been assigned its proper place amid the world's great art traditions.'¹⁵¹ This deprecation of previous curatorial efforts means that

¹⁴⁵ Alain Locke, 'African Art • 1935', excerpt from *American Magazine of Art* 28 (May 1935): 271-78, printed in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 246-247.

¹⁴⁶ Cunard, 'Works of the 'Ignorant Savage'', HRC NCC, Box 5, Folder 6.

¹⁴⁷ Locke, 'African Art • 1935', *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam 247.

¹⁴⁸ Cunard, 'Works of the 'Ignorant Savage'', HRC NCC, Box 5, Folder 6.

¹⁴⁹ Christopher B. Steiner, 'The Tradition of African Art', *Questions of Tradition*, ed. Mark Salber Phillips and Gordon Schochet, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 101.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

the Western art establishment can be continually commended for having been culturally enlightened enough to have assimilated non-Western artefacts into its galleries.

Another problematic aspect to this narrative is the way in which it replicates both the 'discovery narratives' of non-Western art circulated by modernist artists like Vlaminck, Picasso and Matisse, and a broader imperial narrative of the 'discovery' of overseas colonies. As Steiner suggests, '[a]ppreciation of African art, according to this point of view, is not based on knowledge and understanding but rather on the 'discovery' of the unexplored' and so with each new exhibition, 'novelty has to be artificially remanufactured [...] memories must be erased.'¹⁵² Narratives of the 'discovery' of African art, whether by individuals or institutions, can be likened to a form of cultural colonialism, having more to do with Western tastes than with the sovereign identity of the pieces themselves: as Jyotsna Singh has argued, the idea of discovery is always 'inevitably caught up in the process of imaginatively fabricating rather than representing cultural 'others.'¹⁵³ There is a marked sense that in discussing African material culture in terms of its accession to Western cultural institutions and the Western artistic canon, Cunard, Locke and others of their generation helped determine the shape of future interaction with these objects, with the same arguments often reiterated whenever a new major exhibition is staged.

1.3 Collecting Henry: *Henry-Music*

Henry-Music, published by Cunard's Hours Press in 1931 (Fig. 8) is a document which connects the personal, political and cultural motivations for her collecting practices and records the aesthetic intermeshing of African, African-American and European modernist cultures in the early twentieth century. It also powerfully illustrates how Cunard participated in contemporary representations of primitivism and exoticism even as she sought to resist them. *Henry-Music* was one of the final publications put out by the Hours Press before it closed its doors to allow Cunard to concentrate on compiling *Negro*. Although she had already begun collecting African sculpture and jewellery as early as 1919, it was Henry Crowder who first encouraged Cunard's interest in Harlem Renaissance

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Jyotsna Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: 'Discoveries' of India in the Language of Colonialism*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 7.



Fig. 8: Covers of *Henry-Music*, with photomontage by Man Ray.
 Harry Ransom Center, Nancy Cunard Collection.

culture, jazz and issues of racial injustice in the United States, and brought her to what she saw as a great turning-point in her intellectual and political life. On hearing him performing at the Hotel Luna in Venice in 1927 with the famous violinist Eddie South and his Alabamians, she was overwhelmed by this new improvisatory style: 'They were Afro-Americans, coloured musicians, and they played in that 'out of this world' manner which, in ordinary English, would have to be translated, I suppose, by 'ineffable'. Such Jazz and such Swing and such improvisations! And all new to me in style!'¹⁵⁴ Like primitive art, Jazz represented authenticity and modernity in modernist culture, and was seen as a powerful weapon against traditional cultural forms.

In *These Were the Hours*, she writes, he became 'my teacher in all the many questions of color that exist in America and was the primary cause of the compilation, later, of my large *Negro Anthology*,' which she dedicated 'to Henry Crowder my first Negro friend.'¹⁵⁵ The importance of this relationship is restated throughout her writing and correspondence. In her biography of Norman Douglas, which is threaded with her own autobiographical reflections, she recalls again the influence Crowder's words had had on her during this period: 'Not yet in my conscious mind was the plan to make that big book about Africans and other Negroes which later became my *Negro Anthology*. Yet the subject was there in bud—thanks to what I had absorbed from Henry's vivid and descriptive accounts of Afro-America—all of it latent, incubating quietly and soon about to stir.'¹⁵⁶ *Henry-Music* features Crowder's arrangements for piano and voice, his first published compositions and one of the earliest settings of verse to jazz, using lyrics poems from a range of modernist luminaries including Richard Aldington, Harold Acton, Walter Lowenfels, Samuel Beckett and Cunard herself.¹⁵⁷ Published in December 1930, the project was conceived by Cunard

¹⁵⁴ Cunard, *Grand Man: Memories of Norman Douglas*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954), 83.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*; Cunard, *Negro*, unpaginated.

¹⁵⁶ Cunard, *Grand Man*, 92-93. In spite of the damning memoir he wrote of their relationship, *As Wonderful As All That?*, Crowder wrote to Cunard in 1954 to thank her for the words she had written about him in the Douglas biography, telling her 'It really has been a wonderful experience for me to have met and known you, and to have been associated with you during the years.' Henry Crowder, letter to Nancy Cunard, Washington, 11th August 1954, HRC NCC, Box 13, Folder 2.

¹⁵⁷ Beckett's name does not appear on the first circular for *Henry-Music* which suggests he agreed to contribute at some point after the other writers (HRC, NCC, Box 27, Misc B, The Hours Press). The post hoc position of his name on the cover would seem to confirm this. While the other contributors invited Crowder to choose from previous works, Beckett and Cunard both wrote poems especially for the project. Although Beckett dismissed his poem 'From the Only Poet to a Shining Whore' in a letter to Thomas McGreevy as 'the Rahab tomfoolery' (the 'Only Poet' is Dante, and the 'Shining Whore' Rahab, the harlot of Jericho who concealed the spies of Israel), John Pilling suggests that Beckett here downplays the importance of the poem, which 'more closely approximates his ideal of

and came together only after much insistence on her part: after hearing Crowder's improvisations at the piano at Réanville, she writes, 'Why not a music book—songs with words—published by the Hours? Henry's modesty stood in the way for a while. But as I continued my pleading, he said he could write the music if lyrics and poems were found that seemed to his purpose.'¹⁵⁸ Words from European modernist writers, set to black American jazz, are bound in a surrealist tableau of Cunard's African artefacts, arranged by the fashionable American visual artist Man Ray. Bringing together a miscellaneous amalgam of cultural figures and references, *Henry-Music* is a striking textual, visual and musical representation of the early twentieth-century *vogue nègre* in which black culture in all its diverse forms came to signify a fashionable avant-garde aesthetic.

Although the covers were executed by Ray, the foregrounding of Cunard's collection was clearly defined in her commission: 'To find the covers for *Henry-Music* was no problem. They should be reproductions of the African sculptures and carvings of which I by then had many. To do the covers Man Ray's name came to me at once, for he had not only a strong appreciation for African art but for Henry as well.'¹⁵⁹ She goes on to single out photomontage as one of the most important artistic developments of the twenties, praising Ray's use of the technique in particular and suggesting that '[h]is vision in taking and placing, as it were, in 'mating' various objects, was often supreme.'¹⁶⁰ Photomontage was an important technique which had emerged out of Dada and went on to influence the Surrealists and other later artistic movements. However, as has been noted by Elsa Adamowicz, it was a practice only seldom employed by Ray,¹⁶¹ and his use of it on this occasion was perhaps to meet the specific demands of the commission, appearing as it does to enact Cunard's desire to exhibit as many of her artefacts as possible. The result is a tangled and claustrophobic collage, dominated by jewellery and sculptures from her collection, her ivory bracelets alone occupying a full third of the front and rear boards, which join together to form a single surrealist visual tableau. Given the already iconic status of her bracelets, these objects function as much as a metonym for Cunard as they do for African culture in Ray's composition.

poetry' than any other work he had written up until that point. Pilling, 'Beckett and "The Itch to Make": The Early Poems in English', from *Samuel Beckett: Poetry and Other Prose*, ed. Matthijs Engelberts et al., (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 18.

¹⁵⁸ Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 149.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ See Elza Adamowicz, 'The Surrealist (Self-)Portrait: Convulsive Identities', in *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality*, ed. by Silvano Levy, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 40.

A disembodied portrait of Crowder hovers at the top of the front cover, framed by a Congolese Mangbetu harp with an angular cubist-like shadow, which is echoed in the geometric shapes set behind the portrait and the other objects from Cunard's collection. These angular silhouettes at once tie the images together and reinforce the fragmented, mosaic-like quality of the cover, while alluding to the modernist fascination with African sculptures for their geometric, abstract forms. Cunard's ivory bracelets also appear draped over Crowder's shoulders: '[a]t the back of Henry's fine full face on the front cover is what looks like a sort of high collar—in reality my arms laden entirely with dozens of thin, disclike old ivory bracelets from West Africa.'¹⁶² The objects Cunard decorates Crowder with on the covers of *Henry-Music* are predominantly African symbols of female power and she would almost certainly have understood the cultural significance of these objects. A West African woman wearing so much antique ivory on her arms would have had significant political and economic authority, and the rear cover also shows a mask from the highly powerful Bundu/Sande women's secret society in Sierra Leone, and a small Ashanti doll (also photographed for the *Negro* anthology) which are carried by women in order to encourage fertility and conception. In the Western context, the image of a white woman's arms draped over a black man's shoulders would have been a genuinely transgressive visual statement at the time, if not in the avant-garde Parisian circles in which Cunard moved then certainly in wider French and British society. Nonetheless, when set in the context of Harold Acton's recollection that Cunard would call on Crowder to 'Be more *African*'¹⁶³ this addition to Ray's portrait powerfully illustrates her desire to exoticise Crowder, to objectify and then edit or curate him as if he were another item from her collection.

Crowder appears to be exhibited as an exotic artefact on the cover of *Henry-Music*, and in her biography of Norman Douglas, Cunard in fact explicitly reads Crowder as the personification of her African collection and a metonym for Africa and jazz:

My feelings for things African had begun years ago with sculpture, and something of these anonymous old statues had now, it seemed, materialised in the personality of a man partly of that race. My sympathy with the Afro-American had, obviously, begun with music. At present something of both was in the house and part of it.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² *These Were the Hours*, 151. Man Ray's portrait of Crowder and Cunard featured in a recent retrospective of Ray's portraits at the National Portrait Gallery in London, spring 2013.

¹⁶³ See Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 186.

¹⁶⁴ Cunard, *Grand Man*, 86.

That Crowder is absorbed into the domestic space at the end of this passage adds to the sense that Cunard sometimes saw him as another fashionable exotic possession to be exhibited along with the rest of her collection. A noticeable feature of exoticism's mode of perception is its desire to domesticate the unfamiliar, even as it renders people, objects, places etc. 'strange'.¹⁶⁵ This passage also recalls Cunard's suggestion that Josephine Baker's dancing 'could be compared to the purest of African plastic in motion'¹⁶⁶, and Baker of course playfully exploited this primitivist European tendency to connect black America with Africa, and to associate the black body with African artefacts. In his memoir of his relationship with Cunard, Crowder explicitly states that 'the darker a colored man was the more she liked him,' and that she often told him she wished he had darker skin.¹⁶⁷ Mica Nava has suggested that Cunard 'valued her black lover for his *difference*, for his greater humanity and creativity,'¹⁶⁸ but there is a sense from many of her comments that she sometimes felt he was not quite different enough. Cunard's biographer Anne Chisholm also recounts how her bracelets took on a more sinister aspect of domestic abuse, reciting an account from Janet Flanner who remembered meeting Crowder one day 'with a fine set of bruises' which he calmly explained as 'Just braceletwork, Miss Janet.'¹⁶⁹ In the light of these other observations, the image of Cunard's arms swathed in ivory weighing down on Crowder's shoulders can be interpreted a troubling visual representation of her exotic fantasies about Africa in which Crowder is laden with the weight of her collection and her desire for difference.

Hugh Ford suggests that Cunard made the decision to foreground her African collection on the covers of *Henry-Music* because several of the poems included in the book contain allusions to Africa.¹⁷⁰ But aside from Walter Lowenfels's oblique mentions of witch doctors and voodoo, the only poem that references Africa is Cunard's own contribution, 'Equatorial Way.' In a posthumous essay on Cunard, Anthony Thorne recalls witnessing her pour a libation for Crowder into the Grand Canal in Venice, swathed in black satin and her

¹⁶⁵ Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 13.

¹⁶⁶ Cunard, *Negro*, 329.

¹⁶⁷ Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That?*, 104.

¹⁶⁸ Mica Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference*, (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 7.

¹⁶⁹ Cited in Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 134. Louis Aragon also recites a similar story: 'Nancy drank and became drunk often. Then she would become unpleasant, slapping her companion's face with the ivory or metal which clasped her from wrist to elbow. Sometimes she too bore traces of one of these violent scenes.' Cited by Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 114.

¹⁷⁰ Hugh Ford, *Published in Paris: A Literary Chronicle of Paris in the 1920s and 1930s*, (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 282.

'barbaric jewellery [...] with the gesture of a priestess.' He then quotes the inscription Cunard wrote in a copy of *Henry-Music* she later sent him by way of explaining this theatrical gesture:

this book (how long after) of a man you would have loved *then as now*, of a man who introduced the entire world to me in 1928, and two continents: Afro-America and Africa—plus Music, the music of the Negroes of the U.S.A. (in Blues and Whole-Tone Scale). A most wary and prudent man, among many other beauties and qualities, who often said: 'Opinion reserved!' Whereas to me, nothing—not opinion nor emotion nor love nor hate—could be reserved for one instant on the score of things this Man-Continent-People gradually revealed to me about his race and the life of his race.¹⁷¹

The phrase 'Man-Continent-People' is key I think to explaining the arrangement of *Henry-Music*, returning again to Cunard's feelings about Crowder as the metonymic embodiment of Africa, of African-American culture, and of her collection of African art. Like George Antheil's essay for the *Negro* anthology, 'Negro on the Spiral', *Henry-Music* connects jazz and modernist expression to what Antheil calls the 'angular and elliptical' lines of African sculpture, reflecting the exoticist tendency to assign familiar values and associations to unfamiliar things.¹⁷²

Cunard devotes several pages of her book on the Hours Press to praising the composition of *Henry-Music*—both its score and design—yet Crowder makes only a passing remark on the project in his memoirs as 'a book of songs' written 'with the aid of many Pernods.'¹⁷³ This, together with the overwhelming presence of Cunard's collection on the covers of *Henry-Music* and the large hand she played in getting the project off the ground suggest that she was more passionate about the book than was he; as Carl Van Vechten commented in *The Crisis* in 1942, *Henry-Music* is in many ways a work 'by and about Nancy Cunard'.¹⁷⁴ The fragmented and dissociative effect of Ray's photomontage feels appropriate

¹⁷¹ Cunard, letter to Anthony Thorne, cited by Thorne in 'A Share of Nancy' in *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 295. In a letter to Charles Burkhart on hearing of Crowder's death, she writes, 'Henry made me – and so be it...Others have loved me more(?), and I, perhaps others. No probably not, for me, has this been true. In any case Henry made me. I thank him.' Cunard, letter to Charles Burkhart, Lamothe-Fénelon, France, April 24 1955. Special Collections Research Centre Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

¹⁷² George Antheil, 'Negro on the Spiral', *Negro*, 346. This definition of the exotic is discussed by Huggan in *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 14.

¹⁷³ Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That*, 114.

¹⁷⁴ Carl Van Vechten, 'The J. W. Johnson Collection at Yale', *The Crisis*, July 1942, 223.

to this project, which was itself a slightly confused blend of disparate cultural elements, as was characteristic of the exoticising tendencies of the *vogue nègre* of the 1920s and 1930s. It was, however, a relatively early moment in Cunard's engagement with African art, a prelude to the substantial contribution she would soon make to the field with the publication of the *Negro* anthology. Whether we interpret the cover of *Henry-Music* as a striking and innovative, or exoticising and misappropriative, it without doubt stages an interesting visual and textual dialogue between modernism, surrealist aesthetics and transatlantic black culture and is a key example of Cunard's use of her private collection to promote African art within European modernist circles. As with her later *Negro* anthology, *Henry-Music* can also be read as a testament to Cunard's broader aim to promote an Afromodernist¹⁷⁵ aesthetic: an alternative modernist sensibility that recognised African and African diasporic cultures as essential participants in modernist cultural production.

¹⁷⁵ See *Afromodernisms: Paris, Harlem and the Avant-garde*, ed. Fionnghuala Sweeney & Kate Marsh, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012). As James Smalls writes in his contribution to this anthology, 'Afromodernism considers the centrality of a black presence in modernist aesthetics and lived experience.' 'Creating Homoutopia: Féral Benga's Body in the Matric of Modernism', 63.

2 Documentary Modernism: The *Negro* Anthology as a Modernist Collection

In 1931, Cunard sent out a call for contributions to an anthology she had provisionally titled *COLOUR*. The anthology would be 'entirely *Documentary*, exclusive of romance or fiction,' and would be published in 1932 or 1933, or 'as soon as enough material has been collected.'¹ The circular also set out the minimum four sections conceived for the book, soliciting '*outspoken criticism, comment and comparison*' on the following topics:

1. The contemporary Negro in America, S. America, West Indies, Europe. (writers, painters, musicians and other artists and personalities) With photographs.
2. Musical section. Last-century and modern american Negro compositions (Spirituals, Jazz, Blues etc.) – Reproduced. This section is in charge of the composer George Antheil.
3. African. Ethnographical. Reproductions of African Art. Sculpture, Ivory carvings etc. Explorers' data. Recent African photographs.
4. Political and sociological (the colonial system, Liberia etc.) [...] Accounts of lynchings, persecution and race prejudice.

The book also to contain—Poems by Negros, Poems addressed to them.
A list of Museums containing African Art.
Reproductions of Colored Advertisements.²

Published by Wishart & Co. in February 1934, just a couple of months later than scheduled, the final 856-page anthology had remained remarkably faithful to Cunard's original plan. The subjects covered closely matched those called for in the circular, although the final volume, now titled *Negro*, was divided into seven broad sections that reflected its global, pan-Africanist approach: 'America,' 'Negro Stars,' 'Music,' 'Poetry,' 'West Indies and South America,' 'Europe' and 'Africa,' the last of which included a large subsection on 'Sculpture

¹ 'A new book on COLOUR...', HRC Photography Collection, Nancy Cunard Literary File, Album 24. Emphasis in the original.

² *Ibid.*

and Ethnology,' collating together reproductions of almost 150 pieces of African sculpture (including many from Cunard's own private collection) with explanatory essays. As ambitious in sheer size as it was in its aims, Cunard's *Negro* anthology is a vast documentary archive of opinions and materials on race and culture in the 1930s and a polemical attack on the foundations of racist and imperialist discourse. Its 150 contributors included Harlem Renaissance writers (among them Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Zora Neale Hurston), prominent black intellectuals (W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, William Pickens, Arthur Schomburg and George Padmore) and European and American writers and artists (William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, members of the Surrealist movement and Samuel Beckett, who translated a number of entries from French into English). Cunard's objective was to produce a transnational, collaborative work in which 'the whole complex history of Negro culture would have to be compiled, all the indignities and injustices done to the race would have to be recorded too, and the beauty and ingenuity of African art would, for once, have to be elaborately illustrated.'³ With this aim in mind, the anthology included 385 photographs and illustrations, historical, economic, linguistic and scientific studies, statistics, poetry, musical scores, African proverbs, Harlem slang, slave protest songs, folk histories, spirituals and political tracts. Also incorporated were more ephemeral materials like advertisements, images of black celebrities and performers, press cuttings, and personal letters to Cunard. The fragmented format of the anthology, the eclecticism of its materials, and Cunard's combination of private and public documents all lend the text a scrapbook-like quality that appears indebted to her own collecting practices, particularly her commonplace books discussed in the previous chapter. As Benjamin writes in his essay on the figure of the collector, '[t]here is no living library that does not harbor a number of booklike creations'—texts such as albums and scrapbooks that 'form the prismatic fringes of a library'⁴—and *Negro* is one such composite text. Yet this kaleidoscopic, collage format is also one of modernism's trademark configurations. In his 'Note on Modernism,' Edward Said writes of modernism's hallmark 'encyclopaedic form': 'fragments drawn self-consciously from disparate locations, sources, cultures [...and] the strange juxtaposition of the comic and the tragic, high and low, commonplace and exotic.'⁵ *Negro* is in this respect a quintessential, encyclopaedic work of modernism—a 'panorama' of black diasporic culture, as Cunard's preface described it (iii), that combines materials as disparate as celebrities'

³ Ford, 'Introduction', *Negro* (1970), xvi.

⁴ Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library', *Selected Writings*, 491.

⁵ Edward Said, 'A note on modernism', *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994), 229.

portraits and diagrams of slave ships, with children's cartoons and graphic images of lynchings in the United States.

This chapter is composed of two parts, showing how the *Negro* anthology reflects Cunard's avant-garde collecting practices in both its form and content. The first part situates *Negro* in relation to other early twentieth-century anthologies including Locke's *The New Negro* (1922) and documentary collections such as Bataille's *Documents* magazine (1929-1930), examining the cultural politics and fragmentary structure of the anthology form. The second part shows how the *Negro*'s 'Sculpture and Ethnology Section' reflects a parallel culture of modernist collecting and connoisseurship in the field of African art, existing as a witness to its own historical and cultural context of production as much as a study of African cultural invention.

2.1 The Aesthetic of Assemblage: *Negro* and its Intertexts

The jagged harmony is what makes it, and it ceases to be what it was when this is absent.

Zora Neale Hurston, 'Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals', *Negro Anthology*⁶

'But you don't understand, Mr Cape [...] this *is* the format.'

Cunard, interview with Jonathan Cape⁷

Collecting and reassembling formed a significant dimension of Cunard's political, personal and intellectual life, as is manifest in her scrapbooks, her material collection of African sculpture and the work she carried out as an anthologist. She explicitly conceived of *Negro* as a work of collecting, both in terms of the materials and data she assembled and the knowledge and personal experiences she acquired during her two research trips to Harlem, which fed into several essays she wrote for the anthology.⁸ If, as Mieke Bal has argued, collecting is not merely 'a process about which a narrative can be told, but [...] itself a narrative,'⁹ then the *Negro* anthology tells us not only the public story of changing global perspectives on race and culture in the early twentieth century, but also the private history

⁶ Hurston, 'Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals', *Negro*, 360.

⁷ Cunard, requited by Rupert Hart-Davis in 'The Girl at the Writing-Table,' in *BPIR*, ed. Ford, 30-31.

⁸ Cunard, 'Writings from Negro', *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 114; Cunard, *Grand Man*, 98.

⁹ Mieke Bal, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,' in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. Elsner & Cardinal, 100.

of Cunard the collector—providing as the text does a visual/textual archive of her African bracelets and sculptures, her political causes, her personal documents, and the intellectual network that she created around herself. Cunard's presence looms large over the anthology, particularly Ford's 1970 abridged version, which introduces the text with a long account of her life and the assembling of the text. His addition of numerous images of Cunard also annulled her stated aim only to include images of black contributors in the original text.

Cunard has been accused of using the anthology in order to establish her own personal repudiation of her white, upper-class parental culture—echoing criticisms made of her earlier anti-racist pamphlet *Black Man, White Ladyship*, which Claude McKay described as 'a Negro stick to beat the Cunard mother.'¹⁰ But as Jane Marcus has rightly observed, people generally tend to be 'suspicious of the motives of the organizers of such collective cultural efforts' and I would add that this is particularly problematic in the case of internationally-conceived collective projects—one thinks here, for example, of the anthology *Sisterhood is Global* (1984), whose compiler, Robin Morgan, was accused of effacing diversity and cultural difference in the name of her own (white, Western, middle-class) model of international feminism.¹¹ The motives for Cunard's later internationalist anthology, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (1937), were also regarded with a degree of suspicion, *Granta Magazine* suggesting the anthologist's convocation of the famous literary names of the day lent the book a certain 'snob appeal.'¹² Reading criticisms made of Cunard at the time of *Negro's* publication, one is also left with the impression that misgivings around her work as an anthologist stemmed in part from her rapid transition from fashionable, rebellious socialite to serious leftist cultural commentator: as one reviewer for *The Crisis* quipped, 'having discovered the Negro problem overnight, she tells the world about it in a hurry.'¹³

Cunard had originally approached Jonathan Cape to publish *Negro*, but his proposals for restrictions on the size, scope and arrangement of the book eventually led her to take the book elsewhere. After pitching to a number of different publishers, a process she complained was like 'selling oriental rugs to manure merchants,' the radical

¹⁰ Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 261.

¹¹ Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*, 142. See Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique of Morgan's anthology in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003) 106-123.

¹² *Granta Magazine* (University of Cambridge), 19th January 1938. Among Cunard's newspaper clippings, HRC NCC, Vertical Files, Folder 9 (Duplicates, Misc.).

¹³ 'Nancy Cunard Writes a Book', *The Crisis*, ed. W. E. B. Du Bois, May 1934, 138.

publisher Wishart & Co. finally agreed to publish the anthology, giving her full editorial control, providing she would cover all costs.¹⁴ She begins her preface to the text with a defence of its expansive, collective format: 'It was necessary to make this book—and I think in this manner, an Anthology of some 150 voices of both races—for the recording of the struggles and achievements, the persecutions and the revolts against them, of the Negro peoples.' (iii) This opening statement pre-empted what would come to be one of the chief criticisms of the anthology. Cunard had decided that her editorial technique would be as all-inclusive as possible, but this was seen by some critics, both contemporary and recent, as a failing of the text. The literary critic Michael North has argued that *Negro's* 'omnivorous' and fragmentary format merely exposes Cunard's ineptitude as an editor, maintaining that the anthology's 'episodic nature [...] has a weirdly dissociative effect' and that her 'method of organization is simultaneously heavy-handed and hopelessly lax.'¹⁵ A 1934 reviewer for the *Manchester Guardian*, while praising the anthology, was also sceptical about the format: '*Negro* is beautifully warm-hearted, not a little scatter-brained, and wholly unscientific. [...] What is needed is for Miss Cunard to go over the whole ground again, to purge the dross from the present very composite miscellany, and to concentrate its fine ore into a monograph of fifty thousand biting, burning words.'¹⁶ Many of these criticisms were not merely about the fragmented structure of the anthology, but also the contaminating effect of incorporating what were seen as more frivolous or low-brow materials. Henry Crowder, among others, had particularly disapproved of the 'Negro Stars' section: '[some] were not persons whom I would choose as representatives of the progress made by the Negroes [...]' An example of this was the contribution she secured from boxers. I could see no purpose in wasting space on the life stories of these persons.'¹⁷

Other critics, however, read *Negro's* eclecticism as testament to its cultural inclusivity. Lawrence Gellert, a musicologist and collector of African-American blues and spirituals who contributed an essay on 'Negro songs of Protest' to the anthology, described in a letter to Cunard how he had once defended her inclusion of popular culture to such an

¹⁴ Cited by Gordon in *Nancy Cunard*, 172.

¹⁵ Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism*, (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 189-191.

¹⁶ L.B., 'Books of the Day: An Anthology', *The Manchester Guardian*, 5th March 1934, 5.

¹⁷ Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That?*, 116. These comments were perhaps not unrelated to the fact that Cunard had had an affair with the boxer Bob Scallion, featured in *Negro*, during her relationship with Crowder. Many of these attacks on *Negro's* textual promiscuity in fact echo critiques made of Cunard's sexual promiscuity. Burkhart, for example, writes in his memoir of Cunard, 'What drove her? [...] I offer only a hint of an answer: Nancy's uncontrollable and uncontrolled sexuality,' *Herman and Nancy and Ivy: Three Lives in Art*, 58-59.

extent that he 'almost got into a fist fight': for Gellert, 'the record of these Negro Stars [was] not just one of achievements—but a record of a race that has to jump inches higher for the same niche in the white man's hurdle.'¹⁸ In a 1934 review for the *Observer*, the journalist Edward Thompson, father of the historian E. P. Thompson, observed that the book's 'editor is without inhibitions, and has therefore been able to accept from every quarter and to put her stuff as it came to her, straightforwardly. The result is not an anthology, but an encyclopaedia [...] astonishing in its power and real, if often gruesome beauty.'¹⁹ Alain Locke, who admitted he had 'feared a scrapbook' when he read the circular for *Negro*, wrote to Cunard soon after publication commending the comprehensiveness and detail of its content and her skill as an editor in unifying such an ambitiously broad and extensive range of materials: 'I congratulate you, almost enviously, on the finest anthology in every sense of the word ever compiled on the Negro. When I saw the announcements, I feared a scrap book, but by a miracle of arrangement, you have built up a unity of effect and a subtle accumulative force of enlightenment that is beyond all contradiction and evasion.'²⁰ Locke's own anthology, *The New Negro*, now recognised by most as the definitive anthology of the Harlem Renaissance, has been criticised for focusing too narrowly what Locke saw as 'the very kernel' of the black artistic tradition, giving rise to charges of cultural elitism.²¹ In its commitment to inclusiveness and cultural diversity, and in spite of its inclusion of many elite contributors, *Negro* had attracted from some quarters quite the opposite criticism—that it was simply not selective enough. Locke, however, finds unity between the disparate fragments *Negro* attempts to contain, a unity attained through the reader's repeated, 'accumulative' engagement with the text. As Barbara Benedict has written, the anthology form is defined by 'its rejection of linearity, its hospitality to a multiplicity of reading procedures, its invitation to readers to read nonteleologically,'²² and it is precisely this multiplicity and democracy of form that gives the anthology what Locke called its 'accumulative force.'

¹⁸ Gellert, letter to Cunard May 5th 1934, HRC NCC Box 20, Folder 10, 'Letters regarding *Negro: An Anthology* (1934).'

¹⁹ Thompson, 'The Negro Anthology', *The Observer*, April 15th 1934, 8.

²⁰ Locke, letter to Cunard, April 14th 1934, HRC NCC Box 20, Folder 10.

²¹ See Arnold Rampersad, 'Introduction', Alain Locke, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, (New York: Touchstone, 1997) xix. First published 1925. A significant proportion *Negro's* entries were written by relatively unknown authors, yet both anthologies have been accused of favouring a cultural elite.

²² Barbara Benedict, 'The Paradox of the Anthology: Collecting and *Différence* in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *New Literary History*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Spring 2003, 249.

As a contributor to Sitwell's *Wheels* anthology and a friend of Pound's from the early days of Imagism, Cunard would have been well aware of the intervention-making and culture-defining functions of the modernist anthology, and the size, rich typography and lavish binding of *Negro* all suggest that she was committed to producing a collection with particular cultural gravitas. Cunard had also been a participating member and advocate of Wyndham Lewis's *Blast* group, and with its oversized dimensions and capitalised, single-word title advancing diagonally down the cover, *Negro* bears a strong resemblance to the iconic first edition of *Blast* magazine (1914). As Miranda Hickman suggests, *Blast* was marked out not only by its explosive substance, but also by its sheer 'impressiveness as a physical object,'²³ and *Negro*'s format likewise signals its status as an avant-garde and interpolative project. The dark boards and large red typography Cunard used for the cover also echo Wallace Thurman's single-issue Harlem Renaissance magazine *Fire!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists* (1926), a text which, like *Negro*, presented an avant-garde, anti-bourgeois critique of Du Bois' *Crisis* magazine.

In a review for *The Chicago Defender*, the pan-Africanist George Padmore hailed the revolutionary potential of *Negro*, calling it 'a call to action, pointing the way to freedom'—a book that should 'take the place of the old family Bible in the home of every Negro who has fallen a victim to missionary rascality.'²⁴ But the strength of *Negro*'s revolutionary potential was never established due to the poor distribution of the text. The communist and anticolonial content of the anthology had quickly led to its prohibition in a number of British colonies—a significant part of its intended audience—but the costly format was seen by many as the main hindrance to its circulation.²⁵ The editor of Associated Negro Press, for which Cunard later worked as a correspondent, wrote to her soon after publication to

²³ Miranda B. Hickman, *The Geometry of Modernism: The Vorticist Idiom in Lewis, Pound, H.D. and Yeats*, (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005), 31. More details of Cunard's relationship with Lewis and Vorticism are given in Lois Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 41-44.

²⁴ George Padmore, "'Negro" by Nancy Cunard', *The Bookshelf, The Chicago Defender*, May 19th 1934, 11.

²⁵ Secret telegram No. 30 sent by the colonial authorities in April 1934 banned the importation of *Negro* into a number of British colonies, including British Guiana, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. This despatch is significant in that it demonstrates the book's status as an 'undesirable publication' came from central officials rather than from local government—showing that the revolutionary potential George Padmore saw in this book was certainly perceived by the British colonial authorities. Other undesirable publications that were banned in the colonies alongside *Negro* included individual works by Padmore, the *Negro Worker* for which he was employed as an editor, together with all publications from the Scottsboro Campaign Bureau. Public Records Office, London, Co 537/2622 'SECRET: 1948: SECURITY: UNDESIRABLE PUBLICATIONS.' My thanks to my supervisor, Stephanie Newell, for finding this document.

advise her that the price had been left out of their review because it would 'be something of a deterrent', while the contributor and novelist Taylor Gordon told her that '[t]he great pity is the fact that you have to charge so much for it, the people that should read it the most will never be able to.'²⁶ In spite of this powerful disincentive, efforts were being made to circulate the book more widely. Cunard sent copies to all contributors and to various American and English libraries at her own expense and offered the book at half price in Christmas 1934; an advert placed in *The Daily Gleaner* also reveals that one Jamaican bookshop allowed customers to pay for *Negro* in instalments.²⁷ Gellert also reported the excitement caused by the book when he carried it with him to the meetings of various labour groups in the United States:

In each place in turn comrades swooped down on the book. And all work ceased while pages were thumbed [and] the workers mobbed around from first page to last. And protesting frequently against too hasty turning of pages! Dozens of them bid to borrow it but it looks much the worse for wear—already!²⁸

In spite of Cunard's and others' efforts to promote the book, *Negro* received few reviews and its circulation was small: of the 1000 copies published by Wishart & Co. several hundred copies remained unsold and were destroyed during the Blitz, while plans for translations and abridged editions were all later abandoned.

This was a disappointing end to a project that had begun with such high expectations. As Cunard observes in one of her essays for *Negro*, the Harlem Renaissance was said by many 'to be at a halt' by 1934, yet David Levering Lewis describes how her initial call for contributions had 'galvanized' Renaissance writers '[i]n a strange repetition of the collective excitement inspired by Locke's *Survey Graphic* edition,' the text which had provided the basis and impetus for his era-defining anthology, *The New Negro*.²⁹ In its polemical stance, avant-gardism and inclusion of modernist contributors, the *Negro* anthology was clearly indebted to the recent modernist anthology tradition that included Pound's *Des Imagistes* (1914), Lowell's *Some Imagist Poets* (1917) and Lewis's *Blast* magazine, but it also followed in the wake of a number of significant African-American anthologies,

²⁶ Claude Barnett, letter to Cunard, March 26th 1934 & Taylor Gordon, letter to Cunard, May 1st 1934, HRC NCC, Box 20, Folder 10.

²⁷ 'Miss Cunard Makes Special Xmas Offer', *Panama Tribune*, 18th November 1934.

'Get Your Copy of *Negro*', *Daily Gleaner*, 24th March 1934.

²⁸ Gellert, letter to Cunard May 5th 1934, HRC NCC Box 20, Folder 10.

²⁹ Cunard, 'Harlem Reviewed', *Negro*, 73. David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, (Oxford: OUP, 1989), 303. First published 1979.

including Locke's anthology, Blaise Cendrars' *Anthologie nègre* (1921), James Weldon Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), Countee Cullen's *Caroling Dusk: An Anthology of Verse by Negro Poets* (1927) and V. F. Calverton's *Anthology of American Negro Literature* (1929). Brent Hayes Edwards has persuasively argued that this post-war explosion of anthologies of black art and culture takes place because 'the compulsively documentary New Negro movement coincides with the *vogue nègre* (the acquisition-minded European fascination with black performance and artists) and with the institutionalization of anthropology as a discipline.'³⁰ With its pioneering blend of literature, visual art, musical scores, cultural criticism etc., *Negro* shares with *The New Negro* a multimedia format not found in other comparable anthologies of the period, which had concentrated predominantly on literary culture. Calverton's preface to his *Anthology of American Negro Literature* explains his decision to include blues and spirituals without musical scores: 'in an anthology of this character the presence of scales would be somewhat incongruous.'³¹ As a documentary collection, *Negro* was not bound by the same conventions of the literary anthology, which gave Cunard scope to include a much wider variety of materials in her text: as she wrote in a letter to Claude McKay, 'this book is not a *literary* anthology, but a very large symposium indeed.'³² Another major difference came in her decision to incorporate the 'voices of both races' (iii) into the volume. Where European modernist anthologies had been largely limited to white contributors and African-American anthologies to black writers and artists, Cunard's anthology broke the mould in discussing race and racism from a transnational and multiracial perspective. In uniting African and African-American writers and cultural materials, *Negro* is also an early work of black internationalism with echoes of Du Bois' unfinished project, the *Encyclopaedia of the Negro*.³³

Negro also differs from previous anthologies in its loud insistence that racism and race inequality can only be solved through radical societal and political transformations in

³⁰ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 44.

³¹ V. F. Calverton, Preface, *Anthology of American Negro Literature*, (New York: Modern Library, 1929), vii.

³² Cited by Alan Warren Friedman in *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro (1934)*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), xix.

³³ From the early decades of the twentieth century until his death in 1963, W.E.B. DuBois had planned to edit a global, encyclopaedic anthology of black culture, given the 1931 provisional title of *Encyclopaedia of the Negro*, and later *Encyclopaedia Africana*, although this project was never completed.

One of the anthology's contributors, A. A. Colebrooke, who accompanied Cunard to Jamaica as she carried out research for the project, came to regard *Negro* as 'The Encyclopaedia of a Race.' 'A Modern Joan D'Arc', *Daily Gleaner*, 9th April 1934.

the West and its colonies, changes Cunard argued would only come about under Communism. As she writes in her polemical preface:

There are certain sections of the Negro bourgeoisie which hold that justice will come to them from some eventual liberality in the white man. But the more vital of the Negro race have realised that it is Communism alone which throws down the barriers of race as finally as it wipes out class distinctions. The Communist world-order is the solution of the race problem for the Negro [...] To-day in Russia alone is the Negro a free man, a 100 per cent. equal.

What is *Africa*? A continent in the grip of its several imperialist oppressors. [...] The studies by George Padmore, and others, of the economic, inter-racial, social and political systems implanted by the different masters assuredly throw an arc-light strong enough on the irrefutable truth. The truth is that Africa is tragedy. 'The White Man is Killing Africa.'

(iii-iv)

In keeping with these lines, essays written with a Communist stance (although often from quite contradictory perspectives) are scattered throughout the anthology, which opens with a full-page photograph of an anonymous cloth-capped worker titled, 'An American Beast of Burden,' set alongside the poem 'I, Too' by Langston Hughes, who had loose affiliations with the Communist party and was censored by some anti-Communist editors. The broad leftist stance of the anthology did not, however, prevent Cunard from including contributions from authors with opposing political views. For example, a sequence of essays on African society written by the African-American conservative George Schuyler is immediately followed by an article on working conditions in South Africa taken from George Padmore's periodical the *Negro Worker*, which was sponsored by the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) and in turn by the Communist Third International (Comintern). With the benefit of hindsight, Cunard's repeated insistence on Soviet Russia as the supreme model for racial equality now appears misguided, but it is worth remembering that at the time this was a stance taken by a number of black and white artists, labour groups and public intellectuals—not least Padmore, of course, with whom she went on to write the anti-colonial tract *The White Man's Duty* (1942).

The utopian faith placed in the Comintern by many leftist intellectuals like Cunard was gradually eroded over the course of the late 1930s with Stalin's Moscow Trials and the Great Purge, and was for many finally shattered with the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, which 'pulled the rug out from under all those who had been arguing for [its] well-intentioned,

progressive character.³⁴ For Cunard, this disillusionment had begun sooner, however; although she never renounced or reconsidered her allegiance to the Communist cause, in a 1934 article she fiercely criticised Padmore's expulsion from the Party after he withdrew his support for the ITUCNW, which had weakened its stance on colonial independence (see Chapter 4).³⁵ Although Cunard was for many years an ardent supporter of Communist politics, she was, like Langston Hughes, never a subscribing member of the Party, likely for the same reason Hughes himself gave: 'it was based on strict discipline and the acceptance of directives that I, as a writer, did not wish to accept.'³⁶ One party member who knew her at the time said that she would not have been welcomed as a member in any case: 'It must have been obvious then as it is in retrospect that the mere thought of Nancy taking part in organized meetings or being subject to intellectual or organizational discipline was absurd.'³⁷

Along with its emphatic political declarations, Cunard's preface to *Negro* also sets out the two main purposes of the anthology as she conceived them: to achieve recognition for achievements in black music, literature and art, and to expose and critique imperial oppression and racial prejudice around the world (or to show 'the genius of blackness [and] the cruelty of whiteness', as Lemke phrases it).³⁸ Belief in the power of cultural valorisation and the promotion of a black cultural lineage to help counter white prejudice had been put forward by other anthologists of the era, although each took a different tack. In his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, Johnson looked towards the recognition of black culture as an important step towards wider equalities, writing that '[t]he final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced' and that '[t]he world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art.'³⁹ Similarly, Calverton wrote in his introduction to the *Anthology of American Negro Literature* that the growth of African-American literature 'marks

³⁴ Bernard Schweizer, *Radicals on the Road: The Politics of English Travel Writing in the 1930s*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 12-13.

³⁵ Cunard, 'Nancy Cunard Defends Padmore Against Ford', *Afro-American*, 8th December 1934.

³⁶ Hughes, *Autobiography: I Wonder As I Wander*, from *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, Vol. 14, Joseph McLaren ed. (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 140.

As her biographer Chisholm observes, Cunard 'could never for an instant have submerged her own identity in a political organization.' *Nancy Cunard*, 225.

³⁷ Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 225.

³⁸ Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism*, (Oxford, OUP, 1998), 131.

³⁹ James Weldon Johnson, 'Preface to the First Edition' [*The Book of American Negro Poetry*], reprinted in *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Nathan Huggins, (Oxford: OUP, 1976), 281.

the rise of an entire people.⁴⁰ Locke went so far as to state in his preface to *The New Negro* that 'hope [for rehabilitation] rests in the revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective,' a stance since criticised by David Levering Lewis as 'irresponsibly delusional.'⁴¹

As is clear from the preface to *Negro*, Cunard's promotion of African diasporic culture was not guided by Locke's belief that improvements to social conditions could be brought about through aesthetic re-evaluation (or 'from some eventual liberality in the white man,' as she curtly phrases it above). In her essay on the NAACP, 'A Reactionary Negro Organisation,' she is also scathing about Du Bois's notion of racial uplift and his promotion of positivist and primarily middle-class representations of black identity in *The Crisis*, which she directly labels a 'bourgeois placidity' (145) removed from the everyday struggles of African-American workers. (Cunard's criticisms of Du Bois derived predominantly from her criticisms of the NAACP's role in the Scottsboro trials, as I examine in Chapter 4) The foreword to the *Negro* anthology indicates that literature and art are included both in order to further the anthology's revolutionary aims and to disrupt the received imperialist narrative of Western progress: Langston Hughes is 'the revolutionary voice of liberation'; the black poet is said to carry 'the burden of his race'; and 'the form and equal genius' of African sculpture is used to challenge the colonialist's assertion that 'the white man is in Africa for the black man's good.' (vi) The political and the aesthetic are never fully integrated in Cunard's anthology, however, as is made apparent in the horrifically jarring juxtaposition of a large, graphic image of *A lynching in America* at the end of William Pickens' essay 'Aftermath of a Lynching' with the beginning of Zora Neale Hurston's essay on black creativity, 'Characteristics of Negro Expression,' complete with Hurston's smiling author photo. This is just one of many disjunctions in an anthology that brings together romanticist, primitivist explorations of black culture with accounts of racist prejudice and imperialist exploitation, and combative communist entries with measured historical and scientific scholarship.

As cited above, Michael North has argued that the lack of connection between *Negro*'s political outrage and its relish for black cultural expression gives the text a 'weirdly dissociative effect'.⁴² In her work on *The Crisis* magazine, Anne Carroll has, however, framed precisely this kind of jarring juxtaposition as a deliberate editorial technique that throws

⁴⁰ Calverton, 'The Growth of Negro Literature,' *Anthology of American Negro Literature*, 17.

⁴¹ Locke, 'The New Negro', *The New Negro*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 15. First published 1925. All quotations are from this edition. David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 117.

⁴² North, *Dialect of Modernism*, 191.

racial injustice into sharp relief. In *The Crisis*, as she observes, '[j]uxtapositions of protest and affirmation were frequent [and] texts that reported on lynching and violence against African Americans were often placed next to, above, or facing reports of accomplishments and achievements'.⁴³ For Carroll, this created a sense of urgency for readers by highlighting the disparity between the 'accomplishments' and 'treatment' of African Americans, thus making the argument that 'continuing violence in the midst of growing achievements is impossible to justify'.⁴⁴ This concept of 'protest and affirmation' closely corresponds with Cunard's stated aim in the foreword to *Negro*: as she states, the anthology set out to record 'the struggles and achievements [...] of the Negro peoples' (iii), in order to show that both racism and colonialism are indefensible. It is not clear, however, if Cunard was always entirely sensitive to the conflicts between adjacent entries. William Carlos Williams' whimsical anecdote about his early sexual curiosity towards black women, 'The Colored Girls of Passenack,' for example, immediately precedes Arthur Schomburg's earnest appeal for the academy to appoint a chair in African and African-American history. North also highlights the juxtaposition of George Antheil's 'fevered' essay tracing 'black musical creativity to 'the groins, the hips, and the sexual organs' with Clarence Cameron White and Edward G. Perry's sober accounts of African-American musicianship.⁴⁵

Although Cunard's manifesto-like preface attempts to unite the disparate materials in the anthology under the rubric of international Communism—as she writes, 'the chord of oppression, struggle and protest rings, trumpet-like or muffled, but always insistent throughout' (iv)—in the process of editing, she realised that there would be certain inconsistencies given the collaborative nature of the work. Hugh Ford, who spent time interviewing and working with Cunard on her memoirs of the Hours Press in the early 1960s, writes in his introduction to the 1970 abridged edition of *Negro* that 'despite efforts to bring some order to *Negro*, it continued to push out in all directions. Contributions often defied classification. No clear thesis emerged from the articles that had arrived, and the situation worsened as contributors failed to send Nancy the essays that they had promised. Little by little it was decided that *Negro* would have to be published with gaps'.⁴⁶ The collective nature of the anthology form, with its tensions between selectivity and inclusivity, unity and individuality, perhaps inevitably leads to discrepancies between constituent parts.

⁴³ Anne Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 43-44.

⁴⁴ Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro*, 52.

⁴⁵ North, *Dialect of Modernism*, 192.

⁴⁶ Ford, 'Introduction', *Negro*, (1970), xxi.

In the case of the *Negro* anthology, as Brent Hayes Edwards persuasively argues, its decentred and chaotic format, its gaps and inconsistencies, are all elements of a necessarily heterogeneous articulation of the African diaspora (and the 'jagged harmony' of black cultural expression, as Hurston phrases it) which appear to play out the essential 'impossibility of anthologizing blackness.'⁴⁷

Edwards rightly argues that the explosion of anthologies of black culture that took place in the 1920s and 1930s was indebted both to the birth of modern anthropology and the European fascination for non-Western artists and performers during the *vogue nègre*. Yet the emphasis on this particular form was also shaped by the active anthology culture that had sprung up in the wake of Edward Marsh's highly successful *Georgian Poetry* series (1911-1922). Marsh's series had been influential in the rise of 'combative,' polemical modernist anthologies like those of Pound, Lowell and Sitwell mentioned above, which Aaron Jaffe observes shared with Marsh's collection a certain kind of 'promotional logic' that set out 'a shared provenance,' in spite of fundamental oppositions between modernist and Georgian poetics.⁴⁸ Pound had made explicit this use of the anthology form when he wrote that he had conceived of *Des Imagistes* as 'a sort of group manifesto,' and almost every poetry school or movement since the Pound era has used the form in this way.⁴⁹ Both Cunard's and Locke's anthologies departed from the conventions of the modernist poetry anthology in their use of highly varied media, yet both had appropriated its cultural currency and revisionist power in order to promote appreciation for black culture. Their use of polemical prefaces (also present in Calverton and Johnson's literary anthologies) suggest they were well aware of the intervention-making function of the form. In modernist circles and beyond, the anthology had taken on a newly important role in agenda-setting, profile-raising and cultural networking, but the surprising commercial success of *Georgian Poetry* had also caused a flood of 'trade-anthologies,' fiercely criticised in Laura Riding and Robert Graves' *Pamphlet Against Anthologies* for having turned 'poetry into an industrial packet-commodity' driven primarily by 'the economy of book-producing.' Published in 1928, their

⁴⁷ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 316.

Locke's *New Negro* has been similarly described as an 'amazingly diverse and self-divided text.' George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 433.

⁴⁸ Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 137. Some similarly-conceived volumes were in circulation at the time of *Georgian Poetry's* first imprint, but these had not reached the same level of renown.

⁴⁹ See Anne Ferry, *Tradition and the Individual Poem: An Inquiry Into Anthologies*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 223-224.

confrontational pamphlet attacked the commercial verse anthology as a homogenising publisher's genre, 'merely a barometer of fashion,' that placed a meaningless and artificial barrier (the anthologist) between text and reader. The most valuable anthology, they conclude, would either try to rescue 'fugitive' texts that defied classification among the collected works of a single author, or would be necessarily encyclopaedic, attempting to include almost everything—lesser and well-known texts, pieces of merit and those of disputed value—much as Cunard's project did.⁵⁰ Cunard herself suggested in an article on French poetry that every literary anthology is 'for one reason or another [...] biased or incomplete', but she also acknowledged the difficulties faced by the poetry anthologist: 'if selections are to be made (a defence is that they profit the schoolmaster, how many years later in the case of 'moderns' one wonders) the choice rests with someone. Who is to make it? You and I of course, and we should soon see that it is impossible to collect an immediate harvest out of any present-day. The exact skeleton is hard to get at.'⁵¹

A writer for the missionary journal, *Books for Africa*, warned in 1932 that 'most anthologies should be discouraged as giving a false impression', and that the compilers of such texts should be seen as 'tending to encourage mental idleness.'⁵² As a form long used for educational purposes, the anthology is intricately connected to canon-formation: as David Hopkins observes, '[i]n an anthology-based course, the 'canon' studied simply *becomes* the contents of the anthology, and the anthologist thus holds enormous unseen power.'⁵³ In the colonial classroom, the literary anthology thus became a powerful ideological tool in claiming the superiority of British artistic heritage over indigenous cultural forms. As Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o observes, '[t]he question of literary excellence implies a value judgement as to what is literary and what is excellence, and from whose point of view,' a truth occluded by the authoritative status of the literary anthology.⁵⁴ Francis Palgrave's highly successful and once-ubiquitous anthology of Victorian verse, *Golden Treasury* (1861), is mentioned by a number of postcolonial authors as a formative text (for better or for worse) in their secondary school education. In his memoirs, V. S. Naipaul

⁵⁰ Laura Riding & Robert Graves, *Pamphlet Against Anthologies*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), 18, 51-52, 184-189.

⁵¹ 'Paris', press-cutting, Scrapbook 1921-1927, HRC NCC Box 26.

⁵² *Books for Africa* 2 (1), 8. Quoted by Stephanie Newell, Review: Karin Barber, ed. *Readings in African Popular Culture, Africa*, Vol. 69, Nos. 1-2, March 22nd 1999, 333.

⁵³ David Hopkins, "On Anthologies," *The Cambridge Quarterly* Vol. 37, No. 3 (2008), 287.

⁵⁴ Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, 'On the Abolition of the English Department', *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, (London: Routledge, 1995), 441. See also John Docker's essay in this volume on the use of English literature to create cultural hierarchies: 'The Neocolonial Assumption in University Teaching of English', 443-446.

writes, 'I hated the very sight of the red soft-covered book (the soft cover an economy of wartime book-production). The poems he had chosen made me think of poetry as something far away, an affectation, a searching for rare emotion and high language [...] Palgrave made me decide that poetry was not for me.'⁵⁵ Cunard would likely have studied Palgrave's poetry anthology as a child, and Marcus suggests she would have been aware of its educational/ propagandistic use in the British colonies.⁵⁶ *Negro* appears in this sense as a kind of counter-anthology to Palgrave's text, although its banning by the colonial authorities finally prevented it from reaching this section of its intended audience.⁵⁷ Cunard had also hoped the *Negro* anthology could be used for wider educative purposes, but again the politically inflammatory content and costly format would have proved a disincentive.⁵⁸

Although *Negro* was influenced by the poetry anthology tradition, its own 'Poetry' section is comparatively small. But then it is perhaps surprising to find any poetry in a collection which advertised itself as 'entirely *Documentary*,' particularly when fiction was deemed not to meet this criterion. A look at Cunard's own work perhaps explains this apparent discrepancy. She was not uninterested in formal experimentation, as is clear from her post-Imagist free verse experiments in *Parallax* (1925), but poetry later became, for Cunard, primarily a medium for political rallying cries and means of bearing witness to social injustice. As she wrote in an article for *Left Review*, '3 Negro Poets':

⁵⁵ Naipaul, *A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling*, (London: Picador, 2007), 8. Derek Walcott, meanwhile, has stated his gratitude for the role played by this and other anthologies on his early poetic education. Edward Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', 1977, reprinted in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. William Baer, (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1996), 52-53.

⁵⁶ Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*, 142.

⁵⁷ It is worth noting here that the literary anthology first emerged during a period of increasing British imperial wealth: '[Anthologies] sell variety and plenitude, and consequently they arose during a period of high literary production and consumption, and increasing wealth. Restoration England, emerging from an era of severe censorship but high literacy, included readers of all classes, women and men, who, fed by colonial enterprise, were growing more leisured and eager to read.' Benedict, 'The Paradox of the Anthology', 252.

⁵⁸ As André Lefevre has argued, if 'an anthology is to function as a textbook, it had better not contain too much material that might be considered offensive'. *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 125.

We know from Cunard's correspondence files, however, that the Marxist journalist Eugene Gordon (also a contributor to the anthology) made use of the text in a class he taught on 'Negro history and Negro problems.' Letter dated 7th June 1934, HRC NCC Box 20, Folder 10.

C. L. R. James (again, a contributor) also often showed his copy of the anthology to his students. Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *C. L. R. James: A Critical Introduction*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 170.

The Nigerian educator T. K. Utchay founded 'Cunardia School' in Port Harcourt and named his daughter 'Nancy' to honour Cunard's work on the anthology, which he saw as an effort to 'bring sanity to the people of her own race'. Letters from T. K. Utchay to Cunard, HRC NCC, Box 14, Folder 2.

There are some poets, some writers, to whom the burdens, the problems, the tragedies of suffering humanity become as their own. A question of individual temperament. Yet it is obvious that this must happen most to revolutionary and anti-Fascist writers. Life as it is today makes us aghast.⁵⁹

It is also interesting that Cunard should have set out to exclude fiction from a text so committed to generic diversity—fiction and romance were in fact the only proscribed forms in the original call for contributions. Yet anthologies inevitably reflect the tastes and opinions of the anthologist, and Cunard seemed unconvinced of fiction's truth-telling capabilities and wary of its apparent infidelity to real people and places. In 'Harlem Reviewed,' she attacks Carl Van Vechten's controversial novel *Nigger Heaven* (1926) for producing a 'revolting and cheap lithograph' of Harlem culture: 'Van Vechten, the spirit of vulgarity, has depicted Harlem as a grimace.' She also observes that the Harlem one reads about in fiction 'is not the Harlem one sees': 'You don't see the Harlem of the romanticists; it is romantic in its own right.' (73) By contrast, in her preface to *Negro*, she writes of poetry's documentary capabilities: '[t]here is no laughter in any of the Poetry here, *for facts have made it.*'⁶⁰

Soon after *Negro* was published, Cunard again returned to the anthology form, sending out a call for contributions to a poetry anthology titled, *A Symposium of Poetry—Revolution: The Negro Speaks*, which would collect together poems inspired by revolutionary events 'in Negro history—past and present.' The project never came to fruition, but perhaps in answer to criticisms made of *Negro*'s cost, the book was to be published 'at a very popular price,' for around one shilling or twenty five cents. Again, she hoped to publish documentary poems that would serve as a call to arms, including Shelley's famous line from his *Defence of Poetry* that poets are 'the trumpets that sing to battle.'⁶¹ If it had appeared as planned, *Revolution* would have sat alongside several other socio-politically framed literary collections Cunard went on to edit during the thirties and forties: a series of six poetry pamphlets (co-edited with Pablo Neruda and including poems in English, French and Spanish) published in response to the Spanish Civil War and in aid of the Republican cause, *Les Poètes du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol* (1937); a now famous collection of replies

⁵⁹ Cunard, '3 Negro Poets', *Left Review*, Vol. 3 No. 9, October 1937.

⁶⁰ *Negro*, iv. My emphasis. The only ostensibly 'fictional' work in the anthology is Pauli Murray's semi-autobiographical short story 'Ten Thousand Miles on a Dime', 90-93.

⁶¹ Circular for *A Symposium of Poetry—Revolution: The Negro Speaks*, HRC NCC, Box 8, Folder 6.

from contemporary writers to the question, 'Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?' titled *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (1937); a volume of poems *Salvo for Russia* (1942), co-edited with John Banting, sold to help the Soviet war effort; and an anthology of poems collected in celebration of the spirit of the French resistance, *Poems for France* (1944), which she translated and published as *Poèmes à la France* (1946). This last volume was inspired by Stephen Spender and John Lehmann's similarly-conceived collection *Poems for Spain* (1939), which had in its turn been modelled partly on Cunard and Neruda's earlier Spanish pamphlets.

As with these later projects, the *Negro* anthology always had, for Cunard, 'a definite and clearly defined intent: to throw light on the appalling way the entire colour 'question' is handled.'⁶² Returning to Susan Pearce's formation of collecting discussed in Chapter 1, *Negro* (and, indeed, the other anthologies Cunard edited) can thus be read as a textual imprint of what Pearce terms the 'systematic collection'—materials accumulated and displayed in order to make a public statement or cultural intervention, or to further an ideological agenda. In Jeremy Braddock's recent book, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, he suggests that 'what might be broadly named a 'collecting aesthetic' can be identified as a paradigmatic form of modernist art,' citing examples such as the collage formation of visual and literary modernist art, the artistic influence of folklore and ethnographic collections, thematic engagement with collecting in the novels and poetry of the period, and the rise of the modernist anthology form.⁶³ Braddock in fact frames *Negro* as a particular kind of 'archival collection', which 'make[s] fragments of the past, as well as the records of those fragments' historical and present mediations, available to the conditions of unforeseeable futures.⁶⁴ Cunard's own interest in the archive supports Braddock's evaluation: we have already seen how she created her own personal archives in the form of scrapbooks and was involved in helping museums catalogue their collections, but she also sent books, photographs, letters and other documents to various libraries, museums and archives throughout her life. Writing to Charles Burkhart, she even joked about her 'mania for albums and archives.'⁶⁵ The *Negro* anthology is very much a product of a modernist 'collecting aesthetic,' but it is also possible to interpret the text's fragmentary structure through another more particular manifestation of collecting.

⁶² Cunard, Letter to Claude McKay, January 28th 1932, , HRC NCC, Box 10, Folder 4.

⁶³ Jeremy Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 1-2.

⁶⁴ Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, 228.

⁶⁵ Cunard, letter to Charles Burkhart, Lamothe-Fénelon November 3rd 1956, Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Rachel Farebrother has identified a 'collage aesthetic' as a central feature of Harlem Renaissance writing (including various works by Hurston, Jean Toomer's *Cane* and Locke's *New Negro*), a body of literature she reads as characterised by 'fragmentary cultural pieces' and 'the patching together of diverse sources, which can be identified and held in view by the reader.'⁶⁶ Both collages and anthologies—visual and literary forms of collecting—invite a particular kind of 'reading' practice that involves moving from part to whole, drawing out connections and contradictions between constituent elements. As Benedict writes in her study of eighteenth-century anthologies, '[c]ollections are a whole experienced in parts. This formal paradox points to the central, most significant aspects of the anthology: its rejection of linearity, its hospitality to a multiplicity of reading procedures, its invitation to readers to read nonteleologically.'⁶⁷ Laura Winkiel has rightly linked *Negro* to the aesthetics of surrealism: much like a surrealist visual collage, *Negro* combines conflicting and unresolved materials, staging a dialogue between constituent parts, and sharing a similar preoccupation with the materials and phenomena of everyday life. Cunard's close personal ties to members of the movement; her inclusion of their anticolonial manifesto 'Murderous Humanitarianism', co-signed by André Breton, René Crevel, Paul Eluard, Yves Tanguy and others; and the presence of the young Surrealist Raymond Michelet as Cunard's chief collaborator on the volume all further contribute to this impression.

Although *Negro* was clearly influenced by Breton's brand of surrealism, the surrealist project to which the anthology in fact bears the strongest resemblance was conceived partly in opposition to this movement. Like *Negro*, Georges Bataille's journal *Documents* magazine, of which fifteen issues were produced between 1929 and 1930, is a scrapbook-like compilation of documents and images inflected with a surrealist collage aesthetic, combining 'high' art with 'low' texts and images, and serious scholarship with more ephemeral and experimental writing. A collaboration between museum specialists, scholars, artists and critics—several of whom had decamped from Breton's movement—*Documents* is a cultural collage of images and writing on jazz, popular culture, archaeology, film, contemporary art and ethnography. It was devised to be a 'war machine against received ideas': a space for resistance against artistic hierarchies and a direct challenge to what Bataille saw as Breton's mainstream form of surrealism, which he believed 'placed the

⁶⁶ Rachel Farebrother, *The Collage Aesthetic in the Harlem Renaissance*, (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 2.

⁶⁷ Benedict, 'The Paradox of the Anthology', 249.

work before being' and idealised what ought to be shown in stark detail.⁶⁸ Like Breton's 'orthodox' surrealism, it privileged subversive, fragmented art forms, but its texts and images could be darker or more visceral: a close-up study of the big toe, the abattoir, the inside of the human throat.

Negro and *Documents* are both products of the crossovers between ethnography and Parisian avant-garde culture that emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century—and a particular practice Clifford famously termed 'ethnographic surrealism',⁶⁹ which blended avant-garde creativity and surrealist experimentalism with more rigorous cultural investigation. As the promotional text for its launch set out, *Documents* would make 'unclassified works of art, and certain heterogeneous, hitherto neglected productions [...] the object of studies as rigorous, as scientific, as those of archaeologists.'⁷⁰ Like *Negro*, *Documents* was also the work of a collector, Bataille being a trained numismatist, and Julia Kelly has observed it was precisely those qualities 'that might attract an artist or collector to a piece of ethnographic material [...] that additionally motivated the selection of certain objects for reproduction in *Documents*.'⁷¹ The second part of this chapter will look in more detail at the particular ethnographic objects and modes of display Cunard used in her anthology, but it is worth noting here that *Negro* and *Documents* both feature a number of African objects—among them Mangbetu harps and Ekoi headdresses⁷²—that were already highly prized among modernist artists and collectors at the time, and both use a similar aestheticising, minimalist style in their presentation of these objects, reminiscent of the era's newly-modernised public ethnographic collections.

As projects committed to realist cultural documentation and yet firmly rooted in the aesthetics of the European avant-garde, *Documents* and *Negro* are both works of what can be termed 'documentary modernism.' Tyrus Miller's 2002 article 'Documentary /

⁶⁸ Cited by Dawn Ades & Fiona Bradley in 'Introduction', *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and DOCUMENTS*, ed. Dawn Ades & Simon Baker (London; Cambridge, Mass.: Hayward Gallery; MIT Press 2006), 11.

⁶⁹ Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 117.

⁷⁰ Cited by Julia Kelly in *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects: Paris, c. 1925-35*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 43.

⁷¹ Julia Kelly, 'Discipline and indiscipline: the ethnographies of *Documents*', *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 7, 2007: The Use-Value of *Documents*, 11. Accessed online September 2013, <http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal7/>

⁷² *Negro*, 712, 672. Image of Ekoi mask from *Documents* reprinted in *Undercover Surrealism: George Bataille and Documents*, 26. Mangbetu harps featured in André Schaeffner's 'Des instruments de musique dans un musée d'ethnographie,' *Documents*, 1:5 (1929), 248-54. On Schaeffner's article and Bataille's inclusion of highly 'collectable' objects and materials, see Kelly, 'Discipline and indiscipline', 11-12.

Modernism: Convergence and Complementarity in the 1930s' begins by setting out the apparent political and cultural tensions and contradictions between these two terms, both of which emerged during the same period:

Modernists interrogated the ways in which subjective perception and thought mediated any possible apprehension of the world, and they sought to account for the decisive material role that media such as language, paint, and bodily movement played in articulating the artwork's relation to reality. From this basic stance of modernist artists, ultimately, derived many of the defining features of the modernist artwork: its tendency towards difficulty, fragmentation, and abstraction; its self-reflexivity and heightened self-consciousness; its prominent display of artistic technique; its polemical, often mandarin withdrawal from everyday life and culture.⁷³

While documentary, by way of contrast:

seemed to draw its energy and inspiration from the antithetical realm of the everyday, the popular world upon which modernist art and writing had demonstratively turned its back. In reportage, reports, photographs, and films, the documentary artist attempted to register the teeming multiplicity of movements of labor, daily routine, and city life. [...] Documentary, in sum, is frequently thought to represent the furthest development of naturalism in the arts, just as modernism, its aesthetic antipode, is seen as the acme of anti-naturalist impulses.⁷⁴

This apparent dichotomy between modernism and realism was played out in Lukács's early essays written in praise of the realist mode, which attacked the pseudo-radicalism and intellectual bankruptcy of the European avant-garde. These essays were highly critical of modernist techniques of assemblage such as literary fragmentation, collage and montage, and in particular the collecting and aestheticisation of 'primitive' objects, which he saw as evidence of a tendency to regard non-Western cultures 'as a great jumble sale' to be raided at one's convenience. In 'Realism in the Balance', he critiques Ernst Bloch's unreflecting use of the expressions 'useful legacies' and 'plunder' in his praise of surrealist art, which for Lukács demonstrated a wilful misidentification of cultural history as 'a heap of lifeless objects in which one can rummage around at will, picking out whatever one happens to need at the moment [...] something to be taken apart and stuck together in accordance with

⁷³ Tyrus Miller, 'Documentary / Modernism: Convergence and Complementarity in the 1930s', *Modernism/Modernity* 9.2 (2002), Johns Hopkins University Press, 225.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 225-226.

the exigencies of the moment.⁷⁵ There is a particular critique being made here of a cosmopolitan attitude that is insensitive to cultural specificity, echoing current debates around globalisation and cultural homogenisation, but at the heart of Lukács's essay is his belief in a fundamental dichotomy between modernism's subjective, fragmentary forms and realism's socialist, revolutionary power.

The argument Tyrus Miller makes in his article, however, is that modernism's 'formally innovative experimentalism' and realism/documentary's 'naturalist explorations of everyday life were not so much diametrically opposed as instead *complementary* moments of a broader modernist poetics,⁷⁶ drawing parallels between the commitment to verisimilitude and social particularity in British modernist prose poems, Joyce's stream of consciousness experiments, and Mass Observation reportage. *Negro's* street photography, reprinted advertisements, personal letters, accounts of lynchings and racist prejudice, transcriptions of African folk tales and proverbs, and African-American slave protest songs and spirituals, are all plainly elements of realist, documentary work, being what the Scottish filmmaker John Grierson, who in 1926 coined the term 'documentary', called accounts and materials 'taken from the raw.'⁷⁷ Yet it is, as we have seen, also a work with myriad connections to literary and artistic modernism, from its cover typography and polemical preface, to the fragmented, collage-like arrangement of its documents and materials and the glittering array of modernist contributors it brings together. Although Cunard had set out to produce a 'documentary' work, *Negro* is suffused with the aesthetics of modernism, and it might be argued, in fact, that these two fields are tied together by the practice of collecting. For if the collector is one of the central figures of modernism, as Rainey, Braddock and others have argued,⁷⁸ she/he is often also a cultural documentarian, as is clear from a brief look at some of the many other collectors who contributed to *Negro* besides Cunard: Charles Ratton, Paul Guillaume and several other collectors of African sculpture; Lawrence Gellert, a collector of black folk music and spirituals; Zora Neale Hurston, a collector of folklore; and Arthur Schomburg, a collector and bibliophile whose private collection formed the basis of what is now one of the world's most important archives of materials relating to African diasporic culture.

⁷⁵ Georg Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance', *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor, (London: Verso, 1997), 54. First published in *Das Wort*, 1938.

⁷⁶ Miller, 'Documentary / Modernism', 226.

⁷⁷ John Grierson, 'First Principles of Documentary' (1932), *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 147.

⁷⁸ Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, *passim*. Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*, 5.

Lukács had refuted the presence of any revolutionary potential in avant-garde aesthetics, but modernism's fragmentary forms have been conversely interpreted by other critics as having an innate political radicalism. Marjorie Perloff, for example, has argued that collage, in its various incarnations, was the 'central artistic invention of the *avant guerre* [...] forcing the viewer or reader to consider interplay between the pre-existing message or material and the new artistic composition that results from the graft,' and that formal strategies such as 'collage and its cognates (montage, assemblage, construction)' reflect a broader 'desire to break down existing economic and political structures and to transcend nationalist barriers.'⁷⁹ It would be oversimplistic to insist on an inherent subversiveness or revolutionary potential within textual fragmentation, but it is clear that *Negro's* wide-ranging, collective format and generic hybridity allow both for a diverse range of opinions and perspectives on race, and a multiplicity of reading experiences. The contributor Eugene Gordon, among others, praised the anthology for having 'brought together in one volume the opinions of persons who think [...] in *different ways*,⁸⁰ and since there is built into the anthology form an invitation towards a non-linear readerly practice, each reader's experience of the whole is distinct, in spite of steering section divides and explanations built into the editor's preface. *Negro* is a documentary collection that requires the reader to negotiate its often dissonant texts. It is indeed, as one contemporary reviewer observed, 'a very composite miscellany,'⁸¹ but it is through this wide-reaching eclecticism that *Negro* achieves its democracy of form and a necessary provisionality in documenting the period's shifting and sometimes contradictory perspectives on race, culture and identity.

2.2 *Negro's* Collection of African Art

At the time of *Negro's* publication, the 'Negro Sculpture and Ethnology' section was one of the most comprehensive studies of African art that had yet been produced. For a long time omitted from histories of modernism, *Negro* has in recent years received increasing critical attention, but the contribution made by this text to the study of African sculpture is often only mentioned in passing. This is partly owing to the limited availability of the original 1934

⁷⁹ Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), xxxvi.

⁸⁰ Eugene Gordon, letter to Cunard, June 7th 1934, HRC NCC, Box 20, Folder 10.

⁸¹ L.B., 'Books of the Day: An Anthology', *The Manchester Guardian*, 5th March 1934, 5.

edition of the text, recent imprints replicating Ford's 1970 abridgement, which made particularly substantial excisions from this section (at over one hundred pages, by far the longest of the original) with the images culled to a third of their number and the overall section reduced to just a quarter of its original size. Along with a selection of essays and an extensive list of museums containing African art, the first edition contains almost one hundred mostly full or half-page plates of around 150 pieces of Congolese and West African sculpture from museums and private collections (including Cunard's own) and more than fifty sketches of Ashanti masks and fetishes made by Raymond Michelet at the Tervuren Museum in Belgium. Two earlier comparable studies, Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik* (1915) and Vladimir Markov's lesser-known *Iskusstvo negrov* (1919), roughly matched the number of illustrations printed in *Negro*, but Cunard's anthology was the first to combine a large selection of photo-reproductions of African sculpture with a series of critical analyses. In his introductory essay to *Sculpture nègres* (1917), an exhibition catalogue of twenty-four reproductions of African and Oceanic sculpture and the first French book of its kind, Guillaume Apollinaire writes of the lack of 'critical approach' available for the interpretation of African art, maintaining that 'for a long time we will have to be content with the aesthetic sensations and poetic evocations these Negro idols provide.'⁸² Maureen Shanahan suggests that earlier studies of this kind 'readily lent themselves to formalist ahistoricism by foregrounding the object with little commentary,' and has rightly positioned *Negro* as the model for the 'major visual-textual treatises' on African art later produced by some of the anthology's contributors.⁸³

The images of African sculpture were, for Cunard, essential to the anthology's project to record 'the struggles and achievements' (iii) of the African diaspora (or its narratives of 'protest and affirmation'⁸⁴ to return to Anne Carroll's phrase). In Alain Locke's 'Note on African Art' (1924), he writes that African art 'must first be evaluated as a pure form of art and in terms of its marked influence on modern art [...] and then it must be finally interpreted historically to explain its cultural meaning and derivation.'⁸⁵ The structure of

⁸² Guillaume Apollinaire, 'Concerning the Art of the Blacks', preface to *Sculptures nègres* (1917), reprinted in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 107, 109.

⁸³ Maureen Shanahan's article 'Visualizing Africa in Nancy Cunard's Negro Anthology (1934)' is the only study to look at this section of the anthology in detail. She highlights Carl Kjerfve's *Centres de style de la sculpture nègre africaine* (1935-38), Ladislav Szesci's *African Art Speaks* (1952), and Henri Lavachery's *La statuaire de l'Afrique noire* (1954) as examples of subsequent work influenced by Cunard's anthology. See M. G. Shanahan, 'Visualizing Africa in Nancy Cunard's Negro Anthology (1934)', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 6:2, 2005.

⁸⁴ Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro*, 20-54.

⁸⁵ Alain Locke, 'Note on African Art' (1924), in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 187.

Negro's sculpture and ethnology section mirrors this approach, opening with twenty-two pages of photographs before the commentaries begin. Sarah Frioux-Salgas, curator of the recent exhibition on Cunard at the *Musée du Quai Branly*, makes the important point that Cunard's framing of African sculpture within a section that also includes ethnology positions her alongside other figures like Michel Leiris and Georges Henri Rivière—both reformers who also held close ties with the Parisian avant-garde and approached African sculpture on both scientific and aesthetic terms.⁸⁶ For Cunard, the ethnographic and the aesthetic were not mutually exclusive, and the anthology is representative of this dualistic approach to African material cultures. (In her review of the MoMA's 1935 Africa exhibition, for example, Cunard praises Charles Ratton, a contributor to *Negro*, for refusing to distinguish between 'what a race has made, and what a race is' and for having an interest that is 'not that of a connoisseur narrowed down to the comparative aesthetics of the universe.'⁸⁷) The *Negro* anthology then was an early attempt at what has since been referred to as an 'ethno-aesthetics' approach to African art, which tries to bridge the gap between studies that focus on the artistic or aesthetic qualities of an object, and those that emphasise its function and context.⁸⁸

Cunard's anthology also differs radically from its predecessors by framing African art within the context of global struggles against racism and colonial oppression. The 'Sculpture and Ethnology' section of the anthology was conceived partly in response to the Paris Colonial Exhibition of 1931, which Cunard felt had conspicuously neglected traditional African sculpture.⁸⁹ Beginning in the 1800s and continuing well into the last century, world fairs and international exhibitions were attended by many millions of people across Europe and America, the most popular attractions being the live 'anthropological' exhibits of colonised peoples. Reiterating common myths about cannibalism and other taboo-breaking practices, these exhibitions have been shown to have allowed Europeans to deflect the brutality they themselves were perpetrating abroad back onto the peoples whose resources and lands they were exploiting.⁹⁰ Spectacles of national wealth and racial and cultural

⁸⁶ See Sarah Frioux-Salgas, 'Introduction,' « *L'Atlantique noir* » de Nancy Cunard, 21. Frioux-Salgas also notes that Cunard had hoped for a contribution from Georges Henri Rivière for *Negro*, but he did not respond to her invitation.

⁸⁷ Nancy Cunard, 'Works of the 'Ignorant Savage'', for *Opportunity* 1935, HRC NCC Box 5, Folder 6.

⁸⁸ Marie Yvonne Curtis and Ramon Sarro, 'The 'Nimba' Headdress: Art, Ritual, and History of the Baga and Nalu Peoples of Guinea', *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1997, 121.

⁸⁹ Ford, 'Introduction', *Negro* (1970), xxi.

⁹⁰ See Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the Native and the Making of European Identities*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 2.

difference, they also served as a justification for continued colonial occupation, presenting 'native' cultures as having benefited from the benevolent, civilising influence of Europe's imperial powers. Cunard's preface frames the African sculpture included in *Negro* as part of a critique of this received account of Europe's 'imperialist masters': 'At one time labelled en bloc 'cannibals,' 'savages,' who have never produced anything, etc., it is now the fashion to say that the white man is in Africa for the black man's good. Reader, had you never heard of or seen any African sculpture I think the reproductions in this part would suggest to you that the Negro has a superb and individual sense of form and equal genius in his execution.'⁹¹ This section thus formed an important part of the anthology's broader aim to show that colonisation, racist oppression and prejudice could not be defended on grounds of Western progress and cultural supremacy because of the wide achievements in black diasporic art.

Several of the contributors make criticisms of colonial violence and exploitation and set about debunking various myths and stereotypes about African culture (ideas about fixed artistic traditions among particular tribal groups, and the 'primitivism' of African sculpture, for example) but no clear thesis or consensus emerges from the critical essays that accompany the images of African sculpture in *Negro*, which veer between essentialist and anti-essentialist statements, anticolonial contentions, popular stereotypes, primitivist romanticism, historical and ethnographic analysis, and surrealist tropes of magical thinking. In spite of the anticolonial aims of the anthology, what in fact seems to unite this section's written contributions and its presentation of African objects are three early twentieth-century collecting formations, each tied to the aesthetics and value systems of the white modernist intelligentsia: the private collection, the ethnographic museum and the avant-garde gallery. In this section, I want to look at how *Negro*'s anti-imperial arc interacts with and is often contradicted by its links to these institutions, which often privileged Eurocentric notions of primitivism, cultural authenticity and 'universal' aesthetic principles. My main contention here is that while this section of the anthology was in many ways pioneering, it is as much a portrait of the collecting cultures of the period as it is a study of African art—as much a witness to its own historical and cultural context of production as a study of African cultural invention.

The section features four main articles that focus directly on African sculpture: Ladislav Szecsi's commentary on the misapplication of European art historiography to African sculpture, Carl Kjerfve's account of an expedition to collect Bambara sculpture,

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

an ethnographical reading of Congolese statuary by Henri Lavachery, and an essay by Charles Ratton on Benin bronze, the last two of these translated by Cunard's friend, Samuel Beckett.⁹² Following these essays, Michelet's ethnographic critique of Levy-Brühl's notion of 'pre-logicism' in African thought also touches on African material culture. (739-761) Beyond the sculpture and ethnology section, Zora Neale Hurston's 'Characteristics of Negro Expression' remarks on the 'angularity' and 'asymmetry' of black visual art (46), while George Antheil's piece on the influence of African diasporic cultures on Western music, 'The Negro on the Spiral' connects the forms of black American jazz with, similarly, the 'angular and elliptical' lines of African statuary. (346) Of the dozen or so collectors who contributed to the section, as writers and/or owners of particular objects featured, many were either established or soon to be recognised as prominent figures in the field of non-Western art. Ladislav Szecsi, a Hungarian critic and collector who spent most of his life in Paris and the U.S., was only just beginning to establish himself in the field when his essay was published in *Negro*, but in 1950, he founded in New York the first gallery devoted exclusively to African art and soon after published his influential work *African Sculpture Speaks* (1952). The Danish collector Carl Kjerfve owned a collection that had by the 1930s grown into one of the largest in the world, and between 1935 and 1938 published his four-volume *Centres de style de la sculpture nègre africaine*, a study of West and Central African sculpture that was pioneering in its systematic approach to regional stylistic trends. Henry Lavachery was a Belgian collector and professional ethnographer who organised the first major exhibition of African sculpture in Belgium. The last of the essay contributors, the dealer, critic, curator and collector Charles Ratton, was already considered an expert in the field at the time his essay and photoreproductions appeared in *Negro*. A close friend to a number of the Surrealists, he had organised an exhibition of Benin bronzes and ivories at the Trocadéro in 1932 and presided over the famous public auction of André Breton and Paul Éluard's collections of non-Western art in 1931. He would also go on to assist with the posthumous sale of Cunard's collection of African and Oceanic art in Paris in 1966. Each of the four main contributors provided photoreproductions for the section, along with Paul Guillaume, Cunard, Félix Fénéon, Curtis Moffat and other famous collectors of the period.

⁹² Beckett's presence as a translator further ties the anthology to the European avant-garde circles in which Cunard moved. The political significance of his contribution to *Negro* is, however, difficult to quantify. Alan Warren Friedman's *Beckett in Black and Red* claims he felt 'a moral and intellectual commitment to this great collectivist work' (xxvii), while Thomas Hunkeler has argued that there is nothing in Beckett's correspondence of this period to suggest these translations were anything more than '*un gagne-pain et un bon service rendu à une amie*'. See Hunkeler's 'Beckett face au Surréalisme', in *Présence de Samuel Beckett*, ed. Sjef Houppermans, (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006), 44.

Cunard's inclusion of only white European collectors seems curious, particularly given that Alain Locke had already published several important articles on African sculpture and had featured earlier in the anthology. Of the four essays focusing on sculpture, Szecsi's is the most uncomfortably primitivist in its rhetoric: African sculptors 'can be as a prism,' he writes, 'without any intentional preoccupation' and 'have been able to create works of art because of their innate purity and primitiveness.' (679) Kjersmeier's article, apparently contradicting this position, emphasises West African aesthetic autonomy, arguing that it is 'the individual man, the artist, who creates the new forms, and not the people (who in Europe include the patrons and collectors) who decides what the art of the people shall be.' (683) In *Primitivist Modernism*, Sieglinde Lemke argues, however, that this structure of argument is also a form of primitivist discourse, whereby what appear to be factual descriptions of another culture are in fact reflections on and criticisms of the reader's own culture, or 'critiques by counterexample.' This, Lemke argues, is 'a subtle twist on the old trope of revivification' whereby 'assertions of black cultural superiority are meant to introduce new, rejuvenating models to western cultures.'⁹³ This idea of African culture as a 'revivifying' presence is repeated in Antheil's essay on jazz included earlier in the anthology, in which he describes how the influence of black music came in the wake of the stylistic revolution in the visual arts that had been instigated by African sculpture:

Nothing else was strong enough, hard enough, new enough. This music came with absolute sympathy and a complete collateral aesthetic in the other arts. Modigliani had already devoted his life to painting marvellous elliptical heads; Gaudier-Breszka and Brancusi had sculpted them; Chirico painted rooms full of Roman ruins with egg-heads; the Dadaists collected every bit of Negro sculpture they could lay their hands upon; the Surrealists in 1924 exhibited the best of it with their own painters. Without knowing it we were learning to live again...

(350)

These instances of primitivist thinking seem initially to be at odds with Michelet's article 'Primitive Life and Mentality,' which attempts a critique of Lévy-Brühl's notion of 'primitive mentality'—a theory very much in vogue during the 1930s that set out a binary opposition between the non-Western (primitive) and Western (logical) mindset. Michelet's aim in this essay, as he later described it, was to 'show that the African mind was capable of the same industrial accomplishments as the European, outside of direct lines of influence, and was

⁹³ Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism*, 139.

thus armed with the same faculties of logic,' but his celebration of various kinds of surrealist 'magical' thinking in African cultures also ties his essay to the primitivist trope of cultural revivification.⁹⁴

Taken as they were from various European museums and private collections, the objects selected for inclusion in *Negro* are some of those most highly prized among contemporary collectors, many of them also being examples of types of objects, or particular works, known to have influenced European modernist artists. The section opens with a full-page image of a large Guinean *d'mba* (*nimba*) maternity shoulder mask of the Baga peoples in wood and raffia, one of the single most important objects for the European avant-garde. Shanahan has suggested that the prominence given to this object was very much deliberate on Cunard's part. Baga objects were at the forefront of modernist artists' interest in non-Western art and a large number of their masks and figures were held in both European public museums like the Trocadéro and the Tervuren and in contemporary private collections.⁹⁵ Picasso later acquired for his own private collection a *d'mba* shoulder mask very similar to that depicted in *Negro*, now held at the Musée Picasso in Paris.⁹⁶

In April 1920, Picasso had denied the influence of African aesthetics on his work with his famous claim, '*L'art nègre? Connais pas!*' but in 1937 he admitted in an interview with André Malraux that he had studied African art at the Trocadéro before completing *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, the painting now thought of as 'the first cubist picture'.⁹⁷ Although Picasso claimed that the impact of his encounter with African art was imaginative and not formalistic, stylistic traces of *d'mba* masks (and, as Lemke suggests, masks from the Bakota and Fang peoples) can be clearly seen in the figures in *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*.⁹⁸ The *d'mba* mask that opens the sculpture section of *Negro* was donated to the Trocadéro in 1902, and it is now certain that Picasso was familiar with this particular mask at the time he was painting *demoiselles*, later producing a famous series of drawings and busts patently

⁹⁴ Michelet, 'Nancy Cunard', *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 131. My translation.

⁹⁵ Shanahan suggests that by positioning this the *nimba* headdress at the beginning of the section, Cunard thus also gestures towards 'the centrality of France' in the relationship between Africa and the avant-garde, the mask being representative of the institution and, by extension, the nation to which it belonged. See Shanahan, 'Visualizing Africa'.

⁹⁶ Masque d'épaule baga, Guinée, XIX^e siècle, bois et raphia, Paris, musée national Picasso.

⁹⁷ Alfred J Barr, Jr. cited by Lemke in *Primitivist Modernism*, 38.

⁹⁸ Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism*, 33.

Picasso, 'Discovery of African Art, 1906-1907,' from André Malraux, *La Tête d'obsidienne*, reprinted in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 33.

Alfred J Barr, Jr. on Cubism, cited by Lemke, 38.

inspired by this object.⁹⁹ The significance of this particular object for the European avant-garde is also confirmed by a statement made by André Breton in 1941, in which he reminisces, 'It is nearly forty years now since the great Guinean goddess of Fecundity could first be admired in Paris [...] taking its rightful place in art alongside figures which are accepted as expressing ideally the genius of other peoples and other ages.'¹⁰⁰ Breton also suggests that this mask paved the way for a wider appreciation of African material culture, stating that it is 'In the wake of this statue [that] the modern eye has gradually taken in the endless variety of those objects of so-called 'savage' origin and their sumptuous display on the lyrical plane.'¹⁰¹ Even before its move to the Trocadéro, this mask had been shown at the 1900 *Exposition universelle* in Paris, later appearing in Paul Guillaume's *Sculptures nègres* (1917), an album that placed Africa firmly at the heart of avant-garde aesthetic culture.¹⁰² A Baga spirit figure also appears on the third page of plates in the *Negro* anthology—this particular piece from Cunard's own collection. These spirit figures, used to ward off evil spirits, share some of the formal features of the *d'mba* mask including a crest, exaggerated facial proportions and a characteristic 'beaklike' nose.¹⁰³ Both Picasso and Matisse owned pairs of *d'mba* spirit figures similar to the one featured here, Picasso's clearly visible in the photograph of Olga Khokhlova on which he based his painting *Olga in an Armchair*.¹⁰⁴

Fang sculptures and masks from the region covering Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea were also of particular importance to modernist artists and a number of Fang pieces figure in the *Negro* anthology. One of the first African pieces acquired by Vlaminck was a Fang mask and the influence of their *n'gil* masks is clearly visible in the characteristic elongated facial features of Modigliani's work.¹⁰⁵ Fang figures of the *bieri*

⁹⁹ See Peter Stepan, *Picasso's Collection of African & Oceanic Art*, (London: Prestel, 2006) 126. A number of critics have nevertheless tried to disprove the African influence in Picasso's work, confirming Simon Gikandi's claim that modernist artists 'needed the primitive in order to carry out their representational revolution, but [...] once this task had been accomplished, the Other needed to be evacuated from the scene of the modern so that it could enter the institutions of high art.' 'Picasso, Africa and the schemata of difference', *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 10, No. 3, September 2003, 457.

¹⁰⁰ André Breton, untitled, in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 424.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Guillaume's correspondence with Apollinaire, who wrote the preface for this book, reveals a shared desire to transport non-Western art from the framework of the ethnographic museum, where they felt their aesthetic value had been ignored, and to have them recognised as universal masterpieces. See H. Marchal, 'La France à la reconquête des cultures lointaines', *Présences françaises outre-mer, XVI^e-XXI^e siècles: Science, religion et culture*, ed. Philippe Bonnichon, Pierre Gény & Jean Nemo, 470.

¹⁰³ *Negro*, 658. Curtis & Sarro, 'The 'Nimba' Headdress, 124-125.

¹⁰⁴ Picasso acquired these two figures 'through the auspices of Gertrude Stein.' See Stepan, *Picasso's Collection*, 126-7.

¹⁰⁵ See Stepan, *Picasso's Collection*, 135.



*Sculpture of the Pahouin tribe, French Gabon
From the private collection of Paul Guillaume, Paris
By courtesy of the owner*

709

Fig. 9 *Bieri* Reliquary Head 19th-20th Century. Gabon; Fang, Betsi group.
Now held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *Negro* (1934), 709

ancestral cult were some of the most expensive and sought-after collector's items of the period: the reliquary head included in *Negro* (Fig. 9) from the collection of Paul Guillaume is now widely considered the most important of its kind, later passing into the collection of British modernist sculptor Jacob Epstein and now held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹⁰⁶ While in Guillaume's possession, it had been displayed prominently in his apartment alongside paintings by Modigliani and Picasso and other pieces of African statuary. Sometimes referred to as 'The Great Bieri', this piece, admired for its symmetry and smooth lines, is said to have served as a 'muse' for many artists since the early twentieth century, the critic Robert Goldwater referring to it as 'one of the great classics of African art.'¹⁰⁷

I have spoken already of the role played by anthologies in literary canon-formation, but this was true also of material objects. Early twentieth-century exhibitions and books of photoreproductions like *Negro*, Guillaume's *Sculptures nègres* and Einstein's *Negerplastik* played an important role in establishing a canon of African art in the West and in raising the profile (and the price) of particular objects, and collectors would therefore have been keen to have their pieces featured. A number of the objects in the *Negro* anthology, including 'The Great Bieri' and a famous nineteenth-century divination portrait of the God of War commissioned by the Dahomey King Glele, were later exhibited in the MoMA's *African Negro Art* exhibition in 1935. In her study of Walker Evans' photo-documentation of this exhibition, Virginia-Lee Webb writes that this show was pivotal in creating a Western canon of African art, with many of the objects on display coming to be recognised as great masterpieces in the field.¹⁰⁸ We now know from Webb's archival research that guest curator James Johnson Sweeney and the museum's director Alfred H. Barr consulted Cunard's anthology in preparing for this influential exhibition, demonstrating the role *Negro* played in early twentieth-century understanding of African art in spite of its limited circulation.¹⁰⁹

Cunard wrote articles for the *Daily Gleaner*, *Vogue* and Associated Negro Press setting out the impact of African sculpture on European modernism, and she seems to signal her awareness of these lines of influence through the prominence she gives to

¹⁰⁶ *Negro*, 709.

For information on this object, see the Heilbrunn Timeline of African Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, web URL: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1979.206.229>

Shanahan also identifies 'kota, nkisi, and chi-warra figures' as objects featuring in the anthology which were also held in avant-garde collections. 'Visualizing Africa'.

¹⁰⁷ <http://www2.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/312429>

¹⁰⁸ Virginia Lee-Webb, *Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 13.

¹⁰⁹ *Negro* is also recommended in a number of 1930s art periodicals as a valuable source for scholars of African art. See, for example, Hugh Gordon Porteous in *The New English Weekly*, June 6th 1935, 153.

particular objects in *Negro*. The accompanying essays, however, comment only briefly on the impact of these objects on the Western artistic tradition. In Charles Ratton's essay for the anthology, 'The Ancient Bronzes of Black Africa', he explains how the European avant-garde came to favour what they saw as authentically 'primitive' pieces over the more naturalistic, 'hybrid' forms of Benin's art:

It was in virtue of the reaction against the predominating naturalism of art as conceived in Europe that some few artists, in the presence of these African carvings, were overwhelmed by the sense of an entirely new form of beauty. But in their uncertainty as to the precise source of the few specimens of this Negro sculpture at their disposal, they tended to concentrate on those whose synthetic treatment best exemplified their own subversive theories and to regard their bold economy of statement as the essential characteristics of Black art.¹¹⁰

Kjersmeier similarly notes in his article on Bambara sculpture that the works of this region are of the 'geometric and constructive' style 'most appreciated by the generation that saw the beginnings of Cubism and Expressionism.' (683) Although the images Cunard includes largely reflect this preference for more abstract forms, the section does in fact include several pages of images of more naturalistic works from Benin. Szecsi's essay, however, is more interested in the corrupting effects of foreign cultural intervention on indigenous forms than the Africanist influence on European aesthetics, calling to mind Mary Louise Pratt's observation in *Imperial Eyes* that '[w]hile the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery [...] it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis.'¹¹¹

In terms of the photographic styles used in the sculpture and ethnology section of the anthology, the greater part of the images selected for inclusion reflect what was then a relatively recent trend for photographing non-Western objects removed from their spatial and cultural contexts, a practice which began in the late 1910s. This reflected the hierarchies that were beginning to be drawn up between objects perceived as having aesthetic value and more practical objects like tools or domestic items, which do not feature at all in this section of the anthology.¹¹² Prior to this, objects were usually depicted

¹¹⁰ *Negro*, 684. Even as late as the MoMA show in 1984-85, more naturalistic Ife and Benin sculptures were separated from the other "tribal" works on display and consigned to what Clifford calls the 'somewhat arbitrary category of "court" society.' *Predicament of Culture*, 192.

¹¹¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 6.

¹¹² According to John Warne Monroe, 'it became increasingly common for African pieces to be photographed individually, and for hierarchical distinctions to be drawn between objects that could

in interior settings, often alongside other items, in what John Warne Monroe describes as 'trophy assemblages,' which provided a sense of the scale of the pieces depicted and an opportunity for owners to show off the scope of their collections.¹¹³ Increasingly, however, objects were photographed in isolation, reflecting their promotion from curiosities to (commercially marketable) *objets d'art* meriting formalist evaluation using Western artistic criteria. This was very much consistent with the minimalist forms of display now being used for non-Western objects in the space of the art gallery, where in the museum and ethnographic collection this kind of arrangement had reflected their transformation into objects of anthropological/ scientific interest.¹¹⁴ This is the predominant aesthetic of the images in *Negro*: the open spacing of the gallery replicated in the white backgrounds of the images and in the broad white margins surrounding each photograph, with little or no commentary underneath.

In emulating the presentational style of the modernist gallery, the anthology lays claim to the universal artistic value of these objects, removing them from their spatial and temporal realities. Sally Price explains how, in the gallery space, the artistic standing of non-Western objects is signalled through a reduction in label copy: 'ethnographic artifacts become masterpieces of world art at the point when they shed their anthropological contextualization and are judged capable of standing purely on their own aesthetic merit.'¹¹⁵ Apollinaire's introduction to *Sculpture nègres* suggests that the absence of information about the maker and cultural and historical contexts of these objects was also in some way attractive to early connoisseurs: 'the collector's curiosity is stimulated all the more because information concerning their origin is lacking, and at present no artist's name has yet been identified.'¹¹⁶ Where ethnographic information is lacking in the labelling of objects in *Negro*, the collector also benefits from the kind of prominence usually accorded to the artist. This is compounded in the caption printed under an image of an ivory Benin

be perceived as "sculptures" worthy of solitary contemplation...and mere "everyday items" like spears or nets.' 'Surface Tensions: Empire, Parisian Modernism, and "Authenticity" in African Sculpture, 1917-1939,' *American Historical Review*, April 2012, 463.

¹¹³ Monroe, 'Surface Tensions', 463.

¹¹⁴ Sally Price, for example, recounts how Michel Leiris once described to her how the transfer of the Trocadéro Museum collections to the new Musée de l'homme in 1937 came with new 'austere', scientific-looking cases and labels, which legitimated anthropology as a discipline and 'allowed the objects to be upgraded from curios to scientific specimens.' *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), first published 1989, 86. See also Annie E. Coombes on the role of display in the transformation of the 'curio' into 'ethnographic material,' in *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination*, (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1994), 113.

¹¹⁵ Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, 86.

¹¹⁶ Apollinaire, 'Concerning the Art of the Blacks', in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 107.

mask, where the rare extended explanatory note serves only to provide a portrait of the good taste of the London collector, William Downing Webster, from whom the Pitt Rivers Museum had purchased the mask (669).

The 1920s and 30s shift towards isolating individual objects was part of a broader movement in photography described by Lucia Moholy as 'object-consciousness': a style in which the object and its fine details came to be 'self-assertive within the photographic image.' Although, as Moholy writes, this shift marked the beginning of what is often referred to as 'straight photography' (or modern object photography), it was often characterised by its use of 'cuttings and unusual angles' to draw attention to the surface and texture of the object.¹¹⁷ Isolation predominates over assemblage within the images in *Negro's* sculpture and ethnology section, but relatively few of the photographers experiment with framing and angles. Many of the images included appear to be stock photographs provided by the museums and private collections to which the objects belonged. These images reflect a widespread style of photography found in museum or commercial auction catalogues and are therefore quite prosaic in their composition.¹¹⁸

Others, however, are more experimental in arrangement, such as Michelet's fragmented cut-out/ collage-form presentation of a group of masks from the ivory coast, printed with accompanying notes from Szecsi, and the fourteen photographs produced by Raoul Ubac (also spelled Rolf Ubach) which were commissioned by Cunard specifically for the anthology: seven taken of items from her personal collection, six of objects held at the Tervuren Museum in Brussels, and one of a Congolese fetish owned by the Belgian dealer/collector Gustave de Hondt.¹¹⁹ Ubac was active in the surrealist movement and many of his photographs in *Negro* share stylistic elements with Man Ray's primitivist photography. They also depict a number of the very same objects photographed by Ray for the covers of *Henry-Music*, including a selection of Cunard's bracelets, a *Sande/Bundu* secret society mask

¹¹⁷ Lucia Moholy, 'A Hundred Years of Photography', an extract from *A Hundred Years of Photography* reprinted in *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present*, ed. Liz Heron and Val Williams, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 72.

¹¹⁸ Wendy A. Grossman describes these images as 'largely anonymous and banal object photographs of the type that were continually being recycled during this period.' *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens*, (Washington: International Art and Artists, 2009), 102. See also David Bate on the banality of early photographs of non-Western art, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 185-186.

¹¹⁹ In 1932, Cunard donated a number of these images (including some not printed in *Negro*) to what is now the Musée du quai Branly, and they featured prominently in the museum's 2014 exhibition « *L'Atlantique noir* » de Nancy Cunard. See Sarah Frioux-Salgas, 'Introduction' and 'Photographies de la collection personnelle de Nancy Cunard par Raoul Ubac,' « *L'Atlantique noir* » de Nancy Cunard, *Negro Anthology, 1931-1934*, 11, 208-213.



Fig. 10 Konde fetish figure, Bakongo

Fig. 11 Bayaka mask, Bakongo

Fig. 12 Kifwebe mask, Baluba, Congo

Raoul Ubac

All taken at the Tervuren Museum, Belgium

Negro (1934), 714, 718, 726



from Sierra Leone, and a small Ashanti fertility doll. Using the close-ups and unusual perspectives of 'object-conscious' photography, Ubac creates a number of striking, disorienting images, some with the three-dimensional illusion of a *trompe-l'oeil*, particularly his photographs of a *Konde* fetish figure, a *Yaka* (*Bayaka*) mask, and a large *Kifwebe* mask, all from what was then the Belgian Congo (figs. 10-12).¹²⁰ In the first of these, the close cropping and oblique camera angle (the image is shot from above) also give the object an animated quality. Many of the photographs of pieces from Guillaume and Ratton's private collections are also more consciously artistic and experimental, featuring stark tonal contrasts and dramatic interplay between light and shadow. This is particularly apparent in the three full-page photographs of Fang statuary that begin the Congo sculpture section, which include the famous *bieri* reliquary head (fig. 9).¹²¹ As Wendy Grossman observes in relation to Charles Sheeler's pioneering straight photography of West African sculpture of the late 1910s, bold use of light and shadow served to accentuate the sculptural forms, 'infusing life into the object' and presenting the objects 'in a manner commensurate with their newly elevated status' among the avant-garde.¹²²

In these three images of Fang statues in Cunard's anthology, the use of light also emphasises the grain, weathering and rich patina of the objects, achieved with the repeated application of palm oil. In the absence of an artist's signature—graphic signifier of authenticity—these were qualities favoured by many early collectors of African sculpture, not least Guillaume, as evidence of age, 'authenticity' and aesthetic purity. Items with evidence of handling and ceremonial use, such as surface traces of libations having been poured over the object, were particularly sought-after. These attributes added cultural as well as monetary value to the objects, distinguishing them from items produced in the wake of foreign cultural intervention.¹²³ In the circular for an unfinished study of African Ivory, *The Ivory Road*, on which Cunard began work in the mid-1950s, she states that the book will be exclusive of work produced during the 'so-called 'Missionary Period' in Africa,' which seems to confirm that she subscribed to the principle of cultural purity in African art.¹²⁴ The 1931 Paris Colonial Exhibition even included a display case which demonstrated how to spot the

¹²⁰ *Negro*, 718, 726, 714.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 706, 707, 709.

¹²² Grossman, *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens*, 32.

¹²³ 'Michelet and Szecsi, The Different Styles of Masks of the Ivory Coast', *Negro*, 680-681. See, for example, the two 'Sculptures of the Pahouin tribe, French Gaboon', from the collection of Paul Guillaume, *Negro*, 707, 709. For an excellent discussion of the marks of "authenticity" and early connoisseurship of African art, see Monroe, 'Surface Tensions', 453-456.

¹²⁴ Circular, HRC NCC Box 5 Folder 7.

difference between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' sculptures—that is, those pieces dating from before imperial invasion and later items manufactured specifically for export to European dealers. Cunard and Michelet nonetheless felt that this exhibition had concentrated too much on the 'modern decorative art of the colonies' and determined that the 'Sculpture and Ethnology' section of *Negro* would focus predominantly on the ancient art of Africa.¹²⁵

Many of the articles in 'Sculpture and Ethnology' section are framed around this narrative of cultural authenticity. In the opening essay of the section, Szecsi's 'The Term 'Negro Art' is a non-African Concept,' he begins by setting out his definition of the African authentic: 'I mean always the African before the penetration of Europeans and before contact was effected between the two.' For Szecsi, African 'plastic vision was broken by the arrival of the white man [...] its purity and primitive quality [...] corrupted by this influence,' because of imported tools and the impact of missionaries on indigenous magical religious thinking. The work produced in the wake of foreign intervention, he argues, 'is an object of horror, from which all signs even of the old technique are gone.'¹²⁶ A similar argument is made in Lavachery's essay on Congolese sculpture, the last of the four, which warns the reader away from the 'wilfully decadent' sculpture and 'useless trifles' made in the wake of '[c]ivilisation, Christianity [and] industrial processes,' which may appear on the surface more 'primitive' than those pieces 'of the most authentic antiquity.'¹²⁷ As Monroe writes, '[t]he antithesis of the 'authentic' object was...the souvenir: where pre-colonial sculptures were allegedly made for spiritual reasons, their colonial successors seemed irredeemably tainted by the venal motives of creators trapped in the sticky web of imperial commerce.'¹²⁸

This suspicion of commercial motives in the making of more recent objects resonates with the modernist belief in the power of exotic or primitive others to 'revivify' Western culture because of their supposed freedom from the alienating influences of the mass market.¹²⁹ As John Alberg writes, modernist '[a]rtists and intelligentsia took a stand against the vulgarity of our common culture, tried to recapture the freshness and innocence of childhood and to get rid of the traditions and conventional aspects of their

¹²⁵ Ford, 'Introduction', *Negro* (1970), xxi.

¹²⁶ Szecsi, 'The Term 'Negro Art' is essentially a non-African Concept: Quotations from a Paper on Negro Art,' *Negro*, 679.

¹²⁷ Henri Lavachery, 'Essay on Styles in the Statuary of the Congo,' *Negro*, 688.

¹²⁸ Monroe, 'Surface Tensions', 455.

¹²⁹ In 'War Paint and Feathers', T. S. Eliot writes that 'Primitive art and poetry can even, through the studies and experiments of the artist or poet, revivify the contemporary activities' of the modernist artist. Cited in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Flam, 122.

time.¹³⁰ Objects seen to be contaminated by the industrial societies from which these writers and artists were trying to escape were therefore deemed 'inauthentic.' While this notion of authenticity in early connoisseurship of African sculpture had the positive effect of elevating the status of indigenous cultural production, a number of critics have noted how it simultaneously denied contemporary Africans the same artistic agency granted to their predecessors and positioned authentic African culture as 'something always already lost.'¹³¹ The main thesis of Szecsi's essay is that Western artistic principles cannot be applied to African sculpture, but in privileging the authenticity of these objects above all else, he imposes onto these sculptures perhaps the most central tenet of Western art historiography. Resting as it does on the belief that these objects had always been fashioned with the same forms, techniques, tools and purposes prior to foreign intervention, this notion of aesthetic purity also fails to account for the spread of formal and technical influences between indigenous African cultures, particularly given the historically itinerant nature of groups like the Fang. Szecsi's essay here powerfully illustrates European exoticist fantasies about a static, uncontaminated, 'authentic' Africa.

Negro's sculpture and ethnology section leads into a number of essays exposing the physical, social, political and economic abuses committed in Africa under colonial rule, and within the section itself, Michelet's article in particular is critical of those 'travellers and colonists less interested in what a thing meant than in how it looked and how they looked beside it' and of the 'massacres [...] systematic persecution [...] compulsory labour' implemented under European imperialism. (739, 761) Ratton too is explicit in his condemnation of the violence that accompanied expeditions to appropriate African art—particularly in the case of the punitive sacking of Benin, when the British 'gutted this immense and ancient city' and contrived to 'filch from its altars and royal palace some bronze sculptures which they sent to London to be sold as scrap.' This, he writes, was followed by the 'systematic exploitation of African territories,' which 'has effaced the last vestige of their ancient beliefs and indigenous civilisations, and emptied their huts and sanctuaries of those masks and statues which Europe had begun to favour with her approval.' (684)

Yet the collectors who contributed had of course themselves benefited from such colonial-backed expeditions in assembling their African collections. Kjersmeier's collection,

¹³⁰ John Alsberg, cited by Eloise E. Johnson in *Rediscovering the Harlem Renaissance: The Politics of Exclusion*, (New York: Garland, 1997), 96.

¹³¹ Citation from Monroe, 'Surface Tensions', 467. See also Bate, *Photography and Surrealism*, 466-7.

for example, had begun with objects brought back from the Congo by Danish colonial officers before he began organising his own collecting expeditions.¹³² Also featured among the objects in the anthology is a fractured ivory figure that we are told was 'rescued from fire during the sacking of Benin.' (668) This is one of a dozen or so Benin objects Cunard includes. The neutral caption 'Collected by Dr. F. Roth' inserted below the image neglects the role played by this collector in the bloody history of the object. The diaries kept by the British naval surgeon Felix Roth during the Benin expedition, appended to his brother Henry Roth's study, *Great Benin: Its Customs, Art and Horrors*, record his participation in the 'clearing' of local villages that preceded the burning of Benin and the looting of its artefacts:

We shelled the village, and cleared it of the natives. As the launch and surf boats grounded we jumped into the water, which reached to our waists, at once placed out Maxims and guns in position, firing so as to clear the bush where the natives might be hiding [...] [N]o white men were wounded; we all got off scot-free.¹³³

In Cunard's anthology, the violent history of this object's acquisition is obscured. A similarly problematic moment comes at the end of the larger images in the section, where we encounter full-page reproductions of two more of Uba's photographs of Cunard's ivory bracelets. To these she appends a rare explanatory note, a citation from George Thomas Basden's *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, explaining the value of these items in Yoruba culture:

Amongst the Ibo people in Nigeria the most valuable and the most prized of all forms of adornments are the anklets and bracelets of ivory. These can only be worn by rich women or by such as are of high rank [...] Once they are on the limbs (they are forced over feet or hands after a course of powerful massage with oil) they are not removed till death. [...] With the older women these ivories are priceless treasures, and they will endure any hardships in preference to degrading themselves by selling them, however great the inducement may be.

(731)

In light of the anthology's anticolonial stance, the two implicit criticisms of Cunard's collection contained in these lines – that these are 'exotic' props used as symbolic capital to mark out her wealth and status, and that they may have come into her possession through

¹³² See Poul Mørk, 'Unveiling the Mystery: Man Ray's Photographs of the Kiersmeier Collection', sidebar text in Grossman, *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens*, 74.

¹³³ Felix N. Roth, 'A Diary of a Surgeon with the Benin Punitive Expedition,' in H. Ling Roth's *Great Benin: Its Customs, Art and Horrors*, (Halifax, England: F. King & Sons, 1903), Appendices, v.

the suffering or financial exploitation of their original owners – remain unexamined, leaving an uncomfortable irony hanging over these images.

Jane Marcus has argued that Cunard's bracelets, or her 'ivory shackles' as they were once described in the press, are a part of an empathetic performance of slavery: 'a fashionable display of political solidarity with black oppression.'¹³⁴ Cunard fails here, however, to acknowledge the colonial exploitation that brought these objects onto European soil—a criticism made years earlier in a letter she received from one of her mother's friends in response to *Black Man, White Ladyship*:

There is another thing which astonished me, in your mention of Negro Art, and *ivory bangles*, for which you have a very pronounced cult, and which I think you ought, now that you champion them, to drop...You know perhaps that it has been calculated that every tusk has cost the life of at least 10 Negroes.¹³⁵

In 'Picasso, Africa and the Schemata of Difference', Simon Gikandi argues that the West has failed to address this 'intimate relationship between the brutality of late colonialism and the emergence of the ideology of modernism' and the violence that brought African art into its private and public institutions—'the amount of African bodies that had to be destroyed so that the objects would arrive safely at the art museum.'¹³⁶ It was European colonialism that placed African sculpture into the hands of the anticolonial avant-garde—who were thus indebted to the forms of imperial exploitation that many of them, like Cunard, sought to criticise. *Negro* is one of the earliest texts to have brought together European modernism, African culture and anticolonial critique, but in privileging the perspectives of contemporary European collectors, the anthology is perhaps not explicit enough in linking these objects to the colonial brutality exposed elsewhere in the anthology.

The art historian Dele Jagede has called for an 'Afrocentric' approach to African sculpture that moves beyond the decontextualising aesthetics of Western collecting practices. For Jagede, viewing African artworks 'ex situ' opens these works up to romanticisation, when they ought to function both as 'indices of aesthetic cognition' and as 'important tools in stemming the marginalization of the blacks' contributions to world

¹³⁴ Jane Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*, 124. The 'ivory bracelets' quote is cited by Chisholm, 101.

¹³⁵ 'Letter from a Greek beauty specialist doctor in answer to a pamphlet by N.C.' HRC NCC Box 11, Folder 1.

¹³⁶ Gikandi, 'Picasso, Africa and the schemata of difference', 476.

civilization.¹³⁷ The presentation of African sculpture in *Negro*, as we have seen, derives predominantly from the modes of display used in Western private and public collections, with objects removed from their cultural and spatial contexts. Yet in positioning these objects alongside analytic essays and within the context of a broader engagement with African history and culture, the anthology was pioneering in its attempt to use these objects to articulate what Jagede calls a 'more intimate appreciation of the cultures and the peoples of the continent'.¹³⁸ With the emergence of the category of 'primitive art' and the interest generated by the *vogue nègre*, African material cultures were in the 1930s receiving increasing attention in Europe. The struggle for wider recognition had not yet been realised, however, and Cunard's anthology was a conscious effort to counter the marginalisation of African culture in the West.

Although the 'Sculpture and Ethnology' section is now rarely discussed, at the time of publication it was seen by many as one of the most crucial aspects of Cunard's project: as Arthur Schomburg wrote in his review for Associated Negro Press, '[t]he anthology is here in time to fill a needed and necessary space in our libraries, for its exhaustive illustrations of African sculpture taken from the various great Museums of Europe'.¹³⁹ Likewise, when George Padmore reviewed *Negro* for the *Chicago Defender*, he wrote that '[t]he exposition of Negro sculpture and ethnological art [...] alone would have justified the publication of such a book. For years I have given myself over to the study of African ethnology, but I must honestly say that this is the first time I have been able to put my hands on a book containing such a rich collection of the artistic contribution of former African civilizations'.¹⁴⁰ In 1953, Cunard translated an essay by Jean Cassou titled 'In Favour of A Museum in the Home',¹⁴¹ which discusses the democratisation of art through the good quality photoreproductions that were becoming ever more widely available. Cunard herself kept numerous cuttings and scrapbooks of photographs of African sculpture, and the *Negro* anthology can be read as an attempt to bring the world's ethnographic museums and private collections into the home of all of its readers. In its documentary mode of

¹³⁷ Dele Jagede, 'Art for Life's Sake: African Art as a Reflection of an Afrocentric Cosmology', in *The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Traditions*, ed. Kariamu Welsh-Asante, (Westport: Greenwood, 1993), 237-47.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Arthur Schomburg, typescript, '*Negro* - An Anthology - By Nancy Cunard', HRC NCC Box 20, Folder 10.

¹⁴⁰ George Padmore, '"Negro" by Nancy Cunard', *The Bookshelf, Chicago Defender*, May 19th 1934, 11-12.

¹⁴¹ Jean Cassou, 'In Favour of a Museum in the Home', translated from the French by Cunard, 18th January 1950, HRC NCC Box 2, Folder 1.

investigation, its indebtedness to famous public and private collections (including Cunard's own), and its provision of a virtual collection for its readers, the *Negro* anthology represents early twentieth-century collecting cultures in both form and content. It is a book that provides 'a space for collection.'¹⁴²

¹⁴² Ursula Marx uses this term to describe Walter Benjamin's collecting practice in the *Arcades Project*. 'Ragpicking', *Walter Benjamin's Archive*, 252.

Part Two:
Cosmopolitan

3 From *Flâneuse* to Cosmopolitan: Travel, Gender and Identity in *Parallax*, *The Green Hat* and 'Harlem Reviewed'

In 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*', Janet Wolff argues that 'the central figure of the *flâneur* in the literature of modernity can only be male' since modernism 'is essentially a literature about transformations in the public world and in its associated consciousness.'¹ Brought to life by Baudelaire in *The Painter of Modern Life*, and later developed in Benjamin's writing on this poet, the *flâneur* is the detached observer of the modernist city, the streetwalker who revels in the fleeting, ephemeral encounters of the urban environment. Baudelaire writes that

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. [...] For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define.²

The mode of observation adopted by the *flâneur* has come to represent one of the paradigmatic tropes of modernist subjectivity and urban experience. The nineteenth-century bourgeois observer of urban life, the *flâneur* is at once a historical figure, formed by the overlapping realities of the Parisian cityscape, and a metaphorical, critical concept that has been used to interpret the broader relationship between modernity and the city. Cast by Baudelaire as the gentleman stroller of the city's streets, the *flâneur* has, as Wolff suggests, traditionally been gendered male, but Deborah Parsons has argued for a rereading of this archetypal figure of modernism that accounts for the female experience of walking and observing the modernist city, reading a selection of writing by female modernist authors to explore the role of 'women as modern protagonists in engagement

¹ Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 1985, Vol. 2, No. 37, 37. <http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/2/3/37>.

² Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', *The Painter of Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne, (London: Phaidon, 1964), 9. First published in *Le Figaro*, 1863.

with urban processes and their spatial environment.’³ In *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, Parsons also positions the *flâneur* as a precursor to twentieth-century cosmopolitanism, ‘the cosmopolitan overseeing no longer just one city but a host of cities, from a placeless and therefore reputedly objective detachment’—a new kind of international *flânerie* made possible through advances in transportation.⁴

This chapter offers a micro-perspective on travel, gender and cosmopolitan identities in the early twentieth century through Nancy Cunard’s poetry and critical writing, her correspondence files, and the fictional representations of Cunard that appeared in the novels of the period. A reviewer for the famous modernist literary magazine *The Dial* suggested in 1925 that ‘philosophy, to the poets of our generation, means changing one’s city often, changing one’s city in the effort to ‘thread doubt with belief’ while ‘earth drives on his feet behind imperious rains.’⁵ The quotations here are from Cunard’s long poem *Parallax* (1925), and as with many of the poem’s early reviews, *The Dial* characterises the text through its movements between the urban spaces of Europe: ‘London and Aix-en-Provence; Paris and Genoa, with breakfast on the Orient Express [...] Florence [...] a pilgrimage toward a grail so nebulous.’⁶

Technological advances and improvements to infrastructure in nineteenth-century Europe brought about a dramatic increase in international tourism, even as these same advances paved the way for the global conflicts of the century that followed. Cunard was part of a generation of English modernist writers who travelled extensively during the interwar years and *Parallax* provides a semi-autobiographical record of her itinerancy during the early twenties, which she spent between London, Paris, Normandy, Venice, Biarritz, southern France and Tuscany—a precursor to later journeys to farther-flung destinations in the United States, the Caribbean, Russia, Africa and South America.⁷

I begin this chapter by looking at the shift from *flânerie* to cosmopolitanism in this perambulatory work, and at Cunard’s characterisation as the cosmopolitan, modern woman Michael Arlen’s novel *The Green Hat* (1924) and Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* (1928), in which she is used to symbolise the velocity of modern life, ‘[r]ushing about Europe’⁸ with a

³ Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*, (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵ Review, *The Dial*, December 1925, unattributed press cutting, HRC, NCC, Scrapbook 1921-1927, Box 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Cunard’s movements during this period are discussed in Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 83.

⁸ Michael Arlen, *The Green Hat*, (London: Capuchin, 2008), 51. First published in 1924.

disregard for convention. Both the *flâneur* and the cosmopolitan represent a new kind of modern consciousness brought about by transformations in culture and public space. But what cosmopolitanism in particular represents is a set of transnational identifications and an interest in the 'abroad' and in cultural difference that Mica Nava argues emerged 'out of a revolt against the conservatism and narrow national identifications of the parental culture': a 'dialogic psychic formation [...] both of and against mainstream Englishness.'⁹ In the later part of the chapter, I analyse Cunard's essay for the *Negro* anthology on race politics and Harlem culture, 'Harlem Reviewed,' and the resulting press scandal that placed Cunard at the centre of public anxieties about race, gender and miscegenation in response to these new cosmopolitan identity formations.

⁹ Mica Nava, 'Cosmopolitan Modernity: Everyday imaginaries and the register of difference,' in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2002, 19:1-2, 82.

with fragmentary images of the city, from 'the grey gulls / Nailed to the wind' above the Thames, to the Parisian Latin Quarter and Genoa's 'old palatial banks', its narrator walking with the 'recording eyes' of the *flâneur* (10, 20, 23). While *Parallax* has been thought of as owing more to post-Imagist English verse than to surrealism,¹⁴ it does nonetheless share certain affinities with surrealist aesthetics through its cutting and layering of disparate spaces, realities and perspectives. The original front cover illustration by the painter and musician Eugene McCown reflects the jagged portrait of various cityscapes Cunard creates in the poem itself, McCown's surrealist line drawing showing a street scene inflected with multiple angular distortions—a bridge leading to nowhere, an almost vertical street, half-drawn windows, a collapsing colonnade, melting streetlamps and clouds reaching down to the street from the sky above. The poem's *mise en page* also reflects the 'acquiescent drifting' (10) of the poem's speaker, its recurring dashes, hanging indents and drifting *vers libre* meandering over the page with little formal constraint.

Parallax has received little critical attention since it was published by the Hogarth Press in 1925. Contemporary reviewers largely regarded Cunard's work as a lesser imitation of *The Waste Land*, which the Woolfs had published two years previously. In Riding and Graves' *Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927), Cunard is labelled an 'Eliotite'.¹⁵ The word 'parallax,' which describes the illusory displacement of an object when viewed from different positions, is explained by the epigraph from Sir Thomas Browne, likely provided by Virginia Woolf, along with the title itself: 'Many things are known as some are seen, that is by Parallax, / or at some distance from their true and proper being.'¹⁶ Echoing Browne's description of the term, a contemporary reviewer for the *New Statesman* described *Parallax* as T. S. Eliot seen 'at some distance from its true and proper being,' a subtractive and purely imitative work brought on by an attack of 'spiritual phagocytosis.'¹⁷ The *Manchester Guardian* likewise lamented Cunard's imitation of Eliot—'It seems a pity that a poet with such thought and capacity and expressive intensity and rage [...] should go straying into misty wastes of

¹⁴ Penelope Rosemont, *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, (London: Athlone, 1998), 8.

¹⁵ Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, (London: Heinemann, 1927), 201.

¹⁶ Cunard, *Parallax*, 3. Woolf writes in a diary entry that she would choose the title for Cunard's poem (1st November 1924), cited by Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 45. She had written a review of the Golden Cockerel edition of the works of Sir Thomas Browne for the TLS in June 1923, which suggests she may also have provided the epigraph.

¹⁷ 'A Parallel', *New Statesman*, 20th June 1925. *Parallax* was widely reviewed, and although Eliot is mentioned without fail by each commentator, many praised Cunard's work, Raymond Mortimer describing its 'desolate sort of beauty' and calling it 'one of the most moving poems of our time.' 'New Books for the Morning Room Table', *Vogue*, May 1925, 67-68.

that kind.¹⁸ This reviewer too turns the epigraph against the author, writing that if many things are seen 'at some distance from their true and proper being' then 'so, too, it is to be feared, are some poets.'¹⁹ The poem has received little commentary since its year of publication. David Ayers was one of the first recent critics to offer a sustained analysis of the poem, reading *Parallax* as a deliberately intertextual work that in many ways subverts Eliot's earlier project and produces a new kind of literary form. Like some of Cunard's contemporary reviewers, Ayers uses the titular term to describe Cunard's take on *The Waste Land*, although he views it as a work in which 'a systematic reworking and re-presentation of the existing material of a contemporary is used to create a new work'—and a new kind of composite poetic voice that is part-Cunard, part-Eliot.²⁰

Cunard came to mistrust Eliot's politics and writes disparagingly of him in her memoirs, but on hearing of his death in January 1965, she wrote a long prose poem that directly acknowledged the influence of his work on her writing. Of 'Prufrock', she wrote, 'it got into my fibre'; of *The Waste Land*, 'It changed [...] my life in its own time, / As it has changed lives of poets in many lands.'²¹ There is no doubt that Eliot's poetics are woven into the fibre of *Parallax*. In an essay on Eliot, Philip Hobsbaum described Cunard's poem as 'unconscious plagiarism',²² but the allusions and half-citations seem too direct for them to be unintentional. Both poems exist in an abstract and hallucinatory cosmos, but their traceable cartographies are much alike in places: Commercial Street, the Embankment, Battersea, Kew, Oxford Street, Gravesend etc. in *Parallax*; King William Street, the Thames, Highbury, Richmond, Kew, Margate etc. in *The Waste Land*. Eliot's Tiresias finds his counterpart in *Parallax* in the character of 'The articulate skeleton', as is reflected in their distinctive speech patterns: Tiresias – 'I who have sat by Thebes below the wall'²³; and the skeleton – 'I that have walked with / recording eyes'.²⁴ The word 'waste' also appears several times in Cunard's poem, as do a number of Eliotic/Poundian doublings: in *The Waste Land*

¹⁸ C.P., *The Manchester Guardian*, 15th July 1925.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ David Ayers, 'The Waste Land', Nancy Cunard and Mina Loy, in *Modernism: A Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 32.

²¹ Letter, 'Eliot', January 7th 1965, for and to John Hayward, HRC NCC Box 6, Folder 4.

²² Philip Hobsbaum, 'T. S. Eliot', *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature*, ed. Jay Parini, (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 447.

²³ T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), l.245. all quotations are from this edition. Subsequent line references are given parenthetically within the text.

²⁴ Cunard, *Parallax*, 23. Earlier in the poem we read the line, "I that am seed, root and kernel-stone / Buried in the present" (7). Here as elsewhere in the poem, it is not clear whose speech is being reported.

we read 'O City City' (l.259), 'O Lord, [...] / O Lord' (ll.309-310); in *Parallax*, 'Earth, earth' (4), 'Cold, cold' (6), 'Oh symbol, symbol' (8). Where Eliot writes, 'I have heard the key / Turn in the door and turn once only / We think of the key each in his prison' (ll.411-413), Cunard writes, 'Closed doors, where are your keys? [...] One for another / I have changed my prisons' (9, 22). In *The Waste Land* we read, 'And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water' (ll. 23-24), in *Parallax* we read, 'Dry moss, grey stone, / Hill ruins, grass in ruins / Without water, and multitudinous / Tintinnabulation in poplar leaves' (12). For Eliot's 'I read much of the night, and go south in the winter' (l.18), we have Cunard's 'Well, instead— / The south, and its enormous days' (11). And so on.

Ayers has read this last allusion as a deliberate subversion of *The Waste Land*, the phrase 'Well, instead' seeming 'systematically to exclude all reference to Eliot'.²⁵ What these lines also represent is the poem's first movement away from a wintry, alienating England, trapped in a state of post-war disillusionment—'Cold mud, rains', 'Closed hearts,' 'London, the hideous wall, the jail of what I am'²⁶—in a search for alternative possibilities in Europe: here, to southern France, 'timeless and hot. / Trees / Bowed to the immemorial Mistral' (11). When Eliot's poem shifts away from London, it is into a decaying world of classical mythology; in *Parallax*, the viewpoint moves initially into a present-day, verdant and fertile landscape of evergreens and ripe vines in Continental Europe. This is just one of many perspectival shifts in the poem, which opens with the figure of a restless poet gazing through 'his rented casement,' longing for escape into unknown worlds: 'He would have every milestone back of him, / The seas explored, clouds, winds, and stars encompassed' (4). The male poet figure here is hybridic: the verse is distinctly Eliotic, but the desire to escape England and travel abroad was very much Cunard's own.²⁷ These lines reflect the attitude of the cosmopolitan subject, for whom freedom and possibility are associated with the 'other' and the 'elsewhere.' A rejected home (here, London) is key to the imagined landscape of the cosmopolitan subject: as Mica Nava writes, for the cosmopolitan, "Home' [...] tended to be prosaic, class-bound, emotionally and sexually constraining,' while 'abroad' stood for 'sensuality, authenticity and opportunity'.²⁸ The reader is subsequently thrust into passages set in London, southern France, and on to Paris's Left Bank at dawn, Genoa, Pisa,

²⁵ Ayers, 'The Waste Land', Nancy Cunard and Mina Loy, 32.

²⁶ Cunard, *Parallax*, 9. There is an echo here of Eliot's 'Unreal City, / Under the brown fog of a winter dawn' (ll.60-61)

²⁷ As is the speaker's 'fondness for wine', as Ayers observes, 'The Waste Land', Nancy Cunard and Mina Loy, 32.

²⁸ Mica Nava, 'Cosmopolitan Modernity', 90.

Florence and beyond. As in *The Waste Land*, Cunard's vision of London reveals a city still marked by the ravages of war: 'youth and heart-break / Growing from ashes. / The war's dirges / Burning, reverberate.'²⁹ Images of infertility, drought, death and decay recur throughout these passages ('Dry bones turfed over by reiterant seasons / Dry graves filled in') which are staged in a city inhabited by ghosts and wanderers ('The scabrous old,' 'hands / That beg', 'Do ghosts alone possess the outworn decade?') and the narrator begins to wonder if he/she is a vagrant too.³⁰

When the speaker encounters a prostitute, the poem appears to satirise the (Eliotic) narrator's conservative perspective on the temptations of female sexuality with the sarcastic lines, 'From pitiless explorations / Come the unwarrantable deeds, [...] O vulgar lures of a curl! / Tricks, catches, nimble-fingered ruffian / adolescence / Whose beauty pulls / The will to fragments' (5). (In her unpublished poem about Eliot, Cunard would twice ask, 'But why the repressions?'³¹) The original manuscripts for *The Waste Land* show that Eliot had originally included a satirical portrayal of Cunard in 'The Fire Sermon' section of *The Waste Land*, subsequently edited out by Ezra Pound.³² Later, in *Parallax*, a faded London

²⁹ Cunard, *Parallax*, 9. Jane Marcus places Cunard's poem as the last in a series of "Three *The Waste Lands*", three long poems about the First World War published by the Hogarth Press: Hope Mirlees's *Paris* (1920), *The Waste Land* (1922), and finally *Parallax* (1925). 'Afterword: Some Notes on Radical Teaching', in *Communal Modernisms*, eds. Emily Hinnov, Lauren Rosenblum & Laurel Harris, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 195.

³⁰ Cunard, *Parallax*, 8, 10. ...Recalling Eliot's 'the grass is singing / Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel / [...] Dry bones can harm no one' (ll.386-390).

³¹ Letter, 'Eliot', January 7th 1965, for and to John Hayward, HRC NCC Box 6, Folder 4.

³² Cunard appears in the guise of Fresca, a wealthy, promiscuous socialite with unfounded literary aspirations:

[A] strolling slattern in a tawdry gown
 A doorstep dunged by every dog in town. [...]
 Fresca was baptised in a soapy sea
 Of Symonds – Walter Pater – Vernon Lee.
 The Scandinavians bemused her wits,
 The Russians thrilled her to hysteric fits.
 For such chaotic misch-masch potpourri
 What are we to expect but poetry?
 When restless nights distract her brain from sleep
 She may as well write poetry, as count sheep.
 And on those nights when Fresca lies alone,
 She scribbles verse of such a gloomy tone
 That cautious critics say, her style is quite her own.
 Not quite an adult, and still less a child,
 By fate misbred, by flattering friends beguiled,
 Fresca's arrived (the Muses Nine declare)
 To be a sort of can-can salonnière.

antique shop recalls the declining Parisian arcades, one of the favourite haunts of Benjamin's *flâneur*: 'a once-lustrous chain / Hangs in the window of the antiquary, / Dry bric-à-brac, time-dulled, / That some eventual customer must buy' (8). From London the poem moves to France ('The south, and its enormous days') the speaker asking, 'What wings beat in my ears / The tattoo of old journeys' (11)—a sensation described by Benjamin as the 'anamnestic intoxication' of the wanderer.³³ The speaker here reminds him/herself that '*this* is the dream', but nonetheless, 'The foot's impatient (...where?) / the eye is not convinced' and he/she begins to look to the past, to 'lost days', 'Compares, decides what's gone is better' (11), reflecting what Jane Goldman has described as 'modernism's restlessness and refusal to settle.'³⁴

The poem later shifts to Paris, the spiritual home of the 'individual, disparate' *flâneur*, and a dawn walk on the Left Bank and the centre of Bohemian Parisian life:

And Paris
Rolls up the monstrous carpet of its nights,
Picks back the specks and forms—
O individual, disparate,
Where now from the river bank?
From the Seine, up the Quarter, homeward at last
to sleep.
(15-16)

In the second line here the lines between interior and exterior become blurred: as Benjamin observes, '*flânerie* can transform Paris into one great interior—a house whose rooms are the *quartiers*.'³⁵ It is here that we also encounter another of Baudelaire/ Benjamin's street-wanderers, *le chiffonier* or ragpicker:

The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript, ed. Valerie Eliot, 38-41. The connection is confirmed by what Eliot calls the 'chaotic misch-masch' of poetry in which Cunard had taken an interest: in her memoirs of George Moore, she writes, 'Things changed with the literary classes of Professeur Bellessort; it was the Russians and the Scandinavians, that term [Spring 1913], and they were of great interest to me.' Cunard, *G.M.*, 101. There is no evidence to suggest that Cunard was aware of the Fresca passage in the drafts of *The Waste Land*, but we might nonetheless read the above lines in *Parallax* as a response to Eliot's attack on her sexuality.

³³ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 417

³⁴ Jane Goldman, '1925, London, New York, Paris—Metropolitan Modernisms: Parallax and Palimpsest', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-century Literatures in English*, eds. Brian McHale & Randall Stevenson, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 67.

This is perhaps also what Benjamin calls '[t]he peculiar irresolution of the *flâneur*', *Arcades Project*, 425.

³⁵ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 422.

— Clothes, old clothes —
 early is it, or noon,
 By this alarm clock?
 The rag-man turns the corner —
 For him, past one; just *today* here in bed.
 So — one begins again?

(16)

Both the *flâneur* and the rag-picker are collectors of the metropolis, drawing together and reassembling the dispersed and disordered detritus of the city. Citing Baudelaire's description of the rag-picker—'He sorts things out and selects judiciously: he collects like a miser guarding a treasure, refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects between the jaw of the goddess of Industry'—Benjamin uses this figure as a metaphor for Baudelaire's poetics, which are informed by a proto-surrealist preoccupation with *objets trouvés*: 'Ragpicker and poet: both concerned with refuse.'³⁶ But the figure of the rag-picker also comes to represent Benjamin himself, signifying the surrealist, collage-like historical methodology of his *Arcades Project*, which has echoes both of Cunard's own acquisitive, inclusive practice as the anthologist of *Negro*, and the intertextual borrowings of *Parallax*: 'Method of this project: literary montage. [...] the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them.'³⁷

In Paris, the speaker is again restless and searching for experiences—'Habit of days, / The yawning visits the forced revisitations. / Oh very much the same, these faces and places, / These meals and conversations' (17-18)—paradoxically finding newness in the deathly exhibits at the Parisian anatomical museum, *le musée Dupuytren*,

But in the charnel-cloister Dupuytren,
 Down a side-street, there's a full century's matter
 Collected—
 The death-before-life, the atom in the womb
 Preparing — snarled embryos,
 Pinched
 By once roseate poisons.
 (Frail brown
 Pre-natal dust, what life is it you missed?)

³⁶ Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', *Selected Writings*, Volume 4: 1938-1940, ed. Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2002), 48.

³⁷ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 460.

The skeletons swing on a line,
Dark-waxed, patined, defective-boned—
O commensurable fusion of science with disease...
(That was a new contemplation, the
death-museum.)
(18)

Here the speaker uncovers one of the city's secret spaces. In 'Censoring the Realist Gaze', Jann Matlock describes how *le musée Dupuytren* was 'almost never open to the general public', '[u]nseen by those who could only imagine its horrors', and it thus became 'an emblem of all that ought to be hidden from view.'³⁸ Although not the natural habitat of Baudelaire's *flâneur*, in the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin begins to sketch out the experiential relations between the museum and the department store, with objects 'offer[ing] themselves en masse to the passerby'.³⁹ The museum is here also defined as another of 'the dream houses of the collective,' along with arcades, winter gardens, department stores and panoramas etc.—all favourite haunts of the *flâneur*.⁴⁰ Hidden from public view, in a 'chapel-cloister', '[d]own a side-street,' the deathly phantasmagoria of the anatomical museum revealed here in *Parallax* resonate with Cunard's later description in *Negro* of the hidden secrets of the archive: 'what the French so aptly call *les dessous de l'histoire*—the underneath of history.'⁴¹

From Paris, the poem moves to Italy and an accelerated pace of travel—a breathless and briskly-described train journey that characterises the whistle-stop itineraries of the privileged cosmopolitan tourist viewing all the ‘must-see’ sights and works of art: through Genoa, ‘Where the old palatial banks / Rise out of vanquished swamps’; San Gimignano’s famous towers, ‘Where Dante once...’; ‘Defunct’ Arezzo; Pisa ‘the forgotten’; Florence (‘Benozzo / With his embroidered princely cavalcades; / And Signorelli, the austere passion’); and to Cortona, ‘drunk [...] furiously, / with the black wine from a Tuscan hill’ (20-21). In Ford

³⁸ Matlock reports that some nineteenth-century guidebooks advised that it was possible to gain entry to the *musée Dupuytren* only by bribing the concierge. Jann Matlock, 'Censoring the Realist Gaze', in *Spectacles of Realism: Bodies, Gender, Genre*, eds. Margaret Cohen & Christopher Prendergast, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 28-29. Hershel Parker also reports the initial resistance with which he was met when he visited the museum in 1988, hoping to retrace the visit Herman Melville had made in 1849. *Melville Biography: An Inside Narrative*, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 9.

³⁹ *Arcades Project*, 415.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 405-6.

⁴¹ 'Proclamation of Emancipation of the Slaves', Abraham Lincoln, annotated by Cunard, *Negro*, 21. Benjamin had begun to sketch out the idea of the *flâneur* as urban detective in the *Arcades Project*, 439-442.

Madox Ford's *The English Novel* (1930), he would describe this as '[t]he habit of flux', brought on by 'the ease of locomotion', reflecting the restless and relentless sequence of passing sights as observed through the window of a speeding train.⁴² The narrator of *Parallax* is caught in this 'habit of flux,' exchanging place for place, and experience for experience, in a frenetic and faltering poetic *Bildungsroman*. She writes,

One for another
I have changed my prisons
Held fast, as the flame stands, locked in the
prism—
And at one end I see
Beauty of other times, mirage of old beauty
Down a long road, clear of the strands and
patches of associations
Keen resurrected very clear—
[...]
And again behind me, the cities
Rising on the inexpressible meaning of their streets
Unaltering—and the eyes lifting over a wine-glass,
Holding the inexpressible,
playing terror against acceptance—
Eyes, and siren voices lost at dawn...

(22-23)

From Benjamin, '[w]e know that, in the course of *flânerie*, far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment,' and here again past and present collide, the '[b]eauty of other times, mirage of old beauty' glimpsed at the end of a street, beyond the 'patches of associations.'⁴³ The title of *Parallax* has echoes of Joyce's use of the term in *Ulysses*, Bloom's repeated musings on the term reflecting the novel's shifts between multiple discourses and viewpoints: as Barbara Heusel writes, 'the parallaxic phenomenon [...] makes concrete Joyce's method of subtly forcing the reader to synthesize the different perspectives' of the text.⁴⁴ In *Parallax*, this term reflects not only the hybrid persona of the poem's speaker, but also the shifting geographical perspectives of the itinerant modernist expatriate, from where past

⁴² Ford Madox Ford, *The English Novel: From the Earliest Days to the Death of Joseph Conrad*, (London: Constable, 1930), 9.

⁴³ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 419.

⁴⁴ Barbara Stevens Heusel, 'Parallax as a Metaphor for the Structure of *Ulysses*', *Studies in the Novel*, Vol.15, No.2 (Summer 1983), 135.

memories and remote places are viewed 'at some distance from their true and proper being' (3).

Parsons asks whether the figure of the *flâneur* can accommodate female experience of the modernist city, or if we require a different formation in the figure of the *flâneuse* (or perhaps even some altogether distinct formulation).⁴⁵ We could read some significance then into the fact that Cunard chose to exclude the female voice from this peripatetic work (the poetic voice is sometimes male, sometimes in the second person, often a genderless 'I'), which describes what were in fact many of her own experiences of European itinerancy.⁴⁶ In relation to Cunard's critical writing, Renata Morresi has suggested that she deliberately employs a sexless voice in order to speak "beyond" her gender.⁴⁷ Typescripts of articles in her archive show that she sometimes worked under the male pseudonym, 'Ray Holt'. In *Parallax*, the shifting, epicene subjective centre could have multiple functions: a simple dramatic device; a distancing technique that enables her to speak directly about personal experiences; a form of homage to *The Waste Land*; or what the Futurist F. T. Marinetti had identified as the '[m]ultiple and simultaneous states of mind within the same individual,' generated by the '[a]cceleration of life' to today's 'rapid rhythm.'⁴⁸

Parallax is a work which can be read as a nostalgic longing for the more intimate experience of nineteenth-century *flânerie*: by the end of the poem, the text's meanderings through individual cities becomes superseded by restless, accelerated and thoroughly modern movement across the Continent. As Parsons observes, this new, distinctly cosmopolitan perspective, although born out of the figure of the *flâneur*, is quite distinct from his/her predecessor, 'the cosmopolitan overseeing no longer just one city but a host of

⁴⁵ Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, 18.

⁴⁶ David Farley notes that 'Eliot did not journey to Jerusalem, Alexandria, or Carthage to gather material for his poem, nor need he have done so for these foreign cities to function as the signposts of civilization or the coordinates of culture pointing to contemporary desuetude.' *Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad*, (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 2. While these locales act as 'textual signifiers' in Eliot (Farley, *ibid.*), *Parallax* provides a semi-autobiographical record of actual journeys Cunard made across Europe.

⁴⁷ Renata Morresi, 'Negotiating Identity: Nancy Cunard's Otherness' in *Resisting Alterities: Wilson Harris and other avatars of otherness*, Marco Fazzini ed., (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 157.

⁴⁸ F. T. Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax—Radio Imagination—Words-in-Freedom' (1913), *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey et. al., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 144.

I looked in Part One at how modernism's fragmented forms were indebted to the practice of collecting among modernist writers and artists. David Farley suggests that the 'fragmented forms, montage techniques, and streams of consciousness that are the salient and distinguishing features of modernist style and experimentation owe [as] much to the foreign scenes, exotic locales, wrenching perspectives, and uncanny displacements that were the result of a generation unmoored from convention and enlivened by modern travel.' *Modernist Travel Writing*, 1.

cities, from a placeless and therefore reputedly objective detachment.⁴⁹ Responding to Virginia Woolf's famous 'vision of feminized migrancy'—'as a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world'—Jacqueline Rose has cautioned against a celebratory reading of the cosmopolitan modernist viewpoint, in spite of its apparently radical, feminist positioning:

Like being a Jew, being a woman can also be described as a state of non- or partial participation in the available or dominant cultures. Curse and privilege, this unsettled self-positioning, as Woolf expressed it, can become alternately exclusion from, or belonging to, all possible worlds.⁵⁰

Although the cosmopolitan viewpoint can be represented as a triumphant rejection of nationalism in favour of cultural inclusivity and transnational identification, it can also signify placelessness and social or political marginalisation. As it appears in Cunard's poem, this cosmopolitan parallaxis—a shifting mode of observation for a new kind of urban experience—is as alienating and oppressive as it is emancipatory: 'One for another / I have changed my prisons' (22).

⁴⁹ Parsons, 14.

⁵⁰ Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 129. Parsons also quotes from this section, 14.

3.2 Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat* and the Cosmopolitan 'Modern Woman'

'Rushing about Europe like that [...] you let England down.'

*The Green Hat*⁵¹

Just as the figure of the *flâneur* had personified modernity in Baudelaire's Paris, the cosmopolitan 'modern woman' would come to embody the social, psychological, political and technological changes that were taking place in Western metropolitan spaces during the interwar period. Contemporary fiction, newspapers, magazines, adverts, the cinema—all contributed to producing a collective imagining of the modern woman, transgressing national and societal borders in pursuit of independence, adventure, and social and sexual liberation using new modes of transport and communication. As Pamela Caughie has written:

The 'masthead' of British *Vogue* in the 1920s—'VOGUE KNOWS NO FRONTIERS'—captures the modernist sensibility of unlimited boundary crossing inspired by new modes of transportation, such as the motor car and the airplane, and new means of communication, such as the gramophone and the radio. [...] [S]uch border crossing, facilitated by new technologies and fueled by an increasingly touristic and consumer culture in the interwar period, had a profound effect on the imagining of national and personal identity in modernist cultural productions.⁵²

Michael Arlen's best-selling novel *The Green Hat: A Romance for a Few People* (1924) is a text that simultaneously glamourises and condemns the modern woman for her boundary-crossings. Dealing with bold topics such as infidelity, suicide, sexual promiscuity, abortion and syphilis, '[p]art of the secret of *The Green Hat*'s success', as Chisholm observes, 'was Arlen's skilful mixing of the trappings of unconventional, racy, modern behaviour with veneration for the old standards of loyalty, chivalry, and romance.'⁵³ The text is little-known today (its once-scandalous subject matter and Arlen's ornate prose have both dated) but in its own time *The Green Hat* was the book that was 'on everyone's night table' and Arlen was

⁵¹ Arlen, *The Green Hat*, 50.

⁵² Pamela Caughie, 'Modernism, Gender and Passing', in *Gender in Modernism: New Geographies, Complex Intersections*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 372.

⁵³ Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 68.

seen by some as the heir to F. Scott Fitzgerald's legacy, including Fitzgerald himself.⁵⁴ Widely translated and running into numerous reprints, Arlen's novel later formed the basis of Broadway and West End stage shows and a Hollywood film starring Greta Garbo (retitled *A Woman of Affairs* to appease the U.S. censors) both of which would heavily sanitise the original story. Stalin apparently blamed the suicide of his second wife Nadezhda Alliluyeva on the novel, which she had been reading around the time of her death.⁵⁵

The novel's heroine, the *femme fatale*, Iris Storm (*née* March), is the most modern of modern women, speeding around Europe in a yellow Hispano-Suiza, a sexually-liberated, 'shameful, shameless woman' who 'didn't fit in anywhere, to any class, nay, to any nationality' (62, 25). Arlen and Cunard were lovers for a very brief period, and it was well-known at the time that the character of Iris was based on Cunard. The journalist Eugene Gordon recounts that when she visited him in Boston to collect his entry for the *Negro* anthology, he had to remind himself 'that this woman was *not* a fictional Iris March but an actual Nancy Cunard,' hastily checking to make sure his copies of *The Green Hat* and Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (with its Cunard figure, Lucy Tantamount) were hidden from view.⁵⁶ John Banting believed that Cunard had been amused by her portrayal in the novel. On meeting Arlen in Cannes after a night out with George Antheil and others, she told Banting, 'Never mind. The baron [as she called Arlen] made some money from it.'⁵⁷

Cunard's itinerant lifestyle, her social rebelliousness, her sexual emancipation and her participation in avant-garde cultural scenes all turned her into an iconic figuration of the modern woman in the media and in popular culture. Referred to in the press as one of the era's 'ultra-moderns'⁵⁸, her unconventional fashion-sense, remarked on regularly and often

⁵⁴ Cited in Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 132. On Arlen and Fitzgerald, see Michael Soto, 'The Modernist Nation: Generation, Renaissance, and Twentieth-Century American Literature', (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 41. Soto and other commentators have observed that Fitzgerald likely based his character Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* on *The Green Hat*'s heroine.

⁵⁵ See Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, (Oxford: OUP, 1990), 58. Her suicide in November 1932 had also followed violent arguments with her husband during which she had accused him of 'butchering the people.' *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Eugene Gordon, 'The Green Hat' Comes to Chambers Street', in *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 135-136.

⁵⁷ John Banting, 'Nancy Cunard', *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 180.

Cunard noted elsewhere that the life-threatening miscarriage/abortion Iris suffers in a Parisian hospital was 'inspired by the only too real circumstances around me in a hospital in Paris in December 1920 and Jan-Feb 1921. I did nearly die there, and [Arlen] did hear me scream,' although her biographer believes Cunard's operation was likely the result of a gynaecological illness. Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 68.

⁵⁸ Constance Eaton, 'When the Ultra Moderns Confess: Women's Thought-Provoking Revelations in a Piquant Symposium,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 26th September 1929. From Cunard's newspaper clippings, Scrapbook 1921-1927 [sic.] NCC HRC Box 26.

in great detail in the gossip pages, also played an important role in this imagining, as is reproduced in Arlen's exhaustive descriptions of Iris's appearance and trendsetting power. Cunard's African bracelets are not mentioned, but the 'boyish' Iris/Nancy character 'was the first Englishwoman [the narrator] ever saw with 'shingled' hair,' and wears a silver turban or a green felt hat and a leather jacket '*pour le sport*' (238, 43, 15). When Cunard travelled to the United States in the early 1930s to conduct research for *Negro*, she was photographed outside the Grampion Hotel in Harlem still wearing a turban and a leather jacket, and Eugene Gordon reports his amazement when Cunard stepped into his building in Boston on this same trip wearing the eponymous green hat.⁵⁹ As Chadwick and Latimer observe, the 'stereotypical modern woman' often cropped her hair and wore trousers, just as Cunard did, and these 'masculinized' female fashions 'spurred a hysterical level of debate in the contemporary press, which also periodically invoked nineteenth-century laws that had prohibited women from appearing in public wearing masculine attire.'⁶⁰

A 1930 image of Cunard at the printer in the Hours Press shop in Paris shows her in a tuxedo jacket with a bow tie, while in a famous 1925 photograph taken by Man Ray at the Beaumont ball in Paris, she appears with cropped hair, in a mask, top hat and metallic trouser suit, two of her famous bracelets just visible at her cuff, the Dadaist Tristan Tzara kneeling before her and kissing her hand. (fig. 13) The theme of this ball was '*Mode de demain*'—guests having been asked to predict the fashions of the future in choosing their costumes—and this image was widely circulated in fashion magazines and newspapers at the time. Cunard's dandy-esque clothing and tophat, a playful subversion of conventional masculine tropes characteristic of the 1920s '*mode garçon*,'⁶¹ signal the new freedoms (both literal and symbolic) available to the modern woman. Cunard's appropriation of 'exotic' cultural symbols (turbans, beads, animal prints, African jewellery) elsewhere signal a specific kind of elite, cosmopolitan chic and a transnational identification with cultural difference conceived in part as a rejection of English culture (Cunard once wrote that she viewed England with 'a half-foreign eye'⁶²). Just as the *vogue nègre* had brought African forms into mainstream fashion, *Ballets Russes* performances of *Schéhérazade* based on *The Arabian Nights*, which premiered in Paris in 1910 before travelling to London in 1911, and

⁵⁹ Gordon, 'The Green Hat' Comes to Chambers Street', in *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 135.

⁶⁰ Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, 'Becoming Modern: Gender and Sexual Identity After World War I', *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, ed. Chadwick & Latimer, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 3, 7.

⁶¹ *Le mode garçon* also saw clothing tailored for women engaging in exercise, and Arlen's heroine is often referred to as wearing items of clothing '*pour le sport*.'

⁶² Cunard, *Grand Man*, 70



Fig. 13 Cunard with Tristan Tzara at the Beaumont Ball, by Man Ray
Sketch Magazine, 1925
Harry Ransom Center, Nancy Cunard Collection.

the highly popular film *The Sheik* (1921), starring Rudolph Valentino, had both contributed to the popularisation of an orientalist, luxurious, cosmopolitan style that embraced harem trousers, oriental shawls and turbans. Peter Wollen's excellent analysis of *Schéhérazade* has demonstrated the revolutionary impact of Leon Bakst's eroticised, orientalist costumes and set designs on bourgeois consumer culture, citing Cecil Beaton's comment on Paris in the wake of this spectacle that 'a fashion world that had been dominated by corsets, lace feathers and pastel shades soon found itself a seraglio of vivid colours, harem skirts, beads, fringes and voluptuousness.'⁶³ London too was awash the colours of Bakst's sets, and Nava has shown how these transformed both the visual landscape of the city and the intimate spheres of body and home, where women's fantasies of Arab and Latin lovers flourished, particularly after the demographic devastation of the First World War.⁶⁴ When the narrator comments on Iris's turban in *The Green Hat*, she teasingly asks him if it is suggestive to him of Turkey and polygamy (209), referring to the connections that were popularly made between orientalist fantasies of cultural difference and a new kind of eroticism for the modern woman in the West.⁶⁵ In breaking with the conservatism of traditional English culture, these appropriated cosmopolitan fashions signalled the modern woman's social and sexual emancipation and her status as a sophisticated citizen of the modern world.

Iris Storm has all the trappings of the cosmopolitan modern woman. Flouting society's sexual mores and the expectations of her class, Iris chooses the itinerant life of a 'déclassé', a 'renegade' who 'had betrayed her class to perfection' (50-51). Widowed twice by the age of 29, Iris sacrifices her reputation to preserve the honour of her first husband Boy Fenwick, a much-loved and admired young hero of the Great War. Iris allows society to believe that Boy committed suicide on their wedding night, cryptically, 'for purity' (267), pretending that her own impure character had prompted him to throw himself from their hotel window. Iris drifts from relationship to relationship, driven by 'the hungers of the body', and from place to place across Europe: she 'had probably just come back from foreign parts', reports the narrator, and '[a]bout her, it was perfectly obvious, was the aura of many adventures' (95, 17).

Midway through the novel, Iris comes close to death in a Parisian nursing home, where 'cosmopolitan divorcees' and others of '*la clientèle européenne la plus chic*' must pay the price for their 'nasty little coquetties and [...] silly common harlotries' (139-40). Iris is

⁶³ Cecil Beaton, cited by Peter Wollen in Peter Wollen in 'Fashion/Orientalism/The Body', *New Formations*, No. 1, Spring 1987, 21.

⁶⁴ Mica Nava, 'Cosmopolitan Modernity', 93.

⁶⁵ Mica Nava discusses this connection in more detail in 'Cosmopolitan Modernity', 85.

suffering with septic poisoning after losing an illegitimate child. The father, it transpires, was her childhood love, Napier (recently married), whose father, Sir Maurice Harpenden, had prohibited their relationship for the sake of his son's career in the Foreign Service. Despite protestations from friends, who advise Iris against continuing the affair and thus destroying Napier's new marriage, the two flee to Rio. In the novel's melodramatic closing scene, Iris finally confronts Sir Maurice for having prevented their relationship. Seeking to recover Iris's reputation, Napier reveals to his father the true reason for Boy's death: that he had killed himself in remorse for having infected his new wife with syphilis. Napier's need to salvage Iris's good name takes from her 'the only gracious thing I ever did in my life,' (267) and she flees and kills herself by crashing her car into the tree under which she and Napier had played as children, her green hat recovered from the wreckage.

Iris protests in *The Green Hat* that a woman remains invisible 'so long as she keeps to the laws made by men' (254). Revealing her 'shameless, shameful' (62) reputation to have exceeded her transgressions, the novel ultimately tries to domesticate its modern heroine, showing her to have held the last vestige of old-fashioned codes of pride, loyalty and honour now thrown into chaos in the aftermath of war. The novel appears split between radicalism and conservatism, traditional mores being voiced both by older establishment figures like Sir Maurice and the narrator's friend Hilary Townsend and by the conflicted, self-punishing heroine herself, who feels shame for having 'a pagan body and a Chislehurst [pure] mind' (47). It is here, Chisholm observes, that Iris is least like her archetype, being far more conventional and agonising about sex in particular than Cunard ever was.

The Green Hat does still, however, capture something of Cunard's cosmopolitanism and her radicalism in rejecting the privileges of her class, the word 'outlawed' (used numerous times throughout the novel to refer to Iris) a no-doubt deliberate echo of the title of Cunard's first volume of poems *Outlaws* (1922), which calls on the Gods to make her 'symbolic'ly iconoclast⁶⁶, as Arlen does so here:

We all have a crude desire to 'place' our fellows in this or that category or class: we like to know more or less what they are, so that, maybe we may know more or less what we shall be to them [...] you could not [...] 'place' Mrs Storm. You had a conviction, a rather despairing one, that she didn't fit in anywhere, to any class, nay, to any nationality. She wasn't that ghastly thing called 'Bohemian', she wasn't any of those ghastly things called 'society', 'county', upper, middle, and lower-class. She was, you can see, some invention, ghastly or not, of her own. [...]

⁶⁶ Cunard, 'Prayer', *Outlaws*, (London: Elkin Mathews, 1921), 41.

You felt she was tremendously indifferent as to whether she was outlawed or not. [...] Iris, of course, had betrayed her caste to perfection. No one, you might say, could have done that more thoroughly than Iris.

(25-26, 50)

Cunard asks in *These Were the Hours*, 'do not all those who cruise the seas develop a sort of supra-national identity?'⁶⁷ and Arlen's heroine similarly rejects the nationalist ideologies that had recently laid waste to Continental Europe in favour of a cosmopolitan/supranational identification and an imaginary global community that transcends geopolitical borders:

You talk to me of your England. I despise your England, I despise the us that is us. [...] To me, a world which thinks of itself in terms of puny, squalid, bickering little nations and not one glorious field for the crusade of mankind is a world in which to succeed is the highest indignity that can befall a good man, it is a world in which good men are shut up like gods in lavatories.

(257)

Iris is consequently subject to the same anxieties around class, race and miscegenation of which Cunard became the focus. She too is regarded as too sexually active by society,⁶⁸ and the language of purity and impurity, of sexual and social contamination, of shame and shamelessness, pervades the narrative. The character Hilary at one point complains to the narrator that the sweet young girl he used to watch strolling to school with her governess, 'a long little thing, all brown stockings and blue eyes,' had grown into a woman last 'seen night after night in a Russian cabaret in Vienna with an Italian Jew' (80). (Arlen was apparently a known anti-Semite.) Hilary's character, tormented by a 'savage, hurt bewilderment' (80) at this transformation, captures what Caughie identifies as a widespread cultural anxiety about the fate of whiteness and masculinity that set in during the interwar years in response to the emergence of the 'New Woman.'⁶⁹ Earlier in the novel, he tells Iris, 'Rushing about Europe like that [...] you let England down. You've no idea, Iris, how these young foreign blighters hold Englishwomen cheap' (51); Iris's boundary-crossings—social, geographical, sexual, racial—are here seen as a danger to her class (which she 'cheap[ens]'),

⁶⁷ Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 48.

⁶⁸ Jane Marcus suggests that Cunard's work has been overlooked because of her 'unorthodox sexual practices.' *Hearts of Darkness*, 143.

⁶⁹ Caughie, 'Modernism, Gender and Passing', 382.

her nation (which she has 'let [...] down') and her race (which she threatens to damage with miscegenation through her relationships with foreign men).

As a result of her class betrayal, Iris must be ejected from her caste, becoming a '*déclassé*', 'declassified', (50), just as Cunard was socially ostracised and cut off financially by her mother because of her relationship with the black jazz musician, Henry Crowder.⁷⁰ Cunard's mother's lover, the famous conductor Sir Thomas Beecham, suggested she ought to be 'tarred and feathered' because of this relationship, and told her to stay out of England and remain in France where interracial couples were viewed with more tolerance.⁷¹ In her work on 'visceral cosmopolitanism', Nava writes interestingly on specific contexts where sexual relationships and marriages have taken place across divides of racial or cultural difference or social inequity, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. For Nava, such relationships were not simply predicated on the allure of difference, but were 'a self-reflexive act of defiance in a social climate in which the repudiation of racial others was increasingly widespread.'⁷² One of the most important examples for her argument involves relationships between black men and white women during the Second World War when African-American soldiers were stationed in the UK, but she also touches on the relationships between Cunard and Henry Crowder, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf, as instances where the partner was valued precisely because of his cultural difference.⁷³ In the context of Nava's feminist project, which positions women's cross-cultural identifications and desire for 'otherness' as key elements of an oppositional, anti-racist culture at the beginning of the last century, her estimation of Cunard's 'eroticised political consciousness'⁷⁴ is clearly celebratory.

Read in another context, however, we can see how this linking of political engagement and sexual desire (particularly when the former is read as a symptom of the latter) can serve to diminish women's involvement in politics. A close friend of Cunard's in her later years, Charles Burkhart, while claiming not to want to lessen the importance of her campaign work, speculated nonetheless that 'Nancy's championing of the Negro, of the anti-Franco Spaniard, of any oppressed man anywhere, was, I am sure, largely sexual in origin, as—again I am sure—such championings generally are. [...] What drove her? [...] I

⁷⁰ Cunard dryly observed in response, 'The black man is a well-known factor in the changing of testaments (at least in America).' *Black Man, White Ladyship*, reprinted in *Essays on Race and Empire*, ed. Moynagh, 183.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 185.

⁷² Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism*, (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 90.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7, 66.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

offer only a hint of an answer: Nancy's uncontrollable and uncontrolled sexuality.⁷⁵ The cultural and political significance of affective or 'visceral' forms of cosmopolitanism, as Nava points out, still remains critically under-examined, and I will return to this subject in a later part of this chapter.

In *The Green Hat*, the character Hilary is much preoccupied with the accelerating effect of new modes of communication and transportation on the potential damages that members of the younger generation—and in particular, modern women—can inflict on themselves and on society as sexual tourists:

'Your generation [...] is a mess.' [...] 'Your generation,' said Hilary thoughtfully, 'has more opportunities for being a mess than ours had. [...] And your children will have more opportunities than you have. [...] For whereas you have motors and telephones and wireless with which to lose your sense of the stabilities, as you are losing them, they will have cheap aeroplanes as well. When you people nowadays begin to break loose there's no limit to your looseness. There was in my father's time. They couldn't get about so quickly. They couldn't grub about in so many cesspools at one time, rushing in a night between London and any vile paradise of the vulgarities like Deauville or the present Riviera. Even if they broke loose a little – the women, I mean – they generally had to make some compromise with the decencies simply because they had to live in a place, they couldn't make an appointment with a trunk-call to Paris and go and have a few days' "fun" there. But now if a woman has kicked through every restraint of caste and chastity there's the whole world open for her to play the mischief in, there's every invention in the world to help her indulge her intolerable little lusts...'

(80-81)

This unlimited boundary crossing made possible through advances in technology is presented as a dangerous threat to the traditional feminine values of chastity and modesty and to Britain's class system. As Michele Pridmore-Brown explains, 'Britain's island insularity offers no protection in the air age,'⁷⁶ the era of aeroplanes and wireless radio, and these new forms of communication and transportation brought about a rupture in the nation's cultural and psychological identity. Marinetti had written in 1913 of his belief that developments in science and technology had led to fundamental changes to human consciousness, as he describes in 'Words in Freedom':

⁷⁵ Burkhart, *Herman and Nancy and Ivy: Three Lives in Art*, 118, 58-59.

⁷⁶ Cited by Caughie, 'Modernism, Gender and Passing', 402.

Those people who today make use of the telegraph, the telephone, the gramophone, the train, the bicycle, the motorcycle, the automobile, the ocean liner, the dirigible, the airplane, the cinema, the great newspaper (the synthesis of a day in the world's life) are not aware of the decisive influence that these various forms of communication, transportation and information have a decisive influence on their psyches.

An ordinary man, spending a day's time in the train, can be transported from a small town, dead, with empty squares in which the sun, the dust, and the wind divert each other in silence, to a great capital bristling with lights, movement, and street cries.⁷⁷

Among the seventeen major phenomena Marinetti identifies as having been generated by these technological advances, he includes the '[s]emi-equality of man and woman' and '[c]ontempt for love [...] produced by greater freedom and erotic ease among women.'⁷⁸ The modern woman's sexual freedom, her mobility, and her modernity are all read by Marinetti not, as one might perhaps expect, as a progressive attack on traditional values, but as a threat to authentic love, sexual desire and male virility. (In *The Other Modernism*, Cinzia Sartini Blum writes that this passage in Marinetti's manifesto 'sounds a jarring note in the celebration of modern phenomena that have become elements of the new futurist sensibility.'⁷⁹) We see here how even among radical thinkers like Marinetti, the modern woman's newfound liberty (sexual, social and spatial) could be seen as a threat to traditional values and gender identities: 'The lover has lost all prestige, and Love has lost its absolute value', he writes.⁸⁰

In the interwar period, as Latimer and Chadwick observe, the modern woman was both literally and symbolically 'going places', and she was thus often depicted (like Iris) 'at the wheel of an automobile, at the helm of a speedboat, in the cockpit of a plane [...] a figure in transit and transition [who] travelled unescorted.'⁸¹ Iris's suicide at the end of *The Green Hat* converts what might have been a more progressive narrative into a traditional cautionary tale about the dangers of crossing society's traditional sexual and social boundaries. It is no

⁷⁷ Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax', *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Rainey et. al., 143.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷⁹ Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti's Futurist Fiction of Power*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 85-86.

⁸⁰ Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax', *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Rainey et. al., 44.

⁸¹ Chadwick & Latimer, 'Becoming Modern', 3.

coincidence then that Iris's yellow Hispano-Suiza, the symbol of her emancipation, finally becomes the instrument of the modern, mobile woman's destruction.⁸²

Another thinly disguised caricature of Cunard appeared four years after the publication of *The Green Hat* in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928). In part a critique of the influence of modern science on contemporary culture, Huxley's novel is a satirical *roman à clef* about a number of celebrities of the period, including Cunard, her mother, D. H. Lawrence, Huxley himself, and others. The titular contrapuntal form is reflected in Huxley's presentation of characters' simultaneous perspectives on the same series of episodes: the aim of *Point Counter Point* as he saw it was 'to show a piece of life not only from a good many individual points of view, but also under its various aspects, such as scientific, emotional, economic, political, aesthetic, etc.'⁸³ This is described in the novel itself as a kind of 'human fugue,' in which '[t]he parts live their separate lives; they touch, their paths cross, they combine for a moment to create a seemingly final and perfected harmony, only to break apart again.'⁸⁴

As in *The Green Hat*, Huxley's Cunard figure is the object of the lead character's largely unreturned affections, and has been identified as Huxley's 'spiteful vengeance for unrequited love'⁸⁵ (Cunard ended the brief affair they had in the early 1920s and became something of an obsession for him). As in *the Green Hat*, Lucy's emancipation and questioning of the social order are indicated through her cosmopolitanism and ease of movement:

Living modernly's living quickly [...] You can't cart a waggon-load of ideals and romanticisms about with you these days. When you travel by aeroplane, you must leave your heavy baggage behind. The good old-fashioned soul was all right when people lived slowly. But it's too ponderous nowadays. There's no room for it in the aeroplane. [...] I know exactly what I want; so I sacrifice the luggage. [...] And don't expect me to take your grand piano in my two-seater monoplane. [...]

⁸² The term 'mobile woman' is used by Maroula Joannou to analyse the effects of geographical displacement on women writers of Second World War period and beyond. *Women's Writing, Englishness, and National and Cultural Identity: The Mobile Woman and the Migrant Voice, 1938-1962*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1, *passim*.

⁸³ Letter from Huxley to his father, cited by George Woodcock in *Dawn and the Darkest Hour: A Study of Aldous Huxley*, (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2007), 124.

⁸⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, (London: Random House, 2004), 30. All quotations are from this edition. Subsequent references are given parenthetically within the text. First published 1928.

⁸⁵ Volodia Teitelboim, *Neruda: An Intimate Biography*, trans. Beverly J. DeLong-Tonelli, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).

I find it's really impossible to stay in one place more than a couple of months at a time. One gets so stale and wilted, so unutterably bored. The moment I step into the aeroplane at Croydon I feel as though I had been born again. (267, 294)

While Iris Storm is tormented by her sexual desires, Huxley's Lucy Tantamount—like Cunard, a wealthy, fashionable, cosmopolitan, bohemian socialite with left-wing views—is presented as a cold-hearted, predatory 'man-eater', a 'refined and perfumed imitation of a savage or an animal' (250, 71). The protagonist of *Point Counter Point*, Walter Bidlake (Huxley's counterpart in the novel), is drawn to the very qualities in Lucy that emasculate and repel him—her 'teasing provocative detachment', her 'laughing, deliberate sensuality'—which he punishes with sexual force: "But this is a rape," [Lucy] protested. [...] 'Walter laughed. 'Not yet,' he answered. 'But it's going to be' (262-262).

Huxley's bitter portrayal of Lucy Tantamount reflects the deep misogyny that runs through many of the characterisations of Cunard written by her male contemporaries. Renata Morresi has noted that she is often described in animalistic terms by male writers: in Richard Aldington's 'Now Lies She There', she appears as a 'lecherous octopus' and an 'erotic Boa constrictor', in Huxley as an alligator, in René Crevel as a tamer. To these observations by Morresi I would also add Claude McKay's '*vache enragée*', the Surrealist André Thirion's '*regard de serpent*', and T. S. Eliot's 'sly domestic puss puss cat' and 'plain simple bitch'.⁸⁶ These characterisations, as Morresi rightly suggests, are examples of how 'independent women who fail to 'behave correctly' and who question the social order have often been—in literature as in life—represented as instinctual and bestial,'⁸⁷ as is particularly apparent in the case of sexually emancipated women like Cunard. Jane Marcus argues that Cunard was 'constructed as a nymphomaniac in order to explain her affairs with black men', and that her reputation as a femme fatale figure has limited her influence as a writer, public intellectual and cultural historian.⁸⁸ The sexual tourism of male authors like Flaubert, Nerval, Conrad and Maugham of course did little to hamper their own careers, demonstrating the profound sexism that underlies this disregard for Cunard's work. Both

⁸⁶ Renata Morresi, 'Negotiating Identity: Nancy Cunard's Otherness', in *Resisting Alterities: Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*, ed. Marco Fazzini, (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2004), 154.

McKay, *A Long Way From Home: an Autobiography*, excerpt reprinted in Moynagh, 302.

André Thirion, 'Les années folles d'Aragon et Elsa', in *Le Nouvel Observateur* No. 378, February 7th-13th 1972, 54.

Eliot, *The Waste Land*, (original drafts), 41.

⁸⁷ Morresi, 'Negotiating Identity', 154.

⁸⁸ Marcus, *Hearts of Darkness*, 147.

Arlen and Huxley mythologised Cunard as a hypersexualised seductress whose cosmopolitanism and freedom of movement encouraged her sexual predacity. Their novels embedded this depiction of her in popular culture; Cunard was, to use Patricia Clements's memorable phrase, '[t]extually consumed'⁸⁹ by the male authors who represented her in their work.

3.3 'Harlem Reviewed'

Go to Harlem, it's sharper there.
Cunard, 'Harlem Reviewed'

From these fictional representations of Cunard's cosmopolitanism, I want to turn now to her travelogue 'Harlem Reviewed' (1934) and the hysterical media response to her presence in New York, where the local tabloids 'textually consumed' Cunard in much the same way as the novels discussed above. Cunard made two trips to Harlem while compiling the *Negro* anthology, the first in 1931 and the second the following year. She used these trips to solicit and collect entries from various black artists and intellectuals, and succeeded in obtaining pieces from prominent figures such as Langston Hughes, Walter White, William Pickens, W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke. She also spent time exploring and studying Harlem, and her observations would form the basis of an essay titled 'Harlem Reviewed', which she printed in *Negro*. On her first trip she was accompanied by Henry Crowder, the second she spent largely with her friends the artist John Banting and the writer and singer Taylor Gordon, extending her trip to a visit to Cuba and Jamaica with the writer A. A. Colebrooke, another contributor to the anthology.

The first trip passed largely without incident, but Cunard was hounded by the press throughout this second trip, appearing daily on the covers of the New York tabloids, some of which suggested she had come to the United States to pursue sexual relationships with black men. With this, 'the race-hysteria exploded'⁹⁰, as she later wrote, and the press scandal prompted a flurry of hate-mail, including threats of murder, kidnapping and sexual violence, to be sent to her hotel—letters she would use as the basis of an article written for *Negro* on press bias and racial discrimination in the United States, provocatively titled, 'The American Moron and the American of Sense'. She had also hoped to travel to the southern

⁸⁹ Patricia Clements, 'Transmuting' Nancy Cunard', *Dalhousie Review*, 66, 1-2, 1986, 191.

⁹⁰ Cunard, *Grand Man*, 99.

states to witness first-hand the brutal injustices there described by other writers in the anthology, but was advised against this. The journalist Eugene Gordon worried her 'going into the Deep South as she had gone into Harlem [...] would end tragically for Negroes and for her,' and although he later reflected that her commitment to black causes 'entitled her to first place among the investigators who ought to go [there]', he still feared that 'she would have suffered perhaps a more horrible death than Mrs Viola Liuzzo in Alabama 33 years later.'⁹¹ In New York, she was shouted at and threatened on at least two occasions for walking with black friends: 'Just across the Harlem River some white gentlemen flashing by in a car take it into their heads to bawl, "Can't you get yourself a white man?"—you are walking with a Negro, yet you walk down-town with the same and meet no such hysteria, or again, you do.'⁹² After attending the May Day protests in Union Square, she and the black Jamaican owner of her hotel were followed by 'three ugly blonde heads' in a car and booed at from local tenements; at Midtown restaurants they were refused service on account of the 'Jim Crow' segregation laws.⁹³ These episodes illustrate the challenges Cunard faced as a white female traveller carrying out anti-racist work amid the racial tensions and segregation of early 1930s America.

In the more impressionistic passages of her essay, 'Harlem Reviewed', Cunard emerges as a kind of 'anthropological *flâneur*', a term used by James Clifford to describe Claude Lévi-Strauss's early impressions of New York. The New York of 1941 as Lévi-Strauss describes it is what Clifford calls 'an anthropologist's dream, a vast selection of human culture and history' filled with 'unexpected juxtapositions' and 'delightful incongruities'.⁹⁴ Like the Dadaists and Surrealists in the flea markets of Paris, Clifford's 'anthropological

⁹¹ Gordon, "The Green Hat" Comes to Chambers Street, *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 136, 139.

Viola Liuzzo was a white civil rights activist who was murdered by the Ku Klux Klan after participating in the Selma to Montgomery protest march in March 1965.

Plans to visit Africa with Crowder and the writer Norman Douglas (Cunard's friend and mentor) were also prevented when her mother used her influence to prevent her from obtaining the necessary papers. Douglas had also expressed concerns that travelling through colonial Africa with a black man may have been difficult because of the 'Colour Bar'.

Douglas was one of the preeminent travel writers of the period and in 1929 Cunard's Hours Press published *One Day*, his short pamphlet on Greece. Cunard would later write his biography. Reflecting on the genre of travel writing, Douglas wrote, 'It seems to me that the reader of a good travel-book is entitled not only to an exterior voyage, to descriptions of scenery and so forth, but to an interior, a sentimental or temperamental voyage, which takes place side by side with the outer one.' Cunard's travel writing follows this pattern: her essays on Harlem and Jamaica tell us as much about the subjectivity of their narrator as they do the locales they describe.

⁹² Cunard, *Negro*, 67.

⁹³ Ford, 'Introduction', *Negro* (1970), xix.

⁹⁴ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 237.

flâneur' approaches the city with the sensibility of the passionate collector, piecing together cultural fragments and signs among the city's 'chaos of simultaneous possibilities'.⁹⁵ This particular kind of anthropological culture-collecting is perhaps most apparent in Cunard's appended glossary, 'Some Negro Slang', a lexicon of dozens of African-American slang words and expressions often translated into amusingly British English: '*Hinkty*: ill-tempered, evil. [...] *Sweetman, Sweetback*: pimp. [...] *This bed got chains on it*: I simply cannot get up! [...] *Undressing a mite*: picking a man's pockets'.⁹⁶ The collector/*flâneur* of 'Harlem Reviewed' is drawn both to the grand spectacles of Harlem—its nightclubs and theatres, a revival meeting presided over by the famous Reverend Becton—and the smaller fragments of everyday life—local slang words, 'the innumerable 'skin-whitening' and 'anti-kink' parlours', and the sounds of jazz drifting through the streets:

[Harlem] is *hard* and *strong*; its noise, heat, cold, cries and colours are so. And the nostalgia is violent too; the eternal radio seeping through everything day and night, indoors and out, becomes somehow the personification of restlessness, desire, brooding. And then the gorgeous roughness, the gargle of Louis Armstrong's voice breaks through. As everywhere, the real people are in the street. I mean those young men on the corner, and the people all sitting on the steps throughout the breathless, leaden summer. I mean those young men in Pelham Park; the sports groups (and one sees many in their bright sweaters), the strength of a race, its beauty.

(73)

Cunard's essay emerges as a work of cultural and social criticism guided by her anti-racist politics, but it also fulfils many of the conventions of travel writing—a genre that flourished during the early decades of the twentieth century. Moynagh has described the essay as a work that defies simple generic classification, describing it as 'simultaneously part travel narrative, part ethnography and part cultural criticism'.⁹⁷ In *Radicals on the Road: The Politics of English Travel Writing in the 1930s*, Bernard Schweizer argues that the 1930s marked a radical shift in the genre of English travel writing towards more direct, politically engaged cultural commentary. He suggests that travel writers of this decade such as George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene and Rebecca West 'pioneered a new tradition by employing travel writing self-consciously as a platform for voicing radical political ideas [...] whether

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁹⁶ *Negro*, 76. The reader cannot help but wonder if some of the terms on her list, '*Miss Ann, Mr Eddie, Mr Charley*: wealthy social white people' or '*Jig-chaser*: white person who runs after Negroes', were ever levelled against the narrator herself.

⁹⁷ Moynagh, 'Introduction', *Essays on Race and Empire*, 32.

they were in favour of the British Empire, in defense of Roman Catholic hegemony, against fascist aggression, or for a socialist transformation of society.’⁹⁸ For Schweizer, many writers of this period ‘felt compelled to travel because of their political convictions’ and believed that they could thereby ‘enter into a more concrete, more physical relationship with historical and political realities than if they remained immured in their intellectual towers.’⁹⁹

I would dispute Schweizer’s claim to the pioneering nature of this politicisation of the genre in the 1930s, given the long history of political travelogues such as Arthur Young’s *Travels in France* (1792), William Cobbett’s *Rural Rides* (1822-1826), Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1835-1840) and Dickens’ *American Notes* (1842), but his book does capture what was certainly a critical moment in the genre given the international political and social instabilities of the period. ‘Harlem Reviewed’ is very much a political travelogue of this moment. As with much of Cunard’s writing, there is a strong didactic tone to the piece and her observations about Harlem are used throughout the essay to set out her political views and opinions about racial politics in the United States, which were influenced by the work of black Communist writers, particularly George Padmore (See Chapter 4). She lambasts the African-American press for pandering to white money, for its political weakness, its hysterical coverage of interracial relationships and its attempts to discredit Communist activists. (72) She is also critical of the ‘snobbery’ of the black bourgeoisie and of cultural infighting among Harlemites: ‘they are always at it, falling out about empty ‘superiorities’ and ‘inferiorities,’ forgetting the white enemy’. (68) Marcus Garvey’s followers come under fire for paying ‘no heed to the very real and concrete misery, oppression and struggles of the Negro toiling millions throughout the States’ and are said to lack ‘the drive of the black Communist orator, for they are not speaking of anything serious.’ (68) (Here, in particular, her arguments reflect those made by Padmore). Her long, evocative description of a revival meeting given by the famous ‘consecrated dime’ preacher Reverend Becton¹⁰⁰,

⁹⁸ Bernard Schweizer, *Radicals on the Road: The Politics of English Travel Writing in the 1930s*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ The Reverend George Wilson Becton, or the ‘dancing evangelist’ as he was known, was a charismatic preacher at the Salem Methodist Episcopal Church in Harlem. Becton set up an envelope system called ‘the consecrated dime’, whereby he would collect seventy cents (a dime a day) from each member of his congregation every Sunday. Langston Hughes describes him as a charlatan in his autobiography: ‘Every package of dimes was consecrated to God—but given to the Reverend Dr. Becton’ (*The Big Sea*, 276-277). Cunard observes the fruits of this system in her essay, his ‘pearl-grey suit, top hat, cane, ivory gloves’, and records some of Becton’s favourite maxims, ‘God ain’t broke!’ and ‘If Jesus were alive he would dress like me’. Cunard met with Becton during her 1932 trip to Harlem and urged him to turn his ‘dramatic gift’ towards the fight for racial equality (*Negro*,

with its 'immense sound-waves and rhythmical under-surges', 'so fantastic, and *aesthetically* speaking, so moving', is quickly followed by a critique of Becton's failure to align himself with the Communist support for Scottsboro defence, as one young black minister had done: 'Had Becton been honest, had he spoken thus he would have swept the land. [...] But his was an individual racket.' (70-72) International Communism is presented throughout the essay as the only true means to combat racial inequality, and the text closes with her political statement, 'Up with an all-Communist Harlem in an all-Communist United States!' (75) Schweizer observes in his study that the political travel texts of this period were shaped by the 'dualistic construction of national and international politics in the 1930s',¹⁰¹ which manifests in the form of binary political distinctions and propagandising. Interestingly, he briefly mentions Cunard's *Authors Take Sides* (an anthology which had asked contributors to respond to the questions 'Are you for or against the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain? Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?') as the epitome of the period's polarised political climate.¹⁰² 'Harlem Reviewed' presents a similarly polarised and propagandising account of politics and race relations in the United States at the expense of a more nuanced understanding of these issues. There is no room for political individuation here: at this moment in Cunard's thinking, you were either for Communism or against it, and anyone who departs from this dogmatic line, even a high-profile figure like Claude McKay, is said to be 'race-conscious in the wrong way.' (73)

She begins her essay by acknowledging the limitations of travelogues ('Is it possible to give any kind of visual idea of a place by description? I think not, least of all Harlem') before establishing connections between her current surroundings and memories of home: 'When I first saw it, at 7th Avenue, I thought of Mile End Road—the same long vista, same kind of little low houses with, at first sight, many indeterminate things out one the pavement in front of them, same amount of blowing dust, papers, litter.' (64) This uncanny reflection of home soon fades, however: 'But no; the scale, to begin with, was different. It was only from one point that the resemblance came to one'. (64) Ruth Jenkins has looked at how Victorian women travellers used sociological expeditions to the colonies as a means to 'articulate autobiographical quests and definitions of self less possible in England [and...] explore the

72). He was assassinated in Philadelphia in 1933 before Cunard's essay was published and his funeral procession attracted many thousands of followers.

¹⁰¹ Schweizer, *Radicals on the Road*, 103.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

intricate boundaries of culture and self.¹⁰³ The context is different, but much like the colonial travelogues of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, 'Harlem Reviewed' describes cultural encounters in an 'exotic' locale from the perspective of an individual explorer, a privileged observer who interprets unfamiliar sights and experiences for the instruction and enjoyment of the reader. But it also runs against the grain of these colonial travelogues by attempting to subvert the spatial and subjective binaries of home/abroad and self/other.¹⁰⁴ Harlem appears at once familiar *and* other, and where the colonial travel writers of the Victorian era commonly sought to construct a self in opposition to the subjects of their studies, adopting what Annie E. Coombes calls the 'the complacent vantage point of moral high ground' assumed by the 'colonial gaze'¹⁰⁵, Cunard instead tries to establish a politically and culturally enlightened subject position by criticising and distancing herself from other white visitors to Harlem.

The alterity she experiences in Harlem is here expressed in relation to other white tourists, subverting the traditional self/other structure of the colonial gaze:

Notice how many of the whites are unreal in America; they are dim. But the Negro is very real; he is there. And the ofays know it. That's why they come to Harlem—out of curiosity and jealousy and don't-know-why. This desire to get close to the other race has often nothing honest about it; for where the ofays flock, to night-clubs for instance, such as Connie's Inn and the Cotton Club and Small's, expensive cabarets, to these two former the coloured clientele is not longer admitted! [...] No, you can't go to Connie's Inn with your coloured friends. The place is *for whites*. "Niggers" to serve and "coons" to play—and later the same ofay will slip into what he calls "a coloured dive," and there it'll be "'Evening, Mr Brown," polite and cordial, because this will be a real coloured place and the ofay is not sure of himself there a-tall...

This applies of course to the mass of whites who treat Harlem in the same way the English toffs used to talk about "going slumming." The class I'm thinking of is "the club-man." They want entertainment. Go to Harlem, it's sharper there. And it doesn't upset their conception of the Negro's social status. From all the time the Negro has entertained the whites, but never been thought of by this type as possibly a social equal. There are, however, thousands of artists, writers, musicians, intellectuals, etc.,

¹⁰³ Ruth Y. Jenkins, 'The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler', in *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women's Travel Writing*, ed. Kristi Siegel, (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 15.

¹⁰⁴ Sara Suleri describes this process as a 'productive disordering of [the] binary dichotomies' of Eurocentric colonial discourse. 'The Rhetoric of English India', *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, (London: Routledge, 1995), 112.

¹⁰⁵ Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*, 14.

who have good friends in the dark race, and a good knowledge of Harlem life, “the freedom of Harlem,” so to speak.¹⁰⁶

Using the derogatory term *ofays*, Cunard explicitly tries to differentiate herself from those white New Yorkers who saw Harlem as an exotic spectacle or tourist attraction where they could ‘go slumming.’ Nathan Huggins has described how Harlem had become a ‘subversive agent’ for white New Yorkers in the 1920s and 30s: ‘a means of soft rebellion for those who rejected the Babbitry and sterility of their lives, yet could not find within their familiar culture the genius to redefine themselves in more human and vital terms.’¹⁰⁷ Cunard assumes the position of a knowing insider, aligning herself with a number of Harlem Renaissance writers such as Claude McKay, Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman who all observed how the influx of white visitors to Harlem had made life difficult for black residents, particularly because of the ‘Jim-Crow’ segregation laws.

McKay would write in his memoirs of this period that Harlem had become ‘an all-white picnic ground and with no apparent gain to the blacks.’¹⁰⁸ Hughes, a close friend of Cunard’s, was like her critical of the negative impact of white tourists on Harlem’s music scene, who had flooded ‘the little cabarets and bars where formerly only coloured people laughed and sang, and where now the strangers were given the best ringside tables to sit and stare at the Negro customers—like amusing animals in a zoo.’¹⁰⁹ He too observed that ‘Harlem Negroes did not like the Cotton Club and never appreciated its Jim Crow policy in the very heart of their dark community.’¹¹⁰ The ‘rent parties’ Cunard describes in her essay—residential gatherings where a small entrance fee was charged to help with rent payments—became one of the few opportunities for Harlemites to socialise away from inquisitive white tourists. Thurman had written in 1927 that black Harlemites were ‘forced out of their own places of amusement, their jazz appropriated, their entertainers borrowed’, because of ‘something in these places that the cabarets ‘downtown’ cannot approximate, something that at once thrills and tantalizes the white spectator.’¹¹¹ Cunard chooses not to

¹⁰⁶ Cunard, *Negro*, 69-70. The term *ofay* is of disputed origin. Some have suggested it is Pig Latin for foe, others suggest it may come from an African source, possibly the Ibibio word *afia*, meaning ‘white or light-colored.’ Cunard glosses the work underneath her article simply as ‘white’, 69.

¹⁰⁷ Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 91

¹⁰⁸ Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 106. First published 1937.

¹⁰⁹ Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*, (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 225. First published 1940.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 224-225.

¹¹¹ Wallace Thurman, ‘Harlem Facets’, *The Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman: A Harlem Renaissance Reader*, ed. Amritjit Singh & Daniel M. Scott III, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 37.

reflect directly here on her own 'desire to get close to the other race,' but points to her own political motivations by criticising other white tourists for their lack of interest in black social issues. In an article for *The Crisis*, she had earlier criticised 'the hysteria in the devotees of the black 'exoticism' who as soon as the word Negro is pronounced burst out with Ah! Harlem... but know little else of the Negro.'¹¹²

The position Cunard adopts in this essay partly reflects the disposition of the cosmopolitan 'traveller' setting out to differentiate him/herself from the mainstream tourist. Journeying off the beaten track, the traveller pursues undiscovered or exotic places and experiences, recalling the early twentieth-century 'discovery narratives' that circled around the collecting of 'primitive' objects, as discussed in Chapter 1. As Trinh Minh-ha explains here, the modern-day traveller mimics the other in order to inscribe him/herself as a 'non-tourist':

One among some fifty million globe-trotters, the traveller maintains his difference mostly by despising others like himself. I sneeze at organised tours, for the things I see in the wild or in the remote parts of the world are those You can't see when You abide by prepaid ready-made routes. Furthermore, You don't see all that I know how to see, even if You go to the same places [...] Therefore, in order not to be confused with the tourist, the traveller has to become clandestine. He has to imitate the Other, to hide and disguise himself in an attempt to inscribe himself in a counter-exoticism that will allow him to be a non-tourist.¹¹³

Cunard similarly tries to distance herself from other white tourists in Harlem by asserting her experience and independence as a traveller and differentiating herself from those naïve visitors who relied on guides. (Carl Van Vechten, for example, a famous white novelist of the period, offered informal tours for visitors to Harlem, including William Faulkner.¹¹⁴) She referred to herself elsewhere as one of those 'who like to travel [...] far from well-known tracks' and when her friend Charles Burkhardt wrote to her in 1952 to ask for

¹¹² Nancy Cunard, 'Does Anyone Know Any Negroes?', *The Crisis*, September 1931.

¹¹³ Trinh Minh-ha, 'Other than myself/my other self', in *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. Jon Bird et. al., (London: Routledge, 1994), 21-22.

¹¹⁴ Van Vechten became such an authority on Harlem nightlife that he features in Andy Razaf's hit song 'Go Harlem!' which features the lines 'So like Van Vechten / Start inspectin' / Go Harlem, go Harlem, go.'

recommendations for a guide to Harlem, she replied, 'what is this about having to be "taken there"? Why not GO? Go and walk about the damn place'.¹¹⁵

Moynagh suggests that 'the most striking technique Cunard uses to distinguish her essay from other urban travel texts is to describe the typical tour.'¹¹⁶ Using ironic quotation marks and the second person, she describes stops on the customary sightseeing trips around Harlem—'If you are 'shown' Harlem by day you will inevitably have pointed out to you the new Rockefeller apartments' (a marker of social uplift in the area); 'At night you will be taken to the Lafayette Theatre' (the largest theatre in Harlem and the first major venue there to desegregate).¹¹⁷ This establishes that while some visitors (the reader perhaps?) may need a guide to Harlem, the author feels that she does not. In the long passage from 'Harlem Reviewed' cited above, Cunard also mocks white tourist who suddenly finds himself out of his depth at an all-black venue, where 'the ofay is not sure of himself [...] a-tall'. The essay makes clear that its narrator, by contrast, is a seasoned visitor to Harlem endowed with local knowledge: one of those who has 'the freedom of Harlem', as she describes it.¹¹⁸

Cunard is also keen to set herself apart from profiteering writers whom she felt had exploited Harlem culture for their own gain. Among these she identifies Paul Morand, a French modernist author and travel writer whose writing on Harlem features stereotyped portrayals of African Americans who 'long to return to Africa or revert to a supposed ancestral black essence'.¹¹⁹ Van Vechten's controversial novel *Nigger Heaven* (1926) is also singled out for criticism for having painted a misleading portrait of the area. She attacks his

¹¹⁵ Cunard, 'The Triumph of the Treasures of France', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 87, No. 508, July 1945, 169.

Letter to Charles Burkhart, January 21st 1955, Pertenhall, Bedford. Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale. She does acknowledge in this letter, however, that she learned a great deal about Harlem from her companion Taylor Gordon who used to 'promenade' her about there in 1932.

¹¹⁶ Moynagh, *Essays on Race and Empire*, 34.

¹¹⁷ *Negro*, 68-69. Jenkins has observed how Victorian women travel writers like Amelia Edwards also balked at the idea of needing a guide, although they often met with patriarchal disapproval for travelling alone. Perhaps most famous of these Victorian women travellers, Mary Kinglsey, for example, was told that the captain of a ship she travelled on 'had looked forward with *horror* to having a single lady passenger' on board his vessel. See Jenkins, 'The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler', 18, 22.

¹¹⁸ This claim to insider knowledge was something Harlem Renaissance novelist Wallace Thurman observed was commonplace among white visitors to Harlem: 'It is actually amazing what number of white people will assure you that they have seen and are authorities on Harlem and things Harlemites.' 'Harlem Facets', 37.

¹¹⁹ Entry on 'Paul Morand' by Cynthia Bily in the *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance: K-Y*, eds. Cary D. Wintz & Paul Finkelman, (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 811.

work for representing Harlem as a space of unfettered hedonism and amoralism, a cheap form of primitivism that she argued would serve only to legitimise racial prejudice:

[S]uch writers as Van Vechten and Co. have made a revolting and cheap lithograph, so that Harlem, to a large idle-minded public, has come to mean nothing more what-so-ever than a round of hooch-filled night-clubs after a round of "snow" (cocaine) filled bodies. Van Vechten, the spirit of vulgarity, has depicted Harlem as a grimace. He would have written the same way about Montparnasse or Limehouse or Soho. [...] This is not the Harlem one sees.

(73)

Du Bois too had criticised Van Vechten's novel, branding it a lazy and wilfully misleading representation of Harlem, 'an astonishing and wearisome hodge-podge of laboriously stated facts, quotations and expressions illuminated here and there with something that comes near to being nothing but cheap melodrama.'¹²⁰ The 'undisputed prince' of whites associated with Harlem, Van Vechten has been thought of by some as 'a kind of midwife to the Harlem Renaissance' who encouraged writers and urged publishers to take up their work, by others as an opportunist who exploited black expressive culture for his own gain.¹²¹

The witty term 'Negrotarians' was coined by Zora Neale Hurston to describe the various white connoisseurs, patrons and writers who participated in the Harlem Renaissance in one way or another. In *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, David Levering Lewis identifies 'an almost infinite variety' of different subsets to Hurston's classification, assigning Van Vechten to the category of 'Salon Negrotarians', who were drawn to black writers and artists primarily as 'salon exotica.'¹²² Cunard and Van Vechten have sometimes been lumped together under this same nomenclature, but Cunard's motivations seem to align her more closely with the political or humanitarian subset who campaigned against discrimination and inequality, or the 'Lost Generation Negrotarians,' who were drawn to Harlem as they were to Paris by a belief in 'cultural salvation coming from the margins'.¹²³ The Harlem of Cunard's travelogue appears therefore as a space of political urgency and

¹²⁰ Cited by Robert E. Washington in *The Ideologies of African American Literature: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Nationalist Revolt: A Sociology of Literature Perspective*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 65.

¹²¹ Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 93. Langston Hughes thought that Van Vechten had been unfairly scapegoated by some Harlem Renaissance writers, referring to him in his autobiography *The Big Sea* as 'the he-who-gets-slapped', 271.

¹²² David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 98.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

cultural authenticity: the Communist presence there is *'more and more tangible'*, the culture more 'real' and alive. (69, 74)

3.4 Race, Gender and Miscegenation in Cunard's Hate-Mail File

Cunard had travelled to America to collect materials and report on the social and political struggles being faced by black communities there, but the New York tabloids were keen to present her as a sexual tourist in Harlem. The press scandal that exploded during her second visit almost certainly damaged the reception of the anthology: in his review of *Negro*, Henry Lee Moon described his impression of her in 1932 as 'a rail thin woman with an unfortunate faculty for producing reams of scandalous publicity'; she appeared to him then as '[j]ust another white woman sated with the decadence of Anglo-Saxon society rebelling against its restrictive code, seeking new fields to explore, searching for color, [...] not to be taken seriously.'¹²⁴ Cunard would write in the anthology of her frustration at the American media's attempts to diminish her work, in particular William Randolph Hearst's *'yellow sheets'*, on whose pages 'any interest manifested by a white person, even a foreigner to America (such as myself), is immediately turned into a sex 'scandal''. 'No chance,' she continues, 'is ever missed by the American press [...] to stir up as much fury as possible against Negroes and their white friends.'¹²⁵ Cunard never reflected publicly on the sexist dimension to this press scandal or the hate mail it prompted; she saw these rather as a response to the truth-telling project of her anthology.

On 2nd May 1932, the *New York Daily Mirror* and *Daily News* printed articles suggesting that her research trip been a pretext for her affair with the actor and musician Paul Robeson. These reports were erroneously based on her account of the high-society backlash against her relationship with Henry Crowder in the pamphlet *Black Man, White Ladyship*. (As she wrote in the anthology, 'The Hearst publications *invent* black lovers for

¹²⁴ Henry Lee Moon, "Review", cited in Ford, 'Introduction', *Negro* (1970), xx.

In an ironic twist of fate, however, the anthology may not have been published without the scandal. Cunard launched a libel suit against British Allied Newspapers and the *Empire News*, *Daily Dispatch*, and *Sunday Chronicle* who had repeated the claims made against her in the U.S. and used the £1,500 proceeds to publish *Negro*. Cunard thought of this as a kind of 'poetic justice'. She had considered suing the New York press but did not want to remain in New York for the trial. See Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 171.

¹²⁵ Cunard 'The American Moron and the American of Sense — Letters on the Negro', *Negro*, 120. Emphasis in original. Images of Cunard taken on the steps of the Grampion hotel were deliberately cropped for publication in some newspapers so that she appeared only with her African-American companion, Taylor Gordon, and not the white English painter John Banting.

white women.' (120)) The *Daily Mirror* ran the front-page headline, 'CUNARD HEIRESS FOUND IN HARLEM!', reporting that Cunard had come to New York because of her 'deep interest' in Robeson and 'to flaunt her preference for Negro society'.¹²⁶ Both Robeson and Cunard publicly denied the allegations made against them and demanded retractions, and Cunard attempted to lay the rumours to rest by calling a press conference at her hotel, the Grampian in Harlem. She also used this as an opportunity for research, inviting the American public to offer up their views on race relations in the United States for publication in the forthcoming anthology:

And now after your interest in my private affairs (I hope I have sufficiently satisfied this) I want something in return. [...] Why are you Americans so uneasy of the Negro race? The question is the epitome of the whole colour question as it strikes a plain English person such as myself. Who'll write me the best answer to this? I'll print it in my book on Colour.¹²⁷

Many messages of commendation and support for her project arrived at her hotel, but these were accompanied by around thirty pieces of hate-mail, a 'spate of frantic, unsigned and threatening letters'¹²⁸ almost all of which refer to Cunard's sexuality and try to recast her research trip as a pretext for her affairs with black men. Some of the less offensive letters are included in *Negro*, but many were too explicit for publication at the time ('[W]hat is to be done? They are obscene, so this portion of American culture cannot be made public'¹²⁹) featuring kidnapping and death threats, sadomasochistic fantasies, bestiality, racist theories about black sexuality, sexual propositions and threats of rape. Quite different to the self-identified cosmopolitan we find elsewhere, Cunard wryly casts herself as a 'plain English person' in her press statement in order to deflect the allegations made

¹²⁶ James Whittaker, *New York Daily Mirror*, May 2nd 1932, 4.

Later follow-up pieces included a full-page article about Cunard and other women in interracial couples, titled 'The Queer Quirk Which Makes Desdemona Yearn For Her Othello.' *New York City Mirror*, 10th July 1932, 13. This article was specifically concerned with the subject of 'miscegenation', demonstrating how eugenicist discourse was being circulated in the American popular press in the 1930s.

It was also falsely suggested that Cunard had been snubbed by Harlem society. The paper did not print or respond to the petition signed by a dozen black 'personalities' from New York who refuted this claim. See A. A. Colebrooke, 'Some of Miss Cunard's Experiences In Her Quest For Material' in *The Daily Gleaner*, 22nd July 1932.

¹²⁷ Cited in Anne Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p.195.

¹²⁸ Cunard, cited by Gordon in *Nancy Cunard*, 166.

¹²⁹ Cunard, *Negro*, 198.

against her.¹³⁰ Many of the letters she received were nonetheless preoccupied with her ties to France and her Europeaness¹³¹, which were seen as the cause of her engagement in interracial relationships. Paris in the jazz age was undoubtedly more tolerant of sexual relationships between black and white, and American expatriates there saw this as a one of the critical (and, for some, attractive) differences between home and abroad.¹³² Cunard's correspondents read her Europeaness as a threat to the status quo in the United States, telling her to 'go back [to] where [she] came from', just as her mother's paramour Sir Thomas Beecham had done when she returned to England from Paris with Henry Crowder.

For Margaretta Jolly, the decision to publish correspondence often carries with it a belief that 'truth can contribute to social change.'¹³³ Cunard believed the letters were a direct response to her intention to set out the truth of race relations in the United States and no doubt saw her decision to publish extracts from the letters in *Negro* as part of the anthology's larger truth-telling project.¹³⁴ The letters are deeply racist and misogynistic, giving a visceral and unnerving insight into contemporary anxieties about race, gender and miscegenation that circulated around sexually-emancipated, cosmopolitan women like Cunard:

Take this as a solemn warning: your number is up— You are going 'for a ride' very shortly. You are a disgrace to the white race. You can't carry

¹³⁰ Cunard's friend, John Banting, who accompanied her to the press conference, noted her skilful handling of the audience, reporting how she 'expertly batting off the more stupid and destructive questions fired at her' and 'stood up to the barrage smilingly.' Cited by Chisholm, p.195.

¹³¹ 'where do you think you are still in France?'; 'the biggest majority of white women in love with negroes are Europeans which they see no harm in marrying'; 'you went to France to continue your sluttish affections for your unknown black lover.' HRC NCC, Box 20, Folder 8.

¹³² See Tyler Stovall, *Gender, Race and Miscegenation: African Americans in Jazz Age Paris*, in *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, ed. Whitney Chadwick & Tirza True Latimer, 21.

¹³³ Margaretta Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 226.

¹³⁴ 'Many were sex-mad and scatological; all were juicy. [...] A few of the printable effusions went into that book—first-hand evidence of what happens in the United States of America when it is suspected that the truth is going to be set down in print about Coloured and White there!' Cunard, *Grand Man: Memories of Norman Douglas*, 99-100. In White & Stallybrass' brilliant study, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, it is shown how 'differentiation' and noncompliance with society's behavioural codes and with the boundaries of race, gender and sexuality are often translated into the language of the scatological. They suggest that subjectivity is often marked out or defined by what it rejects or excludes: that which is 'low [...] dirty, repulsive, noisy, contaminating' (191) The letters are certainly 'scatological' as Cunard describes them in her book about Douglas. One letter begins with an elaborate fantasy about her having sex with a dog; also in the file is a newspaper clipping of Cunard with Gordon outside her hotel with a penis scrawled on it. The language of dirt, disgust and contamination is threaded throughout, as is the idea of her 'lowering' herself.

on in this country. We will give you until May 15th to think it over. Either give up sleeping with a nigger or take the consequences: this is final.

Nancy Cunard, you may deceive people abroad but you can't deceive the american public. [...] You're not only a disgrace to your family, you're a disgrace to your race.

Miss Nancy Cunard, you are insane or downright degenerate. [...] you have not gained any favour but a whole lot of hatred. If I saw any of your publications I would be the first to suppress it. Furthermore I and a committee are appealing to the U.S. department of labour to have you deported as a depraved miserable degenerate insane. Back to where you belong you bastard.

if Robeson knew that you with your insane uncontrollable passions will cause his ruin in the public eye he wouldn't urinate on you if you were on fire. If you must have black meat to suck on why not do it quietly? We have some others of white skin who are similarly inflicted. You louse. Publish this, no charge.

The english people are real white people but you had to be a low-down cock-sucker that's why you are a nigger lover...¹³⁵ [sic]

As a cosmopolitan/exilic white woman engaging in interracial relationships (be they genuine relationships, or those fabricated by the press), Cunard becomes the object of her correspondents' anxieties about miscegenation, both as the symbolic capital at stake and the very real permeable border of racial difference. As the postcolonial critic Ania Loomba writes,

The fear of racial and cultural pollution prompts the most hysterical dogmas about racial difference and sexual behaviours because it suggests the instability of 'race' as a category. Sexuality is thus a means for the maintenance or erosion of racial difference. Women on both sides of the colonial divide demarcate both the innermost sanctums of race, culture and nation, as well as the porous frontiers through which these are penetrated.¹³⁶

Cunard is thus seen to threaten the collective white identity both symbolically and genetically by choosing the "wrong" love-object(s). Euro-American cultures have been

¹³⁵ Hate mail from the United States (1932), HRC NCC, Box 20, Folder 8.

¹³⁶ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 159.

haunted by what Loomba terms the 'spectre of miscegenation': a presence that 'most graphically brings together anxieties about female sexuality and racial purity.'¹³⁷ The interwar years in America saw a huge increase in membership to the Ku Klux Klan and the introduction of the 1924 Immigration Act, which imposed strict limits on levels of migration into the United States and effectively vetoed entry for those from certain 'undesirable' regions, including Asia, Africa and Southern and Eastern Europe. One of its draughtsmen, Senator David Reed, identified himself as a spokesperson for those citizens 'most interested in keeping American stock up to the highest standard.'¹³⁸ The Act was introduced to safeguard the purity of this American 'stock', the committee arguing that 'if [...] the principle of individual liberty [...] is to endure, the basic strain of our population must be maintained.'¹³⁹ We can see from these statements how the language of eugenics (via agricultural terminology) had filtered down into political discourse and public legislation.

In her study of eugenics and American Modernism, Daylanne K. English shows how eugenicist theories infiltrated politics, social science, medicine, government, literature and popular culture in the first few decades of the twentieth century, attaining 'the status of common sense in its most unnerving Gramscian sense.'¹⁴⁰ By the mid-1930s, the credibility of eugenicist thinking had been weakened by critical voices in the scientific community, but these theories still held traction among America's 'rank-and-file eugenics advocates and practitioners' who carried out an unprecedented number of eugenicist sterilisations during this decade.¹⁴¹ Susan Currell has connected the persistence of eugenicist thinking in the 1930s to the social anxieties caused by the Great Depression, which generated a 'widespread belief that the country was not just economically depressed but also 'diseased' in some way.'¹⁴² These theories were widely disseminated within popular culture, and Cunard's hate-mail file documents the enduring presence of eugenicist thinking in the public imagination. A nervous rhetoric of racial hygiene and contamination can be observed

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* 158-159.

¹³⁸ Cited by George Malcolm Stephenson in *A History of American Immigration, 1820-1924* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964) first published 1926, 190.

¹³⁹ Cited by Benjamin Bernard Ringer in *"We the People" and Others*, (New York: Tavistock, 1983), 797.

¹⁴⁰ Daylanne K. English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, (Chapel Hill, N.C.; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1. Freely adopted by progressives and conservatives alike, eugenicist thinking attracted high-profile advocates like Aldous Huxley, W. B. Yeats, W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey.

¹⁴¹ Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 119.

¹⁴² See Susan Currell, 'Introduction', *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*, ed. Susan Currell & Christina Cogdell, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 3.

throughout the letters she received, and these arguments are presented in just the unnerving 'common-sense' register English describes. Almost all the letters charge Cunard with permissiveness and promiscuity, and blame this improper sexual conduct for the pollution, decline or degeneration of the white race:

We keep them by themselves for the sole purpose of contamination

...you have evidently found it expedient to disrespect your Aryan birthright and [...] we are conscious of that which might result from your present environment while in this country or your previous associations in Europe.

But you miss, Nancy Cunard, a young woman of culter, society, and hight of intelligence, whose birth is of the english blue bloods, and best of opportunities awaiting you at the English Court of the kingdom, have fallen into a fantazy wherein you admit intimate friendship of an unknown black man, who has by this time reached your white livered sol, that the blood in your vains, is turning you black inwardly, and there-by has brought contempt to your heart towards your mother who suffered to bring you into this world, and extend social ambition of the highest for your own benifit, and welfare had you taken advantage of same.¹⁴³ [sic]

In the last of these letters, Cunard's relationships with black men are interpreted as a sign of her hatred for and disloyalty to her class, her race, her nation and her mother, and are painted as part of a eugenicist fantasy about the contamination of her white identity. As a white aristocratic woman who loved across the 'colour line', Cunard threatens to undermine what Abdul JanMohammed famously described as 'the colonial cognitive framework', with its guiding 'manichean allegory of white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilization and savagery, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, self and Other, subject and object.'¹⁴⁴ That this letter is equally as anxious about the contamination of Cunard's class as it is about racial miscegenation is perhaps not surprising: as Benedict Anderson suggests in *Imagined Communities*, '[t]he dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of class, rather than in those of nation: above all in claims to divinity

¹⁴³ Hate mail from the United States (1932), HRC NCC, Box 20, Folder 8.

¹⁴⁴ Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1, "Race", Writing, and Difference (Autumn, 1985), 63.

among rulers and to 'blue' or 'white' blood and 'breeding' among aristocracies.¹⁴⁵ These same kinds of anxieties are even found in Henry Crowder's memoirs of Cunard, in which he admonishes her for her naiveté in crossing social boundaries, suggesting that Cunard became racially/socially diminished as a result of her liaisons with working class black men: 'She seems to have forgotten that instead of raising the lowest of the black race to her level by associating with them she lowers herself to their level.'¹⁴⁶

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed examines posts about Princess Diana on American racist hate websites, in which she is similarly idealised for her 'pure', 'Aryan', aristocratic blood and then denounced for having sex with non-white men. Putting aside the obvious differences of Cunard's political and aesthetic radicalism for a moment, there are some distinct parallels between these two figures: both were pursued by the press and used their fame for the advancement of particular causes; both were fashion icons from the aristocracy who were attacked for their interracial relationships. Citing the blog post 'Lessons from the death of Princess Diana', written by 'the former Women's Director of the World Church of the Creator', Ahmed writes:

In this posting Princess Diana as 'a woman of such racial beauty and purity' is condemned for her relations with 'non-Aryan men'. Such a narrative not only confirms heterosexual love as an obligation to the nation, but also constitutes mixed-race relationships as a sign of hate, as a sign of a willingness to contaminate the blood of the race. Making the nation is tied to making love in the choice of an ideal other (different sex/same race), who can allow the reproduction of the nation as ideal in the form of the future generation (the white Aryan child).¹⁴⁷

The letters Cunard received, like the blog posts Ahmed discusses here, are attempts to police society's boundaries in the face of a dangerous new cosmopolitanism that reneges on woman's symbolic role as the defender of national identity.

The sociologists Benny Temkin and Niza Yanay have shown that the targets of hate mail are often those who, like Cunard, are deemed a threat to social boundaries and the 'collective identity.'¹⁴⁸ Their research reveals that '[g]roups and individuals who [...] are perceived by some as heightening the fragility of social consensus and as blurring the clear-

¹⁴⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006), 149.

¹⁴⁶ Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That?*, 186.

¹⁴⁷ Sara Ahmed, 'In the Name of Love', *Borderlands* Vol. 2, no. 3, 2003, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Benny Temkin and Niza Yanay, 'I Shoot Them with Words': An Analysis of Political Hate-Letters', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Oct., 1988), 481.

cut definition of the collective, will become the target for high levels of intra-collective hostility.¹⁴⁹ Temkin and Yanay also observe attempts at exclusion and conversion to be the two most common responses to this perceived threat to the collective identity: 'One [approach] is to try to 'send' them completely outside the collective through a radical process of exclusion. An alternative strategy is to persuade dissidents to rejoin it by coaxing them into changing their attitudes and behaviour.'¹⁵⁰ Exclusionary statements recur throughout Cunard's hate-mail file, with many writers calling on her to leave the United States altogether, while others try to persuade her to change her behaviour using threats of violence. The use of (often fictional) endorsing organisations is also highlighted as a noticeable feature of hate-mail in Temkin and Yanay's research, and many of Cunard's letters likewise claim to have ties with (or an intent to appeal to) collectives or higher powers like the American government, lynch squads or the Ku Klux Klan. Many also claim to express the beliefs of the wider American public and the demarcation of the collective national identity is repeatedly reasserted: 'you can't deceive the american public'; 'America don't want you'; 'we whip your country before and we can do it again' etc.¹⁵¹

Samuel Scheffler defines cultural cosmopolitanism as the belief that the individual is a 'citizen of the world', and resistance to the idea that the individual's identity 'depends on their membership in a determinate cultural group whose boundaries are reasonably clear and whose stability and cohesion are reasonably secure.'¹⁵² It is precisely this cosmopolitan disregard for national and cultural boundaries that renders Cunard such a dangerous figure in the eyes of those who would preserve the racial and cultural purity of the nation. As the journalist George Seldes observed in his memoir of Cunard, 'We who talk and write about nonconformity rarely have the courage to live the lives of nonconformists, but Nancy Cunard had the courage and paid the price society still demands.'¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 481-482.

¹⁵¹ Hate mail from the United States (1932), HRC NCC, Series II. Correspondence, 1908-1965, Box 20, Folder 8.

¹⁵² Samuel Scheffler, 'Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism', Chapter 7 of *Boundaries and Allegiances: Problems of Justice and Responsibility in Liberal Thought*, (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 112.

¹⁵³ George Seldes, 'Nancy Cunard', *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 163.

4 'Authors Take Sides': Transnationalism and Modernist Literary Culture

In recent years, modernist studies have undergone what has been described as a 'transnational turn', paralleled by a similar collective shift towards transnationalism across literary scholarship as a whole. In their 2008 article, 'The New Modernist Studies', Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz identified more than thirty recent publications which explore in different ways how modernism exceeds the limits of the Euro-American tradition and the boundaries of individual nation-states, in a change they refer to as 'the transnational turn' or 'the globalization of modernism.'¹ Their article identifies three new kinds of scholarship in the field: that which tries to widen modernism's archive beyond Europe and America to include alternative or peripheral writers and works; that which emphasises the importance of 'transnational circulation and translation'; and that which examines how modernist writers and artists responded to imperialism, participated in antiracist or anticolonial projects, and forged 'new models of transnational community.'² Recent scholarly work produced 'under the umbrella of transnational modernism' is here differentiated from an older model of international modernism like that of Eagleton's *Exiles and Émigrés* through its conscious effort to engage with postcolonial theory and/or 'make modernism less Eurocentric.'³ Since this article was published almost seven years ago, scholarship in this area has grown exponentially, inspiring a number of international conferences and the publication of a new reader engaging with this 'transnational turn.'⁴

Nancy Cunard's *Negro* anthology was the largest and most ambitious project of the period to have challenged contemporary attitudes to race and colonialism, incorporating pan-Africanism, African diasporic culture and Euro-American modernism into a single, politically-radical cultural work. The geographical layout of the anthology makes space for a

¹ Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA*, Volume 123, Number 3, May 2008, 741, 738, 739.

² *Ibid.*, 739.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See, for example, *The Global Handbook of Modernism*, ed. Mark Wollaeger & Matt Eatough (Oxford: OUP, 2012); Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Jessica Schiff Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

representation of national struggles for independence, but it also powerfully articulates Paul Gilroy's idea of 'the black Atlantic' through its documentation of African diasporic culture, politics, history and experience across continental and national divides.⁵ This is the project for which Cunard is now best known, and it has been instrumental to the arguments made in important transnational modernist studies like those of Brent Hayes Edwards and Laura Winkiel, whose work has examined the contribution made by the anthology to the chronicling of the black diasporic cultures of the 1930s.⁶ As Winkiel points out, although other black transnationalist projects such as Du Bois's *Crisis* magazine and *The Negro* (1915), and the French journal *La Revue du monde noir* predate the *Negro's* anthology's 'transnational effort', Cunard's project 'far outstripped previous efforts to document the formidable history and cultures of black people around the world.'⁷

Negro is arguably Cunard's most important work, but she played a significant role in fostering transnational networks between European, American and African diasporic writers, artists and intellectuals throughout her life, and in this chapter I will build on existing discussion of her participation in the transnational modernist cultures of the early twentieth century by incorporating other texts in her archive and different aspects of her political campaigning. I am particularly interested here in her work to galvanise transatlantic support for the Scottsboro campaign, her work as a poet, publisher, eyewitness correspondent and activist for the anti-fascist movement during the Spanish Civil War, and her contribution to anticolonial politics and pan-Africanism through her collaborations with George Padmore.

The concept of transnationalism has been used in recent criticism to differentiate from internationalism both in scale and agency. While internationalism has come to represent relationships between global governments, diplomats and larger international organisations, transnationalism can be said to describe the actions or experiences of smaller groups or individuals that transcend national boundaries. These are often described as coming 'from below', taking the form of 'a collection of episodic moments of

⁵ As Gilroy writes, 'The specificity of the modern political and cultural formation I want to call the black Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through [a] desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity.' *The Black Atlantic*, 19.

⁶ Laura Winkiel, 'Nancy Cunard's *Negro* and the Transnational Politics of Race', *Modernism/modernity*, Vol.13, No. 3, September 2006, 507-530. Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁷ Winkiel, 'Nancy Cunard's *Negro* and the Transnational Politics of Race', 508.

internationalist solidarity with little programmatic, strategic or political coherence.⁸ The literary critic Matthew Hart explains how this difference allows us to differentiate between the actions of 'cultural agents whom we might imagine operating 'below' the radar of the nation-state' and those of 'institutions such as, to use an example from the period between the wars, the Comintern.'⁹ Touching briefly on Cunard's work as a political anthologist, Hart describes how this concept of transnationalism carries over from the social and political sciences into the field of literary history, and why we need the term in place of an older model of internationalism:

[W]e need 'transnational' because no language or literature is truly global; we need alternatives to 'international' because the language of state-to-state relations cannot describe, for example, the networks of acquaintances and shared belief that inspired Nancy Cunard, W. H. Auden, and Stephen Spender to collaborate on *Authors Take Sides in the Spanish Civil War* (1937) [sic.]; and we need the perspective "from below" because the wartime experiences of individual authors such as Auden, Orwell or Lorca cannot be smoothly assimilated to the (far from smooth) institutional history of the Popular Front.¹⁰

As early as 1934, Cunard herself recognised the need for a form of global collectivism that went beyond the limits of internationalism. In an article on the controversial Dutch anthropologist and racial theorist Herman Marie Bernelot Moens, she reflected on how his idea of the 'Supra-Nation' could become a means to overthrow class-based as well as racial oppression, bringing 'liberty and inter-human equality'¹¹ to all races. The term

⁸ André C. Drainville, 'The Fetishism of Global Civic Society: Global Governance, Transnational Urbanism and Sustainable Capitalism in the World Economy', *Transnationalism from Below*, Michael Peter Smith & Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998), 47. It is worth noting here that while the term 'transnationalism' has often been used to describe the political/literary activities of Leftist groups and individuals, it is also often used to describe the weakening of the power of nation-states caused by the rise of global capitalism.

⁹ Matthew Hart, 'Transnationalism at the Departure Gate', *A Handbook of Modernism Studies*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté, (Chichester: Wiley, 2013), 159.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

¹¹ Cunard, 'Nancy Cunard Pays Tribute to Famous Dutch Anthropologist', the *New York Age*, 4th August 1934. This article was published accompanied by a short poem, 'The Supra-Nation', in which (reproducing Moens's theories) she subverts popular eugenicist arguments of the period which depended on ideas of racial and biological purity to imagine a 'perfect man' formed by the fusion of all the world's races:

Primitive, conscious, civilized, cultured—blood
Of the world in fusion to make perfect man,
Races are equal—this the future's plan [...]
The Supra-Nation crests the racial seas,

'supranational' is now commonly used in reference to overarching bodies that extend beyond the jurisdiction of individual nations, but Cunard used the term to describe a form of cultural self-identification that 'is more than international, in the sense that it is without, beyond the delimitation of nationality.'¹² In this chapter, I use the term 'transnationalism' to describe both this imagined, global, cosmopolitan attitude, and the worldwide network of social, political and textual relationships, solidarities and collaborations that linked Cunard and other writers and artists of this period.

The three examples I focus on in this chapter—Scottsboro, the Spanish Civil War, and anticolonialism in Britain in the 1940s—are all episodes of transnational collectivism that connect modernism with worldwide struggles against racism, fascism and imperialism in the interwar period. As Patricia Clavin has written, such interwar histories of 'transnational encounters' and political collaboration are of particular importance, since they can help counter the characterisation of the 1930s as 'a period of ultra-nationalism in which no spirit of internationalism could survive.'¹³

4.1 The Scottsboro Nine

The Scottsboro defence campaign was unprecedented in its transatlantic scope and powerful influence on public opinion, and the case became a *cause célèbre* of the period, attracting high-profile supporters such as Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, Langston Hughes, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf, H. G. Wells, Franz Boas, Harold Laski and Maxim Gorky.¹⁴ Cunard played a key role in organising British support for the Scottsboro campaign in the early 1930s and the case remained an important concern for her until the mid to late 1940s when the final defendant was released and another went missing.¹⁵ The campaign focused on a group of nine African-American teenagers put on trial in Scottsboro, Alabama, who had

Docks in new sunset splendours, where the great
Banquet transcendent science that no State
May triumph over.

¹² *Ibid.* Many years later she would ask, 'do not all those who cruise the seas develop a sort of supra-national identity?' Cunard, *These Were the Hours*, 48.

¹³ Patricia Clavin, 'Conceptualising Internationalism Between the World Wars', *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars*, ed. Daniel Laqua, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 3.

¹⁴ Cunard, *Negro*, 259.

¹⁵ Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 196.

been wrongfully accused of raping two white women, Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, on a freight train from Chattanooga to Memphis on 25th March, 1931. Although Ruby Bates subsequently recanted her story and affidavits were collected which called into question the reliability of the alleged victims' testimonies, eight of the nine boys, all of whom were aged between 12 and 19, were found guilty by all-white juries and sentenced to death. As Cunard reported at the time, the jury members were never questioned, as they ought to have been, on whether they held any racial prejudices against the defendants. None of the defendants was ever executed for their alleged crime; five were exonerated on appeal, one conviction was overturned in 1976, and then in 2013, 80 years after they were first accused and arrested, the last three of the Scottsboro Boys were issued with posthumous pardons by the Alabama Board of Pardon and Paroles.

Cunard became familiar with the details of the Scottsboro case during her first trip to Harlem in 1931 and immediately sent money to the boys' families and began raising funds for their defence. By 1933, she was working on two essays about Scottsboro for the *Negro* anthology and serving as the Honorary Treasurer of the Scottsboro Defence Committee in Britain, which organised protests, petitions, benefit events and film screenings in support of the campaign. Her archives include the original petition signatures collected from hundreds of members of the public as well as those of many famous writers of the day. Included among the signatories to a petition she organised in 1933, sent 'in an informal and personal manner'¹⁶ to all the writers and intellectuals she could think of, were Norman Douglas, Samuel Beckett and Ezra Pound, who wrote on his petition slip, 'I not only protest, but if this sort of judicial sanction of murder and frame-up continues I shd. be disposed to advocate direct action. [...] even a state sanely founded can not indefinitely continue if it condones and sanctions legal murder of innocent men.'¹⁷ Pound's contribution here is particularly remarkable given the racist (and anti-Semitic) remarks he makes elsewhere: in response to Cunard's reporting on the Abyssinia crisis, he had told her she had wasted her time and that Ethiopians were 'black Jews.'¹⁸ As with the other political and poetical anthologies she compiled throughout her life, Cunard here used her personal modernist network for political benefit. Among the fundraising events Cunard helped organise were a screening of Sergei Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin*, a demonstration in Hyde Park, a Scottsboro Defence Gala at the Phoenix Theatre and two 'Interracial Dances',

¹⁶ 'Scottsboro Appeal', typewritten statement, HRC NCC Box 28, Folder 6.

¹⁷ Scottsboro petition slips, HRC NCC, Box 28, Folder 6.

¹⁸ Letter from Pound to Cunard, 11th June 1946, HRC NCC Box 10, Folder 6. During the Second World War, Cunard translated Ezra Pound's fascist broadcasts from Italy as a radio monitor for *France Libre*.

which attracted global press attention. The journalists reporting on these events were equally as interested in the 'cosmopolitan'¹⁹ mix of guests as they were the issues of the Scottsboro case, and Cunard had no doubt calculated that an expressly 'black and white' dance would attract wide coverage in the press. The London *Daily Express* described one of these 'exotic' parties, which featured an indoor swimming pool and blazing sun lamps, as 'one of the most spectacular and curious parties that can ever have been held in this country.'²⁰ The Toronto *Star* reported that the air on the night was 'practically solid with smoke and enthusiasm' and that 'Miss Cunard, dressed in black with an enormous ivory bracelet on one arm, stood as a rallying point for the races which danced and chatted in the cause of her negro martyrs. She has been the object of hostile criticism in America. She has quarrelled with her mother. But she would sacrifice and endure anything for the advancement of her beliefs.'²¹

The American campaign was run briefly by the NAACP and subsequently by the International Labor Defence (ILD), the legal wing of the Communist Party of the United States. The two groups had struggled publicly over the defence of the Scottsboro Boys; while the ILD had been accused of hijacking the internationalist scope and high profile of the campaign for its own political gain, bourgeois NAACP representatives were said to have neglected their legal duties and alienated the working-class families of the defendants. The success of ILD representatives was dependent finally on their better ability to connect with the families: as Mark Solomon has written, '[t]he reds had cultivated a sensitivity to impoverished, vulnerable families that was beyond the reach of the middle-class NAACP', one of whose representatives had described the Scottsboro families as 'the densest and dumbest animals it has yet been my privilege to meet.'²² The ILD was also highly effective in its use of mass pressure and public protest alongside their legal defence, tactics Cunard reports the NAACP had always been against.

Cunard's writing on the case largely follows the ILD's Communist line. Her hostility towards the NAACP for its failure to provide an adequate defence is made clear throughout the anthology, but particularly in an article titled 'A Reactionary Negro Organisation', in which she lambasts the NAACP for instructing their lawyer to request life sentences for the defendants instead of formal pardons, and for delaying the handing over of donated funds

¹⁹ 'Aid for Gaoled Negroes', *Daily Mail*, London, 10th July 1933.

²⁰ 'Miss Nancy Cunard's Exotic Party', *Daily Express*, London, 5th July 1933.

²¹ 'Sun-Ray Lamps Beam at Pro-Negro Dance', *Star*, Toronto, 5th August 1933.

²² Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 198-199.

once the case had been taken over by the ILD, which had in the meantime had the original verdicts overturned in the Supreme Court. Cunard's article suggests that had the NAACP retained control over the defence, the defendants would by that time have been yet more 'framed-up black victims' wrongly sentenced to death by the American justice system. In answer to the NAACP's claim that the Communist party had merely hoped to use the case 'as propaganda for their cause of world revolution', Cunard responded that 'the Communists are the most militant defenders and organisers that the Negro race has ever had', and that '[t]ime and time again white comrades [had] been killed for this.' (146)

Cunard's long essay 'Scottsboro and Other Scottsboros' provides a valuable record of the events of the early trials and situates the case within a broader context of class and race oppression across the United States. Her wider anti-racist, socialist arguments appear to follow the lead of the *Daily Worker*, which gave regular front-page coverage to the case as 'an expression of the horrible national oppression of the Negro masses'.²³ The wide attention given to the case in Cunard's transnationally-conceived *Negro* anthology also positions the campaign within the framework of global struggles against racist oppression and imperial exploitation. She begins by stating that the Scottsboro case is not 'such an astounding and unbelievable thing as it must [...] appear to the public at large', since 'capitalist oppression and brutality' make every black worker 'a potential victim of lynching, murder and legal lynching by the white ruling class, simply because he is a worker and black.' (245) 'No, this frame-up is not unparalleled,' she writes, 'though the scale of it and its colossal development into what is now really a world issue, are so.' (245)

The international outcry she documents truly was remarkable, even in spite of American pressure to keep the case out of the European press and to prevent ILD representatives and the families of the defendants from addressing audiences in Europe. As she records:

Protests were pouring in from all over the world. Workers' organisations had signed by the tens of thousands. The first mass manifestations to take place in Europe were outside the American consulate in Berlin; the militancy and anger of the German workers was supreme. Soon there were demonstrations in front of the American consulates in other countries; the legations were wiring to America for orders as to what attitude to take as these manifestations had great effect. [...] Protests poured in from the workers of the Soviet Union, of China, of Mexico. *L'Humanité*, in Paris, lists in one day, just before the execution was postponed by the appeal, the following protests:

²³ *Daily Worker*, January 31st 1933.

40,000 Parisian workers. The Fédération Unitaire des Métaux.
 Jeunesses Communistes. Italian Section of the Red Aid.
 15,000 members of the Parisian Municipal Workers.
 The Ligue de la Défense de la Race Nègre.
 [...] The total number of protests [petition signatories] from all over the world is
 listed at some 10,000,000.

(255, 259)

Ada Wright, the mother of two of the Scottsboro Boys, travelled around Europe in 1932 to speak in front of various labour groups and public audiences about the details of the case and racist exploitation in the United States, and some of the details are recorded in this essay.²⁴ Although Cunard herself had campaigned tirelessly to raise the profile of this particular case, she was anxious for the international publicity it had received to shine a light on the countless other lesser-publicised miscarriages of justice, lynchings and murders of black men and women committed under 'the reign of terror in "the deep south"', dozens of which are listed and briefly summarised in her article (245-249). She observes that not a single one of these crimes had ever been punished.

These records of black victims of lynchings and racist attacks, taken from the ILD's weekly press releases, are part of a myriad of multimedia documents she includes in her essay, which also incorporates photographs of the Scottsboro Boys and their families, images of various protests in England and America, a letter written by the state witness and alleged victim Ruby Bates, reprinted newspaper articles, lists of high-profile supporters, a letter from Andy Wright (one of the defendants) to his mother, and various ILD documents. The essay also includes a staccato, testimonial-style account of the Decatur retrial on March 27th, 1932, which begins:

On this first trial day, the judge, Horton, overrules the defence's demand that all the indictments be quashed on the grounds of the absence of Negro jurors. [State Attorney Prosecutor] Knight's cracker spirit begins to rise. He addresses the witness Tom Sanford, Negro plasterer, as "John," bullies and browbeats him. [The defense counsel] Leibowitz remarks sharply, "Call witness Mr. Sanford." "Not doing that," answers Knight. Then a lynch-inciting pamphlet is discovered. It is being hawked about in the crowd. A battle opens between defence and prosecution; Leibowitz

²⁴ James A. Miller et. al. observe that Cunard's account of Ada Wright's visit to London appears to have been borrowed, unattributed, from the *Daily Worker*. James A. Miller, Susan D. Pennybacker and Eve Rosenhaft, 'Mother Ada Wright and the International Campaign to Free the Scottsboro Boys, 1931-1934', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 2, April 2001, 404.

demands its suppression, Knight defends its right to be circulated. Finally the judge has it confiscated.

(263)

Cunard's dramatised, eyewitness account (she was not present at any of the trials, and would perhaps have taken this from the courts transcripts or media reports) and the assorted primary documents she pastes into the essay give her writing about the Scottsboro trials an immediacy that brilliantly conveys the urgency and complexity of the events of the period, from campaigners' grassroots activism and the press coverage of the case, to political and state interference and the dramatic events of the trials themselves. This kind of documentary assemblage, as we saw in Chapter 2, reflects the collecting dimension of Cunard's political *modus operandi*; the shape of her Scottsboro essay appears therefore as a microcosm of the composite, collage-like structure of the anthology as a whole. Although her essay is a strongly polemical protest on behalf of the ILD defence of the Scottsboro boys, the textual fragmentation of the piece avoids presenting a masterful narrative account of the trials, even as these documents give weight to her political arguments.

Scottsboro was a global, anti-racist campaign that attracted support from prominent modernist writers, artists and intellectuals from around the world. In June 1937, as the Scottsboro Boys faced their fourth trial, Kay Boyle addressed a poem to Cunard on the case titled 'A Communication to Nancy Cunard', which was published in *The New Republic*. As Ellen McWhorter records, the case had by this time become a 'lightning-rod for committed artists' and the publication of Boyle's poem prompted the American modernist composer Miriam Gideon, who was still a student at the time, to set the text to music, 'with three separate choral societies in New York ready to perform the final work.'²⁵ Boyle's aim with this poem was to continue the act of bearing witness her friend Cunard had begun several years earlier with 'Scottsboro and Other Scottsboros', extending the essay's dramatised, documentary method into a literary work. The poem incorporates lines thought to have been cut and pasted from Boyle's private correspondence with one of the Scottsboro Boys, Haywood Patterson, as well as passages of reformed or reimagined witness testimony, which she breaks up over stark, jagged line breaks:

²⁵ Ellen McWhorter, 'On "Communication to Nancy Cunard"', *Modern American Poetry*, http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/boyle/cunard.htm McWhorter records that Boyle also apparently also acknowledged her indebtedness to Carleton Beals, who had written an account of the events of this trial for *The Nation*.

The Testimony

Haywood Patterson:

"So here goes an I shell try
 Faitfully an I possibly can
 Reference to myself in particularly
 And concerning the other boys personal pride
 And life upto now.
 You must be patiene with me and remember
 Most of my English is not of much interest
 And that I am continually
 Stopping and searching for the word."²⁶

Victoria Price:

"I
 cain't
 remember."

"I
 cain't
 remember."

Haywood Patterson's laboured articulation of his innocence is here set alongside Victoria Price's damning silence: as McWhorter observes, 'Within the judicial sphere, Price's silence and Patterson's uneven speech both serve to convict him; she did not need to speak in order for him to be convicted, and nothing he could have said could have prevented him from being convicted.'²⁷ Like the *Negro* anthology, Boyle's Scottsboro poem is a work of documentary modernism that blends modernist forms with a commitment to factual reportage. And just as Cunard had praised the poetry she printed in *Negro* for its basis in facts, she recognised this same truth-telling purpose of Boyle's text, writing on her typescript of the poem, 'in this superb poem every word she wrote is factual truth'.²⁸

The Scottsboro campaign has been interpreted by some historians as a forerunner to the later civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, which brought an end to legal segregation in the United States; others have interpreted it as the first international campaign for human rights and a template for subsequent global appeals to secure the release of political prisoners from Andrei Sakharov to Nelson Mandela.²⁹ The high-profile support of writers around the world such as Boyle, Cunard, and others is interesting in itself, but what was most remarkable about the campaign was the unprecedented transnational solidarity if fostered between local activists, labour groups and the wider public, and Cunard played an important grassroots role in publicising the case, soliciting petition

²⁶ Kay Boyle, 'A Communication to Nancy Cunard', *The New Republic*, June 9th 1937, 127.

²⁷ McWhorter, 'On Communication to Nancy Cunard'.

²⁸ *ibid.* Cunard translated the poem into French in 1948 and sent a copy to Boyle. HRC NCC, Box 31, Folder 4.

²⁹ Steven J. Niven, 'Scottsboro Boys', *Harlem Renaissance Lives from the African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates & Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 448.

signatories, fundraising and organising protests. This was also the period when she began her twenty-year career as a correspondent for Associate Negro Press (ANP), which circulated her reports on the Scottsboro case among black newspapers around the world.³⁰

4.2 Authors Take Sides: Poetry, Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War

There are some poets, some writers, to whom the burdens, the problems, the tragedies of suffering humanity become as their own. A question of individual temperament. Yet it is obvious that this must happen most to revolutionary and anti-Fascist writers. Life as it is to-day makes us aghast; we revolt against what, in this present phase, has brought it to this pass: Fascism. We want to smash Fascism, for ever and everywhere. [...] No more frontiers—no more hatred between men.

Nancy Cunard, '3 Negro Poets'³¹

The Spanish Civil War became a 'rallying point' for a generation of socially and politically engaged liberal writers in the West who had until then lacked a single unified purpose in their opposition to the rising threat of international Fascism. It also acted as a catalyst on many non-political writers, 'bringing to the surface their half-formulated political theories and humanitarian hopes,' while the birth of Leftist publications such as the *Left Review* and *New Writing* provided political writers in Britain with a new receptive readership.³² Many liberal intellectuals and members of the mobilised Left travelled to Spain to offer humanitarian support or report on the conflict, but many were also drawn to the prospect of armed resistance on behalf of the principles they had advocated in their writings and political meetings. As W. H. Auden famously said of this period, 'I shall probably be a bloody bad soldier. But how can I speak to/for them without becoming one?'³³ Among some of the most famous of the writers who travelled to Spain along with Auden during this period were Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, Louis Aragon, Pablo Neruda, George Orwell and Langston Hughes. Cunard provided aid relief, fundraised, campaigned

³⁰ Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 201.

³¹ Nancy Cunard, '3 Negro Poets', *Left Review* 3, no. 9 (October 1937): 535-536.

³² Hugh Ford, *A Poet's War: British Poets and the Spanish Civil War*, (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1965), 19-20.

³³ Cited in Humphrey Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Biography*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 207.

for the release of Republican prisoners, and worked as a journalist on the front lines from 1936 until the final days of the conflict in 1939, when she was one of the last eyewitness correspondents there reporting on the plight of Spanish refugees, many of whom she helped gain safe passage into France or South America. In 1937, she attended the Second Congress of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture in Madrid. Langston Hughes and Cunard both wrote reports for ANP on the role played by African American and other black volunteers in the Republican-supporting Abraham Lincoln and International Brigades, some of whom were fighting against Moorish battalions conscripted by Franco into his *Ejército de África*.

Many rightly believed then that the Spanish war would have a decisive effect on the future of European politics and was the prelude to another major international conflict. In August 1936, Cunard wrote that the spread of Fascism to France, 'engineered by the alliances of the fascist leaders of diverse countries, [was] foremost in the minds of all.'³⁴ The transnational collectivism of this period can be understood as a response to what Eric Hobsbawm describes as 'an international ideological civil war': 'international [...] because it raised essentially the same issues in most Western countries', and 'civil [...] because the lines between the pro- and anti-fascist forces ran through each society.'³⁵ Anglophone support fell overwhelmingly on the side of the Republican government, but some on the right saw the insurgents as the last defence against the spread of Communism in the West. With the benefit of historical perspective and in light of materials uncovered with the opening up of the Soviet archives, revisionist accounts of the Spanish Civil War now offer a more nuanced understanding of the conflict, looking at the duplicitous role played by Stalin, the effects of the West's noninterventionist policy, infighting among Communist factions, and the weakness of some Republican leaders. It has also been suggested that the international attention given to the conflict was not universally welcomed, escalating what was seen from its beginnings as a proxy war.³⁶ At the time, however, most saw the Spanish Civil War as a polarised, ideological battle between antifascism and fascism, a straightforward struggle between the allies and enemies of democratic freedom.

³⁴ Cunard, 'Blacks in Spanish Revolution Fighting on Side of Royalists', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 22nd August 1936.

³⁵ Cited in Schweizer, *Radicals on the Road*, 9.

³⁶ These revisionist arguments, made by Stanley Payne, Paul Preston and others are summarised by Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 218-219. See also Jeremy Treglown, 'How Anglo writers stole the story of the Spanish Civil War', *New Statesman*, 23rd May 2014.

Cunard's Spanish Civil War work is very much a product of this polarised political climate. Her eyewitness reportage, written for ANP, the Republican-supporting *Manchester Guardian*, Sylvia Pankhurst's *New Times*, and Charles Duff's *Spanish Newsletter*, *Spain at War* and *Voice of Spain*, is unashamedly partisan, making no effort to hide her political sympathies. Again, she returned to the literary collection as a form of political activism, first publishing a sequence of poetry anthologies sold in London and Paris in aid of the Republican cause and soon afterwards a collection of statements about the conflict written by international writers. The first of these, a series of six multilingual pamphlets of poetry in English, Spanish and French, *Les Poètes du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol* (1937), was co-edited with Pablo Neruda, who was serving as the Chilean consul in Madrid. Neruda had encouraged her to take up this project after she had suggested it to him at his house *La Casa de las Flores*, which served as a hub for left-wing intellectuals at the time. She returned to her old Mathieu press at Réanville and began printing the leaflets with Neruda, which included poems by Cunard, Tristan Tzara, Louis Aragon and Langston Hughes; the fifth pamphlet they published is also likely to have marked the first publication of Auden's poem 'Spain', the most celebrated of poems written in English on the Spanish Civil War. Jeremy Treglown has written interestingly on the dominant Anglocentric understanding of this war, which he suggests has come about partly as a result of the prominence given to English and American literary responses to the conflict. He cites, for example, Michael Schmidt's observation in the *New Statesman* that the 1980 Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse, a source used by students of the period for many years, included very little Spanish writing.³⁷ Cunard and Neruda's series of poetry pamphlets then is particularly significant given the wide selection of Spanish contributions it includes, from Neruda himself, Rafael Alberti, Gonzales Tunon, Vicente Aleixandre and Federico García Lorca, who was executed by Spanish Nationalist forces in 1936. Like John Lehmann's periodical *New Writing*, these pamphlets brought native authors to an audience still relatively unfamiliar with Spanish literary responses to the conflict.³⁸ Through their publication of *Les Poètes du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol*, Cunard and Neruda expressed a commitment to producing a transnational and multilingual poetic response to the Spanish Civil War, founded on political solidarity with the Republican cause.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ John Lehmann made a conscious decision to translate and publish poetry of 'the Spanish experience' in Britain in the face of this Anglocentrism. See Gayle Rogers, *Modernism and the New Spain: Britain, Cosmopolitan Europe, and Literary History*, (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 179.

The language of Cunard's own poems on Spain differs radically from the conscious avant-gardism of earlier works like *Parallax* and marks a shift towards a more markedly direct, politicised poetics:

By the shards of the southern wasteland,...Arguélles,.Vallécas,
Lírias's Palace in rivers of flame...
By the Puente de los Franceses, by the Southern Station,
Cuatro Caminos, Tetuán (the air bursting with death)...
By Úsera, Araváca, Garabítas,
By Las Véntas, Monclóa, Lavapiés,

B a t t l e.

If the poets be not dead—but what matter if the poets be dead—
Nothing matters but Madrid in its winter of death and dying—
Yet the poets were not dead; they came, anguished, wondering, and erect
Men of Madrid and women, and children on road and street
Taught what a clenched fist means when what is in it is truth.³⁹

Publishers were generally unreceptive towards Cunard's later poems. In an internal memo sent to Leonard Woolf at the Hogarth Press, John Lehmann wrote: 'I agree with you that for personal reasons one would rather like to make an offer for this book of poems. They are, however, no more my cup of tea than yours and they do not strike me as being in any way effective as poetry, in spite of a generous indignation against injustice and suffering that runs through them all.'⁴⁰ For Cunard, art and politics were deeply and irrevocably intertwined, and this 'generous indignation against injustice and suffering' extends throughout her poetry, from the as yet unfocused altruism of her early poetry written with the outbreak of the First World War —'Now let me bear alone the ageing world/ On firmer shoulders than the giant Atlas. / Make me symbolic'ly iconoclast'⁴¹—to these later political poems on the Spanish Civil War based on her experience as a freelance war correspondent. (Hugh Ford uses the apt term 'verse journalism' to describe the poetics of this latter period.⁴²) Where other Spanish Civil War writers came to repudiate their writing of this period (Auden described the work he wrote then as 'trash' and excluded it from his

³⁹ Cunard, 'December 1936, M a d r i d,' from 'Sequences from a Long Epic on Spain', *Poems of Nancy Cunard from the Bodleian Library*, ed. John Lucas, (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2005), 55.

⁴⁰ John Lehmann, internal memo to Leonard Woolf at the Hogarth Press 12th January 1945. From the Leonard Woolf Papers, University of Sussex Special Collections at The Keep, SxMs-13/4/14/2/2.

⁴¹ Cunard, 'Prayer', *Outlaws*, (London: Elkin Mathews, 1921), 41. (This poem was written in 1914. See Lucas ed. *Poems of Nancy Cunard*, 25.)

⁴² Ford, *A Poet's War*, p.24.

collected poems⁴³), Cunard remained faithful to this socially-conscious poetics of protest, writing in this mode until the end of her life. Following Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel's model of alternative 'geomodernisms', the overt political nature and 'apparently nonexperimental aesthetics'⁴⁴ of this later work need not necessarily place it outside the boundaries of the modernist project.

Later poetic works of Cunard's that never made it to publication include *Passport to Freedom*, a sequence of seven poems addressed to seven countries (France, Italy, Russia, Spain, Germany, England, America) during the Second World War, and an unfinished epic poem on Spain. To cite Brecht's famous comment on poetical exigency, Cunard believed that 'lyric poetry especially ought without doubt to be a thing we must be able to examine for its usefulness'⁴⁵: this manifested both in her use of poetry anthologies as international political rallying cries and as a means to raise funds for political causes, and in the increasing emphasis on bearing witness to political injustice in her own poetic output. In an essay for the *Left Review* on Langston Hughes, Nicolás Guillén and Jacques Roumain, Cunard begins by quoting the anti-Fascist German writer Ludwig Renn, who worked as a commander for the Spanish People's Army. Speaking at the Second International Writers' Congress in Madrid in 1937, Renn declared that the role of the writer was no longer to 'make stories but to make history.'⁴⁶ The act of witnessing, as Soshana Felman writes, can be described as '*an apprenticeship in history*' in which the 'historical crisis of the witness brings about a certain form of *cognition*'.⁴⁷ The lines quoted above from 'December 1936, Madrid', from her long, unfinished Spanish epic, describe a writer likewise politically and poetically reformed by the experience of war: she has been 'Taught what a clenched fist means when it is in truth', by what had become a literal and symbolic struggle between fascism and democracy.

In his review of the prevalent opposition towards neutral politics in the 1930s, Valentine Cunningham cites the writer Frank Chapman, who observed in 1936 the 'increasing anxiety among writers [...] to find something firm to cling to in the chaos of

⁴³ Carpenter, *W. H. Auden*, 331.

⁴⁴ Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, 'Introduction: The Global Horizons of Modernism', *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*. (Chesham: Indiana University Press, 2005), 7.

⁴⁵ Bertolt Brecht, cited in David Constantine, 'The Usefulness of Poetry', from Ronald Speirs ed. *Brecht's Poetry of Political Exile*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29.

⁴⁶ See Cunard, '3 Negro Poets', 529.

⁴⁷ Soshana Felman, 'Camus' *The Plague*, or a Monument to Witnessing', in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Soshana Felman & Dori Laub (London: Routledge, 1992), 109-110. Emphasis in original.

contemporary life; the determination to be on one side or the other of the fence, not sitting on it as a mark for both parties. To join no party seems, now, a sign of weakmindedness.⁴⁸ More than any other text of this period, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (1937) represents the stark political divide that ran through this generation of writers, and the pressure they faced to make public pronouncements about their political affiliations. Cunard had written to her friend Anthony Thorne early in the conflict to tell him of her feeling that she 'ought to be doing something for Spain (literary) in connection with England. But what? It is the most difficult subject to deal in, because people (in sufficient numbers) in England shy away from the subject 'like mad', possibly from a bad conscience.'⁴⁹

She settled on the idea of a survey to be sent out to writers and poets soliciting their opinions on the war; responses quickly began to arrive, and 148 were printed as a sixpenny pamphlet by the *Left Review*. Within a fortnight of publication, 5,000 copies had been sold. Cunard's inclusion of eleven other signatories on the title page, including Auden, Neruda, Tzara and Aragon, has led to the wide impression that the anthology was edited collectively with the other listed writers and artists, but she in fact wrote the questionnaire and devised and organised this project from the outset. Her survey asked:

The equivocal attitude, the Ivory Tower, the paradoxical,
the ironic detachment, will no longer do. [...]

This is the question we are asking you:

**Are you for, or against the legal Government
and the People of Republican Spain?**

Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?

It is impossible any longer to take no side.⁵⁰

The first two lines here read like a critique of 'high' modernist cultural formations, which sits at odds with Cunard's own active participation in modernist scenes (not to mention that of her elite band of co-signatories). The responses were of course overwhelmingly in favour of the Republican cause: of the 148 printed responses, 127 were for the government, 5 against,

⁴⁸ Valentine Cunningham, 'Neutral?: 1930s Writers and Taking Sides', *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s*, ed. Frank Gloversmith, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 45.

⁴⁹ Letter from Nancy Cunard to Anthony Thorne, 'A Share of Nancy', *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 297-298.

⁵⁰ Cunard, 'The Question', *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*, (London: Left Review, 1937), unpaginated. Emphasis in original.

and 16 neutral.⁵¹ Among those who expressed support for the Republicans were Samuel Beckett, Kay Boyle, Ford Madox Ford, Aldous Huxley, Sylvia Pankhurst, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Rebecca West and Leonard Woolf. The five negative respondents were Edmund Blunden, Arthur Machen, Geoffrey Moss, Eleanor Smith and Evelyn Waugh, who wrote 'If I were a Spaniard I should be fighting for General Franco. As an Englishman I am not in the predicament of choosing between two evils'.⁵² Among the neutrals were Vera Brittain, who wrote that as a pacifist she could not support either side of the conflict, Norman Douglas, T. S. Eliot, H. G. Wells, Vita Sackville-West and Ezra Pound, who wrote in his typical vituperative style that 'Spain is an emotional luxury of a gang of sap-headed dilettantes'.⁵³ Many of these neutral or anti-republican respondents protested against the polarised rhetoric and unashamed bias of the survey. As Waugh complained, 'I am not a Fascist nor shall I become one unless it were the only alternative to Marxism. It is mischievous to suggest that such a choice is imminent'.⁵⁴ Cunard, however, firmly believed that it was the responsibility of all artists and writers to state clearly their political affiliations in Spain, as she makes clear in her own response to the survey:

It is unthinkable for any honest intellectual to be profascist, as it is degenerate to be for Franco, the assassin of the Spanish and Arab people. Spain is not 'politics,' but life; its immediate future will affect every human who has a sense of what life and its facts mean, who has respect for himself and humanity. Above all others, the writer the intellectual must take sides. His place is with the people against fascism; his duty, to protest against the present degeneration of democracies.⁵⁵

⁵¹ At least 173 statements were received but only 148 printed because of space limitations. Lesser-known writers were excluded. The publisher, Randall Swingler, prefaced the text with a note stressing, 'in no instance has an Answer been omitted on grounds of "policy"'. All the omitted answers also spoke in favour of the Government. One last minute 'unclassified' entry from George Bernard Shaw was also added at the last minute, bringing the final total to 149.

⁵² Waugh, *Authors Take Sides*, unpaginated.

⁵³ George Orwell's pointed, homophobic response was not included: 'Will you please stop sending me this bloody rubbish. This is the second or third time I have had it. I am not one of your fashionable pansies like Auden or Spender, I was six months in Spain, most of the time fighting, I have a bullet hole in me at present and I am not going to write blah about defending democracy or gallant little anybody.' Cunard wrote to the publisher, Randall Swingler, 'as this is not in any sense an "answer" we are spared the mere query, even, of how to deal with it.' Cited by Andy Croft in *Comrade Heart: A Life of Randall Swingler*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 67-68. Orwell had travelled to Spain to fight against fascism but became disillusioned by the infighting and suspicion between different Communist factions. His account *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) is widely seen as one of the more valuable and truthful accounts of the conflict.

⁵⁴ Waugh, *Authors Take Sides*, unpaginated.

⁵⁵ Cunard, *Authors Take Sides*, unpaginated.

It is little wonder that in the wake of this kind of public political climate Auden reflected later that his famous poem 'Spain' had expressed 'an attitude which for a few weeks or months he had felt intellectually forced to adopt.'⁵⁶

The multinational writers Marcus Garvey, C. L. R. James, George Padmore, and Mulk Raj Anand (all of whom were living in London at the time) wrote passionately in support of the Spanish Republican government. This transnational, multiracial dimension to *Authors Take Sides* is often overlooked. The participation of the first three would have been thanks to the transnational intellectual network Cunard had formed while compiling *Negro* and her ongoing collaborations with Padmore; the Indian writer Anand she knew personally, and he wrote a chapter about her in his Bloomsbury memoirs.⁵⁷ George Padmore's response, which articulates the links between Spain and the recent Abyssinia crisis, is among the more interesting contributions to the anthology. While attesting to the solidarity between African colonial peoples and fighters against Fascism in Spain, Padmore is unafraid to criticise the Spanish government for 'failing to make an anti-imperialist gesture to the Moors' and says that this 'should be a reminder to the European workers that: 'No people who oppress another people can themselves be free.'⁵⁸ These arguments would be echoed in *The White Man's Duty* (1942), a successful pamphlet he co-wrote with Cunard on the failure of European allied nations to offer increased sovereignty to colonial peoples in return for their support in the fight against fascism. *Authors Take Sides* was clearly a divisive project, calling as it does for such polarised opinions on events in Spain, but it also documents the transnational political affiliations of a community of poets and writers who spoke out overwhelmingly against fascism and in favour of the Second Spanish Republic. As such, it also challenges the distinctions that are usually drawn between 'high' aesthetic modernism and the more politically engaged writing of the 1930s.

Cunard firmly believed in the political responsibilities of writers and later became involved in PEN International, an organisation founded in the aftermath of the First World War to bring together writers from former adversary nations in support of peace and freedom of expression. The stated aim of *Authors Take Sides* was to publicise the views on Spain of 'writers and poets, who are among the most sensitive instruments of a nation'⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Stephen Spender, cited by Michael Thurston in *Making Something Happen: American Political Poetry between the World Wars*, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 223.

⁵⁷ Mulk Raj Anand, 'Crumpets with Nancy Cunard and Catherine Carswell at Whytelady's', *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1981).

⁵⁸ Padmore, *Authors Take Sides*, unpaginated.

⁵⁹ Cunard, *Authors Take Sides*, unpaginated.

and therefore uniquely qualified, in Cunard's eyes, to respond to global political events. E. M. Forster, however, politely declined to participate in the anthology because he '[did] not feel that manifestoes by writers carry any weight whatever'.⁶⁰ Whatever truth there may be to this observation, *Authors Take Sides* marked the beginning of a new literary genre and a new form of political protest: as Cunard's biographer Anne Chisholm notes, 'the idea that it was useful to collect names of well-known writers and thinkers in support of political causes in other countries has tended to reappear, in the form of letters to periodicals as well as specially published documents.'⁶¹ The year after Cunard's anthology was published, a counterpart volume was published in New York, titled *Writers Take Sides: Letters about the War in Spain from 418 American Authors*, which included contributions from John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. This genre has also stretched well into the twentieth century and beyond: more recently, there has been the publication of *Authors Take Sides on Vietnam* (1967); *Authors Take Sides on the Falklands* (1982); and *Authors Take Sides: Iraq and the Gulf War* (2004).

4.3 Pan-Africanism and Decolonisation in *The White Man's Duty*

In 1942, Cunard began work on a collaborative project with the influential pan-Africanist George Padmore on the question of how the Second World War ought to affect Europe's attitude towards its colonies. Titled *The White Man's Duty: An Analysis of the Colonial Question in Light of the Atlantic Charter*, Cunard and Padmore's pamphlet is a record of several conversations between the two about race relations and decolonisation, transcribed almost verbatim by Padmore's partner, Dorothy Pizer. Published as a popular 'Hurricane Ninepenny' pamphlet by W. H. Allen, the first printing of 12,500 copies sold out within a few months and a second printing of 5,880 copies sold out soon after; a third imprint was requested but the publishers were unable to meet demand because of wartime paper shortages.⁶²

Although initially concerned about Cunard's press notoriety, Padmore became one of her two chief collaborators on *Negro*, contributing four essays, advice and useful contacts

⁶⁰ Cited by Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 240.

⁶¹ Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 242.

⁶² Moynagh, *Essays on Race and Empire*, 70.

for the project.⁶³ After the anthology was published, she helped produce the manuscript for his treatise, *How Britain Rules Africa*, which set out to awaken workers in Western capitalist countries to the continuing exploitation of peoples in Britain's colonies. The *Negro* anthology is clearly aligned with Padmore's advocacy of a transnational conception of black struggles, which he articulated both in terms of pan-Africanism and radical black Communism. He was for several years editor of the black Communist periodical the *Negro Worker*, which also influenced many of the arguments Cunard makes in the *Negro* anthology.⁶⁴ In an influential pamphlet, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (1931), Padmore described Garveyism as 'the most reactionary expression in Negro bourgeois nationalism [...] alien to the interests of Negro toilers', which used 'the same demagogic methods of appeal used by the leaders of Zionism'.⁶⁵ In *Negro*, Cunard's writing closely follows Padmore's language and thinking: Garveyism was for her, a 'sort of Zionism' and '[t]he wrong kind of pride; a race pride which stopped at that, and paid no heed to the very real and concrete misery, oppression and struggles of the Negro toiling millions throughout the States.' (68)

Although it was a collaborative work, Padmore provides the main political momentum and argumentation in the conversations in *The White Man's Duty*. The pamphlet was, as Leslie James observes, 'a prime example of Padmore's practice of taking the words of the colonizer, of making visible government pronouncements regarding colonial governance, and holding them to account'.⁶⁶ It responded to the publication of the Atlantic Charter, an eight-clause policy statement signed by Britain and the United States in August 1941 in which both nations agreed to certain common principles, including a pact against territorial aggrandisement and a pledge to disarm aggressive nations after the war. The basis and main focus of *The White Man's Duty* is the third clause of the statement, which pledged to 'respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and [...] to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who

⁶³ The two had first met in 1932. Around this time, Padmore wrote to his friend Arnold Ward, presumably in the wake of the New York press scandal, 'I am sending you a Negro newspaper with news about Nancy. [...] She certainly makes herself cheap with all this newspaper notoriety.' Cited by Miller et. al., 'Mother Ada Wright', 424. Michelet was Cunard's principal collaborator on *Negro*.

⁶⁴ Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 224.

⁶⁵ George Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, (London: Red International of Labour of Unions Magazine for the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 1931), 126.

⁶⁶ Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 52.

have been forcibly deprived of them.⁶⁷ When asked at a West African Students' Union meeting in London whether this applied to Britain's colonies, the Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee had replied that there was no reason to think 'that the freedom and social security for which [Britain was] fighting should be denied to any of the races of mankind', forcing Churchill to issue subsequent rebuttal statements, initially in the House and later through the acting chief secretary of the Nigerian government.⁶⁸ As Padmore observes in one section of the dialogue, '[y]ou would suppose, from the way in which it is worded, that clause three of the Charter would have application to all the peoples of the world. [...] This, apparently, was the meaning given to it not only by colonial peoples, but even by prominent members of the British government.'⁶⁹

The working title of the project was *Atlantic Charter or Colour Bar?* and Cunard's typescript shows the final title was provided by the publisher Mark Goulden at W. H. Allen & Co. Goulden's revised title, *The White Man's Duty*, plays on the title of Rudyard Kipling's infamous poem *The White Man's Burden*, which celebrated the nobility of the colonial project. The poem begins:

Take up the White Man's burden—
 Send forth the best ye breed—
 Go bind your sons to exile
 To serve your captives' need;
 To wait in heavy harness,
 On fluttered folk and wild—
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
 Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man's burden—
 In patience to abide,
 To veil the threat of terror
 And check the show of pride;
 By open speech and simple,
 An hundred times made plain,
 To seek another's profit,
 And work another's gain.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ George Padmore & Nancy Cunard, *The White Man's Duty: An Analysis of the Colonial Question in Light of the Atlantic Charter* (1943), reprinted in *Essays on Race and Empire*, ed. Moynagh, 137.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 137-139.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷⁰ Rudyard Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden' (1898), *The White Man's Burdens: An Anthology of British Poetry of the Empire*, ed. Chris Brooks & Peter Faulkner, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), 307.

Kipling's poem represents the 'manichean allegory'⁷¹ of colonial discourse, with its dichotomous framing of civilised coloniser and savage colonial subject. As Maureen Moynagh notes, the representation of imperialism as 'a benevolent undertaking' is subverted in Cunard and Padmore's pamphlet.⁷² The white man's duty, as they present it, is to relinquish this 'burden' of imperial responsibility, and to entrust colonial nations with self-governance, economic sovereignty and universal suffrage, 'regardless of the state of their social development.'⁷³ The incentive offered to Britain is full co-operation in the fight against fascism, '[f]or what driving force is there comparable to that which animates free peoples in the struggle to maintain their liberty? What is wanted, therefore, is a declaration granting to Britain's colonial subjects all the social and political rights for which the people of Great Britain are fighting. [...] We want not only the end of Nazism and of fascism, but also the end of Empire and 'democratic' imperialism.'⁷⁴

The primary focus of the essay is major constitutional reform for Britain's colonial territories, but Padmore and Cunard also touch on the need for domestic social and legal reforms in Britain and America to remedy widespread racial discrimination. Among the topics they cover here are the disproportionate number of unemployed African Americans, the Jim Crow segregation laws, and their British counterpart the 'Colour Bar'. Cunard cites in her introduction to the pamphlet an article taken from an African-American newspaper reporting on British proposals to create separate air-raid shelters for black people. The paper had commented: 'If this is all that Britain is fighting for, the status quo, then to ask American Negroes to fight and die for Britain is like asking them to fight and die for Mississippi.' What is needed, she observes, is 'a change of heart, and of policy.'⁷⁵ Cunard and Padmore's call for antiracism legislation in *The White Man's Duty* came over thirty years before this was enshrined in British law with the passing of the Race Relations Act (1976).

Also discussed are the stifling trade monopolies run in West Africa by British companies such as Unilever, Lyons & Co. and Cadbury's, who 'strangle the African farmer'

⁷¹ JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory', 63.

Although the title was chosen by Goulden, Leslie James notes that Padmore also subverted colonial discourse for effect in his writing. Padmore said, for example, that his aim in *How Britain Rules Africa* (1936) was 'to throw light into dark places', i.e. to bring knowledge and understanding to those who were unfamiliar with the plight of colonial peoples. James, 41.

⁷² Moynagh, *Essays on Race and Empire*, 40.

⁷³ Cunard and Padmore, *The White Man's Duty*, in *Essays on Race and Empire*, ed. Moynagh, 145.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 175, 144.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 130-131.

by fixing the price at which they will buy his cocoa and then fixing the prices of the food, clothing and tools they sell to him.⁷⁶ Padmore also begins to sketch out his belief in the need for a pan-African federation or 'socialist commonwealth' of the West African nations of Sierra Leone, Gambia, the Gold Coast and Nigeria, with all natural resources immediately nationalised to provide for social reforms, and power transferred directly to local peoples, who already filled important administrative roles and would 'learn the art of government only by practicing it'.⁷⁷ Padmore continued to address the issue of African federalism throughout his later writing, and in 1953 attended a West African Nationalist Congress convened by Kwame Nkrumah, which passed a resolution to establish a 'strong and truly federal state, capable of protecting itself from outside invasion and able to preserve its internal security'.⁷⁸ In 1944 he had helped to found the Pan-African Federation and alongside Nkrumah organised the famous Fifth Pan-African Congress (1945) in Manchester; ninety delegates attended this event, including 26 African representatives, many of whom went on to become post-independence leaders.

Padmore was one of the most influential figures in the pan-Africanist movement and was also for several years the most senior black figure in the Communist Third International. Born in Trinidad, Padmore had joined the Party around 1927, and in 1929 travelled to Moscow where he was soon made head of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) and editor of the periodical the *Negro Worker*, which was banned by colonial governments (along with other publications by Padmore) on grounds of sedition. His rapid rise within the Party came to an end however, when it began to weaken its anticolonial stance in order to bolster anti-fascist alliances with France and Britain against Germany. He had by this point already been arrested by the Nazis and spent several months in jail. Having resigned from his positions over the Party's betrayal of colonial peoples, Padmore was in 1934 expelled from the Comintern, which launched a 'campaign of vilification' against him, branding him a racist and 'a petit bourgeois nationalist'.⁷⁹

Cunard was deeply angered by Padmore's treatment by the Comintern and wrote articles challenging their actions. In a 1934 article for *Afro-American*, Cunard lambasted the

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

⁷⁸ Cited by Donald Rothchild in *Toward Unity in Africa: A Study of Federalism in British Africa*, (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1960), 184.

⁷⁹ This period of Padmore's life is described in James Campbell's entry on him in the *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance: K-Y*, 948-949.

Party for its 'vicious and slanderous lies' about Padmore, particularly the attacks against him in a *Daily Worker* article by James Ford, the three-time Vice-Presidential candidate for the US Communist Party who had also been a contributor to *Negro*. Titled 'Padmore Sups With Kings and Emperors', Ford's essay had criticised Padmore's description of Haile Selassie as 'a progressive monarch' in one of his essays for *Negro*. Cunard responded, 'It appears that because Padmore resigned from the Communist party in 1934 in protest against certain policies of the communist leaders in connection with the International Negro Workers Committee and the Negro Worker [...] all means are now used to present him as having become an imperialist, a traitor of the Cause.'⁸⁰ Privately, she reflected that 'NOTHING has so much upset me as this 'case,' in the whole of my life [...] On the one hand Padmore, one of the few people I revered for his integrity and very being [...] on the other hand that this should come from members of the ideology (Communism) that I admired also entirely and wholly.'⁸¹

Padmore moved to Paris and eventually to London, where he established the International African Service Bureau (IASB). Formed in 1937, the IASB 'devoted itself to the study of the colonial question and the spread of propaganda and agitation all over Britain, in Africa and in the territories inhabited by people of African descent.'⁸² Cunard became a patron of the organisation, along with Sylvia Pankhurst. A centre for black internationalism, its members wrote articles, organised marches, spoke at leftist meetings in London and at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, and were at the centre of an active print culture, producing between them the journal *International African Opinion* and a series of important anticolonialist publications, including C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and *A History of Negro Revolt* (1938); Jomo Kenyatta's *Kenya: Land of Conflict* (1945); and Padmore's *How Britain Rules Africa* (1936) and collaborative work in *The White Man's Duty* (1943). All of these writers had submitted contributions for Cunard's *Negro* anthology. The IASB also published Raymond Michelet's pamphlet *African Empires and Civilisations* (1945), which had originally been printed as an essay in *Negro*. Michelet was Cunard's principal collaborator on the anthology and she was asked to write the introduction to this pamphlet, in which she praises 'his tribute to African truth'⁸³; Padmore is listed as the editor of the text.

When Padmore's *How Britain Rules Africa* was published, C. L. R. James criticised his comrade for proposing that enlightened sections of Europe's ruling classes could help free

⁸⁰ Cunard, 'Nancy Cunard Defends Padmore Against Ford', *Afro-American*, 8th December 1934.

⁸¹ Quoted in Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, 224.

⁸² C. L. R. James, cited by Edwards in *The Practice of Diaspora*, 299.

⁸³ Cunard, 'A Note on the Author' [Raymond Michelet], September 1944, HRC NCC Box 7, Folder 1.

Africans from colonial rule: 'That is madness,' he wrote. 'How does the lion co-operate with the lamb? Africans must win their own freedom. Nobody will win it for them.'⁸⁴ Although James's earlier pamphlet *A Case for West Indian Self-Government* (1933) had argued for decolonisation in the Caribbean, he came to believe that liberation from imperialism could only come from below. In reflecting on 'the white man's duty' to relinquish political and economic sovereignty to his colonies, Cunard and Padmore continue to advocate the same top-down model for decolonisation James criticised in Padmore's earlier work. The most famous text to have emerged out of this group, James's *Black Jacobins*, by contrast, focuses on grassroots resistance as the means to black liberation, framing the Haitian revolution of 1791-1804 as a model for anticolonial resistance in Africa.⁸⁵ *The White Man's Duty* points to the exploitation of peoples in Britain's colonies and the hypocrisy of this in the light of Britain's antifascist, liberationist rhetoric, but the text does not at any point articulate a model for a militant, popular resistance. It instead challenges popular complacency about empire, deconstructing the logic of a supposedly liberal, paternalistic, welfarist form of colonialism that served to protect the interests of its subjects. The pamphlet's final counsel to colonial peoples is to take up the fight against fascism and bargain with imperialist powers for freedom: 'It will not serve you to lose a British master to find instead a German or a Japanese one. [...] Let Britain know [...] that you will fight to the death against the Nazi and the Japanese peril, that you will keep your word to Britain as long as she keeps hers to you.'⁸⁶



Contemporary scholarship has shifted away from the metropole/periphery model of imperial historiography, which depended on the model of a stable Europe at the heart of empire. Critics like Burton and Sinha have shown how 'metropolitan and colonial histories were both constituted by the history of imperialism', and many theorists now focus instead on transnational networks or 'webs of empire' that chart the flow of ideas, peoples and

⁸⁴ James, 'Civilizing' the 'Blacks', *New Leader*, 29th May 1936, 5.

⁸⁵ James wrote in a preface to the 1980 edition that he wrote the text 'not with the Caribbean but with Africa in mind.' 'Foreword', *The Black Jacobins*, (London: Penguin, 2001), xvi.

⁸⁶ *The White Man's Duty, Essays on Race and Empire*, ed. Moynagh, 176-177.

goods across imperial formations.⁸⁷ This model, as Ballantyne has argued, is particularly effective because it 'underscores that the empire was a structure, a complex system of overlapping and interwoven institutions, organizations, ideologies and discourses' and 'captures the integrative nature of this cultural traffic, the ways in which the empire connected disparate points in space into a complex mesh of networks.'⁸⁸

In working with Padmore and others in the IASB group as a writer, patron and anthologist, Cunard contributed to a wide-reaching network of black diasporic intellectuals working to counter ideologies of racism and colonialism around the world. Comprised of radical thinkers (many from Communist backgrounds) who had migrated to the heart of the empire from various British colonies, this network was seen as a seditious threat to imperial ideology, particularly in terms of its radical, anticolonial print culture. Padmore's *Negro Worker*, other of his pamphlets, and Cunard's *Negro* anthology all found themselves on the central colonial administration's list of banned publications, together with any materials related to the Scottsboro campaign. Work by David Killingray, and more recently by James Smith, has also shown that Cunard and members of the IASB were regularly monitored by MI5.⁸⁹ These details from the British government archives show how central imperial powers tried to limit the reach of these transnational political networks and literary projects in order to maintain the metropole/periphery model of imperial power. In collaborating with Padmore and others at the IASB, Cunard helped rechart the centred geography of empire, turning the colonial metropole into a base for anti-imperial activism.

The transnational textual and political collaborations discussed in this chapter function both as part of an alternative modernist tradition or what Gilroy terms a 'counterculture of modernity'⁹⁰, and also as constitutive presences in a globally conceived account of modernist literary culture. Moynagh has argued that anticolonial texts of this

⁸⁷ Citation from Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and The 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 182. See also, for example, Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁸⁸ Tony Ballantyne, 'Rereading the Archive and Opening up the Nation-State: Colonial Knowledge in South Asia (and Beyond)', in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and Through the Nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), 113.

⁸⁹ James Smith notes that the MI5 files on Cunard have not yet been released or may have been destroyed, but points to evidence in other files that show she was under surveillance. *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1930-1960*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), xi. On the IASB, see James Killingray, *Africans in Britain*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 183, 193. First published 1994.

⁹⁰ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 1, *passim*.

period such as *The White Man's Duty*, are fundamental to a global understanding of the modernist project:

Both a malaise about empire and a 'new imperialist' fervour are manifest in European literary culture around the turn of the century and both are transmuted, in different ways, into modernist literary culture. That Euro-American malaise is usefully illuminated by being set against the literary worlds of the African diaspora, but also against anti-imperialist writing like *The White Man's Duty*, as inter-locking parts of the 'global history of modernism'.⁹¹

The three episodes of Cunard's political/literary campaign work discussed in this chapter—Scottsboro, the Spanish Civil War, and her collaboration with Padmore on *The White Man's Duty*—are all parts of this global history of modernism, founded on what Rebecca Rutledge Fisher has described as a 'cosmopolitan notion of global belonging'.⁹²

⁹¹ Moynagh, 'Introduction', *Essays on Race and Empire*, 45.

⁹² Rebecca Rutledge Fisher, 'Cultural Artifacts and the Narrative of History: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Exhibiting of Culture at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle', *Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic: Literature, Modernity and Diaspora*, ed. Jeremy Braddock & Jonathan P. Eburne, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 17.

Afterword

Clifford has suggested that collecting is, broadly speaking, a common human pursuit: 'Some sort of 'gathering' around the self and the group—the assemblage of a material 'world', the marking-off of a subjective domain that is not 'other'—is probably universal.'¹ Yet it is also clear that only a privileged few among the world's populations could ever afford to be a collector, or indeed a cosmopolitan, in the sense Cunard was. The kind of cosmopolitan imagining Cunard conceived of then would only have been available to those elite subjects who could afford to travel the world as she did.

Both of the identity formations that shape this project might be said to belong to a privileged class position, and yet they are both also now in a sense 'universal'. We might argue that the cosmopolitan/*flâneur* and the collector have both become obsolete in late capitalist societies, not through lack of relevance but through oversaturation. As Susan Buck-Morss writes:

In our own time, in the case of the *flâneur*, it is not his perceptive attitude which has been lost, but rather its marginality. If the *flâneur* has disappeared as a specific figure, it is because the perceptive attitude which he embodied saturates modern existence, specifically, the society of mass consumption. [...] The same can be argued for all of Benjamin's historical figures. In commodity society [...] all of us are collectors of things.²

Cunard imagined that she would go through her archives at the end of her life:

I would like to be a shaky, obstinate old housekeeper—tidying up. I know that at the end I shall go through all my letters, all of them from 1914 to 19—whatever-it-may-be, and I'll be too dry then for even the feeling of a tear mounting to the brain. Perhaps I'll be an old scavenger, occupied with cats—half blind. 'Is it a kitten on my knees,' I'll be saying, 'or just one of those letters?'³

¹ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 218.

² Susan Buck-Morss, 'The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering', *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 157.

³ Letter from 1926 to Janet Flanner, Fielding, *Emerald & Nancy*, 179

In reality, her final days passed in a frenetic madness in Paris. Alone in her hotel, she had gathered together the papers and correspondence she had to hand and set them on fire. Michelet reported that it had come to her in these last years of her life ‘to think of herself as African, and to think that her true life was no longer here in Europe’.⁴

What might Cunard, with her ‘mania for albums and archives,’⁵ have made of her own collections—her albums, scrapbooks, letters, photographs, newspaper clippings and writings—being held at some of the most prestigious collecting institutions in the world? In a letter to Charles Burkhart, she wrote of her amusement of the idea of a collector of her own works. As she waited for her book on Norman Douglas, *Grand Man*, to be released in 1954, she wrote to Burkhart of her surprise to hear from the exporters, Jackson Books, that dozens of Cunard collectors had already requested copies in advance: ‘Sixty American clients [...] have particularly asked for the English edition—‘collectors’, that letter says, of my works! (It is odd to me that there should be *one* such collector.)’⁶ Little could she have imagined then that her *Negro* anthology, so little read and discussed in its own time, would become one of the most valuable and collectible of all modernist texts.

⁴ Raymond Michelet, ‘Nancy Cunard,’ *Brave Poet*, ed. Ford, 131. My translation.

⁵ Cunard, letter to Charles Burkhart, Lamothe-Fénelon, 3rd November 1956, Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

⁶ Cunard, letter to Charles Burkhart, Lamothe-Fénelon, 3rd June 1954, Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

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