

REINTERPRETING THE DILEMMA OF THE FUTURIST-MODERNIST NARRATOR IN MINA LOY'S "APHORISMS ON FUTURISM"¹

MINA LOY'UN "FÜTÜRİZM ÜZERİNE AFORİZMALAR" ADLI ŞİİRİNDE FÜTÜRİST- MODERNİST ANLATICININ İKİLEMİNİN YENİDEN YORUMLANMASI

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Abstract

The British poet and artist Mina Loy holds an exceptional place in the art and literature of the avant-garde and enlightens the dawn of the Modernist era in the early twentieth century. Loy's poetry is innovative with its unusual and idiosyncratic fragmentary style and shifting narrative voices, while her artworks are unique, maintaining an eclectic approach associated with the canonical artistic movements of her age, such as Futurism, Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. Her creative visual and literary output problematizes the conventions of that time by both opposing and reconciling with them. Loy's manifesto-poem, "Aphorisms on Futurism" (1914), intertextually connects the significations in each aphorism with one another and with her other textual and artistic works. The text creates the chains of signification to reveal the dialogical rhetoric as well as the evolutionary nature of the narrative voice manoeuvring between Futurism and Modernism in relation both to herself and the implied readers. Loy's persona argues for destroying the traditional language forms and proclaims a new form, which is representative of Futurist poetry, by subverting the retrospective ones and constructing new ones. Within this framework, Loy's untitled 1951 New York painting seems to represent the destruction of the traditional art forms to celebrate the concepts of dynamism and deformation, which evokes the features of Futurist, Dadaist, and Cubist aesthetics. In this experimental poem, the arguments of Loy's fictive persona, through shifting between Futurism and Modernism, create complex

Öz

Avangart sanat ve edebiyatta özel bir yere sahip olan, İngiliz şair ve sanatçı Mina Loy, yirminci yüzyılın başında erken Modernist dönemin ortaya çıkışını aydınlatan bir figür olarak karşımıza çıkar. Loy'un şiirleri, alışılmadık ve kendine özgü parçalanmış biçemi ve değişken anlatıcılarıyla yenilikçi özellikler taşıırken, sanat eserleri Fütürizm, Kübizm, Dadaizm ve Sürrealizm gibi döneminin başlıca sanat hareketleri ile ilişkili bir şekilde eklektik bir yaklaşım izlemesi açısından özgündür. Yazarın yaratıcı görsel ve yazınsal yapıtları, çağının alışlagelmiş geleneklerini, kimi zaman onlara karşı çıkarak kimi zaman da onlarla uzlaşarak sorunsallaştırır. Loy'un 1914'de kaleme aldığı "Fütürizm üzerine Aforizmalar" adlı manifesto-şiiri hem aforizmalarındaki hem de yazarın diğer görsel ve yazınsal çalışmalarındaki anlamlandırmaları metinlerarası bağlamda birbirine bağlayarak ele alır ve bu anlamlandırmalar, Fütürizm ve Modernizm arasında yön değiştiren ve anlatıcının hem kendisi hem de ima edilen okuyucularıyla olan diyalogunu ve evrimsel doğasını ortaya çıkaran adeta bir anlamlandırma zinciri yaratır. Eserde Loy'un anlatıcısı, geleneksel dil türlerini yok edip yeni türler oluşturma (Fütürist şiir) ve böylelikle bilinç özgürlüğüne ulaşmayı ele alır. Görsel açıdan baktığımızda ise, Loy'un 1951'de New York'ta resmettiği tablosu, Fütürist, Dadaist ve Kübist sanat akımlarında gördüğümüz dinamizm ve deformasyon kavramlarına övgüler yaparken, alışlagelmiş sanat türlerinin yok edilmesini de temsil eder. Loy'un bu deneysel şiirindeki kurgusal anlatıcının argümanları, Fütürizm ve Modernizm arasında yön

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intertextuality between the aphorisms and the narrator's shifting voices. The arguments of the narrative voice illuminate the narrator's Futurist-Modernist project by inviting both herself and the readers to attain the individual consciousness and liberation through a metamorphic journey from being a Futurist to a Modernist.

Keywords: Mina Loy, Futurism, Modernism, Intertextuality, Individual Consciousness, Futurist Art.

değiştirerek hem aforizmalar hem de anlatıcının değişken sesleri arasında karmaşık bir metinlerarasılık yaratırken, anlatıcının Fütürist-Modernist projesini de ortaya koyar ve hem kendisini hem de okuyucuyu kişisel bilinç özgürlüğüne ulaşmaya davet ederek, Fütürist kimlikten Modernist kimliğe doğru evrimsel bir yolculuğa doğru götürür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mina Loy, Fütürizm, Modernizm, Metinlerarasılık, Kişisel Bilinç, Fütürist Sanat

Introduction

Produced and published at the focal points of the transnational avant-gardes, Mina Loy joined the Futurists with Marinetti; engaged with Futurism and versions of early twentieth-century feminism; was involved in the commencement of the Dada movement with Tristan Tzara and later shifted to Surrealism, inspired by Andre Bréton and Giorgio de Chirico. Recognition of Loy as an avant-garde poet largely depends on her early writings, which were produced between 1914 and 1920, and centered on Futurist and feminist concerns. Her poetic works were published in various significant New York magazines of the early 1900s, such as *Camera Work*, *The Trend*, *Rogue*, *The Little Review* and *Others*, and her several prose works in *Charm* and *The Blind Man*, before being published in a book. Loy's works usually shift between concepts of Futurism and Modernism and undergo various transformations. These shifts and transformations are performed stylistically through the narrator's use of fragmentation, interruptions of punctuation, and complex juxtapositions of words or images in the literary and artistic forms through which they are expressed: the poem, the aphorism, the manifesto, the assemblage, and the modernist and Surrealist paintings.

"Aphorisms on Futurism" is Mina Loy's first published work; it was penned when she was involved in the Futurist movement in Florence and published in the January issue of photographer Alfred Stieglitz's³ magazine, *Camera Work*, in 1914.⁴ This work of Loy consists of fifty-two aphorisms: it is a collection of fragments that develops an

³ Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) was an American photographer and the editor of *Camera Work* from 1903 to 1917. See, "Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) and American Photography." *The Metmuseum*, www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/stgp/hd_stgp.htm.

⁴ "[It was] first published in Alfred Stieglitz's epochal quarterly, *Camera Work* 45 (January [June] 1912,) pp. 13-15." In Roger L. Conover, Roger. Ed. *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996, p. 215.

argument about art and life through a series of contrasts and parallels. In her *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*, Carolyn Burke, Loy's biographer, notes that "[Loy] was intrigued by Marinetti's *parole-in-libertà* or words-set-free, a poetic form, he claimed, which liberated language from the patterns of linearity. She found herself responding to his writing's dynamism now that she knew what the term meant . . ." (160). In terms of its form and pattern, the language of the text echoes the Futurists' technique used by Marinetti, founder of Futurism, in his "Futurist Manifesto," *-parole in libertà-*: words-in-freedom.⁵ Loy's narrator uses this style as a device to express her ideas. Infinitive verbs and upper-case letters used in the aphorisms emphasize ideas in the shape of commandments. The aphorisms are introduced in different lines with a space between each; the first words of each aphorism are written with bold and capitalized letters, which creates the visual impression of graphic artwork.

"Aphorisms"⁶ differ from "manifestos": an aphorism makes a concise statement in a witty way, while a manifesto usually takes the form of revolutionary rhetoric, calling the public to action to stop or change something urgently. To illustrate, Franz Kafka's aphorisms written between 1917 and 1918 also serve as canonical collections of aphorisms in the Modernist era. However, Loy's choice represents a combination of both—a manifesto in the form of aphorisms—which makes the text unique and unconventional: a "manifesto-poem."

As regards its narrative style, the persona seems to be addressing an audience: she uses imperative forms—and occasionally the second-person pronoun—the indefinable "you" and "your"—in a didactic tone. However, the narration also gives the impression of being a self-dialogue in which the narrative voice converses with herself and attempts to solve the incompatibilities in her own mind. As Carolyn Burke, who produced essential sources in Loy scholarship, comments, "This idiosyncratic manifesto adapted Futurist practice to a form that was, in essence, a dialogue with herself" (160). This is a variation on the "interior monologue," a form used in modernist literature, in which the narrator expresses her ideas and actions in a thinking process.

The text is satirical in character, shifting between praise and irony by accepting and rejecting established concepts of life. In a superficial manner, it embraces Futurism

⁵ See "Italian Futurism: 1909-1944 Reconstructing the Universe." exhibitions.guggenheim.org/futurism/.

⁶ An "Aphorism" is a short phrase that says something true or wise.
www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/aphorism

in terms of its enthusiasm for dynamism, speed, advanced technology, and urban modernity, as well as the language form which appears in Futurist manifestos. However, the aphorisms contain philosophical, psychological, and revolutionary arguments: they touch upon various themes such as new art forms, regeneration of the individual consciousness, and expansion of the mind from limitedness to immensity within space and time.

In this argument, Loy's narrator takes a number of existing expressions as well as the concepts associated with them and redefines them in the context of her own vision. These expressions include line, future/Futurism/Futurist, the great man, God, egotism, life, time, mind, and consciousness. To date, although various critics have quoted from the aphorisms, the text has not been analysed as a systematically complete and self-contained argument. My close reading performs an analysis through an intertextual interpretation of the text, which makes it possible to group, rearrange and rearticulate the aphorisms, and so create intertextual links between the significations, through conjunctions as well as the voice of the fictive persona shifting between Futurism and Modernism.

Aesthetic Production Of The Futurist Artist

Futurist artists, namely Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, and Gino Severini, depicted the dynamism and speed with their aesthetic artworks by suggesting optimism about technology and industrialization in the Modern Age. This part of the article focuses on the relationship between the aphorisms and the aesthetic production of the Futurist artists.

The argument of the aphorisms begins with a couplet distinguishing the past and the future and relating it to history and tradition. The past is associated with death and the future with life:

[1]⁷ DIE in the Past
Live in the Future.

These associations are clearly metaphorical, and Loy's narrator explains the metaphors as the text proceeds. In between them is the present, which represents a

⁷ The numbers referring to the aphorisms in the poem are arranged in accordance with the line sequence appearing in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover, 1996, pp. 149-152.

starting point (the “velocity of velocities” or the speed of speed, i.e., the conditions of possibility) for the future:

[2] THE velocity of velocities arrives in starting.

This suggests that while the past represents slowness, the future represents a speed that has to be reached. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the founder of Futurism, declares in “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” “[w]e affirm that the beauty of the world has been enriched by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed . . . We have already created velocity which is eternal and omnipresent” (Marinetti 51). Here, the term “velocity” is associated with one of the primary ideas of the Futurist philosophy—dynamism.

The process of getting to the future from the present is described through a series of contrasts. The past (dying) is associated with “material” [3]⁸ and visible “form”:

[3] IN pressing the material to derive its essence, matter becomes deformed.

[4] AND form hurtling against itself is thrown beyond the synopsis of vision.

The focus here is on the relation between “matter” and “essence,” or the difference between form and meaning. While matter and its essence are connected, the essence is not available to us and cannot be accessed unless the external form is modified—“deformed.” It suggests that the essence of objects in the world, in general, cannot be perceived without some action that modifies visible forms. This action may be interpreted as the activity of a visual artist in compressing materials to produce significations, which evokes motion in paintings. As the narrator argues, the matter must be expanded to find the hidden essence in it.⁹ While the future holds the essences [3] which are beyond vision, [4] the starting point to get to these invisible essences is possible by “pressing” the material to destroy the external forms.

The argument related to the “deformed” matter brings to mind the abstract forms

⁸ The numbers of the aphorisms are indicated in square brackets in the in-text references of the article.

⁹ The persona’s characterisation of the matter as “deformed” echoes a statement by the sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957), who was deeply influenced by Auguste Rodin: “The artist should know how to dig out the being that is within matter.” See “Constantin Brâncuși: French-Romanian Photographer and Sculptor.” *The Art Story*, www.theartstory.org/artist-brancusi-constantin.htm.

used in Futurist artworks. Boccioni's well-known statue, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913), is considered a precursor example of Futurist sculpture. The motion of the "Futurist man" is depicted in a "deformed" form, which is described as "hideous" [6] in the poem, and human movement is merged into space. (Figure 1):



Figure 1. Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913¹⁰

The process of the "form hurt[ling] against itself" appears as contradictory, as it destroys itself to the point where it is no longer perceivable and "beyond the synopsis of vision" [4]. Here, the sense of movement suggested by "hurtling" can be explained in terms of the "velocity of velocities" [2]. This phrase can be understood better if we substitute for it a similar phrase: "idea of ideas;" this suggests the underlying concept or conditions under which ideas become meaningful. Thus, similarly, the "velocity of velocities" describes the conditions of possibility of speed; and these conditions are necessary for form to "hurt[le] against itself" as they are the starting point. From these conditions of possibility, specific examples of "velocities" or speeds can be derived. Any example of speed is, therefore, a synecdochic representation of the possibility of speed

¹⁰ Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913. The original copy is kept in MoMA, NY. www.moma.org/collection/works/81179.

in general.

From this perspective, the external and visible forms to be destroyed are represented by the line and the circle; they are the foundation of art and are full of possibilities:

- [5] **THE straight line and the circle are the parents of design, form
the basis of art; there is no limit to their coherent variability.**

All other forms derive from these two forms because they are infinitely variable; they frame the “basis of art.” However, in contrast to the traditional idea that artistic forms should be “beautiful,” the *Aphorisms* argue for such forms to be destroyed in order to access the essence, as they are empty inside and lead nowhere. The destruction of these traditional forms of art—“the straight line and the circle”—is illustrated in an untitled 1951 New York painting by Mina Loy, reproduced in Figure 2:



Figure 2. Mina Loy, a 1951 New York painting¹¹

The figures in this three-dimensional image are depicted in a straight linear form. However, the deformed human silhouettes are far beyond linearity; their movements are

¹¹ Mina Loy, a 1951 New York painting. *Flickr*, www.flickr.com/photos/uknowit/30079675.

blended with space, and their irregular vertical positions make them dynamic figures as they move and circle around one another. The tones of the colours—yellow, green, and brown—are intertwined with each other and do not represent sharp tonal differences. All these features echo features of Futurist, Dadaist, and Cubist aesthetics. Another striking aspect of this painting is that the way the silhouettes are pinned bears a resemblance to the image of Christ in Loy's 1955-1959 painting, *Christ on a Clothesline*,¹² which could be interpreted in this context as hanging out and disinfecting the external and traditional—Futurist—forms existing in the physical space.¹³

The narrative voice also declares that "there is no limit" [5] to the use of these two external forms—"the line and the circle"—[5], because as they are the "parents of design," all *forms* can be generated from them. However, multiple *materials* can be used in art, a viewpoint which can be interpreted as an echo of Boccioni's ideas: in his "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture," (1912) Boccioni announces the need to

[d]estroy the literary and traditional dignity of marble and bronze. Reject the idea that one material must be used exclusively in the construction of a sculptural whole. Insist that even twenty different types of material can be used in a single work of art in order to achieve its plastic feeling. To mention a few examples; glass, wood, cardboard, iron, cement, hair, leather, cloth, mirrors, electric lights, and so on (Boccioni 118).

In this regard, Loy's narrative voice shifts into a more sympathetic tone; she urges her reader to *love* the things that are opposed to the traditional forms—the ugly [6] and the dilapidated—and "rehabilitate":

[6] **LOVE the hideous in order to find the sublime core of it.**

[7] **OPEN your arms to the dilapidated; rehabilitate them.**

Once such external forms are destroyed, this will lead people to the "sublime core" of the essences which represent the future. Since we have been conditioned to appreciate traditional forms of the beauty of the past, our eyes are already open to them:

¹² See Mina Loy's *Christ on a Clothesline* (1955-1959),
<http://www.francisnaumann.com/daughters%20of%20dada/Loy.html>

¹³ For a detailed analysis of Loy's painting, *Christ on a Clothesline*, see Karabulut, T. "Futurism and Feminist Performativity: Mina Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto,' *Househunting* and *Christ on a Clothesline*." *Women Studies: an interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1-30.

[8] YOU prefer to observe the past on which your eyes are already opened.

Using the contrast between the past and the present, Loy's narrator only sees the hope in the future and negates the attachment to the "Past" time—*passéism*—this is the most contrasting view of the Futurist philosophy since Futurists reject the past as well as its nostalgia, artistic and political traditions. In order to avoid being stuck on the exterior things in the past that we are fixated on, we have to close our eyes to them and focus on what is beyond them. This may appear to be darkness at the start, [9] but once we *leap* into it, we will find the invisible, internal, and sublime essences "explod[ing] with *Light*".

[9] BUT the Future is only dark from outside.

[10] Leap into it—and it EXPLODES with *Light*.

This leap from external to internal space can be explained as a change of focus. The narrator implies that instead of focusing on the décor of the house, the person living in it must be centered:

[11] FORGET that you live in houses, that you may live in your-self—

People who are fixated on exterior things like the appearance of their house are very limited in their minds:

[12] FOR the smallest people live in the greatest houses.

These "smallest people" might refer to small-minded individuals; since they only focus on the exterior products and attach importance to domestic convenience, their minds remain limited. However, by rejecting their external and material focus, even these people can expand their minds:

[13] BUT the smallest person, potentially, is as great as the Universe.

The "Universe" represents the immensity and boundlessness of the individual mind, in contrast to the limitedness of the smallest person. Therefore, the mind, previously compressed with fixed thoughts, is now to be released from its limits and expanded.

MENTAL EXPANSION OF THE POTENTIAL FUTURIST MIND

Once the mind of the individual is set free, it can be saved from its limits; this expansion will bring about self-development and psychic liberation of the individual mind:

[14] WHAT can you know of expansion, who limit yourselves to compromise?

At this point, Loy's persona clarifies the attitudes of the traditional Futurist man—who is considered as the "great man" and who has looked down on other people throughout history:

[15] HITHERTO the great man has achieved greatness by keeping the people small.

Since these people have influenced others with their ideas so far, their attitude can be identified with human selfishness. While subverting the traditional Futurist man, Loy's narrator redefines her own "great man"—the potential Futurist man:

[16] BUT in the Future, by inspiring the people to expand to their fullest capacity, the great man proportionately must be tremendous—a God.

Loy's narrator envisages that the "great man" will play a vital role in the prospective process of individual development. She redefines the concept of "God" and glorifies the "great man"—the potential Futurist man who will have the power to expand other people to their fullest capacity and inspire them; it will make him as "tremendous [as] a God." Loy's narrator's definition of man being "as tremendous [as] God" can be associated with the Nietzschean frame of mind. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) notes in his *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* that "[you have] to become master over yourself, master of your own good qualities . . . acquire power over your eye and no and learn to hold and withhold them in accordance with your higher aims . . ." (Nietzsche 11). The potential Futurist individual is depicted as powerful, superior, and independent throughout the text, and in this way, can attain his/her psychic liberation.

The narrator then focuses on human relations as well as one's own comfort of mind; she argues that individual self-development cannot be separated from relations

with other people:

[17] LOVE of others is the appreciation of one's self.

Self-love is a pre-requisite condition to loving other people; Loy's persona implies that one must first love yourself before one loves other people. This means that a human being becomes a synecdoche for the whole of humanity; one must sympathize or empathize with herself in order to embrace all mankind:

**[18] MAY your egotism be so gigantic that you comprise mankind
in your self-sympathy.**

The term "egotism" generally describes one's inflated opinions in an imagined self; an egotist places herself at the centre of the universe with no concern for other people. Traditional egotism can be connected with the egotist doctrines of the so-called "great man," [15] which have influenced humanity throughout history. However, Loy's persona redefines this drive as "gigantic" self-love to embrace the whole of mankind. This argument suggests that one must also self-sympathize and be mindful of herself: the individual must look into herself deeply by leaving her ego aside [18]. In this way, a person may comprise all human beings to perceive the whole and reach the "sublime." Thus, the descriptions [17, 18] in Loy's poem suggest a new kind of egotism: one for the individual herself—self-love—which then becomes generalized or universalized to include other people—social relations. The future and the past are sharply contrasted to foreground the absoluteness of the future:

[19] THE Future is limitless—the past a trail of insidious reactions.

This characterisation exhibits the impatient vision of Loy's persona towards the arrival of the future, as she describes its infiniteness and immensity. Although the future is "limitless" and immense, the past is limited and finite, which will lead people nowhere but to the route of harmful and deceitful attitudes—"insidious reactions"—such as "egotism" in the traditional sense. The argument of this aphorism is connected to the next aphorism in terms of the mental independence of the individual:

**[20] LIFE is only limited by our prejudices. Destroy them, and you
cease to be at the mercy of yourself.**

Here, the narrative voice argues that individuals should not conform to the restrictions of society—"prejudices." Rather, the restrictions must be destroyed so that

the individual mind can be expanded to attain its psychic liberation [14]. In these two aphorisms, [19, 20] it is argued that destruction of such judgements is only possible by means of giving up one's self-pity. The individual can, in this way, perceive life and reach mental liberation. Human beings' life experience is itself connected to the concept of time:

[21] TIME is the dispersion of intensiveness.

The term "intensiveness" can be interpreted as the individual's focusing on one subject, which can be thought of as the compression of thoughts: "pressing" [3] and "[limit]ing yourselves" [14]. This idea of dispersing compression may echo the narrator's call with regard to the limitlessness of the artists, for them to use multiple forms instead of focusing on a single form [5]. On the other hand, it can be associated with the traditional egotism described previously [15], as it does not "comprise mankind" [18] but focuses on one's own imagined self. So, while the concept of traditional time focuses on one single subject, which limits itself, Loy's narrator argues for timelessness, which is possible through the "expansion" of thoughts [14]. Based on the characterisation of the concept of time in the earlier aphorism, the Futurist poem can now be understood as a timeless and endless form:

[22] THE Futurist can live a thousand years in one poem.

The narrative voice argues, apparently paradoxically, for both the eternality or dispersion of the Futurist poet and the limitation and compression suggested by his aesthetic talent:

[23] HE can compress every aesthetic principle in one line.

The apparent paradox lies in the fact that the term "line," a form used in the literary genre of the poem, is connected with the aesthetic form of the "line," which was described earlier as one of the external forms to be destroyed—the "straight line" [5]. However, here Loy's narrator redefines it by relating it to the talent of the potential Futurist man. It is suggested that both Futurist poets and artists must use various forms while producing their works. As the potential Futurist can "comprise mankind" by leaving his ego aside, he can abridge all the aesthetic principles in a single form. In the context of the "velocity of velocities," [3] the "line" can also be represented as a condition of possibility, which makes the work open to alternative interpretations. This representation will then save it from its boundaries and make its possibilities an

independent work.

This is based on the “limitless” nature of the individual human mind:

**[24] THE mind is a magician bound by assimilations; let him loose
and the smallest idea conceived in freedom will suffice to negate
the wisdom of all forefathers.**

An individual mind has a miraculous capacity to absorb new ideas; however, exterior associations limit it. Therefore, the narrator suggests, the individual mind should be set free from the external “assimilations” [24]—“prejudices” [20]. Even the “smallest idea” [13] formed in freedom would be sufficient to invalidate the established values of “all forefathers”—traditional “great m[e]n” [15]. This means that the free mind has to resist the impulse to conform to the established traditional boundaries of the past automatically and reject the new [1, 8] and instead, embrace and assent to it:

**[25] Looking on the past you arrive at “Yes,” but before you can
act upon it you have already arrived at “No.”**

In other words, Loy’s persona is critiquing those who blindly look at the “past” [8] and negate everything new—“No”—without questioning it as focusing on the past would lead these people nowhere but to external things. Instead, it is needed to abandon the traditional past and be receptive to the internal things—new ideas:

**[26] THE Futurist must leap from affirmative to affirmative, ignoring
intermittent negations—must spring from stepping-stone to
stone of creative explorations; without slipping back into the
turbid stream of accepted facts.**

This is a clarification of the attitude expected from the potential Futurist. As explained earlier, *Leap*[ing] from external things to internal ones represents the future, which “EXPLODES with *Light*” [10]. Loy’s Futurist individual must change her focus to find the invisible and internal essences in the sublime by arriving at “Yes,” [25] and “*Leap*[ing]” to the positive and creative ideas: the potential Futurist must move forward on the stepping-stone[s] without getting stuck—“slipping back”—in the dark current of the “accepted facts” of the “great man” [15] and the “forefathers” [24]. In short, Loy’s narrator glorifies the eternal infiniteness of the future liberated from “prejudices,” [20]

"assimilations," [24] "negations," and the "accepted facts" [26].

THE MARGINAL SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE FUTURIST-MODERNIST INDIVIDUAL

At this crucial point, following the argument against "accepted facts," Loy's narrator moves on from the potential Futurist perspective to a broader, modernist perspective, considering all these characterisations to be aspects of the concept of the absolute, and she implies that the only truth on which "man may pin his faith" is that there is no "absolute" truth:

**[27] THERE are no excrescences on the absolute, to which man
 may pin his faith.**

From a semiotic perspective, the term "absolute" can be associated with both the concept of totality, where the fragments stand synecdochically for the whole of the universe, and the quality of being unlimited, where the individuals exceed their boundaries and discover themselves. Thus, the concept of absoluteness is manifested as the narrator's revolutionary project for the upcoming modern world. The potential Futurist man, in the wake of modernism, needs to "spring from stepping-stone to stone" [26] to attain the "absolute" as there is no abnormality on the absoluteness. These abnormalities—"excrescences"—can be interpreted as the external things described earlier [3, 11, 20, 24, 26].

The traditional concept of beauty has changed throughout history, but now a new form is necessary since humanity is in a dilemma:

[28] TODAY is the crisis in consciousness.

This new form suggested by Loy's persona is consciousness; the present is in the moment of a subtle crisis. The concept of consciousness is therefore developed in more detail:

**[29] CONSCIOUSNESS cannot spontaneously accept or reject
 new forms, as offered by creative genius; it is the new form for
 however great period of time it may remain a mere irritant—
 that moulds consciousness to the necessary amplitude for hold-
 ing it.**

“Consciousness” is the key for the individual man to change his perception to reach psychic liberation; this argument evokes the narrator of “Feminist Manifesto,” who calls women to the consciousness of femininity: “seek within yourselves to find out what you are” (Loy, *LLB* in Conover, 154). As in the manifesto, the dilemma of “consciousness,” Loy’s narrator employs here invites the ideal readers to self-determination in order to find their own consciousness without limiting their “fullest capacity,” [16] because at present, this new form is in a status of crisis due to the limited understanding of the individual minds who were influenced by the traditional ideas of the “great man” [15]. This change may be considered an “irritant,” in that people are hesitant to absorb new forms because they have restricted themselves to individual development; but individual consciousness is timeless:

[30] CONSCIOUSNESS has no climax.

The new form is beyond limited concepts of time and space; it represents mental freedom connected with the interior space of the individual human mind. It is the ultimate form which is free from all its external restraints and leads to the unconditioned totality; it does not depend on any “excrescences” [27]. When the contrast between internal and external spaces is reconsidered, the new form—“consciousness”—semiotically alludes to the typical twentieth-century narrative technique “stream of consciousness,” in which the narrator expresses her subliminal feelings. This new form is subsequently introduced in connection with its limitless capacity in the universe:

[31] LET the Universe flow into your consciousness, there is no limit to its capacity, nothing that it shall not re-create.

This aphorism becomes clear if one considers that the fragments signify the totality—the “absolute” [27]. Once the new form of “consciousness” is perceived by humanity, it will also absorb the whole universe. As a result, the universe will be infused into the human consciousness, which has a limitless potential to regenerate society. Now, the *starting* point—“the velocity of velocities” [2]—can be reframed in this context. The phrase describes a synecdochic representation of the future as well as the possibility of speed. In the context of “the idea of ideas,” the “velocity” represents “consciousness” while “velocities” represents the totality—“the Universe.” The narrator connects this argument to the next aphorism to stress the potential of “consciousness,” which will absorb the elements of life:

[32] UNSCREW your capability of absorption and grasp the elements of Life—*Whole*.

This is only possible through the absorption of the individual consciousness by the universe; in this way, the key elements of life can be apprehended:

**[33] MISERY is in the disintegration of Joy;
Intellect, of Intuition;
Acceptance, of Inspiration.**

Following her characterisation of abstract concepts of life—"LOVE," [17] "TIME," [21] "MIND" [24] and "CONSCIOUSNESS," [29]—Loy's narrator now redefines other essential elements of human life; she considers these concepts necessary for the psychic evolution of mankind. Potential future time is associated with light and happiness while the past represents dark and misery, and at this point, these fundamental elements of life are introduced in contrast with one another. "MISERY" is described as a factor which limits "Joy"; it should be abandoned. The potential Futurist must always look ahead—to the future "EXPLOD[ING] with *Light*" [10]. "Intuition" is related to human consciousness as well as "appreciation of one's self" [17]; it is restricted by "Intellect" [33]—human "wisdom" [24] imposed by the "accepted facts" [26] of "all forefathers" [24]. Here, the emphasis is on the significance of psychic insight rather than on reason and knowing. Finally, "acceptance" and "Inspiration" are contrasted with each other: "acceptance" represents agreeing with the "prejudices" and "accepted facts," while inspiration transforms people, so they embrace and participate in new ideas and forms—"consciousness" which enables them to "find the sublime" [6]. The narrator now reframes the concept of the individual psyche of the modern world and argues for the creation of a healthy personality that has to be purified from the ideas of other people:

[34] CEASE to build up your personality with the ejections of irrelevant minds.

The expansion of the individual mind is possible through the elimination of the "accepted facts" and ideas of the "forefathers." In this way, everyone will have his/her own views freed from "prejudices" and other people's ideas. This can be achieved through the individual's own choices:

- [35] NOT to be a cipher in your ambient,
But to color your ambient with your preferences.**

In this context, Loy's persona discusses the status of the modern individual in the social order. In order not to be a worthless person in society, one should fix up her environment with her own choices not by "accept[ing] the facts" as they are, but furnishing them with her own decisions:

- [36] NOT to accept experience at its face value.**
[37] BUT to readjust activity to the peculiarity of your own will.

Individuals must not believe what they see; instead, they must make their own preferences and distinctive characteristics to find the deeper meaning inside them. All these suggestions are brought up as fundamental principles to achieve psychic liberation:

- [38] THESE are the primary tentatives towards independence.**

Through these characterisations, the individual man is introduced as the source of the problem:

- [39] MAN is a slave only to his own mental lethargy.**

In other words, the traditional Futurist is limited by his attitude of laziness—indifference towards his own individual development. As an apathetic action, it limits the individual and makes the person self-restricted. Loy's narrator implies that it is one's own choice of psychic laziness which results in your limited creativity. Once the individual is rescued from the boundaries in her mind and becomes conscious, she will be free in her own creativity and attain her own mental independence, which will reshape the modern world. This freedom reflects the limitlessness of the individual mind's capacity:

- [40] YOU cannot restrict the mind's capacity.**

Considering the indefinable second-person pronoun, "YOU," Loy's narrator's voice shifts to a different form of dialogue. She interacts directly with the reader and calls the audience to self-realisation. Arguing that individuals must not limit their psychic scope, she critiques the attitudes of human beings who limit themselves:

- [41] THEREFORE you stand not only in abject servitude to your
perceptive consciousness—**

**[42] BUT also to the mechanical re-actions of the subconsciousness,
that rubbish heap of race-tradition—**

Drawing on the word's traditional definition, the narrator blames individuals who are despicably limited in their "consciousness." These people perceive the world in their senseless "subconsciousness," which represents a "rubbish heap of race-tradition." The figurative suggestion of the hyphenated "race-tradition" is an ironic perspective on nationalism; this attitude reflects the limited attitudes of individuals—"prejudices" and false, imagined freedoms.:

**[43] AND believing yourself to be free—your least conception is
colored
by the pigment of retrograde superstitions.**

The potential individual of the future should set his mind free so that he will be purified from such beliefs in "retrograde superstitions" and from "insidious reactions" [19]. The idea of mental space brings together these characterisations which limit people:

**[44] HERE are the fallow-lands of mental spatiality that Futurism
will clear—**

These attitudes are "fallow-lands" which the psychic development of Futurism will eliminate, if through it, as the narrator suggests, human beings move towards self-realisation:

**[45] MAKING place for whatever you are brave enough, beautiful
enough to draw out of the realized self.**

As a consequence of the potential "consciousness," the one who believes in herself and behaves courageously and aesthetically—not traditionally—will be able to attain her self-realisation. The narrator's voice abruptly shifts to a contentious and combative polemic—the most aggressive aphorism in the text:

**[46] TO your blushing we shout the obscenities, we scream the blas-
phemies, that you, being weak, whisper alone in the dark.**

This is the first time Loy's narrator uses the first-person plural "we," which gives

the impression of a collective voice, recalling the rhetoric of an earlier aphorism—“your egotism” and “you comprise mankind in your self-sympathy” [18] in which she uses the second-person plural “you.” Here, both are used in the same sentence to concentrate on the two polar sides by drawing attention to the distance between them. These “obscenities” and “blasphemies” represent the language the potential Modernist-Futurists use; they are “whisper[ed]” by the anti-Futurists as they feel ashamed and speak among themselves secretly:

[47] THEY are empty except of your shame.

Since their minds are limited, the language of the Futurists does not make any sense of them, so they are embarrassed; these sounds are dispersed and lost:

[48] AND so these sounds shall dissolve back to their innate senselessness.

These—the “obscenities” and “blasphemies”—will turn into absurdity in the small minds of traditionalists since they do not have conscious awareness. In this way, following the social change, now the aesthetic change will occur; the narrator announces her utopian idea of the revolution of Futurist language:

[49] THUS shall evolve the language of the Future.

The narrative voice takes on an enthusiastic tone; she now promises the evolution of the language—a new form she expects to be evolved by the limitless individual minds. The text concludes by envisaging an imagined and respected superior race:

[50] THROUGH derision of Humanity as it appears—

[51] TO arrive at respect for man as he shall be—

In order for individuals to get the respect they deserve from society, the narrator suggests this solution :

**[52] ACCEPT the tremendous truth of Futurism
Leaving all those**

—Knick-knacks.—

Moreover, it is only possible through the acceptance of the inspiring path of the new “Futurism.” The text ends with the narrator’s rejection of outmoded external forms; the “—Knick-knacks—” represent the traditional limited ways of thinking that are to be

destroyed for the regeneration of a new modernist world.

THE FUTURIST NARRATOR'S SHIFT TOWARDS MODERNISM

This part of the article elaborates on how the pencilled substitutions of the author in the first appearance of the text reflect the shift of the narrative voice from being a futurist to a modernist. The pencilled alterations the author made on the first published copy of the "Aphorisms" are often connected, through historical and biographical interpretations and based on the historical accounts, with the fragmentation of the author from the Futurist movement (Figure 3):

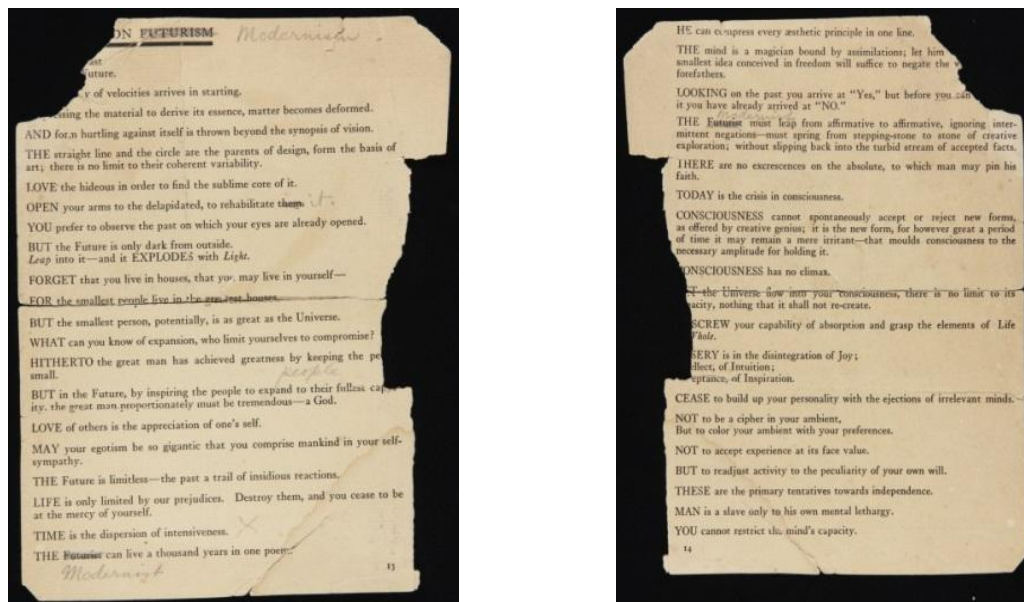


Figure 3. Loy's pencilled substitutions on her "Aphorisms on Futurism"¹⁴

In the manuscript, the term "Futurism" was crossed out and replaced with "Modernism," "Futurist" with "Modernist," and "Future" with "Modern," in pencil. The title was also altered from "Futurism" to "Modernism," but the rest of the text remained the same. Roger Conover, for example, remarks in his *Editor's Notes* that

[a] printed leaf of the [*Camera Work*] text at Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library bears [Mina Loy's] pencilled substitution

¹⁴ "Aphorisms on Futurism." Published in *Camera Work* 45, 1914 January. The altered copy with the changes is archived at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature, Mina Loy Papers MSS 6, Box 6, folder 152. When exactly Loy made these changes is unknown. See brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3547622.

of the word ‘modern’ for ‘future’ and “Modernism’ for ‘Futurism’ throughout. [Loy] probably made these notes after abandoning her Futurist allegiance; although she might have retrospectively preferred to call this piece ‘Aphorisms on Modernism.’ (215).

However, the reason why I have retained the original title of the poem here is not to base my analysis on the biographical and historical accounts but to shift focus to the narrator’s account and away from the author’s. The chronological course of the aphorisms and the intertextual connections between them embody the shift in Loy’s narrator’s views from Futurism to Modernism, as the narrator diverges from Futurist ideologies to “the new form” [29]: “the crisis in consciousness” [28].

CONCLUSION

“Aphorisms on Futurism” is a written proclamation in dialogue form; the aphorisms propounded are inflammatory and revolutionary for the upcoming modern world. The text can be considered an aesthetic and ideological assessment of modernity. The narrator of the poem sets forth an argument to mankind; she suggests that the universe is in need of a radical revolution which is only possible through a change and an awareness in the ways individuals think: “human consciousness” for a modern world. The revolution will take place by transcending the limitations of individual minds.

Although there are parallels between Loy’s text and the Futurist manifestos, in particular stylistically, and it is generally thought that Loy’s “Aphorisms on Futurism” is a reproduction of Marinetti’s “Futurist Manifesto,” the style and form of “Aphorisms on Futurism” differ from that of other Futurist texts. Compared to the Futurist manifestos, the fragments are connected to each other and provide a coherent argument. The text focuses on the spiritual evolution of the human consciousness and expansion of the individual mind to “comprise mankind,” contrary to the Futurists’ vision of violence, egotism, and nationalism. In opposition to the Futurists’ fantasy of destroying the traditions of the past, Loy’s text suggests that an individual should reconcile with the retrospective ideas and “rehabilitate” [7] the conventions of the past through love, self-sympathy, and psychic liberation.

Through the argument related to the destruction of the retrospective conventions, Loy’s persona subverts the aesthetic and social traditions of the past, which she sees as insufficient for the modern world. A new form of thinking is needed to perceive “the elements of Life—*Whole*” [32], and this is proposed through the fifty-two aphorisms. The psychic independence of individual minds is urgently needed for the regeneration

of society; this is only possible through the expansion of human minds with an awareness of self-consciousness. The mental expansion and intellectual consciousness of the individual can only be guaranteed through the metamorphic experience of a "cosmic reproductivity" (*The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, Loy 7) actualizing in linguistic and artistic layers. This conception is also developed in Loy's "Parturition" (1914), where the act of childbirth is depicted metaphorically as "cosmic initiation" (*The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, Loy 7) as well as a contact with the "contents of the universe" (Loy 6). The narrator of the text, in this way, takes the concepts of Futurism in another direction and suggests a new form, which can be anticipated as the herald of a new era: Modernism.

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