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Bust the Roof off Everything:

Private Space and Social Life in Modernist Literature

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Comparative Literature

by

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ABSTRACT

Bust the Roof off Everything:
Private Space and Social Life in Modernist Literature

by

Ekaterina Lopatko

While Modernism is renowned for its depictions of the lonely individual navigating atomizing and alienating public space, a study of representations of private, domestic spaces in Modernist literature complements this focus by foregrounding the role of increased social consciousness and relationality in these authors' understanding of modernity. This thesis examines the ways in which various Modernist writers, including Jean Rhys, Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Walter Benjamin, André Breton and Anais Nin express their consciousness of the social conditions and challenges of their day through their depictions, structural and psychological, of interior living spaces. Arguing against the nineteenth-century conception of the enclosed, idyllic family home, these authors continue to center the importance of domestic space while reimagining its structure and significance.

Introduction: Modernism and the Public

Modernity is often depicted as a time of fragmentation, atomization and alienation. As social norms and institutions underwent rapid change in the wake of the technological advances of the Industrial Revolution, and the attending economic, political and cultural transformations of the period, many responded to these rapid shifts with confusion, nostalgia, or even despair. Modernist literature is commonly held to reflect such trends through its focus on interiority and public space, particularly in the modern city. Perhaps the reigning image of this literature is the flâneur – the lonely individual wearing his way through anonymous crowds flowing through wide, repetitive city streets threatening to swallow up any semblance of stability. Interpersonal ties cannot survive in such a barren climate, not to mention a harmonious social order, if ever one there was. The lonely flâneur turns inward, transcribing his disorientation and exhilaration into a flow of consciousness that painstakingly records every minute impression to fill the void of perceived loss – of the familiar streets of his youth; of a stable social order in which he can know his place; of the warm shelter of the family home.

This is one rather pessimistic narrative of modernity, one that finds expression in canonical urban literature and scholarship in the lineage of Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. It centers what literary scholar Keith Tester calls the flâneur's existential emptiness, his loss of psychic stability, or "*being*" (7). While undoubtedly this narrative speaks to one experience of modernity, it is far from the only one. In fact, shifting the frame of analysis from exterior urban space alone to include interior, domestic spaces reveals an altogether different image of modernity.

Traditionally, scholarship centers on the city as the privileged locus of modernity, as evidenced by the vast field of flânerie studies, as well as the more recent spatial turn in

humanities scholarship, which takes up geographic motifs with renewed vigor. As Andrew Thacker details in the 2005 article "The Idea of a Critical Literary Geography," this movement has used literature to map urban spaces, including tracing links between distant and disparate spaces around the world, a methodology which often overlaps with a postcolonial studies approach in tracing migration and other global spatial resonances. While the city undoubtedly remains an emblematic site both of modernity and in Modernist literature, it should not be rendered synonymous with the city streets, nor imagined as a diametrical ideological negation of the private, the domestic, and the home.

This thesis will present a view of the Modernist domestic that foregrounds the sustained importance and influence of sociality and relationality to the writers of this time. Against the bourgeois home, imagined as an ideal, enclosed shelter from the perils of the social world, literature presents the Modernist interior as always already social. In fact, attempts to isolate the interior from the exterior are presented as ineffectual, problematic and even unethical or outright harmful. As such, the categories of public and private space exist in uneasy opposition that collapses in on itself when asserted too starkly; rather, public and private are interwoven, complementary and mutually constitutive. Just as the flâneur blends the two by making his home in the streets, the Modernist home appears as a space where social relations, tensions and injustices play out in miniature, often encoded into the very structure of the space and the objects within. This reversibility of public and private spheres, wherein both participate in the totality of social space, thus emerges as a key theme of Modernist literature.

In the first or introductory section, I will begin with an exploration of thematics of public and private in modernity, beginning with nineteenth-century depictions of the city.

While some literature of this time period sketches stark oppositions between public, urban space and private, domestic space, representing these categories as purity and impurity, or safety and danger, Modernists tend to complicate such claims. While the Modernist streets presented a space of greater freedom, especially to women, this shift of focus on the public did not replace an attention to the private sphere, which authors reimagined for the new era. In particular, Virginia Woolf captures the transition from Victorian to Modernist domesticity in both life and work, arguing for the necessity for a private space liberated from the constraints of bourgeois family structures to facilitate creative work, especially for the woman writer, in the famous essays "Street Haunting" and *A Room of One's Own*. In London and in Paris, writers and artists lived out the importance of Modernist domestic space through participation in clubs and salons, such as Woolf's Bloomsbury Group and Natalie Barney's salon, which facilitated creative innovation through the exchange of ideas, connections and material and professional support.

In the second section, the analysis will turn more concretely to Modernist domestic spaces as portrayed in literature. As we will see, there is no such thing as a "private" Modernist domestic; all such spaces, even the most ostensibly privileged and sheltered from the social world, are constructed through and permeable to a plethora of social forces. In particular, three Modernist women authors – Jean Rhys, Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes – portray social inequalities obliquely through their depictions of interior space, from the most privileged to the most modest. While the wealthy have the means and motivations to maintain a structural and psychological separation between public and private space, this boundary can never be absolute, as Woolf shows; on the other hand, poorer characters are more directly vulnerable to incursions of the often painful realities of the social world into

their homes, which structurally reinforce exclusion and coercion. In and through domestic space, the complexity of social relations is revealed, including socioeconomic inequality and racial prejudice.

The third section shifts the focus from spaces themselves to the objects that comprise them. More specifically, this section will explore interpretations of modern, capitalist production and circulation of objects in relation to public and private worlds. It begins with Émile Zola's nineteenth century novel *Au Bonheur des dames* as a case study in the social world's incursion into the private family home through the department store's unleashing of modern forms of production, marketing, advertising and visual display that combine to create the commodity as such. This then sets the scene for a study of the Modernist object through the work of Walter Benjamin and André Breton. On the one hand, Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood around 1900* echoes the nostalgia for the sheltered bourgeois private by representing the intrusion of the telephone as a destabilizing sign of modernity, effecting a collapse of patriarchal sovereignty over the private domain. On the other, Benjamin's analysis of Breton's *Nadja* offers a more dynamic portrait of the interplay of Modernist public and private. In *Nadja*, the flâneur's embrace of street as home becomes a revolutionary gesture, encoded in the "outmoded" or Surrealist objects that frame and guide the scope of chance encounters. As such, the same objects previously depicted as trampling over established social orders and boundaries to expand the reach of concentrated economic forces into private life here become channels for imagining new, creative, and increasingly and authentically relational forms of living.

The final section will reincorporate the two previous foci on interior spaces and objects to connect them with the other celebrated form of Modernist interiority – the psyche.

Against the radically isolated psyche sometimes associated with literary Modernism, the texts examined in this section – Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* and Anais Nin's *House of Incest* – depict the limitations and dangers of such psychological states by exteriorizing them as houses and objects in the home. Here, spatial and psychic interiority coalesce around two axes – the collection, and the incestuous house. Using Baudrillard's analysis of the collector, I will study three key instances of collecting in *Nightwood*, each representing an attempt to assert control over interior space, but ultimately failing to correct for the social and relational challenges confronting each character. In this way, Barnes implicitly advocates against attempted sovereignty and enclosure, both materially and, more importantly, psychologically. Then, I will take up the image of the uncanny, traumatized or incestuous house as theorized by Freud in "The Uncanny" and fictionalized by Barnes and Nin. In both cases, the incestuous house represents the extreme of attempted enclosure of the domestic, or familial, from the wider social world, with disastrous consequences. Once again, these two Modernist writers argue against the artificial separation of public and private spheres as depicted through an amplified rendering of the "incestuous" bourgeois home and family. Rather, and not unlike Benjamin's reading of *Nadja*, they gesture towards a recognition of and advocation for the more open, fluid and integrated relationship between individual, interpersonal / familial, and wider social worlds, which characterizes the Modernist literature presented throughout this study.

I.   Modern City and Modernist Domestic

The Abject City

In response to the rapid transformation of urban life throughout the nineteenth century, many theorists, writers and social reformers turned their attention to the conditions on the city streets. This often included attempts to grapple with, catalogue and redress perceived social and moral ills of the modern metropolis, like overcrowding, poor sanitation, and the general dissolution of public morality imagined to arise from an increasingly public way of life. This moral panic, indulged to varying degrees by artists and writers of the day, has been theorized as stemming largely from a fear of contamination of bourgeois propriety through often literal, physical contact with the lower classes, no longer avoidable on the heterogenous city streets. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White detail in the famous 1986 essay "The City: The Sewer, the Gaze and the Contaminating Touch," the perceived impure bodies of the poor and working classes loomed disproportionately large in the bourgeois class's conception of the modern city: "In Chadwick, in Mayhew, in countless Victorian reformers, the slum, the labouring poor, the prostitute, the sewer, were recreated for the bourgeois study and drawing-room as much as for the urban council chamber. Indeed, the reformers were central to the construction of the urban geography of the bourgeois Imaginary" (125-26). Such fears and stereotypes were reproduced and circulated not only through reformers' reports, but also in the literature of the day, as Stallybrass and White note. This was not a strictly English phenomenon; across the channel, Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, published in the *Journal des débats* between 1842 and 1843, detailed the harrowing conditions of workers on the city streets. Sue's introduction echoes the language that Stallybrass, following Marx and Engels, uses to theorize the lumpenproletariat in "Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat," in which he states, "Marx and Engels, indeed, sometimes used lumpenproletariat as a racial category, and in this they simply repeated one of the

commonplaces of bourgeois social analysis in the nineteenth century: the depiction of the poor as a nomadic tribe, innately depraved" (70). While Sue does not write of exactly the same people that Marx would term the lumpenproletariat, he does rearticulate a similar trope of "othering" the poor through images of abjection. *Les Mystères de Paris* opens with a warning to the reader: "Ce début annonce au lecteur qu'il doit assister à de sinistres scènes ; s'il y consent, il pénétrera dans des régions horribles, inconnues; des types hideux, effrayants, fourmilleront dans ces cloaques impurs comme les reptiles dans les marais" (Sue). That is to say, if they proceed, the reader will encounter the "strange places, foul urban abscesses that teem with criminals as terrifying and revolting as swamp creatures" (Betensky and Loesberg 3). Here, rather than (merely, directly) racializing the urban poor, Sue compares them to animals, specifically swamp animals who evoke the horror of heterogeneity, as Stallybrass writes, or of miasma. In the essay "Miasma," Michael Taussig writes that the swamp acutely threatens "humanity's separation from animality on account of the invention of prohibitions," echoing Sue's conflation of human and animal in the "criminal" urban space in which prohibitions are broken (10). At the same time, Taussig explores the bridge between the horror and abjection evoked by the swamp with the fecundity of life that it produces. Quoting from Georges Bataille, he portrays the swamp as a "fetid sticky object without boundaries, which teems with life and yet is the sign of death" (*The Accursed Share* 81, quoted in Taussig 10).

Echoing the contradictory functions and affects of the swamp, Sue's text reflects the multilayered attitude of the bourgeoisie towards the working poor, and by extension, public urban space in general. On one hand, public urban space enabled the breakdown of boundaries between bodies that the bourgeois private space maintained so strictly,

unwholesome mixing producing criminality and moral degradation. This "swamp" threatened to swallow the proper body of the bourgeois individual who strays into its territory; hence Sue's performative warning to his readers. In this way, modern urbanization was configured as a direct threat to bourgeois morality, predicated on the enclosure of the private, domestic space. At the same time, the corruption and danger of the city streets beckoned as much as they repulsed. Despite the overdetermined affects of fear and disgust infusing depictions of the urban underclass, the sheer volume of literature and reports on this subject speaks to a quasi-pornographic desire for vicarious participation in the perceived freedoms of the public sphere off limits for the respectable bourgeois, especially the woman. Novels like Sue's catered to a fascination with a public but hidden life that unfolded beyond the bounds of propriety; from the safety of the drawing room, readers could vicariously participate in the titillating breaking of taboos imagined to abound "out there."

Other writers like Charles Baudelaire portrayed a fascination with the unknown, inaccessible "other" encountered in public through an aesthetic of voyeurism. In the poem "À une passante" in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire's poetic narrator "drinks" from the eye of an unknown woman both "la douceur qui fascine" and "le plaisir qui tue" ["The sweetness that enthralls and the pleasure that kills"] (127.8). Echoing the interlayered forces of desire and danger offered by the promiscuity of the city streets, the poet's reaction to the unattended, anonymous woman, already evocative due to her mere presence on the street, reflects the general fear and allure of urban public space. While Stallybrass and White privilege the touch as the sense that threatens the purity and integrity of the (bourgeois) body, for Baudelaire, vision becomes a relatively safer way to indulge in the pleasures of the public, at least in a fleeting and imaginary fashion. Overall, for the nineteenth-century reformer and the

writer alike, modern city streets promised an enticing transgression, a destabilization of the familiar, even as they threatened the safety and bodily and psychic integrity of the subject, as captured by Baudelaire's "le plaisir qui tue." However, despite the mixed affects applied in representations of the public, it remained a space of otherness opposed imaginatively to the comfort, stability and shelter of the domestic interior.

The Gendered City

This self whose propriety could be violated on the city streets was not only classed, but also gendered. Before the twentieth century, the purity of the bourgeois woman was a common problematic for writers and reformers alike. Following the Industrial Revolution and attending urbanization, more and more lower- and middle-class women left the home and entered the urban workforce, and even wealthy women whose husbands provided for the household began to gain more mobility and autonomy, especially in urban space. As a result, the ideal of the private sphere, which would shield the pure, fragile woman from the coarseness of the public domain, and which she in turn maintained by exercising her innately superior moral and spiritual judgement, began to crumble. The city came to signify liberation and opportunity of all kinds, but especially for the woman. And yet, the association of urban space with impurity followed women moving through urban space unattended, who had to tread carefully to avoid being branded a "public woman," or prostitute.

Even though women of various social classes did move through urban public space to some extent, this movement remained highly fraught and problematic until the twentieth century. A woman in public was always remarked upon – typically for worse. For this reason, scholars like Janet Wolff have argued for the impossibility of the *flâneuse*, at least if defined as the woman who could participate in the canonical activities of the male *flâneur*.

Buttressing this claim, Wolff quotes sociologist Richard Sennett, who "recognizes that the 'right to escape to public privacy was unequally enjoyed by the sexes', since even by the late nineteenth century women could not go alone to a café in Paris or a restaurant in London'" (217, quoted in Wolff 8). Likewise, "in the earlier period of 'public life' women had to take a good deal more care about the 'signs' of their dress, which would be scrutinized for an indication of their social rank," distinguishing the "loose" woman from the "respectable" (Wolff 8). To equally enjoy the anonymity of the streets, a woman quite literally had to masquerade as a man, as George Sand famously did on her walks across Paris.

The high-status woman in particular had to be protected from the contaminating influences of the streets – and from allegations of impropriety should she be glimpsed in public unattended, without probable cause, or in the wrong neighborhood. In Honoré de Balzac's *Ferragus,* Madame Jules, the paragon of bourgeois virtue and domesticity, is ruined when she is spotted paying a secret rendezvous to a man in a working-class neighborhood and cannot offer a satisfactory explanation to her husband. Spatially, her respectability is thus confined to the private space of the bourgeois apartment; her solo ventures into the public torment her husband and eventually unravel the couple's blissful married life, escalating to her melodramatic death.

Despite conservative resistance, over time, women of all social statuses increasingly found their way into the public sphere. While working women were by necessity granted greater mobility earlier, though not without attending risks of surveillance and harm, for the well-to-do woman supported by her husband, the first sanctioned unattended foray into the public came in the semi-contained, transitional space of the department store. As dramatized by Émile Zola in *Au Bonheur des dames*, women of all classes could shop and mingle

without male supervision in this protected environment – though not without the panoptic gaze of the owner substituting for the more traditional patriarchal oversight of the husband or father.

By the twentieth century, women could increasingly appear in public independently from men without damage to their reputation. Increasing social and legal emancipation meant a gradual untethering from the traditional bourgeois home with its physical and symbolic confinement. As women began moving more freely through public space and earning their own incomes, they could carve out both physical and psychic space for themselves, independent from the patriarchal confines of domesticity and motherhood. Thus women's social emancipation was closely linked to their physical entry into public space.

The Modernist Domestic

Unsurprisingly, many progressive women celebrated the demise of Victorian-era domesticity and all its restrictions. In *A Room of One's Own* and "Professions for Women," Virginia Woolf famously dramatizes her rebellion against the "Angel in the House," her original term for this paragon of domestic femininity, modeled on her own mother. Lecturing at the National Society for Women's Service in 1931, Woolf addressed an audience of young professional women: "You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her – you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House," but "in those days – the last of Queen Victoria – every house had its Angel" (*The Crowded Dance of Modern Life* 102). The Angel, or the stereotypical Victorian mother and wife, was "intensely sympathetic," "immensely charming," "utterly unselfish," and "excelled in the difficult arts of family life"; above all, "she was pure" (*CD*[1] 102). When Woolf first tried to write

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[1] *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life.*

professionally, she reminisces, "it was she who used to come between me and my paper," burdening her with the weight of familial and cultural expectations antithetical to the role of a writer – "Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own," the Angel whispers to Woolf, derailing her early attempts (*CD* 102-03).

If the Angel lives in the house, then logically, liberation is in the streets. Throughout her work, Woolf extolls the benefits of "street haunting" for women. Her novels are peppered with iconic *flâneuses*, from Clarissa and Elizabeth Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway* to Katharine Hilbery and Mary Datchet in *Night and Day.* However, Woolf's most direct appraisal of the value of access to public space for women comes in the essay 1927 "Street Haunting." For Woolf's narrator, "rambling the streets of London" is "the greatest pleasure," and for the woman writer specifically, it poses an opportunity for both a generative shift in perception and fresh encounters to stimulate the imagination (*CD* 70). Tellingly, the pretense concocted by the narrator for an evening walk is an errand directly tied with Woolf's craft – buying a pencil. This goal is both symbolic and incidental; along the way to the shop, the narrator encounters a variety of sights and people that become creative fodder, the essay itself the testament.

While a cursory reading of "Street Haunting" does imply that the woman writer needs to step outside the private home to stimulate her craft, Woolf's relationship to domestic space remains more ambiguous. Rather than totally forsaking the private in favor of a stereotypical Modernist public life, Woolf reimagines the domestic to better serve the needs of the woman artist. In this, she complicates the aforementioned separation of public and private by challenging the association between the private home and boundaries and separation from the indeterminate mixing of the public. For Woolf, the traditional bourgeois home offers very

little privacy and psychic separation for the woman, the Angel in the House who is expected to self-sacrifice constantly and take on the needs and opinions of those around her. Woolf captures this extreme emotional availability in her novel *To the Lighthouse*. In a rare moment of solitude, Mrs. Ramsay, the quintessential Angel in the House, reflects: "They came to her, naturally, since she was a woman, all day long with this and that; one wanting this, another that; the children were growing up; she often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions" (*To the Lighthouse* 32). The constant demands of her family exhaust Mrs. Ramsay to the point of hollowing out her sense of self, replacing it with others' psychic content.

To mitigate this lack of psychic separation afforded to Victorian women, which makes independent thought and thus intellectual work impossible, Woolf prescribes the now-proverbial room of one's own to the woman artist so that she may develop the "mind of her own" that will allow her to create authentically (*CD* 103). In this way, instead of rejecting bourgeois domesticity outright, she reforms it to better serve the needs of the modern woman. For Woolf, then, women's liberation originates in and relies upon certain conditions in the private sphere, although as the essay "Street Haunting" demonstrates, the freedom to explore the public independently also forms a crucial part. In this, Woolf complicates the unidirectional feminist vision of domestic as oppressive and public as liberatory. At the conclusion of "Street Haunting," after a stimulating foray into the public, the narrator reenters her own space with relief: "Still as we approach our own doorstep again, it is comforting to feel the old possessions, the old prejudices, fold us round; and the self, which has been blown about at so many street corners, which has battered like a moth at the flame of so many inaccessible lanterns, sheltered and enclosed" (*CD* 81). Of course, Woolf's

narrator, like Woolf herself, is financially privileged enough to afford the comforts of

material possessions, as well as prejudices that, on the whole, appear to stack in her favor.

This privilege, however, is inseparable from the necessary conditions of a creative life for a

woman: the ability retreat temporarily to an enclosed, protected space in which to rest, think

and create. Thus the woman artist must be able to both move freely through the public *and*

independently control her private environment.

Despite the privileged association between Modernism and public space, it is often

private space that provided the indispensable conditions for artistic innovation. This includes

not only a sheltered work and living environment, as Woolf expresses, but also communal

spaces to house creative social networks. Instead of fully rejecting nineteenth-century social

conventions like structured calls to another's home, many Modernists refashioned these

practices to serve their needs and lifestyles. In Woolf, it is the woman's ability to access the

boons of bourgeois private life traditionally reserved for, or at least administered by, the

patriarch – a stable income and personal property, or "money and a room of her own" – that

allows her to become a modern thinker, writer and person (*A Room of One's Own* 4).

Likewise, despite their revolutionary ideas and practices, Modernist circles benefitted from

the traditional and often hereditary privileges of money, status and social connections. The

classic example is Woolf's own Bloomsbury Group, who "lived in squares, painted in circles

and loved in triangles," as Dorothy Parker reportedly quipped. Likewise, in Paris, expatriate

artists gathered in salons and drawing rooms to exchange ideas, insights and more. In *Women

of the Left Bank*, Shari Benstock traces a history of women's Modernism through a spatial

heuristic, titling many chapters by the address of the woman or women who resided there.

Among the most famous addresses includes Natalie Barney's Sapphic salon at rue Jacob,

where the wealthy and prominent Barney lived her feminist ideals by connecting and advancing women artists and intellectuals creatively, professionally and sexually. As Woolf and Barney's examples demonstrate, the freedom to reimagine the domestic came with wealth. In order to create a private alcove in which to live and work autonomously, artists needed a certain degree of financial independence, which, for women especially, often meant paradoxically depending on a stable income from an outside source, typically a wealthy family member. Just as in *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf's narrator attains her independence when her aunt leaves her a yearly income in her will, Woolf herself, like most members of the Bloomsbury Group, inherited substantial family wealth. This access to resources facilitated Woolf's career, as well as that of her friends, in very concrete and substantial ways; in 1917, Woolf and her husband founded the Hogarth Press, named after one of their houses, through which she and her friends would publish much of their work for decades. Likewise, Natalie Barney was "upper middle class but financially independent," and thus free to devote herself to her artistic and social pursuits, which involved facilitating a space for others to exchange and express radical beliefs and connecting people for the benefit of their artistic careers (Benstock 8).

As it turns out, the private sphere was far from passé for Modernists; despite the traditional privileging of public urban space in Modernist literature and scholarship, the domestic sphere provided the indispensable conditions for many writers to create their work, not to mention the networks to publish and share it. In this fundamental way, the Modernist "private" resists the very label, as individual writers' conditions and level of autonomy within the domestic space both directly facilitated others' creative output and closely depended on resources obtained through familial and social networks.

II.   Modernist Living Spaces and Social Consciousness

In addition to its well-studied documentation of exterior urban space – streets, cafés,
cinemas, parks, etc. – Modernist literature reflects the parallel significance of domestic space
for its creators. Given the complex recent history of gendered designations of public and
private space in the modern city, it is unsurprising that women Modernists in particular
depicted the domestic as an important space that mirrors and complicates social hierarchies
that pervade the entire society. In this section, I will examine representations of living spaces
across a range of socioeconomic statuses in the work of three Modernist writers – Jean Rhys,
Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes. While each author is highly distinctive in style, subject
and key concerns and ideas regarding individual experience and social realities, together,
they conjure a rich and evocative reflection of the ways in which Modernist writers, and
women writers specifically, understood the role of the domestic sphere in their own lives and
in their societies.

Each of these writers refuses any binary separation between public and private space
imagined to structure the nineteenth-century social order, if not absolutely or uncritically. In
their work, the domestic sphere is positioned on a flowing continuum of public and private,
all of which fold into the category of social space as theorized by Henri Lefebvre. In *The
Production of Space*, Lefebvre writes, "every society" "produces a space, its own space," a
cumulative "outcome of past actions" "which permits fresh actions to occur" (32, 73). An
ever-evolving stage for the dynamic interplays of human life, social space cannot be reduced
to the material that comprises it; rather, it "subsumes things produced, and encompasses their
interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity" (Lefebvre 73). In other words, social
space is distinctly material, but not only so; while Lefebvre's analysis hinges on a Marxist

materialist understanding of causality, it provides a useful heuristic outside this framework, too, for it acknowledges the complex web interactions between people, groups and institutions that, in an ongoing and never finalized manner, shapes the conditions for the types of spaces that can exist within any given society and the kinds of activities and behaviors that take place within them. In a sense, "social space" describes physical spaces as material planes of possibility which shape, in a non-absolutizing manner, the possible outcomes that can occur within them. However, and importantly, the definition also accounts for change over time, so that individuals' actions in any given space also gradually accumulate into a new set of possibility, thus allowing for social change.

Following this framework, we can approach literary representations of domestic space as mediated, individual snapshots that reflect one version of social realities and possibilities, which are both structurally contained in the space itself and layered onto them implicitly and affectively. Specifically, each author is highly attuned to the role of social hierarchy and inequality in determining the conditions and possibilities of each space, revealing how shelter, safety and isolation, the nineteenth-century domestic ideals, are explicitly the privilege of the wealthy, and even then, far from absolute.

Designing Impasse: Jean Rhys

In the 1939 novel *Good Morning, Midnight*, Jean Rhys portrays the social construction of domestic space in a way that speaks to its implicit but highly potent structural hierarchies. Rather than depicting private homes, Rhys's work centers a particular kind of liminal living space so emblematic of Modernism and modernity – the hotel room. In the cultural shorthand, the hotel room stands for a kind lifestyle imagined as quintessentially modern – transitory and anonymous, precarious, equal parts liberated and lonely. On a meta level, the

Modernist artist or writer is often pictured living in hotel rooms as a marker of a free and bohemian ethos. Some spatial theorists[2] have imagined the hotel room as a space of radical anonymity where social norms and codes unravel, a sort of non-space, or *non-lieu*, as theorized by Marc Augé to describe various types of "transit points" and "temporary abodes" that are "there to be passed through" (78). In Rhys's work, however, the hotel is anything but neutral or asocial; at the same time, she pushes back against the naïve, privileged view of hotel living as romantic or liberated by showing the dark side of this seemingly untethered existence. Although her single women protagonists have rejected conventional living and ostensibly escaped from the shackles of the confined nineteenth-century domestic sphere, they suffer from an exclusion from the comfort and stability that social ties provide while remaining no less trapped by their circumstances and social position. These misfortunes are not only embedded within, but are also directly effected by their physical surroundings; despite their purported anonymity, hotel rooms in Rhys's texts reveal a desire to control the behavior of those who reside within, a structural manifestation of asymmetries of social status that echoes and reinforces codes and norms that privilege certain people and certain behaviors at the exclusion of others.

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys's protagonist, Sasha Jensen carves out a liminal existence as a single woman in the modern city. Having failed at both the conventional feminine lifestyle – marriage – and the liberated, modern, independent working woman's existence, Sasha spends the narrative shuttling between various hotel rooms. The increasing liminality and transitory quality of her lodgings reflects her progressive social, emotional and

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[2] In the article "'Always the same stairs, always the same room': The Uncanny Architecture of Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*," Emma Zimmerman argues that spatial theorists like Siegfried Kracauer and Marc Augé overlook the social embeddedness of the hotel in positioning these spaces as too radically removed from the "everyday" world of public and private space.

psychological descent throughout the novel; both her surroundings and her life grow more and more desperate over the course of the narrative. As Emma Zimmerman argues in the article "'Always the same stairs, always the same room': The Uncanny Architecture of Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*," the hotel room reflects the uncanny nature of Sasha's existence, both in the unsatisfying repetitions of painful patterns in her personal life and in the way traumatic memories plague her through psychological recurrence. This uncanniness is not merely a structural externalization of individual unhappiness, but rather stems from Sasha's marginal social position in interwar Europe. As an immigrant and a destitute single woman, Sasha lives in hotel rooms not from a desire for liberation, but because she cannot access the stability and security of a permanent home.

In *Good Morning, Midnight,* Sasha obliquely references this asymmetrical allocation of secure domestic space: "Never tell the truth about this business of rooms, because it would bust the roof off everything and undermine the whole social system" (33). Mixing the structural and the social, Sasha gestures towards the unveiling of hidden injustices as "busting the roof off everything," evoking the image of a house which has been physically compromised, its interior and its inhabitants exposed to the public gaze (*GMM*[3] 33). This deroofed house is clearly the bourgeois home, a symbol of the respectable and self-righteous moral order that maintains the "whole social system," along with its injustices, the logics of which would be seriously compromised if the truth of the conditions of the poor were to be revealed (*GMM* 33). In this way, Rhys lampoons the bourgeois socioeconomic order that relies on an ethic of deliberate blindness to justify its own existence.

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[3] *Good Morning, Midnight.*

More concretely, "this business of rooms" for Sasha is a material representation of her lack of agency in determining the conditions and direction of her own life (*GMM 33*). Throughout the text, Sasha makes this business an existential one; she yearns for "A nice room. A beautiful room," while simultaneously resigning herself to the impossibility of improving her surroundings and her circumstances (*GMM* 33). "I shall exist on a different plane at once if I can get this room, if only for a couple of nights," she thinks, "Who says you can't escape your fate? I'll escape from mine, into room number 219. Just try me, just give me a chance" (*GMM* 37). In this case, a brighter fate is embedded into the promise of a better decorated and equipped room – "with rose-coloured curtains, carpet and bath" (*GMM* 37). Sasha imagines her fate improving through another spatial metaphor, an existence "on a different plane," recalling the structure of the multi-story apartment and hotel buildings where she spends her life. However, Rhys forecloses on the possibility of her character attaining emancipation within these structures; the grim refrain, "always the same stairs, always the same room," echoes throughout the text, undermining all hope that Sasha, and the narrative, might achieve a substantive improvement in her fate, which grows only more desperate as she moves through an endless series of different but effectively and affectively identical rooms (*GMM* 32). In the Lefebvrian sense, we might argue that for Sasha, the series of identical hotel rooms reinscribes the same grim potentialities for future action, barring her structurally and psychologically from any truly new actions that would alter the course of her life for the better. In this way, against the modern liberal ideal of personal responsibility, independence and self-determination, in Rhys, individual fate becomes a socially constructed ground, just like the hotel room itself.

While the succession of hotel rooms through which Sasha moves, constrained always

by a precarious financial situation, reflects the great difficulty of the poor of moving onto a

"different plane" of social existence, the particular structure of these rooms introduces an

additional layer of social control (*GMM* 33). In fact, Rhys's hotel rooms are rife with

structural elements meant to elicit behaviors corresponding to a specific system of social

values. In the opening lines of *Good Morning, Midnight,* Sasha enters the first of many hotel

rooms; Rhys describes the room as follows: "There are two beds, a big one for madame and a

smaller one on the opposite side for monsieur. The wash-basin is shut off by a curtain" (9).

As In *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, Victoria Rosner deconstructs this

deceptively simple setup to draw out its latent assumptions:

> It keeps male and female as far apart as possible, defining them through
>
> opposition. The room recommends marriage to its occupants, dubbed
>
> "madame" and "monsieur." Madame's larger bed, presumably intended to
>
> accommodate monsieur should he choose to pay a nocturnal visit,
>
> announces the sexual ground rules of this space. The sanitary facilities have
>
> yet to migrate to a separate room and are cordoned off by a curtain, a divider
>
> that invokes the impropriety of the body by hiding away its ablutions even
>
> in the intimate environs of the bedroom (1).

Beneath its simple, standardized façade, the anonymous hotel room imposes a concrete,

socially derived relational dynamic that centers, predictably, on the gender and sexual

relations of the family. As Foucault theorizes in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality,*

the family, far from being left to their own devices to exist outside of the social in a sheltered

private realm, is the primary and privileged unit of social control. Thus the hotel room

becomes a profoundly social space in the Lefebvrian sense, determined not only along the axis of social class and economic production, but also according to "the social relations of reproduction, i.e. the bio-physiological relations between the sexes and between age groups, along with the specific organization of the family" (32). While Foucault focuses on the institutional and the psychiatric dimensions of social control, in Lefebvre, such norms are reinforced structurally. In Foucault, the Victorian family polices itself first and foremost, but as Rhys demonstrates, the morality of the wealthy finds its way into the living spaces of the more precariously and marginally positioned through material design, among other means. In this instance, Rhys's hotel room relies on a crass, streamlined visual language that aims to mediate a person's relationship to their own body. In providing the structural conditions for certain types of intimacy while barring others, the standard, anonymous hotel room becomes a potent and far-reaching tool of the standardization of social behavior through a coercive design and building practice.

In this case, the room hypocritically enforces the codes of bourgeois propriety onto those who cannot afford to access the shelter and stability of properly bourgeois spaces, like Sasha.

While Rhys's characters experience hotel rooms as quasi-independent beings with the agency to speak and alter the course their destiny, as Lefebvre reminds us, each was once constructed by people and groups with the resources to finance large-scale building projects. Thus those with greater access to material resources, although absent from Rhys's narrative, determine the structure of the spaces where those with a more liminal and precarious social existence will spend their lives.

In *Good Morning, Midnight,* this socioeconomic reality echoes the psychosocial reality of Sasha and those in a similarly marginal position. Denied the privileges of the affluent while still expected to abide by its values, she finds herself doubly slighted. As she observes, she cannot win if she is expected to play by rules designed to exclude her, yet resisting or circumventing these rules leads only to punishment and further exclusion. In this way, the impossibility built into the structure of the room itself – the demand for bourgeois propriety of "madame" and "monsieur" in a setting explicitly designed for those excluded by definition from the privileges of the traditional family – mirrors the structural impossibility, or "impasse," of Sasha's social existence (*GMM* 9). From the novel's outset, Sasha experiences this impasse viscerally in the dissonance between the room arranged for the happily – or at least respectably – married "madame" and "monsieur" and her own socially abject status – a single woman of doubtful sexual respectability, fired from jobs and abandoned by her husband, staying in the hotel room alone. In this way, Rhys uses the liminal dwelling space of the hotel to mirror and describe the social inequalities that overdetermine the possibilities of an individual's life path in interwar Europe, against various social tropes like the modern, liberated and self-determining individual, and especially woman. Rather than presenting a radically progressive, uninscribed space in which the emancipated woman might design her own life free from the stifling constraints of traditional social norms, the hotel room both reinforces such norms and positions access to the privileges they promise – wealth, stability, shelter from turbulence – permanently out of reach.

Vaults and Windows: Virginia Woolf

While Sasha's physical surroundings cruelly reinscribe her socioeconomic position, leaving her with no illusion as to the connection between her fate and her surroundings, in Virginia Woolf's work, those with more means paradoxically aim to obscure the connection between their affluent domestic spaces and their social positions. However, the specter of the social world is never far off the page, even in the most seemingly self-enclosed domestic scene, reminding readers that no world, no matter how privileged, is ever truly separate from the outside. In this way, Woolf reinforces Rhys's observation as to the profound social enmeshment of private living spaces, though the types of spaces each author depicts diverge significantly.

Woolf draws this link most clearly in *Mrs. Dalloway* between Clarissa's sheltered existence and her husband Richard's political position. Entering her home, "cool as a vault," after a morning running errands in London, Mrs. Dalloway "felt like a nun who had left the world and feels fold round her the familiar veils and the response to old devotions" (*MD*[4] 29). After the bustle of the streets, Clarissa experiences her home as a cloistered space, in keeping with the notion that affluence and social status can secure a separation between public and private. Quite literally, the material structure of her house lends itself to this illusion, the thick walls cordoning off the noise of the street and creating the impression of a vault.

In contrast, Woolf's other, cheaper London homes do not offer the same degree of insulation. In *The Years*, Woolf uses street noise insistently as a narrative device to separate wealth from poverty. When Rose visits her less fortunate cousins Maggie and Sara, the section begins, "The shabby street on the south side of the river was very noisy" (*The Years*

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[4] *Mrs. Dalloway.*

162). Once she arrives, Rose remarks, "But don't you find it rather noisy?" and soon repeats this comment almost word-for-word, having forgotten the first one, in one of the scene's several moments of socially awkward faux pas that express the class tension between these relatives (*The Years* 165). As the cousins talk, a "man was crying under the window," directing their attention out of the room and onto the streets, where there is a factory, a reminder of the working-class environs (*The Years* 165). Lost in the memory of her wealthy childhood home, Abercorn Terrace, Rose is jolted back to the present when "there was a great rattle under the windows. A dray went roaring past" (*The Years* 167). Here the noise of the streets tethers the cousins not only to the present moment, but also reminds them repeatedly of the social reality that grounds the scene, one of labor, industry and no small degree of human suffering, as evoked by the wailing man.

Unlike Maggie and Sara, who are described as rather poor, Clarissa Dalloway has the means to shelter herself from this harsh social reality in a home as sequestered and sanctified as a nunnery, thanks to her husband's high-ranking political career. Continuing into the hall, she muses, "It was her life, and, bending her head over the hall table, she bowed beneath the influence, felt blessed and purified," thinking, "one must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments" "above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it all" (*MD* 29). Without her husband and, implicitly, the work he does and the social role he occupies outside the home, Clarissa's sequestered and sanctified existence would not be possible, reified in this passage as the physical space of the home itself.

It is not by accident that Clarissa's sheltered, domestic existence depends on her husband's public activities. The logics of the upper-class Victorian family uphold this strict, gendered division between the public and the private spheres. However, despite the

imperative to keep public and private as separate as possible, the public man relies as much

on his wife's domesticity as her sheltered domestic existence does on her husband's public

involvement. In her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, Woolf expresses this through the first

iteration of the Dalloways, a couple becomes the Richard and Clarissa of *Mrs. Dalloway.*

Richard Dalloway, a conservative politician, tells Rachel Vinrace, the young woman

protagonist, "I will never allow my wife to talk politics," explaining:

> It is impossible for human beings, constituted as they are, both to fight and to
>
> have ideals. If I have preserved mine, as I am thankful to say that in great
>
> measure I have, it is due to the fact that I have been able to come home to my
>
> wife in the evening and to find that she has spent her day in calling, music,
>
> play with the children, domestic duties—what you will; her illusions have not
>
> been destroyed. She gives me courage to go on. The strain of public life is
>
> very great. (*The Voyage Out* 44)

In other words, Richard relies on his wife's innocence and idealism, sustained by the

sheltered domestic space he provides for her, to do the public work he does; their roles in the

perpetuation of their family lifestyle are thus mutually reinforcing. However, as Richard

himself admits, at the core of this social order is an illusion. Primarily this refers to the wife's

idealism about the state of the social and political world, which keeps him from growing

cynical and discouraged under the strain of the harsh realities of political life.

At the same time, this illusion extends to the very sanctity of the domestic sphere. If

Clarissa were to begin to "talk politics" and discover the sorts of compromises her husband is

forced to make in his working life, which directly enable her sheltered domestic happiness,

she would lose all of her illusions – about the social world, but also about her own lifestyle

and its implication in the perpetuation of suffering, and perhaps most devastatingly, her

illusions about the power and virtue of her husband, the core illusion of the happy bourgeois

marriage (*The Voyage Out* 44). For the less wealthy, like Maggie and Sara in *The Years*, the

suffering of the social is structurally unavoidable; their homes do not provide adequate

insulation from the noise beyond their walls, which precludes a sense of a domestic life

shielded from the world outside. Those of higher status are equally embedded in the social

realm, but their resources allow them to create a private space largely enclosed from its

harsher realities, at least for the female members of the family. However, greater social

power translates into greater responsibility, the high-status politician being the prime

example. Just like Jean Rhys's Sasha argues that revealing the truth about "this business of

rooms" would "bust the roof off everything and undermine the whole social system," so

would opening the bourgeois domestic to the truth of the social system that maintains it

would collapse the whole system, for the husband could no longer go on performing his

public role without the deluded optimism of his wife (*GMM* 33).

Despite all their efforts and resources, even the wealthy Dalloways cannot keep the

suffering of the social out of their domestic space. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa acutely

experiences this shock – itself a sentiment typically associated with the public space of the

modern city streets – during her party when the psychiatrist Sir William Bradshaw and his

wife recount "a very sad case" in which "a young man" "had killed himself" (183). This

young man is Septimus, the shadow mirror image of the protagonist Clarissa, and a shell-

shocked World War I veteran who commits suicide by jumping from a window. At this

moment, the two narrative threads cross, and although Clarissa is first indignant at the

intrusion – "What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party?" – she feels that

"somehow it was her disaster—her disgrace" (*MD* 184, 185). The word "disgrace" is evocative considering the possible links between Clarissa's social circle – the very politicians who make decisions about deploying armed forces, present in this moment in her home – and Septimus's tragic death resulting from the psychological damage of the war. Woolf thus conjures, though without explicitly tracing, the relational threads that connect Clarissa, her husband and their social milieu with Septimus's death. "They make life intolerable, men like that," Clarissa muses, referring specifically to the Sir William Bradshaw, "a great doctor yet to her obscurely evil," although "men like that" gestures evocatively towards other "great" but "obscurely evil" men who, like Sir William Bradshaw, due to their social positions wield power over the fates of people like Septimus and his wife (*MD* 184). Rather than intellectualizing these connections, Clarissa experiences the tragedy somatically: "always her body went through it first" (*MD* 184). Empathizing viscerally in this embodied way, she continues to relate the death intuitively to herself; "It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. She had wanted success" (*MD* 185). Despite enjoying all the material and psychic protections her society offers to its most privileged – and perhaps because of this – even Clarissa, the guardian of the domestic according to bourgeois orthodoxy, feels intimately implicated in the fates of those beyond her doors; even her vault-like house cannot definitively filter out their suffering. While Clarissa loves her husband and credits him as the pillar of her own psychic stability, one cannot help but wonder if her admiration is symptomatic of the same illusion that the Richard Dalloway of *The Voyage Out* prescribed for his Clarissa. This illusion permits both of them to go on living as they do, but this scene in *Mrs. Dalloway* foregrounds

the collateral damage of the social system that relies on such illusions, not excluding her own guilt. It is perhaps for this reason that Clarissa perceives Septimus so directly as "her disaster," "her disgrace" and "her punishment" (*MD* 184, 185).

Curiously, despite the great dissonance in their social statuses, in this scene, Clarissa appears similarly restrained and immobile as Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight.* While Sasha describes her life and her surroundings as an "impasse," Clarissa is "forced to stand here in her evening dress," a phrase that emphasizes control and a tethering to a specific positionality, both physical and social (*GMM* 9, *MD* 185). Much like Sasha cannot escape her social position and thus her fate as it relates to suffering and loss, Clarissa appears to stand apart from social suffering in her wealthy, protected, vaultlike home, but is still forces to experience it intimately and directly, as if it were happening to her, not only despite, but *through* and *because of*, her distance. Thus both women, one embedded, for better or for worse, within the traditional home and the social fabric of power and privilege, the other excluded from it and occupying the liminal space of the hotel, experience the relationship between their homes and the suffering of the social world as an intimately linked inevitability. In this way, both Woolf and Rhys demonstrate through their work a keen awareness of what we might call the social consciousness of the home, a clean break from any imagined separation of public and private or idealization of the private as a space of reliable comfort and escape.

Racial Spaces: Djuna Barnes

While Rhys and Woolf both foreground, in different ways, the influence of wealth and social status in the way safety, mobility and suffering are encoded into living spaces, in the 1936 novel *Nightwood,* Djuna Barnes introduces an additional element into the equation: race. A

canonical Modernist text, *Nightwood* centers around a small group of characters whose lives and loves overlap over the course of the late-nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth century Europe and America. While Barnes emphasizes the often-painful relationships between the characters, the cities, streets, cafés, houses and hotels through which they move form a critical backdrop for untangling the baroque narrative. Thematically, identity takes center stage, including depictions of various forms of queerness and preoccupations with race, religion, blood titles and lineage.

In the first chapter, Barnes introduces one of the main characters, Felix Volkbein, at the moment of his birth to his parents, Hedvig and Guido. Guido has married Hedvig, a Christian German woman, in an explicit attempt to correct the perceived burden of his Jewish identity, obviously a particularly salient topic in 1930s Europe. In the portrayal of Guido and Hedvig's partnered life, Barnes emphasizes the need for erasing the perceived and internalized stain of Guido's racialized identity, described in the novel as blood, by assimilating to and adopting the trappings of Hedvig's Christianness. In so doing, Barnes highlights the implicit racial exclusions encoded into a particular lifestyle of wealth and respectability:

> In the Vienna of Volkbein's day there were few trades that welcomed Jews,
> yet somehow he had managed, by various deals in household goods, by
> discreet buying of old masters and first editions and by money changing, to
> secure for Hedvig a house in the Inner City, to the north overlooking the
> Prater, a house that, large, dark and imposing, because a fantastic museum of
> their encounter. (7)

Vividly, this passage points to the enmeshment of identity, economy and property in producing domestic spaces. Despite being privileged racially and described in the text in highly masculine terms, Hedvig remains in the stereotypical female role in the partnership; and yet, her higher racial status dictates that she must be treated according to certain expectations that express themselves through lifestyle and specifically real estate. Thus, despite the barriers of socioeconomic exclusion, Guido must "secure for Hedvig a house in the Inner City," both for his wife and to attain his own desire of assimilation or "passing" (Barnes 7). The use of the word "secure" is telling, for it evokes the guiding affect of bourgeois private life – the safety and shelter of the domestic interior – while acknowledging the precarity of the endeavor for Guido specifically due to his Jewishness (Barnes 7). For him, the private shelter of the domestic, represented by the "house in the Inner City," is not given, as it is implicitly for the Dalloways, but must be grasped and seized against perceived threats, another connotation of "secure" (Barnes 7).

For Guido, the effort required to secure the home means engaging in peripheral economic activity, described with an emphasis on ambiguity, secrecy and indeterminacy – "*various* deals in household goods," "*discreet* buying of old masters and first editions," "money changing" (Barnes 7, emphasis added). While in Woolf, discretion around political and economic activity functions to cordon off the unsavory but allegedly necessary moral compromises of public life, namely the violence implicit in imperial politics and commerce, to preserve the innocence of the domestic, here, ambiguity around money speaks of a different kind of shame. The only forms of economic activity from which Guido, as a Jew, is not excluded are dubiously regarded – most obviously money lending, but also conjured through the ambiguity and discretion used to describe his other deals. Thus Guido must

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engage in disreputable activities to obtain the social marker of respectability – the bourgeois home, large and desirably placed. In other words, not unlike Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, he must work against the exclusionary logics of their social world that grant certain people access to certain spaces while barring others in order to move to a new plane of existence.

On the surface, Guido appears to be more successful in transforming his fate than Sasha; he acquires not only the beautiful room she yearns for, but an entire house. However, even the prestige Guido secures for his family symbolically through the house, the quintessential marker of stability and status in a society oriented around property ownership, is fraught due to their Jewish identity. Although it is not discussed in the text, Guido's Jewishness is clearly passed on to their son Felix, despite the Jewish tradition of matrilineal descent. Evidently, Guido's wish to dissolve his and his descendants' unsavory identity through Hedvig is unsuccessful, as rendered implicitly through the fate of the house. The reader never learns what happens to the family home, but it is apparently not passed down to Felix, who is described as having spent the first thirty years of his life in an untraceable, nomadic existence and, like his father, remains obsessed with sublimating his race through aristocratic titles. These titles are especially significant to the family because, like race, they are markers of social caste that can be passed down through a lineage, but unlike race, they are not tied directly to a reified bloodline. As symbolic markers of a secure social status that cannot be taken away once conferred, they suggest a strong urge to compensate for the insecurity and even disgust with their own hereditary identity, passed down from father to son. In this way, through the disappearance of the Volkbein house, which should be a permanent asset that can be transferred to descendants – and is even described as especially

long-lasting as "large, dark and imposing" and a "museum of their encounter" – Barnes implies that socially constructed beliefs like racial prejudice represent an even stronger force than the legally and culturally privileged and protected acquisition of private property (7).

In various ways, Jean Rhys, Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes all foreground the social enmeshment of private, domestic and living spaces in the modern city. Conjuring the myriad ways social identity – gender, marital status, wealth, job and race – can affect access to more or less secure and comfortable spaces, while acknowledging the precarity of this endeavor and the limits of even the most secure home to truly shelter anyone from the inevitable turbulence and suffering of human life in societies, these women writers advance a uniquely modern vision of domestic space, one that is at odds with both the nineteenth-century nostalgic craving for security in enclosure and the stereotypical modern embrace of liberation through an untethering from the rigid space of the traditional family home. This traditional family home survives as an ideal well into the twentieth century, even in the work of the most avant-garde writers of the era, but only as an unattainable paradox. In Modernist literature, especially in the writing of women who still remembered a recent time of greater restrictions for their gender in the home, domestic space remains a complex and contradictory, though very much not unexamined, sphere of human social life.

III.   Sovereigns Subjects and Surrealist Objects

While the previous section analyzed depictions of various types of domestic and living spaces in women's Modernist literature, tracing the ways in which public norms interact with the private sphere through architecture and access, this section will address the question of permeability and separation between public and private spaces through a different channel:

objects. Rhys, Woolf and Barnes each demonstrate the ways in which living spaces remain permeable to the structures and logics of the social world. Similarly, an analysis of material objects as they circulate between public and private spaces offers a parallel pathway through which Modernist writers and theorists imagined these spheres interacting. More specifically, modern objects in the form of the commodity tend to mark the boundaries of each individual's control over their private space, problematizing the liberal, patriarchal notion of sovereignty over one's territory and possession. This tension became highly pronounced in nineteenth-century representations, as dramatized in Émile Zola's 1883 novel *Au Bonheur des dames,* and to a certain extent in Walter Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood Around 1900.* However, by the twentieth century, literary depictions of the relationship between commodities, individual sovereignty and the social world became more complex. In particular, the French Surrealist movement pushed back on the unilateral power of the commodity to enforce the interests and morality of the capitalist class. In André Breton's *Nadja*, particularly as analyzed by Benjamin, objects become opportunities for reimagining social relation. By guiding chance encounters in the streets that Breton makes home, outmoded, Surrealist objects blend public and private space in a highly relational way that challenges, rather than merely reinscribing, hegemonic ways of living and being together. In all of these texts, objects appear as channels that mediate the forces of social progress across private and public spaces, though these forces appear differently to different authors.

Commodification: Zola and the Department Store

The nineteenth century saw a clash between the liberal, bourgeois ideal of individual sovereignty and the rapid revolution in production, economic structures and practices, and material relations in society. In particular, the perception of the overpowering force of

commodity capitalism destabilized conventional understandings of patriarchal power over one's domain. In *Au Bonheur des dames,* Zola takes up the department store as a case study in changing relations between commercial activity, family and social and relational networks. In the novel, the department store, modeled on the historical *Le Bon Marché,* founded in Paris in 1838 and modernized into the form it takes in Zola's novel in 1852, becomes the site of this transformation, a liminal space in which categories of public and private, family and society, and even reality and mystification become moot and entangled. Although Zola demonstrates painstakingly the intricate relationships between the many characters and actors – Mouret, the department store owner, wealthy customers, store workers, business competitors, government officials and more – the store and its owner are depicted as a new iteration of sovereign power that displace the individual patriarch and reach well into the private sphere of family life. In this way, Zola represents commodities and capitalist production as a destabilization of not only economic practices, but also of nineteenth-century norms around domestic space and private life.

As Zola relates, in nineteenth-century Europe, new modes of industrial production, distribution, marketing and advertising encouraged new and intensified feelings and behaviors around the acquisition of objects. Divorced from allegedly rational assessments of necessity, purchasing behavior became more socially and affectively driven than ever before. Instead of speaking to the fulfillment of preexisting needs, modern advertising explicitly set out to create new desires for novel products, coveted for the status they conferred more than the utility they provided. Even more strikingly, the majority of the public could now afford to indulge in this type of relationship to objects, which had previously been largely reserved for nobility and aristocracy. At the same time, advances in production and distribution chains

meant that trend cycles shortened dramatically, from the length of a monarch's reign to a mere season, escalating the frequency and intensity of purchasing behavior and creating fashion in the modern sense of the word.

In *Au Bonheur des dames,* Zola demonstrates how these new processes coalesced into a new understanding of house, home and sovereignty. The department store becomes a transitional space between the public and the private spheres, a "house" of sorts with the owner, Octave Mouret, as its reigning patriarchal figure. This relationship is rendered spatially when Mouret watches over his domain from the top of a grand staircase, surveilling and "dominating" the "whole house" as the father/husband traditionally would: "il domina encore la maison entière" (Zola 209). Incidentally, the link between house and commerce predates the department store with the luxury artisan "houses" like Hermès or Louis Vuitton, both of which were founded in the mid-nineteenth century and operated traditionally on a family business model. The association between fashion and luxury and the "house" exists in popular parlance to this day, as dramatized the 2021 film *House of Gucci*.

Although the department store famously ruptured the small-scale family enterprise model, as represented by Denise's uncle Baudu's small textile business, where the first salesman is slated to become the son-in-law, its reach into the home life of customers intensified. This entry is personified with Mouret entering the salon of Madame Desforges, a wealthy friend and an important customer, bringing with him new merchandise to tempt the ladies; the women also bring new purchases to their social gatherings to show off before their friends. Mouret is treated as an esteemed councilor, his opinion on prices and quality of items solicited, giving him the opportunity to advertise his own goods, which his modern production system and business model allows him to sell far more cheaply than other,

smaller, more traditional "houses," like Baudu's. Mouret also conducts clandestine market research through his social network, noting the whims and preferences of the upper-class women whom his less-wealthy customers strive to imitate. In Madame Desforges's salon, private life clearly mixes with the social and commercial to create multifaceted relationships that profoundly influence the circulation of objects, not only for the people present, but in a way that trickles down through the entire society.

The force of Mouret's marketing techniques is represented as overpowering; women lose their minds before the dazzling displays at *Au Bonheur des dames*, their reason overwhelmed. The first and most poignant example is Denise herself, the young woman protagonist who arrives in Paris from the provinces, where she worked as a shop girl with "le premier marchand de nouveautés de la ville" (Zola 5). Despite the prestige of her old employer, she is completely unprepared for the spectacle of *Au Bonheur des dames*; she is "absorbée," forgets her uncle entirely, her and her brother "séduits" by the seemingly endless window displays (Zola 7, 8). Her awe is so intense that turns to fear; she is embarrassed and shocked, unable to imagine so much as entering the store.

For those who do enter, not only does this type of production and distribution create new needs, but Zola implies that it renders people, specifically women, powerless to resist the lure of the commodity. In this way, commercial interests wrest control over domestic life and individual finances from the family members, and specifically from the man of the house. Madame Marty's character is a stark example of the commodity's ability to wreak havoc in the domestic sphere:

On la connaissait pour sa rage de dépense, sans force devant la tentation,

d'une honnêteté stricte, incapable de céder à un amant, mais tout de suite

lâche et la chair vaincue, devant le moindre bout de chiffon. Fille d'un petit

employé, elle ruinait aujourd'hui son mari, professeur de cinquième au lycée

Bonaparte, qui devait doubler ses six mille francs d'appointements en courant

le cachet, pour suffire au budget sans cesse croissant du ménage. (Zola 132)

Here, the commodity is rendered even more seductive than the lover, the traditional threat to

the patriarch's control over his wife and household. As a result, the husband is doubly

humiliated – firstly, for his lack of means, and secondly, for his inability to control his wife.

Though this passage seems to place the blame on Madame Marty's own lack of discretion

and willpower, the crisis of her spending pits two patriarchal interests against one another –

her husband and Mouret – for Mouret's business model explicitly encourages and relies on

imprudent spending, which ruins the family. While the bourgeois family model relies on the

sovereign power of the patriarch, the department store uses the mechanism of the branded

and commodified object to wrest this power from the husband, placing it in the hands of the

business owner. Although the relative liberation of the woman in the department store

remains a moot point, the department store, as well as the new economic system and the

object relations it encourages, clearly destabilized the authority and autonomy of the male-

headed, enclosed bourgeois household by encouraging an increasingly social and emotional

relationship to objects. Through new techniques of marketing and advertising, the store

reaches into the domestic domain while also appearing as a new type of space that blends

public and private. In this way, Zola's text foreshadows the Modernist destabilization of

these categories while still presenting the role of objects in this process in a largely unilateral

fashion.

Sovereignty and Technology: Benjamin's Telephone

In *Berlin Childhood Around 1900,* Walter Benjamin offers a similar case study in a particular kind of object's power to infiltrate the bourgeois family home and destabilize its codes. In a series of spatially oriented vignettes, the text traces the slippage of space's signification over time through an exploration of interior and exterior spaces in turn-of-the-century Berlin. Layering past and present, the narrative relates, filtered through the recollections of the adult writer, the affective imprints of a specific domestic material culture on the impressionable psyche of a child. Many of the objects, styles and spaces that Benjamin recalls had either become outmoded – like the imperial panorama – or ceased to be novelties – like the telephone – by the time of writing. While the text as a whole traces the effects of technological and social change over time on the physical and affective landscape of a city and a mind, one vignette in particular, "The Telephone," viscerally captures the intrusion of progressive social forces into the private home. The text depicts the installation of the telephone in Benjamin's childhood home as a sort of alien invasion that disrupts the peace of the bourgeois order, comically inverting the sovereign power of its patriarch, the father, over the space. Benjamin writes:

> I was an intimate observer of the way it [the telephone] rose above the
> humiliations of its early years. For once the chandelier, fire screen, potted
> palm, console table, gueridon, and alcove balustrade—all formerly on display
> in the front rooms—had finally faded and died a natural death, the apparatus,
> like a legendary hero once exposed to die in a mountain gorge, left the dark
> hallway in the back of the house to make its regal entry into this cleaner and
> brighter rooms that now were inhabited by the younger generation. For the

latter, it became a consolation for their loneliness. To the despondent who

wanted to leave this wicked world, it shone with the light in a last hope. With

the forsaken, it shared its bed. Now when everything depended on its call, the

strident voice it had acquired in exile was grown softer. (*BC*[5] 48)

Strikingly, in this passage, agency rests almost entirely with the inanimate object – the

telephone – which "rose above the humiliations of its early years" once other objects had

"faded and died a natural death" (*BC* 48). This slow process of migration and replacement of

interior objects gestures towards ecological, even Darwinian motifs; at the same time, objects

are clearly anthropomorphized, the telephone "a legendary hero once exposed to die in a

mountain gorge," now making its "regal entry" to the front rooms of the house (*BC* 48). In

this way it becomes an actor at least on par with the humans, the "younger generation" who

now inhabits the rooms (*BC* 48). In fact, people are conjured mainly as recipients of the

telephone's evolving status in the home; after the "devastation" it induced in its early years

spent as an "outcast settled carelessly between the dirty-linen hamper and the gasometer," the

telephone now offers them consolation, hope and companionship (*BC* 49).

The seeming autonomy of the telephone dramatizes the inescapable march of

technological progress so characteristic of the modern era. Similarly to Zola, Benjamin

presents the power of the object as overpowering to the individual, as representative of the

overwhelming power of a new social, cultural and economic order. However, while Zola's

objects are mainly feminine clothing and home goods, the telephone becomes a more

dynamic actor by nature, as a medium of communication and connection. Thus, by its very

nature, it already signals a greater connectivity between the private home and the social

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[5] *Berlin Childhood Around 1900.*

world, gesturing towards an anonymous infinity of people who could be reached instantaneously. Within the space of the family home in the passage, the telephone appears to act freely and independently, but that is because the force behind the imperative to place the telephone in the house, and then to transport it to the front rooms, is located outside this space and beyond the bounds of the text. It is the abstract and collective imperative of social pressure, conjured obliquely in this passage as a "schoolfriend" who "wished to speak to me," as well as in the negative, the telephone appearing as an "alarm signal that menaced not only my parents' midday nap but the historical era that underwrote and enveloped this siesta" (*BC* 49). Here, the whims of a young schoolboy are evoked comically as having the power to disturb not only an entire household, but an entire social order, which emphasizes the paradoxical fragility of the seemingly solid and durable bourgeoisie. Of course, it is not just the schoolboy himself who disturbs the traditional parents, but the force of novelty and progress he represents, which intrude directly and in an unrestrained fashion into the private home.

With further irony, Benjamin dramatizes the powerlessness of the bourgeois individual against the vast currents of social change in describing his father's furious reaction to the introduction of the telephone into his own home: "But his real orgies were reserved for cranking the handle, to which he gave himself up for minutes at a time, nearly forgetting himself in the process. His hand, on these occasions, was a dervish over come by frenzy" (*BC* 49). Parodying the patriarch's restraint and self-control by comparing his father's gestures to sexual abandon and mystical rapture, Benjamin implies that an object, and the social force behind it, can destabilize the sovereign homeowner and the conservative order he represents. The father loses control over himself and his own home; in this way, the

telephone's disturbance challenges the belief that the bourgeois private sphere could be isolated from social forces. In "The Telephone" as in Zola, the economic and technological changes of modernity threaten to the power hierarchies of the nineteenth-century domestic sphere through the objects that enter these spaces.

Surrealist Objects and Profane Illumination

In Benjamin's analysis of the Surrealists and Baudelaire, he advances a vision of the role of the object in the modern public and private spheres that disperses agency more widely while keeping with the object as a channel for social forces of progress. In his analysis of nineteenth-century culture, Walter Benjamin characterizes the commodity as a social phenomenon despite its most likely destination for a private home. In "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," he locates the commodity in the public sphere through an analogy to the figure of the flâneur: "The intoxication to which the *flaneur* surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers" (55). For Benjamin, the nature of the commodity is not only profoundly social but explicitly relational: "If the soul of the commodity which Marx occasionally mentions in jest existed, it would be the most empathetic ever encountered in the realm of souls, for it would have to see in everyone the buyer in whose hand and house it wants to nestle" ("Paris"[6] 55). Just like the flâneur, the commodity can only exist as such in the public sphere. Once they enter the house, intoxication recedes and the flâneur, a sort of universal everyman identity, contracts back into the individual man; likewise, the commodity eventually loses its auratic halo and flattens, if not into some sort of fictitious essentialized form, into a more specified role in its new surroundings. While this may not occur immediately, gradually the commodified object

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[6] "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire."

becomes outmoded and loses its mystification, or the allure tied to status and human desire more generally.

Due in part to this extreme capacity for relationality, the commodity has a powerful effect on the human psyche. For Benjamin, all objects are profoundly psychological and play a vital role in personality formation, as evidenced throughout his work, but notably in *Berlin Childhood.* In the previously examined vignette "The Telephone," Benjamin opens with a remark about the complex correspondence between the material and the psychological: "Whether because of the structure of the apparatus or because of the structure of memory, it is certain that the noises of the first telephone conversations echo differently in my ear from those of today" (*BC* 48). In positioning them as equivalent and interchangeable potential causes, Benjamin grants equal importance to physical structures and mental structures in influencing perception over time. Leaving the question open and refusing to definitively settle the causality of the observation implies that it is impossible – or unimportant – to disentangle the relationship between "real" objects and objects as they appear in our psyches, that is to say, often ambiguous and flexible to alterations over time.

Thus for Benjamin there is no real object "out there" prior to human perception, just as there is no pure psyche unmarked by objects encountered in the world. As Helga Geger-Ryan argues in "Abjection in the Texts of Walter Benjamin," Benjamin's work "is . . . a search for the moulds of objects which have shaped people in the same way that a baking tin forms cookies . . . The inner space, this dimension between soma and phantasma, is firstly created by objects" (122). Indeed, unlike psychoanalysts who view inanimate objects as developmentally secondary or compensatory – for the mother, for instance, as D. W. Winnicott claims in the 1953 essay "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena—A

Study of the First Not-Me Possession" – here Geger-Ryan asserts the primacy of material objects in psychological formation within Benjamin's thought. While the intricacies of developmental remain tangential to this argument, Benjamin's privileging of objects in psychic life is highly germane. For him, commodities are particularly potent objects due to their intensified affective force, shaped by capitalist methods of production and display. Building from Marx's notion of commodity fetishism, Benjamin understands commodities as "wish images," or "an expression in distorted form of genuine utopian impulses emanating from" the "dreaming collectivity," similar to the collective unconscious, as Graeme Gilloch explicates in *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (115).

Due to this dual coding of the commodity – both capitalist mystification and utopian longing – unlike the objects in Zola's department store, Benjamin's commodity does not wield its influence in a top-down manner that only enforces the interests and desires of the dominant class. While acknowledging its narcotic lure, Benjamin also locates revolutionary power in the commodity, which can be wrested loose from its intended purpose of mystification to the opposite effect: ushering in new social orders. As Maurizia Boscagli writes in *Stuff Theory*:

> He aims to reappropriate the power of phantasmagoria and its relation to the
> unconscious away from commodity fetishism, to use it instead to realize
> collective and individual desires, and for social change. What he's asking of
> the object is to reactivate a sleeping historical memory, a dream of social
> justice still alive in nineteenth-century industrial culture and its technological
> modernity. (40)

Thus the psychic significance of commodified object is malleable; the object can never be fully encoded within a specific desire-imperative structure, no matter how sophisticated the mechanisms of marketing and branding. In *Stuff Theory*, Boscagli locates objects' potential for (radical) slippage in "stuff," or objects that have lost their primary commodified sheen but have not yet been fully discarded, expelled from the social sphere as garbage. Such stuff is commonly, though not always, encountered in domestic space, each person's dumping grounds for ex-commodities from which the initial glow has faded. Thus Benjamin and Boscagli both locate the kernel of the experience through which an object can inspire a new social order in the private sphere, linking private property, space and experience to the social and political realm.

For Benjamin, this revolutionary transformation of the social occurs when the private is made public. According to Boscagli, this takes place through a moment he calls "profane illumination," a shift in perception in which a commodity loses its fetishistic quality and comes to "reactivate a sleeping historical memory, a dream of social justice still alive in nineteenth-century industrial culture and its technological modernity" (*Stuff Theory* 40). This profane illumination takes place not only on the level of objects, but also through the exhibition of private, domestic space and private life. In "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," Benjamin locates such moments in André Breton's Surrealist novel *Nadja*:

> In other respects Breton's book illustrates well a number of the basic
> characteristics of this "profane illumination." He calls *Nadja* "a book with a
> banging door." (In Moscow I lived in a hotel in which almost all the rooms
> were occupied by Tibetan lamas who had come to Moscow for a congress of

Buddhist churches. I was struck by the number of doors in the corridors that were always left ajar. What had at first seemed accidental began to be disturbing. I found out that in these rooms lived members of a sect who had sworn never to occupy closed rooms. The shock I had then must be felt by the reader of *Nadja*.) To live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence. It is also an intoxication, a moral exhibitionism, that we badly need. Discretion concerning one's own existence, once an aristocratic virtue, has become more and more an affair of petit-bourgeois parvenus. *Nadja* has achieved the true, creative synthesis between the art novel and the *roman-à-clef*.

Relating Breton's novel to the anecdote of the Tibetan lamas, Benjamin refers to the shock one feels when faced with the absence of privacy, or of the private made public. To have no secrets is a "revolutionary virtue par excellence," Benjamin argues, evoking the socialist and communist ideal of radically collective living ("Surrealism"[7]). The link to *Nadja*, in which the narrative occurs largely on the streets and in the cafes of Paris and rarely enters the private homes of the characters, is made symbolically; instead of literally throwing open his doors, *Nadja's* narrator demonstrates an analogous openness as "an intoxication, a moral exhibitionism" that resists the reactionary "discretion" of the "petit-bourgeois parvenus" ("Surrealism"). In a sense, rather than directly publicizing the domestic, Breton domesticates public space without rejecting its public qualities, claiming the streets and other social spaces of Paris as his home with all their strangeness, anonymity and unpredictability. In *Nadja*, he expresses this preference through character of Nadja, muse and proxy for the sort of life

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[7] "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia."

Breton idealizes: "[elle] n'aimait qu'être dans la rue, pour elle seul champ d'expérience valable" (113). Breton as narrator also embodies this ethos through the complete devotion of narrative space and attention to experiences in public spaces, mainly in the streets. The private realm is largely absent from the novel, replaced by streets, cafés, theaters, markets and the like. Relinquishing the secrecy, shelter and sovereignty of the bourgeois domestic enclosure, Breton's narrator surrenders his destiny to chance encounters with strange people – and strange objects.

In keeping with Geger-Ryan's claim of the primacy of objects in Benjamin's psychic schema, in his reading of *Nadja,* Benjamin privileges objects over people: "[Breton's narrator] is closer to the things that Nadja is close to than to her," he writes ("Surrealism"). Thus it is the material elements of this encounter that, for Benjamin, contain the kernel social and political significance of the novel. Elaborating on this claim, he writes of Breton and the Surrealists:

> He was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the "outmoded," in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution—no one can have a more exact concept of it than these authors. No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution—not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects—can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism. ("Surrealism")

Once outmoded, objects and spaces reveal the cracks in the promises of the dominant social order, which is perpetuated through the "wish images" of commodities. In this way, they function analogously to the Rhys room, which threatens to "bust the roof off everything and undermine the whole social system" (*GMM* 33). No longer alluring enough to feed into the mystification on which capitalism relies according to Benjamin, the outmoded object, or the ex-commodity, contains a latent revolutionary energy that needs only the proper perception to be activated, which Breton and the Surrealists provide.

These Surrealist outmoded objects, which circulate through the social realm divorced from their original points of production and sale, such as Zola's department store, deploy their revolutionary energies by guiding chance encounters. In *Nadja*, the primary locus of this secondary circulation is the famous Saint-Ouen flea market in Paris; Breton writes, "j'y suis souvent, en quête de ces objets qu'on ne trouve nulle part ailleurs, démodés, fragmentés, inutilisables, presque incompréhensibles, pervers enfin au sens où je l'entends et où je l'aime" (55). For Breton, the "perversion" of these objects lies in their very incomprehensibility, which forces one to reimagine reality in a way that is often contradictory – or perverse, in the direct meaning of the word – to the dominant social perspective. As Michael Sheringman writes in *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealists to the Present*, "Surrealism does not aim to see new things, but to see things anew: to make the act of perception performative rather than merely constative" (82). By rejecting the closed circuit of constative meaning, Surrealist perception opens up the performativity of objects' signification, thus creating space for new perceptions and

meanings that fan out from the object into the social world. In this way, perceiving an outmoded object facilitates the psychic shift of profane illumination.

When conscious reason fails to immediately categorize an "incomprehensible" object upon sight, a space appears for the unconscious to fill this gap. It is thus that Breton's narrator navigates the flea market, an experience that, thorough the mysterious magnetism of certain meaningful objects, guides him towards a serendipitous and "revolutionary" interpersonal encounter. Browsing with his friend at Saint-Ouen, Breton writes, "notre attention s'est portée simultanément sur un exemplaire très frais des *Œuvres complètes* de Rimbaud," a motif that weaves together several chance encounters in this section of *Nadja* (55). Following the syntax of the phrase, Breton and his friend do not actively notice the book, nor does the book actively draw their awareness, but their attention is directed towards it in a passive construction that does not name the actor directly. This suggests a third force at play – an unseen energy, following Surrealist logic, that could be located in the object, or more specifically, in the unconscious of those perceiving the object. This energy or unconscious perception operates through the object to facilitate the connection with a saleswoman, a fellow poet of "great revolutionary faith": "dans tous ses propos passe une grande foi révolutionnaire" (Breton 56). Thus, in addition to perceiving the revolutionary energies in the outmoded, the Surrealists also perceive, and connect with, revolutionary *social* energies *through* the outmoded, the object divorced from its primary commercial or social context, displaced from its normal chain of production and distribution. In this process, the unconscious mind plays a crucial role as the Surrealists' guide and as the storehouse for unrealized hopes and dreams, in keeping with the associations latent in Benjamin's conception of commodity as "wish image." In this way the Surrealist object facilitates a

reimagining of the dominant social order, both by creating space for new perception and imagination in the individual, and by connecting people who share this perception.

In these ways, objects implicate the individual subject in the social world: they delineate the boundaries of one's sovereignty over one's own private space while also providing the perceptual opening for a reimagining of collective forms of life. In the first instance, capitalist systems of production play a disproportionate role in regulating the circulation of objects – the telephone enters Benjamin's family home against his father's wishes, just as Madame Marty is seduced by Mouret's marketing tactics and spends her husband's entire salary on frivolous items. Thus the commodified object, whose value is socially determined and upheld, as in Madame Desforges's salon, undercuts the notion of individual sovereignty in the private sphere. However, the meaning and value that the object acquires in the process of commodification is unstable and reversible, highly dependent on the context and the perception of the individual viewer. In this way, the outmoded Surrealist object of Benjamin and Breton becomes a politically potent channel for social rebellion and utopic imagination to take root in the individual psyche, leading, perhaps, to collective action that resists the logics and goals of the same dominant channels of production and distribution that created the object in the first place.

IV.   Psychic Collections and Incestuous Houses

In this final section, interior space and objects come together in an examination of extreme case studies of enclosure and control. In the two works analyzed – Barnes's *Nightwood* and Anais Nin's *House of Incest* – the question of sovereignty asserts itself through two main tropes – the collection and the incestuous house. Although they appear in different forms in

the two texts, each case involves a bid for control over or outside of the social, relational world through the use of domestic spaces and objects. Further, both novelists are highly critical of such attempts, framing them as traumatized, compensatory and ultimately inadequate, futile or even counterproductive. In this way, Nin and Barnes, like the authors examined in previous sections, discount the possibility of individual sovereignty by foregrounding the intrusion of social pressures and forces into the most intimate, private spaces. Thus they participate in a Modernism that explicitly privileges social and relational interconnectedness over and above the self-enclosed individual, complicating the movement's relationship to interiority and individual consciousness. At the same time, they advocate for new types of domestic and family norms departing explicitly from the traditional nineteenth-century family, ones that escape an "incestuous," excessively inward orientation but are instead more permeable to the wider social world, not unlike Breton, Woolf and Rhys foreground the social interconnectedness of the modern domestic.

Collecting the Self

As Baudrillard argues in the essay "The System of Collecting," much like domestic space is imagined as a domain over which sovereign, patriarchal control can be administered, people perceive the acquisition of objects as an assertion of unilateral control that serves to build and buttress a fragile psyche. Thus collection allows one to maintain a sense of sovereignty, not only over their environment but also over their own self. In fact, the psyche is often analogized as a house in theory and literature alike, including Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, Freud's "The Uncanny," Barnes's *Nightwood* and Nin's *House of Incest.* However, in these novels as implied in Baudrillard, the collector, operating in an artificial vacuum, cannot achieve full sovereignty over their collection – and thus over themselves.

The collection of objects remains a compensation – useful, but only in a limited way – for the full engagement in social relationality that the collector fears and craves. A close reading of several key passages in *Nightwood* will elucidate three distinct instances in which the collection becomes a way to assert control over a space and fulfill the needs of a self. Ultimately, each character falls short of their individual goal for various reasons, but all that involve the impossibility of the artificially enclosed domestic space. As a particular, narrow unit of social space, domestic space remains open to the fraught relationality of the social and all that this implies. Thus an attempt to mediate one's existential desires through objects alone is doomed to fail; relational problems demand relational solutions.

In "The System of Collecting," Baudrillard writes of the "everyday passion" for the "loved object" that collectors, and people in general, experience (7). Unlike interpersonal passion, the love for an object is "regulative": "we can only guess at its fundamental role in keeping the lives of the individual subject or of the collectivity on an even footing, and in supporting our very project of survival" (Baudrillard 7). Although he connects the possessed object to the social realm in this indirect way, Baudrillard also claims a high degree of individual control over "the objects in our lives," which represent "something profoundly related to subjectivity: for while the object is a resistant material body, it is also, simultaneously, a mental realm over which I hold sway, a thing whose meaning is *governed by myself alone*" (7, emphasis added). This governing, also described as *possession* (as opposed to utilization), is "an enterprise of abstract mastery whereby the subject seeks to assert himself as an autonomous totality outside the world" (Baudrillard 8). "Outside the world" echoes the imaginary of the sealed-off domestic space, an enclave separate from the social world like Clarissa's "nunnery," over which the "autonomous" individual as sovereign

can assert his "abstract mastery" (Baudrillard 8). Thus the home and the self become analogous, both self-regulated through the objects placed within.

Using Baudrillard's analysis as a point of departure, we will turn to three instances of collecting in Barnes's *Nightwood*: Nora and Robin's home, Jenny's stolen objects, and Matthew's gender-affirming clothing and makeup. Interpreting collecting loosely as a large-scale accumulation of a particular set of objects housed in one's living space, the following study will examine how Barnes presents collecting as a partially successful but ultimately flawed gesture towards control over the self as buttress against the insecurity of the social and the relational.

The first instance of collecting represents an attempt to curate not one self, but a relationship. However, due to the focus on control and enclosure, it relates to Baudrillard's description of collecting as "an enterprise of abstract mastery whereby the subject seeks to assert himself as an autonomous totality outside the world" (8). In this passage, Barnes describes Nora and Robin's joint home, an apartment that Nora bought but Robin chose. Barnes writes:

> In the passage of their lives together every object in the garden, every
> item in the house, every word they spoke, attested to their mutual love, the
> combining of their humours. There were circus chairs, wooden horses bought
> from a ring of an old merry-go-round, Venetian chandeliers from the Flea
> Fair, stage-drops from Munich, cherubim from Vienna, ecclesiastical
> hangings from Rome, a spinet from England, and a miscellaneous collection
> of music boxes from many countries; such was the museum of their

encounter, as Felix's hearsay house had been testimony of the age when his father had lived with his mother.

> When the time came that Nora was alone most of the night and part of the day, she suffered from the personality of the house, the punishment of those who collect their lives together. Unconsciously at first, she went about disturbing nothing; then she became aware that her soft and careful movements were the outcome of an unreasoning fear—if she disarranged anything Robin might become confused—might lose the scent of home. (61)

Collected together, the miscellaneous objects originally externalize and solidify the couple's "mutual love," the material and thus more permanent counterpart to "every word they spoke" (Barnes 61). However, this positive affect the objects accrue through association with the relationship is vulnerable to rifts. When Robin begins going out at night, worrying Nora and leaving her alone, Nora "suffered from the personality of the house," which, once a "testimony" of love, now becomes a "punishment of those who collect their lives together" (Barnes 61). Instead of serving as a comforting reminder, as intended, the objects now haunt Nora; unable to secure her happiness and stability, they have the opposite effect, amplifying her anguish.

Nora's sense of powerlessness in the relationship is also externalized into her "unconscious" and "unreasoning fear" of disturbing the objects in the house (Barnes 61). Nora moves through the house hoping to find comfort in the objects collected to testify to "mutual love," but instead finds herself paralyzed, fearing that any slight interference on her part will make the situation, and thus her suffering, even worse (Barnes 61). In this way, the

collection meant to cement the bond between two lovers becomes an impasse and a material reinforcement of suffering.

Although the couple collected the objects together, Nora's treatment of them comes to reflect a bid for control, not over the self but over Robin and the relationship. Implicitly, the mutual collection of objects was insufficient to bind Robin to her loving sentiment toward Nora; in fact, perhaps it effected the opposite, stifling her in their accumulating immobility and reawakening her impulse for wandering. Whatever the case, the house's function of safeguarding the couple's relationship from the intrusion of the outside world has clearly failed, so that it becomes a museum in the negative sense, a storehouse of dead objects from a bygone era. The outside world imposes through the figure of Robin conjured in her absence, mingling with strangers in nighttime cafés. Instead of mirroring the relationship as a "combining of their humors," the house and its collection of objects takes on its own independent "personality" that turns on Nora, tormenting her with the loss of her lover (Barnes 61). In this way, the collection fails in the Baudrillardian sense of establishing an "autonomous" realm outside the world over which the collector can have full sovereignty. Of course, this is largely due to the inherently relational nature of this particular collection. However, as we will see, even individual collections have a way of implicitly conjuring the social, throwing into further doubt the possibility of curating the self as a monolithic totality through one's objects.

Jenny, Robin's lover after Nora, collects objects in a way more closely aligned with Baudrillard's analysis; she seeks to construct an authentic self by amassing objects. However, she cannot do so by appropriating objects that have belonged to other people. Bearing traces of former ownership, they remain foreign to her; she cannot assert her mastery over them

even when she technically possesses them. In this way, they reflect her other psychological challenges rather than helping her to overcome them. Barnes writes:

> Her walls, her cupboards, her bureaux, were teeming with second-hand dealings with life. It takes a bold and authentic robber to get first-hand plunder. Someone else's marriage ring was on her finger; the photograph taken of Robin for Nora sat upon her table. The books in her library were other people's selections. She lived among her own things like a visitor to a room kept "exactly as it was when—". She tiptoed, even when she went to draw a bath, nervous and andante. She stopped, fluttering and febrile, before every object in her house. She had no sense of humour or peace or rest, and her own quivering uncertainty made even the objects which she pointed out to the company, as, "My virgin from Palma", or, "The lefthand glove of La Duse", recede into a distance of uncertainty, so that it was almost impossible for the onlooker to see them at all. (72)

Jenny's relationship to the objects she collects directly mirrors her approach to life – lacking original ideas and desires, she seizes upon others' beliefs, identities and even their loves in a shallow and doomed attempt at authenticity. Essentially, she attempts to resignify objects and bend them to her will, appropriating them by force; Barnes describes her as a "bold and authentic robber" (75). At the same time, her appropriation is unsuccessful, or at least incomplete, for she remains "nervous" and lives "like a visitor among her own things," which resist her attempts at possession (Barnes 72). In fact, instead of yielding to her possession, her objects "recede into a distance of uncertainty," escaping her grasp (Barnes 72). Jenny's relationship to objects echoes her approach to personal relationships; Barnes reinforces her

lack of integrity in describing her love affairs as dealing in "second-hand and therefore incalculable emotions" (75). Rather than relating to others directly, "she appropriated the most passionate love that she knew, Nora's for Robin" (Barnes 75). Once again, an attempt to assert power over an object – here a person, or a relationship, objectified – serves the goal of constructing an authentic personality. However, as with her material collection, Jenny remains nervous and insecure in her relationship with Robin, who eventually leaves her to wander across the country, ending up back in Nora's chapel.

As we can see, a collection of objects cannot perform the role of ego formation, even in a compensatory function. Echoing the same inadequacies that plague Jenny in her interpersonal life, her collection merely reinforces her lack of authentic agency in relating to the outside world. However, the attempt to resignify objects through appropriation is revealed to be only partially successful. Robin and Nora's collection involves inscribing objects with the affective flavor of their relationship, which remains attached to the objects, although its inflection is vulnerable to shifts in the outside relationship. On the other hand, Jenny attempts to claim others' meaning for her own, absorbing the qualities with which previous owners imbued their objects. However, the objects resist her possession, remaining unruly and inaccessible. In this way, Barnes qualifies Baudrillard's thesis regarding the collector's ability to fully determine the meaning of the collected objects, as if in a vacuum. Being socially produced, circulated and signified, objects retain the traces of other people in excess of the would-be sovereign will of the collector.

Finally, Doctor Matthew's collection of feminine-coded objects seems to offer a private compensation for his inability to live out life as his authentic gender. When Nora enters Matthew's room late one night, she finds, among a mass of medical instruments and

miscellaneous objects, "some twenty perfume bottles, almost empty, pomades, creams, rouges, powder boxes and puffs. From the half-open drawers of this chiffonier hung laces, ribands, stockings, ladies' underclothing and an abdominal brace, which gave the impression that the feminine finery had suffered venery" (Barnes 85). Barnes evokes an overabundance of feminine objects that seems at odds both with the tiny size of the room and the metal instruments that the underground gynecologist keeps alongside them. The description of the room and the collection conjures a sense of gender confusion, if not dysphoria; Barnes writes, "There was something appallingly degraded about the room, like the rooms in brothels," evoking the presence of the abject feminine, while at the same time mixing genders by describing it as a "cross between a *chambre à coucher* and a boxer's training camp" (85). In the following lines, Barnes contradicts earlier descriptions by completely erasing the feminine: "There is a certain belligerence in a room in which a woman has never set foot; every object seems to be battling its own compression" (85). In both concretizing and denying Matthew's womanhood through the description of the room, Barnes suggests that the objects "battling [their] own compression" are the feminine objects, the clothing and the makeup on the verge of being squeezed out of existence by the little space afforded them. In this way, they are analogous to Matthew's own experience of femininity, which he can only live out in the same miniscule, abject space. Just as the feminine commodities that originated and circulated in the social sphere are now literally and symbolically compressed in this isolated space, Matthew's gender expression, which involves a desire for social recognition, is confined to this private space against his will and nature.

By isolating these objects in his space, Matthew performs a resignification that allows him to curate the identity he desires, if only in a limited capacity. While commodified

products like feminine clothing and makeup clearly aim to attract, define and enforce a certain type of identity for people with certain types of bodies, as Zola's nearly total attention on female customers implies, in Matthew's possession, this correlation between female and femininity is broken. Adorning an otherwise "masculine" room described as a "boxer's training camp," they take on a certain instability and volatility that accompanies the uneasy bending of social norms (Barnes 85). For this reason, Nora is viscerally embarrassed upon entering, as if she has caught the doctor in a deviant and shameful private behavior not intended to be seen. While they compensate for Matthew's desire to live as a woman, these commodities cannot unequivocally confer their feminine signification; rather, they exist in a sort of significatory limbo, neither adhering neatly to the body as a one-to-one signifier/signified relationship, nor totally divorced from their feminine associations. If not fully incomprehensible like the outmoded Surrealist object, these objects become destabilized in their social meaning, opening up space for new kinds of perception and social imagination to peek through.

> Nora glimpses this possibility in the moment when she enters the room:
> It flashed into Nora's head: "God, children know something they can't tell;
> they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!" But this thought, which was
> only the sensation of a thought, was of but a second's duration as she opened
> the door; in the next, the doctor had snatched the wig from his head, and
> sinking down in the bed drew the sheets up over his breast. (Barnes 85-86)

The destabilization of gender categories appears to Nora as a flash of insight rising up from her unconscious at the sight of Matthew's feminine objects; the thought appears as taboo, the supposed innocence of the child rendered corrupt through the forbidden desire for "Red

Riding Hood and the wolf in bed," a sexualized rendering of gender fluidity or ambiguity (Barnes 85). The insight's disappearance coincides with the doctor's concealment of his feminine objects, "snatching" the wig off his head and covering his nightgown. However, if only for a moment, these objects, through Matthew's appropriation and resignification, have succeeded in destabilizing conventional understandings of gender.

While Matthew's collection functions as a valuable coping mechanism for his inability to publicly inhabit the female gender, when self-determination is not real or complete when confined to the private home. Because gender and identity must be recognized and validated socially for the individual to experience themselves affirmed, Matthew's feminine objects cannot replace other people in performing this function. Barnes points to the tragedy of the confinement of Matthew's gender expression through Nora's observation: "He dresses to lie beside himself, who is so constructed that love, for him, can be only something special; in a room that giving back evidence of his occupancy, is as mauled as the last agony" (86). Cut off from social recognition by others' prejudice, not least Nora herself, Matthew's only option is to "lie beside himself" in a room that, through the objects collected within, mirrors his constructed self back to him (Barnes 86). However, while the room can provide "evidence," it cannot offer true recognition of Matthew as a subject, as another person could (Barnes 86). Instead, it is "mauled as the last agony," reflecting in material form Matthew's internal pain, which persists despite his ability to perform himself as he chooses within the private confines of the space (Barnes 86). Thus Barnes demonstrates how in Matthew the collection as ego compensation reveals its final limits; seeking "to assert himself as an autonomous totality outside the world" to live his authentic gender expression, carefully fashioning a self by manipulating a collection of

objects in an enclosed, private space, he is unable to dispel the pain of harmful prejudices he encounters in the social world, which drive him to this isolationist tactic in the first place (Baudrillard 8). Although the collector fears the instability of social life and interpersonal relationships – often for good reason, as Matthew's example reveals – the "security" of objects can only ever be compensatory, as Baudrillard implies, coming at the psychic cost of "abstraction and regression" (10). Ultimately failing to fully deliver on the person's desires, in Barnes's work, the object can also turn on its owner, mirroring the pain of their psychic and relational shortcomings back to them, as Nora's, Jenny's and Matthew's collections each do.

Dream house, House of Incest

While Barnes's representations of collecting reveal the perceived shortcomings of personal sovereignty outside of the social world, the image of the psychic house in *Nightwood* and *House of Incest* provides another avenue for critique of the traditional domestic trope of isolation and enclosure. In this way, these Modernist women writers challenge both the nineteenth-century ideals that figured the domestic family space as an idyllic, feminized shelter, and the assumption of excessive self-absorption in the Modernist movement. In these texts, instead of a positive protection, excessive isolation from the outside world becomes harmful and self-destructive.

Many thinkers, spatial and psychoanalytic, have invoked the comparison of house and psyche to think both types of interior space and the links between them. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard uses the house as the privileged image of intimate space, which includes both the material and the psychic. "Our soul is an abode," Bachelard writes, "And by remembering 'houses' and 'rooms,' we learn to 'abide' within ourselves. Now everything

becomes clear, the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them" (71). While Bachelard's house is encoded rather exclusively with positive affect, as a comforting and necessary container for the developmental process, as "abode" implies, Sigmund Freud uses the house image in a more unstable sense to evoke the possibility of psychic rupture and repression in the 1919 essay "The Uncanny." For Freud, the uncanny "is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124). In this definition, the uncanny is linked to the interior space of both home and mind through the association with something "once well known" or "familiar" (Freud 124). The etymology of the word also relates the uncanny with the home; in German, "uncanny" is *unheimlich,* or literally "unhomely," the opposite of *heimlich,* which means homely, familiar, intimate, comfortable, friendly, not strange, to name just several synonyms cited in the text. And yet, for Freud, the uncanny or unhomely is not merely opposed to the familiar as the unfamiliar; it is the familiar *forgotten* and returned in an unfamiliar, strange and frightening manner.

Presenting "the essential content of this short study," Freud writes that the defining affect of the uncanny is the "fear" that is triggered by "something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" regardless of the original affect that was repressed (147-48). The uncanny or "haunted" house, as the German expression goes, is thus a metaphor for the psyche which contains repressed content, or powerful emotional experience that has been sequestered from the conscious mind. Unlike Bachelard's poetic rendering of the child's developmental process, Freud's invokes the image of the house not as a comforting container but as a space for elisions, ruptures and psychological disquiet, a house that is at once intimately ours – for it is ourselves – and

frighteningly foreign – for we have closed certain highly upsetting psychic "rooms" and forgotten what they contain, so that opening the doors again disturbs us profoundly.

When certain rooms in our psychic house become walled off due to trauma, the self tends to retreat and isolate. However, this defense mechanism is counterproductive; it takes an opening to the outside to dispel stagnation and transform the uncanny recurrence of the past into new, more positive psychic structures and behaviors. In *Nightwood* and Anais Nin's novella *House of Incest*, the closed-off, traumatized psyche is rendered through the image of an incestuous house. The house is incestuous in two ways: first, literally, as the characters have suffered directly incestuous trauma, but also metaphorically, in that its affective energies are oriented exclusively inwards in a way that becomes pathological. Both texts illustrate attempts to open the incestuous house to break the cycle of uncanny recurrence, one by bringing the outside into the house, and the other through a more direct attempt to evacuate the house by throwing open its doors and windows, especially of the stagnant, walled-off rooms where traumatic memories live. In this way, they transcribe the perceived dangers implicit in the isolation of the domestic; when a family home becomes literally enclosed and incestuous, the psyche suffers from an analogous, self-destructive separation that can only be remedied by opening up that which has been sealed off. Appearing in the work of women writers living in a period of progressive emancipation from confinement in the domestic sphere, this visceral preference against isolation and for increasing openness of the house can be read as supporting greater freedom and integration into the social world for women.

At the climactic moment in *Nightwood,* just before Nora discovers Robin's infidelity with Jenny, Barnes includes an extensive scene of a recurring dream Nora has about her

grandmother, an ambiguously traumatic figure. While anxiously waiting for Robin to return from her nighttime wandering, Nora "fell into a dream which she recognized," although it had not been "well dreamt" in previous versions, before Robin's integration (Barnes 67). Structurally, the dream echoes the waking scene, where Nora is on a high floor of an apartment building overlooking a courtyard. In the dream, Nora is also "standing at the top of a house, that is, the last floor but one—this was her grandmother's room" (Barnes 67). She calls to Robin, who has "entered the dream" from below (foreshadowing Nora's sighting of her in the courtyard from above), "'Come up, this is Grandmother's room,' yet knowing it was impossible because the room was "taboo" (Barnes 68). The repressed and taboo image of the incestuous grandmother permeates the dream; she appears to Nora as strange, other than the way she remembered her, but at the same time "everlasting and continuous," in other words, eternally recurring like the dream itself – and the trauma (Barnes 69). In this way, Barnes echoes Freud's rendering of the uncanny house as one which harbors repressed trauma that expresses as an anxious premonition of recurrence when triggered. If the dream represents Nora's psyche, the "everlasting and continuous" painful memory of her grandmother is the room that is closed off to the outside, in this case to Robin (Barnes 69).

Robin's presence in this traumatized scene is crucial. Nora attempts to exorcise the past by inviting Robin to enter Grandmother's room, rather than entering the room alone. By bringing the outsider into her house, or her psyche, Nora hopes to lift the taboo by transposing the incestuous attraction she feels for her grandmother onto Robin. In this way Robin completes the dream by allowing Nora to process the repressed content of her psyche, rendered spatially as a room located at the upper extreme of the house, where it is most distant and difficult to access, but also the most symbolically privileged and powerful, the

"head" of the "body of the house," attesting to the power of the incestuous trauma in Nora's psychic life (Barnes 68). Unfortunately, Robin is barred from this room, and thus Nora is unable to fully exorcise the repressed psychic content. Due to the impossibility of fully integrating the outsider, she remains trapped in an incestuous emotional register wherein her libidinal energy is focused inward, grasping at Robin as a missing element of the self and not as an outside person.

Because Robin is coded as an incestuous character to Nora, her presence in the house does not change the structure of the trauma, whether she enters the room or not. Throughout the text, Nora admits that she loves Robin primarily in this way: "She is myself. What am I to do?" she tells Matthew (Barnes 136). More explicitly, Nora's attraction to Robin is uncanny in Freud's sense of something repressed which recurs, connecting Robin to the incestuous attachment figures of her past. Tellingly, in introducing the character, Barnes characterizes Robin as "eaten death returning," conjuring both recurrence and the incestuous mode through the shadow of cannibalism, or the consumption of one's own flesh, when she adds, "we feel that we could eat her… for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers" (Barnes 41). Even more explicitly allying Robin with the image of recurring incestuous trauma, Nora describes Robin as a relative who "becomes one's lover," and who consequentially "must be everything," becoming all-*consuming* in a reversal of the previous invocation of cannibalism – "we feel that we could eat her" (Barnes 166, 41). Because Robin is presented as such a potent figure of incest for Nora, her introduction into Nora's house, real and psychic, does not alter the structure of the trauma. As a figure whom Nora hopes to use to transvalue her pain by displacing attachment onto her, Robin enters the dream, but is unable to enter into the real site of the pain, the grandmother's room. Meanwhile, her

physical absence from Nora's house represents her inability or unwillingness to perform this role for Nora. Instead of opening the sealed room, or leaving the incestuous house altogether, Nora's dream shows her trying to integrate an outside person into the incestuous psychic drama, an attempt which falls short of its intended purpose, Robin's abandonment of the relationship ultimately recycling the pain of Nora's past that Barnes foreshadows as "eaten death returning" (41). Thus for Barnes, the enclosed family home, rather than sheltering the inhabitants from harm, reproduces a generational trauma that arises from an improper and harmful inward orientation of feeling and libidinal energy. Specifically, in channeling this trauma exclusively through female figures, Barnes mounts a pointed critique of nineteenth-century associations between idealized femininity and the idealized domestic.

In *House of Incest*, Anais Nin presents a related vision of the incestuous house which explicitly renders healing as an opening of the closed house to the wider social world. Originally published in 1936 after years of work and revision, the Surrealist-inflected novella thematizes, fictionalizes and aestheticizes Nin's own experiences with childhood incest trauma. In this text, the uncanny house appears as one in which "Everything had been made to stand still, and everything was rotting away" (Nin 34). Conjuring the psychic stagnation of a repressed memory, a repository of experience too painful to touch and therefore unable to be moved and processed, Nin evokes the metaphoric danger of a closed house; enclosure leads to stagnation and decay. However, opening the house is no easy solution: Nin's narrator laments, "I am so utterly lonely, but I also have such a fear that my isolation be broken through, and I no longer be the head and ruler of my universe" (30). As seen in previously examined texts, the desire for control and sovereignty over a space is rendered as a

counterproductive desire, one which hurts the same self who strives to maintain hegemony over their own domain, psychic and spatial.

The enclosed house is as alluring as it is self-destructive. Ultimately, Nin says, "The fear of madness will burn down the walls of our secret house and send us out into the world seeking warm contact. Worlds self-made and self-nourished are so full of ghosts and monsters" (30). In this sentence, "worlds" and "secret house" become conflated, bringing together the previous images that alternate between the two. In a sense, a house becomes an entire world to those who inhabit it in the same way one's psyche both houses them and frames, or even composes, their entire world. The less permeable to outside forces a house / world becomes, however, the more uncanny, filled with "ghosts and monsters," frightening specters of the past. Despite the often-disabling fear of the outside world, Nin argues that it is necessary to open one's inner world to avoid self-inflicted haunting and madness.

For Nin, the enclosed house is the incestuous house, traumatized in a particular way that keeps it shut to the outside world. Like Barnes, Nin renders the repressed trauma spatially as an inaccessible room: "In the house of incest there was a room which could not be found, a room without window, the fortress of their love, a room without window where the mind and blood coalesced in a union without orgasm and rootless like those of fishes" (34). Not only can she not access the room or memory, but it is erased entirely, the memory closed in upon itself and thus unable to be dispelled through later intervention. In this image of the incestuous room, stillness reigns supreme; the brother immobile before a portrait of Jeanne, a fixed image he can love free from the fear of loss, and outside the room Jeanne is "Standing still for many years, between the moment she had lost her brother and the moment she had looked at the façade of the house of incest, moving in endless circles round the

corners of the dreams, never reaching the end of her voyage, and apprehended all wonder through the rock-agedness of her pain, by dying" (42).

Ultimately, the stillness and closure of the room does not protect from pain, but the incestuous room does block the flow of life by trapping it in endless circles that coalesce around the same point without ever reaching it. To break this circuit, the narrator and Jeanne stumble from room to room searching for the lost room, hoping that finding it and shattering its frozen stillness will release them from captivity both physical and psychological. Nin writes:

> If only we could all escape from this house of incest, where we only love
>
> ourselves in the other, if only I could save you all from yourselves, said the
>
> modern Christ. But none of us could bear to pass through the tunnel which led
>
> from the house into the world on the other side of the walls, where there were
>
> leaves on the trees, where water ran beside the paths, where there was daylight
>
> and joy. We could not believe that the tunnel would open on daylight: we
>
> feared to be trapped into darkness again; we feared to return whence we had
>
> come, from darkness and night. (48-49)

While the text ends tragically, a solution is evoked through the image of escape. Rather than integrating the outsider into the house, as Nora attempts to do in *Nightwood*, Nin draws a tunnel that will lead the characters directly out, breaking the cycle perpetuated by the unnatural enclosure of house and psyche. In this text, counter to the ideal of the protected domestic space, healing and safety is explicitly relational and portrayed as lying outside the walls of the home. Challenging the myth of the sanctity of the bourgeois domestic, where the shelter of the home is evoked as a protection against the harms of the outside world, these

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texts reflect a belief that it is the home itself that can pose a threat to our safety and wellbeing, recalling Foucault's claim that the overly enclosed bourgeois family home is "'incestuous' from the start" by virtue of its excessive inward affective orientation (108-109). These Modernist writers thus critique such an affective orientation as inherently harmful, reflecting a pushback against women's entrapment in the home, and argue for a realignment, favoring a more balanced, open and fluid relationship between public and private that acknowledges the potential harms of both and does not exclude one in favor of the other.

Conclusion

The previous sections have aimed towards a partial reimagining of Modernist literature through a multifaceted study of its depictions of and attitudes towards interior, domestic and living spaces as they relate to the wider social world and its forces and challenges. While Modernism has been extensively studied in its focus on the public sphere – the city streets and other quintessential spaces of the modern city – or alternatively, privileging the interiority of the individual at the expense of social and relational life, the examples in this study have drawn out a different side of Modernist literature, one that uses private, domestic space to interrogate the social forces, challenges, injustices and transformations of their age. Each author complicates the stark division between public and private space which undergirds certain nineteenth-century ideals of family life, social structure and morality. Rather than rebelling completely against the perceived shortcomings of the past, writers used depictions of domestic spaces and objects to advance positive analyses, critiques and even new agendas for collective living, all of which rely, first and foremost, on a recognition of the profound interdependence between people of different social standings and milieus,

connected through the complex causalities encoded in physical space and objects. In this way, Modernist literature injects a deep social awareness into narratives seemingly centered on the private experience of one or a few isolated individuals. Specifically, women writers like Jean Rhys, Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes and Anais Nin challenge traditional tropes of the feminine domestic as safe and enclosed without rejecting the importance of the home in the life of the modern woman. Rather than leaving the family and the home entirely, the modern woman must rearrange it to become less myopic, restrictive and incestuous through a recognition of the links between interior and exterior, with all its challenges and injustices. Similarly, commodity capitalism becomes complicated in the work of Walter Benjamin and Surrealist writers like André Breton, as innovations in production and sales techniques do not only mount a unilateral intrusion into the traditional family home, but also spread the seeds of perception of radical social possibilities. For these writers, objects within and outside domestic space remain socially and psychologically potent but flexible signifiers that can facilitate connections between individuals and give rise to new imaginations of collective life. In each case presented in this study, Modernist writers call for a greater recognition of the complex connections between living spaces and social structures, allowing for no neutral or perfectly enclosed private space in modern life. In this way, they fundamentally reject the possibility of individual sovereignty, whether spatial or psychological, and foreground the inherent relationality of social life that must be acknowledged to shift towards more equitable, just and liberatory ways of living in a rapidly changing world.

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