Angles

New Perspectives on the Anglophone World

1 | 2015

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/angles/2002>

DOI: 10.4000/angles.2002

ISSN: 2274-2042

Publisher

Société des Anglicistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur

Electronic reference

Yasna Bozhkova, "'The Language of the Future' and the Crisis of Modernity: Mina Loy's 'Aphorisms on Futurism'", *Angles* [Online], 1 | 2015, Online since 01 November 2015, connection on 06 June 2022.

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/angles/2002> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.2002>

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'The Language of the Future' and the Crisis of Modernity: Mina Loy's 'Aphorisms on Futurism'

Yasna Bozhkova

THE Futurist can live a thousand years in one
poem.

HE can compress every æsthetic principle in one
line.

Mina Loy, "Aphorisms on Futurism" (1914)

- 1 For a long time, the modernist poet and painter Mina Loy remained marginal to, and even absent from, the modernist canon. Her work has gained increasing prominence in recent modernist scholarship, especially in studies which work toward a critical redefinition of Modernism as a variety of competing modernisms rather than as a monolithic and homogeneous phenomenon. Indeed, for various reasons, Loy's case is especially suited to demonstrate this plurality of "isms" which shaped the modernist movement: the eclectic, protean nature of her work, which spans across visual arts and literature, her cosmopolitanism, her role as a transatlantic mediator between artistic communities in London, Munich, Paris, Florence, and New York, and her ambivalent engagement with avant-gardes with conflicting agendas, among which were Italian Futurism, New York Dada, and Surrealism. Her hybrid aesthetics deliberately explore the tensions generated by the collisions of disparate elements, and her highly idiosyncratic poetic voice simultaneously embraces the radical innovation which characterizes her cultural moment, and ironically points to its limits.
- 2 This paper focuses on the ironic strategies which emerge in Loy's first published text, "Aphorisms on Futurism." The publication of "Aphorisms" in the January 1914 issue of Alfred Stieglitz's influential journal *Camera Work*¹ put Loy on the map of the international literary avant-garde, marking her turn from the visual arts to poetry. "Aphorisms" was penned in Florence while Loy was amorously and artistically involved with Futurist leaders F.T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini, editor of the Florence-based

Futurist periodical *Lacerba*. Loy's poems and plays, which also bore the imprint of Futurist aesthetics, appeared shortly thereafter in the small New York magazines *Trend*, *Rogue*, and *Others*, causing quite an uproar with their highly fractured syntax, experimental punctuation, and enigmatic imagery. In October 1916, Loy sailed from Florence to New York and became an initiate of the Arensberg circle, a cluster of artists, poets, and intellectuals around art patron Walter Arensberg, which brought together the poets whose work appeared in *Others* and the artists of New York Dada. Even though Loy's Futurist phase was brief, her connections with the Futurists and her "madly elliptical style" were inextricably intertwined in the making of her reputation on the other side of the Atlantic as one of the most innovative European avant-gardists:

Visiting the shrines of modern art and literature in Paris and Florence, and being accepted as a coeval in the maddest circles, Miss Loy, who is an artist as well as a poet, imbibed the precepts of Apollinaire and Marinetti [sic] and became a Futurist with all the earnestness and irony of a woman possessed and obsessed with the sum of human experience and disillusion. [...] In an unsophisticated land, such sophistry, clinical frankness and sardonic conclusions, wedded to a madly elliptical style scornful of the regulation grammar, syntax, and punctuation, [...] horrified our gentry and drove our critics into furious despair. (Kreymborg 488)

- 3 "Aphorisms on Futurism" is usually interpreted as a Futurist manifesto and is often read along with her contemporaneous "Feminist Manifesto," which remained unpublished in her lifetime. Critical appraisals based on a cross-reading of the two texts such as Natalya Lusty's "Sexing the Manifesto: Mina Loy, Feminism and Futurism" focus on her feminist critique of Futurism's misogyny and foreground the acute unresolved tension between a Futurist and a feminist poetics that characterizes Loy's early writings. Less attention has been paid to the project of a "language of the Future" (LLB 152) that emerges in "Aphorisms," which resonates differently in the context of what Marjorie Perloff has called "the Futurist moment" than it does in the context of Loy's later literary production, which also engages with subsequent avant-gardes like Dada and Surrealism. While Loy distanced herself from Italian Futurism soon after she relocated to New York, her style retained its epigrammatic and often enigmatic density, her tendency to write terse, cryptic poetry and her long periods of silence growing increasingly pronounced in her later years.
- 4 On her copy of the printed version of "Aphorisms on Futurism",² Loy crossed out the word "Futurism" and replaced it with the word "Modernism." In a note, Loy's literary executor and editor Roger Conover explains that even though Loy might have retrospectively preferred to call this piece "Aphorisms on Modernism," he chose to retain the original title because of its obvious stylistic and thematic debt to Futurism.³ While indeed the text is undoubtedly influenced by Futurism in its aesthetics and thematic concerns, it resonates more richly and ambivalently within a broader definition of "Modernism":

THE ~~Futurist~~ Modernist can live a thousand years in one poem.
HE can compress every æsthetic principle in one line.
- 5 This key revision brings to the fore the irony inherent in Loy's "Aphorisms," underscoring the fact that while the attempt to do away with the verbosity and ornament characteristic of traditional discourse and the call for telegraphic brevity and maximum concision were a common point in many avant-garde agendas and emerge as inseparable from modernity; disparate modernisms used brevity to different ends. While it suggests that the project of a "language of the Future" extends beyond the

aesthetics of Italian Futurism properly speaking to the modernist movement as a whole, Loy's revision also underscores the problem of Modernism as a chain reaction of "isms," each with their own agenda of ever more radical experimentation in search of a new poetic language of modernity.

Figure 1: "Aphorisms on Futurism"

From: Mina Loy papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.loy>

- 6 This paper uses the aesthetic principles outlined in "Aphorisms on Futurism" as an interpretative lens through which to examine how Loy's poetic strategies of extreme concision and density evolve from her Futurist phase to her later work, which remains formally innovative but has different thematic concerns. It argues that Loy's text must be read with a double focus: on the one hand, attending to the context of its composition, situating it in a climactic moment of acute crisis, a radical call for destruction of language, and an unprecedented fervor of experimentation, and on the other, through the prism of this key later revision, in order to trace how this anarchistic call for destruction of traditional discourse to be replaced by a utopian "language of the Future" later collapses into a poetics of silence, a silence whose dimensions are both aesthetic and historical. The ironic ambivalence of "Aphorisms" is already inherent in its strategic generic ambiguity: it reads *both* as a Futurist manifesto and as a disconnected series of aphorisms, which raises, as should become clear, discrepant horizons of generic expectations and becomes a key vehicle for reflecting ambivalently on the crisis of modernity.

The Language of the Future

- 7 Most likely composed in late 1913 or early 1914, Loy's "Aphorisms on Futurism" is essentially a product of what Marjorie Perloff calls "the Futurist moment" in *The Futurist Moment: Avant-garde, Avant Guerre and the Language of Rupture*, a concept she herself borrows from Renato Poggioli's seminal study *Theory of the Avant-Garde*:

the futurist moment belongs to all the avant-gardes and not only to the one named for it [...] the so-named movement was only a significant symptom of a broader and deeper state of mind. Italian futurism had the great merit of fixing and expressing it, coining that most fortunate term as its own label. [...] the futurist manifestation represents, so to speak, a prophetic and utopian phase, the arena of agitation and preparation for the announced revolution, if not the revolution itself. (Poggioli qtd. in Perloff xvii)

- 8 What Perloff calls the "Futurist moment" is this brief "prophetic and utopian phase" which immediately preceded the eruption of World War I when the language of revolution was omnipresent. Even though this climactic moment was characterized by a ubiquitous call for rupture with tradition, it triggered a chain reaction of radical innovation marked by intense rivalries between different avant-garde groups. United by the idea that traditional language is obsolete, avant-gardes demanded a complete restructuring of language and artistic forms in order to respond to the new episteme charted by new philosophical and scientific theories about the nature of time, consciousness, and being, as well as to a new everyday modernity marked by the advances of technology and early globalization.
- 9 London-born and having lived in Munich and Paris where she had been precociously immersed in the most innovative artistic currents, in Florence Loy was strategically placed to respond to these disparate strains of modernity, on the one hand through her involvement with Marinetti and Papini, through whom she imbibed the precepts not only of Italian but also indirectly of Russian Futurism, and on the other, through her encounter with Gertrude Stein and other Anglophone avant-gardists at Mabel Dodge's Florentine Villa Curonia.⁴ Loy produced her first writings "in the throes of conversion to Futurism",⁵ galvanized by their incendiary manifestoes and by the acute schism between Past and Future that Futurism demanded. Founded on January 1st 1913, the Florence-based periodical *Lacerba* edited by Giovanni Papini attracted to Florence Futurist leader Marinetti, who had been shuttling between Milan and Paris. Through her brief amorous involvement with Marinetti and Papini, Loy was initiated into the circle of Futurist painters, witnessed a number of the *serate futuriste* (Futurist evenings), violently provocative spectacles which anticipated the scandal brought about by Dada happenings, and in 1914 took part in the First Free International Futurist Exhibition at the Sprovieri Gallery in Rome. Like the Futurist manifestoes, Loy's "Aphorisms on Futurism" hinges on the break between Past and Future:

DIE in the Past.

Live in the Future.

[...]

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

BUT the Future is only dark from outside.

Leap into it—and it EXPLODES with Light.

[...]

THE Future is limitless—the past a trail of insidious reactions. (LLB 149-150)

- 10 The revolutionary rhetoric of the Futurist manifestoes calls for a complete destruction of the Past and a utopian exaltation with the idea of Future, postulating “an abyss between those docile slaves of past tradition and us free moderns, who are confident in the radiant splendour of our future.” (FM 25). This desire for a complete *tabula rasa* is summed up in Marinetti’s “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism”: “We stand on the last promontory of the centuries!... Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.” (FM 22).
- 11 In this violent obliteration of the Past, not only traditional literary language, but literature itself, become obsolete: for Marinetti, libraries are “cemeteries” which must be destroyed like museums, and the book is a tomb or a “funerary urn” of its author (FM 22-3). The Futurist project seeks to abolish the idea of a purely “literary” mode and collapse the boundaries between Art and Life, World and Text. It calls for a complete revolution of language in order to respond to the speed, simultaneity, and everyday ephemerality of modern experience, predicating artistic creation on technology and seeking inspiration in the telephone, the newspaper, the telegraph, and the airplane. Since literary language has become obsolete and the book is the tomb of its author, the Futurist poem emerges as an act beyond literature, a gesture transgressing the boundaries of the written page.
- 12 Futurism’s revolutionary project for an absolute liberation of the Word finds its most synthetic expression in Marinetti’s seminal manifesto “Destruction of Syntax—Imagination without Strings—Words-in-Freedom,” published in Papini’s *Lacerba* in June 1913, which calls for a “multilinear lyricism” of “telegraphic images”:

With words-in-freedom we will have: CONDENSED METAPHORS. TELEGRAPHIC IMAGES. MAXIMUM VIBRATIONS. NODES OF THOUGHT. CLOSED OR OPEN FANS OF MOVEMENT. COMPRESSED ANALOGIES. COLOR BALANCES. DIMENSIONS, WEIGHTS, MEASURES, AND THE SPEED OF SENSATIONS. THE PLUNGE OF THE ESSENTIAL WORD INTO THE WATER OF SENSIBILITY, MINUS THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES THAT THE WORD PRODUCES. RESTFUL MOMENTS OF INTUITION. MOVEMENTS IN TWO, THREE, FOUR, FIVE DIFFERENT RHYTHMS. THE ANALYTIC, EXPLORATORY POLES THAT SUSTAIN THE BUNDLE OF INTUITIVE STRINGS. (FM 100)
- 13 Marinetti’s *immaginazione senza fili* has been translated both as “imagination without strings,” evoking the liberation of the Word from the chains of traditional syntax, and as “wireless imagination,” which points to the telegraph as the new avant-garde mode of poetic creation, best able to convey the simultaneity and speed of modern experience. The Futurist language is “telegraphic” not only because it abolishes traditional syntax and punctuation and presents liberated words freely flowing on the space of the page, but also because in its most extreme form it should not be written on a page at all, but charted by an airplane in the sky, as in Marinetti’s “Bulgarian Airplane,”⁶ written when he was a war correspondent in the Balkan war. The Futurist poet no longer composes books of poetry but is, for instance, a war correspondent sending telegraphic news from the front. It is hardly accidental that Marinetti reaches the conclusion that traditional syntax is obsolete while riding on an airplane: “Sitting astride the fuel tank of an airplane, [...] I felt the ridiculous inanity of the old syntax inherited from Homer. A raging need to liberate words, dragging them out from the prison of the Latin period!” (“Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature,” FA 119). The

poetic language of the Future is the one of the “swirling propeller” (FA 119) of the airplane.

- 14 Loy's Futurist play *Collision*, contemporaneous with “Aphorisms on Futurism” and published in *Rogue* in August 1915 (see Figure 2), engages with the Futurist idea of a telegraphic language, where traditional syntax is completely subverted. Barely a page long, it presents an inextricable fusion between the stage directions and the lines of the character, a fusion which is particularly interesting since *Collision* is essentially a play about the dynamics of creation:

Huge hall—disparate planes, angles—whiteness—central arc-light—blaze
 Emptiness—
 But for one man—
 [...]

 Man: “Back! Bang door! Succession—incentive—ejection—idea—space—cleared of
 nothings—leaves everything—material—exhaustless creation!”

 Stares blankly into arc-light—presses electric button—shattering insistent noise
 surrounds room—intermittently arc-light extinguishes—vari-colored shafts of
 lightning crash through fifty-nine windows at irregular heights—the floor worked
 by propellers—the dissymetric receding and incursive planes and angles of walls
 and ceiling interchange kaleidoscopically to successive intricacies—occasional
 explosions irrupt the modes of
 DISHARMONY.
 [...]

 Expansion—Extension—Intension—
 CREATION—
 (LaLB 78)

Figure 2: Extract from *Collision*

Source: <https://mlarchive.suzannechurchill.com/items/show/1>.

- 15 Even though Marinetti's *parole in libertà* which do away with linear models of reading have been as influential in twentieth-century avant-garde as Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, Marinetti's call for an extreme telegraphic brevity has its obvious limitations: the utopian idea of a complete revolution of language brought about by the abolition of traditional syntax and the liberation of the word culminates in what he calls a "numerical sensibility":

My love of precision and essential brevity has naturally given me a taste for numbers, which live and breathe on the paper like living beings in our new *numerical sensibility*. [...] The mathematical signs + - x = serve to achieve marvellous syntheses and share, with their abstract simplicity of anonymous gears, in expressing the geometrical and mechanical splendours. For example, it would have needed at least an entire page of description to render this vast and complex battle horizon, when I found this definitive lyric equation: 'horizon = sharp bore of the sun + 5 triangular shadows (1 kilometre wide) + 3 lozenges of rosy light + 5 fragments of hills + 30 columns of smoke + 23 flames.' (FM 158-159)

- 16 As the above lines make clear, as revolutionary as Marinetti's principles are, they essentially amount to reducing discourse to a mathematical equation: his experimental words-in-freedom such as "BATAILLE POIDS + ODEUR" (Marinetti 1987: 75-80) exemplify such a mode of creation. Likewise, Marinetti's use of onomatopoeia, which spectacularly collapses into unintelligibility in words-in-freedom like *Zang Tumb Tuuum* and *Dunes*, illuminates the irony inherent in Loy's idea of a "language of the Future":

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

THUS shall evolve the language of the Future. (LLB 152)

- 17 This ironic idea of a language of the Future which dissolves into senselessness may be related not only to the project of Italian Futurism but to Russian Cubo-Futurism as well. Contemporaneously with Marinetti's "Destruction of Syntax," Alexei Kruchenykh's manifestoes "Declaration of the Word as Such" and "New Ways of the Word: The Language of the Future, Death to Symbolism" laid the foundations of *zaum*, variously translated from Russian as "transreason", "transration" or "beyonsense," which is essentially a "free" language liberated from "meaning"—"a language which does not have any definite meaning, a transrational language" (RF 67). In "New Ways of the Word," Kruchenykh writes: "In our art we already have the first experiments of the language of the future." (RF 70). Loy's ironic idea of a "language of the Future" which ultimately "dissolve[s]" sounds "back to their innate senselessness" reflects the linguistic project of *zaum*, a language rich in sound effects but deliberately devoid of meaning. The linguistic project of Russian Cubo-Futurism hinges on a paradox: on the one hand, *zaum* is a language deliberately "liberated" from meaning, but on the other, it is also predicated on the utopian idea of a universal poetic language, an organic version of Esperanto: "Transrational works can provide a universal poetic language, born organically, and not artificially like Esperanto." (Kruchenykh, "Declaration on Transrational Language," RF 183). In practice, however, the poetic experiments of *zaum* "dissolve" into unintelligibility, as in Kruchenykh's 1913 poem "Dyr bul schyl" (Figure 3):

ДЫР БУЛ ЩЫЛ
УБЕЩУР
СКУМ
БЫ СО БУ
Р Л ЭЗ
(Russian Original)

dyr bul shchyl
ubeshchur
skum
vy so bu
r l èz
(Transliteration)
(RF 60)

Figure 3: Kruchenykh's 1913 poem "Dyr bul schyl"

Facsimile: http://archives.getty.edu:30008/getty_images/digitalresources/russian_ag/pdfs/gri_88-B26240.pdf

- 18 Loy's play *The Sacred Prostitute* features a character named "Futurism" who delivers a Futurist "proto-poem," which ostensibly parodies both Marinetti's onomatopoeias and the *zaum* of the Russian Cubo-Futurists:

Tatatata ta ta ta ta ta ta ta ta ta
plum plam plam pluff pluff frrrrrr
urrrrrrrrrrrraaaaaaaa
pluff plaff plaff gottgott gluglu
craaa craaa
cloc-cloc gluglu gluglu cloc-cloc
gluglu
scscscsc — (SE 196)

- 19 This split between language and meaning must be read through the prism of the Saussurean linguistic revolution: while Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* would not be published until 1916, it only made explicit the split that the avant-gardes were already intuitively aware of and deliberately working toward. Saussurean linguistics brought about the emergence of language as an autonomous system, distinct from meaning: "[l]anguage is a form and not a substance. [...] This truth could not be

overstressed, for [...] all our incorrect ways of naming things that pertain to language, stem from the involuntary supposition that the linguistic phenomenon must have substance." (Saussure 122; emphasis his). In this irreversible split between language and meaning, language emerges as pure form. This turning away from the idea of language as a transparent vehicle of "meaning," and an increasing focus on the materiality of language itself is a turn similar to the early twentieth-century turning away from mimetic representation in visual arts, and may also be related to Cubist experiments with collage that feature letters, which deliberately oscillate between a linguistic and a purely visual interpretation of the letter. What Loy's ironic idea of a "language of the Future" that collapses into "senselessness" foregrounds is that this radical linguistic experimentation, which seeks to do away with "meaning" and bring about a liberation of language as pure form, ultimately leads to a semantic silence.

A is A is A: A "Radium of the Word"

- 20 Loy's other decisive Florentine encounter was with Gertrude Stein, who was a regular visitor at Mabel Dodge's Villa Curonia. Her turn from visual arts to literature was precipitated among other things by her encounter with Stein's unsettling poetics and her radical experiments with syntax and punctuation. The publication of Loy's "Aphorisms" in *Camera Work* inscribes it in the context of Stein's portraits "Matisse" and "Picasso" and her "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia," which had appeared in the same journal in 1912-1913. In Florence Loy also read the manuscript of Stein's *The Making of Americans*, and her response to Stein's challenging experimentation with syntax and punctuation is referred to in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*: "Mina [was] among the very earliest to be interested in the work of Gertrude Stein. [...] [She] was able to understand without the commas. She has always been able to understand." (Stein 2013: 92). Loy was also undoubtedly acquainted with Stein's "device" "Rose is a rose is a rose," (Stein 1922: 187), which dates from the 1913 poem "Sacred Emily" and resurfaces repeatedly in Stein's writings. Stein's device is both the perfect linguistic loop, an endless tautology which can be extended to infinity, and an ironic aphorism predicated on the law of identity: A is A. In a prose piece titled "Gertrude Stein," Loy refers to her encounter with the "austere verity" of Stein's experimentation, in which language is no longer a question of "meaning" but a question of "Being":

Some years ago I left Gertrude Stein's Villino in Fiesole with a manuscript she had given me.

"Each one is one. Each one is being the one each one is being. Each one is one is being one. Each one is being the one that one is being. Each one is being one each one is one.

Each one is one. Each one is very well accustomed to be one. Each one is very well accustomed to be that one. Each one is one." (Galleries Lafayette) [...]

This was when Bergson was in the air,⁷ and his beads of Time strung on the continuous flux of Being, seemed to have found a literary conclusion in the austere verity of Gertrude Stein's theme — 'Being' as the absolute occupation. (*LaLB* 289)

- 21 Stein's experimentation seeks to capture "the very pulse of duration" (*LaLB* 289), wherein words become "beads of Time strung on the continuous flux of Being". Thus, Loy's idea that "[the] Modernist can live a thousand years in one poem [and] can compress every aesthetic principle in one line" echoes not only the Futurist idea of simultaneity but also Bergson's theory of *durée*, which posits a new relation between

time and consciousness. The need for innovative poetic forms which respond to new theories about the nature of time, consciousness, and being is reflected in Loy's "Aphorisms":

CONSCIOUSNESS cannot spontaneously accept or reject new forms, as offered by creative genius; it is the new form, for however great a period of time it may remain a mere irritant—that molds consciousness to the necessary amplitude for holding it. CONSCIOUSNESS has no climax. (LLB 151)

- 22 As the above lines suggest, the relationship between consciousness and artistic form is twofold: on the one hand, what is at stake is a search for artistic forms which can contain the increasingly complex nature of modern experience; on the other, in the reverse process innovative forms also generate new "amplitudes" of experience and "mold" consciousness into new forms of understanding. This process of "molding" is described in very concrete, physical, quasi-scientific terms: "IN pressing the material to derive its essence, matter becomes deformed." (LLB 149). The idea of the poet as a scientist in a linguistic laboratory reappears in the poem "Gertrude Stein":⁸

Curie
of the laboratory
of vocabulary
she crushed
the tonnage
of consciousness
congealed to phrases
to extract
a radium of the word (LLB 94)

- 23 In this experimental poetics of "compression," the poet must crush "the tonnage of consciousness / [...] to extract / a radium of the word." Yet, Loy also points out, perhaps with a certain irony, that this scientific "extraction" of the "radium of the word" leaves behind a litter of "incoherent debris": "Truly with this method of Gertrude Stein's a goodly amount of incoherent debris gets littered around the radium that she crushes out of phrased consciousness." (LaLB, 294).

"Dichten = Condensare."

- 24 This quasi-scientific poetics of condensation which emerges in Loy's "Aphorisms" also points to the extreme concision of Imagist aesthetics. Concision and density are essential to modernist poetry, as the second of the founding aesthetic principles of Imagism postulates: "To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation." (Pound 1954: 3). Pound later complained that the brevity he called for was not always followed: "[v]ers libre has become as prolix and as verbose as any of the flaccid varieties that preceded it." (Pound 1954: 3). Pound's turn to Oriental poetic models like the Japanese *haiku*, and his fascination with Lao Tzu and Confucius suggests that his search for brevity was on an altogether different path from Marinetti's. Like Eliot, he was also wary of an easy "liberation" of the word at the expense of depth of meaning: "No vers is libre for the man who wants to do a good job." (Eliot qtd. in Pound 1954: 12). Pound's seminal poem "In a Station of the Metro" appeared in the April 1913 edition of *Poetry*:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals on a wet, black bough .

- 25 He famously referred to the poem not as a description but as an “equation,” where the unstated relation between the first and the second line triggers a myriad of possible interpretations. The suggestive, impenetrable depth of Japanese *haiku* aims at achieving uncommunicable metaphysical essence through a single image concisely put. If Marinetti’s “numeric sensibility” seeks to achieve “[t]he plunge of the essential word into the water of sensibility *minus the concentric circles that the word produces*” (FM 100; my emphasis), the Poundian mode seeks precisely to work with the concentric circles of potential meanings that hover around the word, wherein the word becomes impregnated or even oversaturated with a dense cloud of meanings. The principles of this poetics of condensation, essential for all modernist poetry, are outlined in *ABC of Reading*:

Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.

Dichten = condensare. [...]

I begin with poetry because it is the most concentrated form of verbal expression.

[...] ‘Dichten’ is the German verb corresponding to the noun ‘Dichtung’ meaning poetry, and the lexicographer has rendered it by the Italian verb meaning ‘to condense’. (Pound 1961: 36)

- 26 While both Marinetti and Pound call for extreme concision, Pound’s idea of a concise linguistic form charged with an extreme density of substance is completely absent from Marinetti’s equations: if Marinetti’s linguistic experiments ultimately seek to liberate language from meaning, Pound’s formula signals an attempt to save meaning through a maximum economy of words which allows the “charging” of language with a dense cloud of potential meanings.
- 27 Even in Loy’s Futurist phase, her poetry is in fact much closer to the terse density of Imagism, and more broadly speaking to the Poundian mode of modernist poetry. This overcharging of language with a hovering cloud of potential meanings is already at work in *Songs to Joannes* (1915-1917), Loy’s first major poetic breakthrough, a poem which is read by most Loy scholars as a response to her disappointing relationships with Marinetti and Papini, and more broadly as a riposte to Futurism’s misogyny and “contempt for woman conceived as a reservoir of love” (FA 86). *Songs to Joannes* is a longer opus of significant complexity which cannot be fully addressed in the context of this paper, but it is useful to focus briefly on fragments which stand as individual poems. The poem is strewn with long series of dashes which render graphically the intrusion of silence, wherein language collapses into the unsaid:

We sidle up

To Nature

— — — that irate pornographer (LLB 63)

From archetypal pantomime

Stringing emotions

Looped aloft

— — — (LLB 66)

The moon is cold

Joannes

Where the Mediterranean — — — — (LLB 67)

- 28 The poem hinges on a kaleidoscopic juxtaposition of fragments, all of which converge in its last section, which is composed of a single line: “Love — — — the preeminent litterateur.” (LLB 68). Even though they do not follow exactly the syllable pattern of *haiku*, these fragments resemble the suggestive, impenetrable depth of Japanese poetry.

At the same time, through her experiments with fractured syntax and punctuation, Loy achieves the “multilinear lyricism”, “condensed metaphors” and “telegraphic images” advocated by Marinetti’s manifesto much more effectively than Marinetti’s own words-in-freedom.

- 29 Loy’s later poems become increasingly condensed, increasingly cryptic and opaque. In his 1926 review of Loy’s first poetic collection *Lunar Baedeker* (sic), Yvor Winters praised the “ominous grandeur” of Loy’s images “frozen into epigrams.” (qtd. in Burke 323). Indeed, many of her stanzas (or even entire poems, such as “Gertrude Stein”) read as aphorisms or epigrams, such as those two examples from the poem “Lunar Baedeker”, permeated with decadent imagery and an ironic voice which hinges on alliteration:

Peris in livery
prepare
Lethe
for posthumous parvenues
[...]
Onyx-eyed Odalisques
and ornithologies
observe
the flight
of Eros obsolete (LLB 82)

- 30 Loy’s appearances in print also become increasingly rare in her later years. In a 1924 interview with Eugène Jolas, who presented her as “a writer who works with almost Stoic slowness, Miss Mina Loy, author of that strangely cryptic *Lunar Baedeker*,” she observed epigrammatically “One must have lived ten years to write a poem.” (qtd. in Burke 337). This statement suggests a poetic strategy of withdrawal and silence, of condensing experience into the increasingly cryptic density of her aphoristic style, a strategy which echoes Pound’s idea that “It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.” (Pound 1954: 4). This epigrammatic poetics which unfolds in Loy’s later writing is already at work in “Aphorisms on Futurism,” whose strategic generic indeterminacy is fundamental to understanding its ironic ambivalence.

The Crisis of Modernity: From Manifesto to Aphorism

- 31 While generic blurring is at the very heart of the Futurist endeavour, the aphorism’s generic characteristics are radically at odds with the incendiary, dogmatic discourse of the Futurist manifesto. As Perloff explains, “[t]he Futurist manifesto marks the transformation of what had traditionally been a vehicle for political statement into a literary, one might say, a quasi-poetic construct.” (81-2). In the context of “the manifesto fever that swept across Europe in the years preceding the First World War” (Perloff 81), the manifesto effectively becomes the poetic vehicle of the revolution that it calls for: it exemplifies the very revolutionary principles that it advocates, hinging on an aggression which is both verbal and visual, through experimental typography, and on a grandiloquence which is both theatrical and politicized. Presenting an inextricable fusion between theory and practice, the manifesto is the poetic form of the Futurist movement. It also provides an essential interpretative lens for the reader/spectator,

allowing him to decode experimental texts like *Zang Tumb Tuuum*, which are unintelligible in themselves.

- 32 Even though there was hardly a similar “aphorism fever” in the early 20th-century “paroxysm”⁹ of “isms,” the aphorism has been used by key thinkers of modernity as varied as Wilde, Nietzsche, Kafka, and Wittgenstein, to name but a few. While both the manifesto and the aphorism are extremely condensed, the dogmatic charge and revolutionary drive of the manifesto, where the artistic and the political are inextricably enmeshed, are at odds with the generic characteristics of the aphorism. Although telegraphic brevity is at the very heart of the Futurist poetics, it is obvious that what it seeks to achieve is a maximum velocity, as well as a verbal and visual aggression of the liberated word, rather than the irony and depth of meaning characteristic of the aphorism. In his article “The Aphorism: Fragments from the Breakdown of Reason,” Gary Saul Morson introduces a key distinction between “aphorism” and “dictum”: although by definition both are extremely concise, the dictum is a straightforward statement, whereas the aphorism is characterized by suggestive depth, irony, and a tendency to paradox, and only hints at something which is beyond language. There is a thorough-going connection between aphorism and silence: the aphorism is a fragment, which only obliquely points at something which remains unsaid, inviting a multiplicity of interpretations. Ironic or not, its essence remains in what is beyond words:

As we read such fragments, their incompleteness seems a part of them, because they speak of the necessary incompleteness of our knowledge of what is most important. They gesture beyond themselves, and the white space that follows seems a part of them. They are [...] flashes that die out before we have quite made out what they reveal. (Morson 423)

- 33 Morson quotes the famous conclusion of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence,” as the quintessential aphorism which illuminates the thorough-going connection between the terse, paradoxical nature of the aphorism and the silence that follows it. He concludes: “The dictum says Something. The aphorism shows Something Else.” (Morson 428).
- 34 While “Aphorisms on Futurism” reads as a Futurist manifesto to the extent that it hinges on the acute opposition between Past and Future, Loy’s title introduces a strategic generic ambiguity. Writing aphoristically is a way to undermine the prescriptive, dogmatic charge of Futurist rhetoric. It is important to note that “Aphorisms on Futurism” is much less formally aggressive than her contemporaneous “Feminist Manifesto,” whose visual and verbal aggression is much closer to the one characteristic of the Futurist manifestoes:

The feminist movement as at present is
Inadequate
 [...]

 As conditions are at present constituted—you have the choice
 between Parasitism, & Prostitution —or Negation (LLB 153-4)

- 35 Although “Aphorisms” introduces some experiments with typography, it deliberately remains more composed than the “Feminist Manifesto,” which suggests that Loy wished it to read precisely as a series of *aphorisms* rather than as a manifesto, or at least to introduce a strategic tension between the two genres. On the one hand, the capitalized initial words of each aphorism echo Marinetti’s *parole in libertà*, as in the use

of infinitive verbs, prescribed by Marinetti: "DIE", "LOVE", "OPEN", "LET", "UNSCREW", "ACCEPT", which charts a trajectory from the first proposition "DIE in the Past" to the last "ACCEPT the tremendous truth of Futurism", or in "TIME", "LIFE", "CONSCIOUSNESS", "TODAY", which seek to radically redefine Being, Time, and Consciousness, situating them in a moment of acute crisis. On the other hand, the fact that the first word, rather than the key word, is systematically capitalized creates a visual effect quite different from the one in "Feminist Manifesto," where the visual emphasis corresponds to the logical emphasis. In "Aphorisms" the capitalization of words rarely coincides with the logical emphasis, which is especially obvious in words like "IN", "AND", "FOR", "BUT" and "THE", and this discrepancy creates an ironic effect which undermines the dogmatic potential of the manifesto. While the context of its publication invites the reader to interpret "Aphorisms on Futurism" as a manifesto, its ironic depth begins to unfold precisely as through this distance it disintegrates into a series of semi-disconnected aphorisms. Pervaded with irony about the crisis of modernity, these aphorisms are united by the key formula "TODAY is the crisis in consciousness." (LLB 151).

- 36 Loy's use of the aphorism also points to an affiliation with the aphorisms of Oscar Wilde and engages with a *fin-de-siècle* tradition of wit and satire. Born in London, Loy came of age under the influence of Aestheticism and Decadence, and both her poetry and visual art show a tangible decadent influence. In Wilde's pithy epigrams, the paradoxical nature of the aphorism becomes a key strategy of ironically theorizing modernity, such as in "Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern; one is apt to grow old fashioned quite suddenly." (Wilde 25) While the cynical wit which pervades Wilde's aphorisms paved the way for the Futurist destruction of language and more broadly for the aesthetic crisis of Modernism, such cynical, pithy quips have little to do with the mathematical brevity advocated by Marinetti, and they wittily allude to a dialectical relation between experiment and tradition inherent even in the most revolutionary moments. The irony of Wilde's epigram illuminates the problem of the essential ephemerality of the avant-gardes, and of Futurism in particular, as a brief moment of utopian fervour, destroying literary and artistic language without proposing a lasting alternative, "without worrying if the new creations produced were on the whole superior to those destroyed." (Gramsci qtd. in Perloff 38). Similarly, Loy's revision which replaces "Futurism" with "Modernism," and her ironic remark that "[The Modernist] can compress every æsthetic principle in one line" (emphasis mine) foregrounds the problem of Modernism as a chain reaction of manifestoes and "isms", propelled by a pressing need for ever more radical innovation.
- 37 Through its strategic generic ambivalence Loy's text oscillates between the revolutionary drive of the manifesto and the ironic silence of the aphorism. While Loy's later work retained the impetus of the formal break brought about by Futurism, she quickly distanced herself from the movement's more dogmatic aspects. Her reaction not only against Futurism's misogyny but also against its polemic, violent rhetoric, and its glorification of war which foreshadows its later engagement with Fascism surfaces most poignantly in the 1920 poem "Lion's Jaws," which features a satiric portrait of "Raminetti", leader of the "flabbergast movement":

Manifesto
of the flabbergast movement
hurled by the leader Raminetti

to crash upon the audacious lightning
[...]
Raminetti
cracked the whip of the circus-master
astride a prismatic locomotive
ramping the tottering platform
of the Arts (LLB 48)

- 38 The virulent irony against Marinetti's bombastic rhetoric which appears in "Lion's Jaws" and radically revises Loy's affiliation with Futurism can also be attributed to her involvement in iconoclastic activities of New York Dada in 1917,¹⁰ and her encounter with Marcel Duchamp. In 1916-1917 she was a key agent in New York Dada's subversive anti-art practices, particularly the series of events in April and May 1917 which came to be known as "The Richard Mutt Case"¹¹ — the creation of the Society of Independent Artists with its democratic "no jury" policy, Duchamp's subsequent resignation from it following the scandal caused by his anonymous submission of *Fountain* and the short-lived Dada journal *The Blind Man*, which deliberately magnified the scandal and transformed it into an artistic act. Duchamp's radical attempts to do away with an art of painting become obsolete culminated in *Tu m'* (1918), a last painting marking the moment when he gave up painting altogether. In Duchamp's ironic strategies, the silence of the artist effectively becomes his artistic act: Art is replaced by an iconoclastic anti-art gesture.

"Colossal Absentee": Silence as the Paradoxical Language of the Modern

"Je préfère de beaucoup, par exemple, la boxe à la
littérature."
Arthur Cravan

- 39 The other Dada figure who would leave a much more thorough imprint on Loy's writing was poet-boxer Arthur Cravan. His self-mythologizing¹² as a poet-pugilist and nephew of Oscar Wilde¹³ hinged on a strategy of provocation and scandal repeatedly restaged in the little magazine *Maintenant* that Cravan published in Paris in 1912-1915, as in the hoax "Oscar Wilde is alive!", which appeared in the October 1913 issue. While Cravan was posthumously claimed as a proto-Dadaist and then transformed by Surrealism as a mythic precursor, he would have been skeptical of being reduced to another "ism". Loy and Cravan met at a gathering of the Arensberg salon in New York and fell in love while they were both involved in the activities of New York Dada. Upon America's entry in the war he escaped to Mexico to avoid conscription, and Loy followed him there in early 1918.¹⁴ His mysterious disappearance off the coast of Mexico in 1918 is an enigma that would haunt Loy and her writing for the rest of her life. Cravan's "Notes" were published posthumously in 1942-1943 in the Surrealist magazine *VVV*, with an introduction by Breton:

En lui sans compromis s'accomplit la volonté de Rimbaud : « Il faut être absolument moderne. ». [...] Nous devons à Mme Mina Loy la communication des très importantes NOTES inédites dont nous commençons ici la publication. [...] les connaisseurs respireront dans ces pages le climat pur du génie, du génie à l'état brut. Longtemps, les poètes reviendront y boire comme à une source." (Breton in Cravan 105)

- 40 Breton praises "Notes" as the posthumous legacy of a "génie à l'état brut", and it is hardly accidental that he quotes Rimbaud's famous formula in his introduction. Cravan's affiliation with Rimbaud was enacted through his pseudonym, the name "Arthur" chosen after Arthur Rimbaud, which is ironically referred to in "Notes": "J'ai pensé un instant à signer Arthur I" (Cravan 106). Cravan's telegraphic, disconnected "Notes" read as an ironic posthumous manifesto of the poet of the future, who is "absolutely modern" to the extent that he does away with poetry altogether:

Car si j'avais su le latin à dix-huit ans je serais empereur — Quel est le plus néfaste : le climat du Congo ou le génie ? — les plants de (carottes) en forme de tombeau — la pensée sort du feu — [...] — J'ai pensé un instant à signer Arthur I — [...] je suivais le mouvement des brumes sur le théâtre des plaines et des vallées où les plants en rectangle de raves et de choux formaient comme de vastes tombeaux — électrosémaphore — [...] — les télégrammes — [...] — les coccinelles poudreuses des musées — [...] Je me lève londonien et me couche asiatique — [...] je suis un nerveux — J'ai remis ma ceinture de scrupuleux, je me destine à la vie, je suis musclé — [...] — j'ai été aussi le poète des destins — arcs voltaïques — [...] je traîne en mon âme des amas de locomotives, de colonnes brisées, de ferrailles — [...] l'éphémère en moi a des racines profondes — [...] haleine du printemps, je te respire comme une baleine — [...] double-cœur, quadruple cerveau, colosse rose et miroir du monde et machine à faire des vers — je suis brute à me donner un coup de poing et subtil jusqu'à la neurasthénie — [...] mélancolie athlétique — (Cravan 105-109)

- 41 Apart from *Maintenant*, which hinges on his poetic affiliation with Oscar Wilde, Cravan's only *œuvre* is this series of disconnected and paradoxical aphorisms written in the nonsensical language of Dada. The idea of the poet without an *œuvre*, cultivated by Cravan himself, was later endowed with a mythic status as it was interwoven into the strategies of negation of the Dadaists and Surrealists. In the paradoxical figure of Cravan, the poet-pugilist, converge several disparate strains of the "modern": Wilde's cynical wit, Marinetti's *parole in libertà* which render literary language, and literature itself, obsolete, the anti-art, *épater le bourgeois*, nonsensical spirit of Dada's *jeux de mots*, and the incandescent, meteoric gesture inherent in Rimbaud's formula "Il faut être absolument moderne." In their nonsensical Dada language, Cravan's aphorisms obliquely allude to the idea of the book as the tomb of the poet: "Quel est le plus néfaste : le climat du Congo ou le génie ? — les plants de (carottes) en forme de tombeau". In the wake of Marinetti's idea that the book is obsolete, that the language of the future must collapse the boundaries between Art and Life, World and Text, that the poem of the future must be a telegram sent from the war front, here the disconnected "télégrammes" of a poet-pugilist emerge as the poetic language of the future ("colosse rose et miroir du monde et machine à faire des vers"). Cravan's "mélancolie athlétique," his double identity of poet-pugilist, is the absolute paradox: it is both a "mélancolie poétique" and the absolute rejection of poetry as obsolete.
- 42 If, as Loy's "Aphorisms" suggest, "[the Modernist] can compress every æsthetic principle in one line," Cravan's "line" is his paradoxical formula "l'éphémère en moi a des racines profondes." In the wake of Rimbaud's famous formula "Il faut être absolument moderne," it posits an inextricable fusion between the meteoric brevity of his existence and his enigmatic final silence, which emerges as a poetic act, reenacting Rimbaud's. It suggests that the poetic language of the modern is ephemeral, that it flashes like a meteor, and then, as it spends itself, collapses into silence. Cravan also embodies the strategies of paradox and sarcasm that are at work in Wilde's aphorism: the irony is that the modern is short-lived, ephemeral, and the search for a new poetic

language which is “absolutely modern” ultimately leads to the destruction of poetry, to its collapse into silence. The subversive humor of Cravan’s quips points to the fact that being “too modern” (Wilde 25) means that one no longer writes poetry at all, because literature itself is obsolete: “Je préfère de beaucoup, par exemple, la boîte à la littérature.” (Cravan 35)

- 43 Cravan’s strategies of negation left an indelible imprint on Loy’s writing. In her memoir “Colossus”, she refers to his writings: “the manuscripts he left behind set in motion a cerebral newsreel depicting his life as vivid as the terse remarks he had sown in my mind.” (qtd. in Parmar 28). In Loy’s writing, Cravan is endowed with the dimensions of a mythic figure: he emerges as “Colossus,” the quintessential “modern,” as the absolute embodiment of modernity. The figure of the poet who is “absolutely modern” to the extent that he does away with poetry altogether resurfaces through the paradoxical figure of a “colossal absentee,” (LLB 96) echoing his “colosse rose et [...] machine à faire des vers.” This figure of a “colossal absentee”, at once mythic and spectral, becomes a central void that her writing revolves around, articulated most acutely in poems like “The Widow’s Jazz” and “Letters of the Unliving”. Loy’s poetic self-casting as Cravan’s widow “left to converse with an unanswering abyss” (Parmar 36) evolves into a poetics of silence, which culminates in the poem “Letters of the Unliving,” ending with an image that reads like a final epigram of the poet who renounces poetry:

O leave me
my final illiteracy
of memory’s languour
my preference
to drift in lenient coma
an older Ophelia
on Lethe (LLB 132)

- 44 Casting herself as an “Ophelia” to her “colossal absentee”, Loy reenacts Cravan’s gesture of negation of poetry, and delineates a final plunge of the poet into the “unanswering hiatus” (LLB 130), a gesture which reflects the idea that only silence can convey what language no longer can.

“Time-Bomb”: From 1914 to 1945

- 45 The nonsensical language of Dada, its radical doubt concerning language as a vehicle for meaning and the category of “meaning” in the first place is a negation whose dimensions are not only aesthetic but historical, and can be understood as a reaction to the horrors of World War I. Cravan’s slogan “On ne me fait pas marcher, moi!” effectively sums up not only his own anti-war attitude¹⁵ but Dada’s position as a whole. If, on the one hand, the crisis of Modernism is located in a chain reaction of “isms”, ever more radical and ever more ephemeral, triggered by the ever more pressing need to “make it new,” on the other, it is framed historically by the crises of the two World Wars. The poetics of silence which is omnipresent in Loy’s later work, both as a thematic motif in the poetry and as a refusal to write, is rooted not only in the haunting enigma of Cravan’s disappearance, but also in a larger historical crisis, what she calls “the cataclysmic factor in human evolution WAR” (LaLB 277). Perloff refers to the catastrophe of World War I as “[t]he specter of [...] a future wholly unanticipated by the very artists who called themselves Futurists” (Perloff 38). By the time of the even

greater cataclysm of World War II, Futurism had aligned itself with Fascism, but the question of the poetic language of modernity remained as pressing as in 1914.

- 46 It is useful here to briefly look at Loy's poem "Time-Bomb," composed around 1945, which strikingly revisits some of her 1914 "Aphorisms," such as "TODAY is the crisis in consciousness," operating a radical reversal of the utopian fervor and incendiary rhetoric of the Futurist moment. While in "Aphorisms" she exclaims "Leap into [the Future]—and it EXPLODES with *Light*. / THE Future is limitless—the past a trail of insidious reactions." (LLB 149-150), "Time-Bomb" posits a radically different relation between Past and Future:

The present moment
is an explosion ,
a scission
of past and future
[...]
Only the momentary
goggle of death
fixes the fugitive
momentum . (LLB 123)

- 47 "Time-Bomb" reads as an aphorism which radically revises her 1914 text: if in 1914 "scission" resonates with the Futurist project of a complete obliteration of the Past and a confident leap into the "radiant splendour" (FM 25) of the Future, in 1945 it reads as an unmistakable reference to the atom bomb. It points to a nuclear disintegration of language which, while it may be related to the idea of the "radium of the word" that appears in "Gertrude Stein," no longer conjures up the image of a poet-scientist in the laboratory of vocabulary, but that of a devastating nuclear "explosion," where the poem, no longer able to convey the unspeakable, becomes the "the momentary / goggle of death" which fixes "the fugitive / momentum" of language. Thus, "Time-Bomb" reads as the closing parenthesis of Loy's "Aphorisms on ~~Futurism~~ Modernism".

Conclusion

- 48 Through broadening the spatial and temporal context of Loy's "Aphorisms on Futurism", this paper has sought to demonstrate that the notion of a "language of the Future" remains pivotal in her later writing, both as a utopian horizon and as an ironic reflection on the collapse of language into unintelligibility, and accounts for the ironic sliding on the edge of the unreadable which characterizes her highly idiosyncratic poetic idiom. Loy's poetics defines the aphorism as a quintessentially modern genre, diametrically opposed to the manifesto. Developing aphoristic elements in her poetry allows Loy to explore ironically the radical innovation of language both as an absolute necessity and as an impossibility. Language's increasing failure to convey the aesthetic, historical and ontological crises of modernity results in a poetics which increasingly revolves around the notion of silence. As the shadow double of language, silence generates potent meanings which language can no longer contain.

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NOTES

1. See *Camera Work* 45 (January [June] 1914): 13-5.
2. A single leaf with the first page of "Aphorisms" from *Camera Work*, on which the word "Futurism" is replaced by "Modernism" and "Futurist" by "Modernist," is now among the Mina Loy papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. It is unclear when exactly Loy made the change.
3. See Editor's Note, *LLB* 215-6.
4. For a more detailed biographical account of Loy's personal involvement with Marinetti and Papini, as well as her friendships with Mabel Dodge, Gertrude Stein, and other Anglophone expatriates, see Carolyn Burke's biography *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (1996: 119-194).
5. Letter from Mina Loy to Mabel Dodge dated February 1914, quoted in Burke (1996: 157).
6. The experimental typography of Marinetti's words-in-freedom makes them impossible to reproduce here. See Marinetti (1987: 83-4). See also "Bombardment" in *FA*, 431-3.
7. Papini was also a disciple of Bergson and had translated his texts into Italian.
8. The poem was originally published as an epigraph to Loy's prose essay about Stein quoted above.
9. The idea of a "paroxysm" of "isms" appears in Apollinaire's 1913 manifesto "The Futurist Anti-Tradition," which also appeared in *Lacerba*. See *FA* 152.
10. For a more detailed biographical account, see "Subversive Amusements (New York, 1916-17)" in Burke (1996: 211-233).
11. See "The Richard Mutt Case" in *The Blind Man*, reproduced in Naumann (1994: 185).
12. On the question of Cravan's self-mythologizing strategies, see Sandeep Parmar's "Mina Loy's 'Colossus' and the Myth of Arthur Cravan." Quotations from Parmar's article are followed by paragraph numbers rather than page numbers.
13. While taken by many to be a hoax, Cravan's claim to be Wilde's nephew was actually true. Cravan's real name was Fabian Avenarius Lloyd. His father's sister, Constance Lloyd, was married to Oscar Wilde.
14. For a more detailed biographical account, see "Colossus (New York, 1917)" and "Mexico (1917-18)" in Burke (1996: 234-265). See also "Mina Loy and Arthur Cravan" in Naumann (1994: 162-8).
15. Arguably, Cravan's death was obliquely caused by the war, since he had been obliged to flee from Europe to New York and then to Mexico in order to avoid conscription.

ABSTRACTS

This paper focuses on Mina Loy's "Aphorisms on Futurism," written in Florence while she was involved with Futurist leaders F.T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini, and first published in 1914 in Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work*. In Loy's "Aphorisms" emerges the utopian idea of a poetic "language of the Future," which reflects the Futurist project to destroy language, replacing a traditional syntax that has become obsolete with a telegraphic language of modernity. On her own copy of "Aphorisms," Loy later replaced the word "Futurism" with the word "Modernism," suggesting, perhaps with a certain irony, that the project of a poetic "language of the Future" extends beyond the aesthetics of Italian Futurism to the Modernist movement as a whole, yet pinpointing the problem of Modernism as a chain reaction of "isms," each with its own agenda of

radical experimentation in search of a new poetic language of modernity. Taking this key later revision as its departure point, this paper reads Loy's text with a double focus: on the one hand, situating it in the context of its composition and reading it through the prism of Futurism's incendiary rhetoric, and on the other, within a broader definition of Modernism, tracing how this violent call for destruction of traditional discourse later collapses into a poetics of silence, whose dimensions are both aesthetic and historical. The ironic ambivalence of "Aphorisms" is already inherent in its strategic generic ambiguity: it reads both as a Futurist manifesto and as a series of aphorisms, oscillating between the revolutionary rhetoric of the manifesto and the ironic silence of the aphorism, which becomes a key vehicle for reflecting ambivalently on the crisis of modernity. Finally, this paper also suggests that the aesthetic principles outlined in Loy's "Aphorisms" can be used as an interpretative lens through which to examine her poetic strategies of extreme concision and density.

Cet article se focalise sur « Aphorisms on Futurism », le premier texte publié de Mina Loy, écrit à Florence lorsqu'elle côtoyait les futuristes F.T. Marinetti et Giovanni Papini, et paru en 1914 dans la revue *Camera Work* d'Alfred Stieglitz. Dans « Aphorisms » émerge l'idée utopique d'une « langue du Futur », qui reflète le projet futuriste de faire exploser la langue, en remplaçant la syntaxe traditionnelle devenue obsolète par une langue télégraphique de la modernité. Sur son propre exemplaire du texte, aujourd'hui parmi ses archives, Loy remplaça le mot « Futurism » par le mot « Modernism », suggérant ainsi, sans doute avec une certaine ironie, que le projet d'une langue poétique du Futur s'étend au-delà du futurisme et concerne tout le mouvement moderniste qui se définit alors comme une réaction en chaîne d'« ismes », chacun avec son projet de révolutionner la langue poétique. S'appuyant sur l'éclairage qu'apporte cette modification clé, cet article propose une double lecture d'« Aphorisms », à la fois « on Futurism » et « on Modernism » : d'une part, en le plaçant dans le contexte des manifestes futuristes, et de l'autre, dans l'optique d'une définition plus large du Modernisme, en démontrant comment cet appel violent à la destruction de la langue mène paradoxalement à une poétique du silence, dont les dimensions sont à la fois esthétiques et historiques. L'ambivalence ironique d'« Aphorisms on Futurism » s'explique entre autres par son ambiguïté générique : il peut être interprété à la fois comme un manifeste futuriste et comme une série d'aphorismes, oscillant ainsi entre la rhétorique incendiaire du manifeste et le silence ironique de l'aphorisme, ce qui devient une stratégie de réflexion ambivalente sur la crise de la modernité. Enfin, cet article propose que les principes esthétiques qui émergent dans ce premier texte de Loy apportent également un éclairage sur les stratégies d'extrême concision et la densité souvent énigmatique des poèmes de Loy, dont beaucoup ressemblent à des aphorismes ou épigrammes.

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Mots-clés: Loy Mina, futurisme, Modernisme, Marinetti Filippo Tommaso, Papini Giovanni, Stein Gertrude, Pound Ezra, Wilde Oscar, Cravan Arthur, aphorisme, manifeste

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“‘Sappho lunaire’: Mina Loy’s “Meteoric Idiom” focuses on Loy’s hybrid aesthetics where tension between disparate and often discordant elements is left deliberately unresolved. While Loy engaged with the aesthetics of Decadence, Futurism, Imagism, Dada, and Surrealism among others, she refused to fully adhere to any artistic programme, working instead through a constant shift of the aesthetic paradigm which introduces an ironic relativity between different forms of modernity. Yasna Bozhkova has recently presented her research on Mina Loy at the 15th and 16th annual conferences of the Modernist Studies Association, as well as at the inaugural conference of the French Society of Modernist Studies. Her article “‘Fever 103°’: The Poetics of Paroxysm in the Common Text of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton” appeared in the spring 2014 issue of the journal *L’Atelier*. Contact: yasna.bozhkova [at] univ-paris3.fr