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遊走於紐約大都會之中：哈林文藝復興時期作家克羅德・麥肯詩作中的都市漫遊與種族政治

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摘要

在此篇論文中，我嘗試透過都市漫遊者（the *flâneur*）的相關概念與討論來探討哈林文藝復興時期的作家克羅德・麥肯（Claude McKay）詩作中關於二十世紀初紐約城市的書寫。在麥肯為數眾多的詩歌作品中，其中數篇關於哈林區以及紐約都會的詩歌裡的詩歌敘述者（speakers）可以被視為在 1920 與 1930 年代時期寓居於此大都會的匿名黑人漫遊者。在這些作品中，麥肯再現了二十世紀初尋常黑人大眾與紐約城市地景的複雜關聯，並進而探索黑人主體與社群所扮演的角色和功能，以及因寓居其中而發展的情感樣貌與文化表述。在論文中，我將先討論克羅德・麥肯如何體現二十世紀初現代都會生活中的詩人，並進一步申論在哈林文藝復興時期的脈絡中，都市漫遊者作為消費者（the *flâneur*-as-consumer）與都市漫遊者作為作家（the *flâneur*-as-writer）的不同都會漫遊經驗。在論文的後半，我將進而探討此都市漫遊的黑人詩人作家如何透過筆下的敘述者從日常的遊走經驗裡考掘、錯置與辯證如夢似幻的現代都會魔幻景況（phantasmagoria）與多重交疊的現實黑人城市歷史與經驗。論文的結尾則討論具有批判意識的詩中敘述者如何在醉心於黑人都會大眾之際，仍繼續揭露與測繪屬於黑人社群的都市地理空間與文化表述。凱肯詩作中的敘述者於是不僅是悠哉閒晃的都會漫遊者，他（們）同時也兼具知識勞動、都會探索與文化批評等多重角色與功能。麥肯與其詩中的敘述者因而在二十世紀初的大都會中體現與實踐了不同面貌與可能的新世紀新黑人（the New Negro）。

關鍵詞：克羅德・麥肯、哈林文藝復興時期、紐約城市、都市漫遊、種族政治、詩歌

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Walking in New York: The Racial Politics of Flânerie in Claude McKay's City Poetry

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Abstract[**]

In this paper, I employ the relevant concepts and discussions of the modern urban figure of the *flâneur* and hence the concepts of walking to characterize the speakers of McKay's several poems about cities. The speakers of McKay's poems can be regarded as anonymous black figures inhabiting and experiencing the urban milieu of Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s. As the poetic speakers walk around the city, they reveal the material spectacles and intricate histories of the great city, and furthermore, the peculiar roles the ordinary blacks play in the economic and cultural life. Several of McKay's poems hence delineate distinctive relationships between the ordinary blacks and the Harlemite urban landscapes, revealing the emotions and sensations perceived by the black folks. By studying some of McKay's lesser-known poems, I first seek to characterize McKay as an artist of the modern urban life in the early-twentieth-century New York, and then compare and contrast the qualities of the black *flâneur*-as-writer with the white *flâneur*-as-consumer during the Harlem Renaissance. Furthermore, I will continue to explore the black *flâneur*-as-writer who moves from the dreaming state to the multiple and overlapping realities and histories behind the urban phantasmagorias. Ultimately, I will conclude how the critically-minded *flâneur*-as-writer uncovers and charts the alternative Harlemite urban geography while intoxicated by the urban black crowd. By drawing on less conspicuous aspects of the *flâneur* in existing literature, I argue that the historical figure of the *flâneur* embodied by McKay the poet and his poetic speakers is not just an idle loiterer in the streets but an intellectual laborer, an urban explorer and a cultural critic who develops an alternative reading and practice of black urban modernity, and embodies a type of the emerging New Negro in the Negro Metropolis in the early phase of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Claude McKay, The Harlem Renaissance, New York, the *flâneur* poetry, race

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Walking in New York: The Racial Politics of Flânerie in Claude McKay's City Poetry

1. Claude McKay in Harlem[1]

Harlem, the cultural mecca or the Promised Land for people of African descent both inside and outside the United States, has been referred to as Nigger Heaven, Negro Metropolis and Black Manhattan by different writers and artists since the early twentieth century. After centuries of migration and settlement, Harlem gradually became the meeting place of black artists in the fields of literature, music, theater, paintings, dances, singing, musicals and other forms of entertainment and performance. Before the Harlem Renaissance, roughly from the late 1910s to the early 1930s, African-American writers committed themselves to writing the culture and history of black people during and after the Reconstruction era in America, and paved the way for the flourishing of the Black Literary Renaissance, such as the dialect poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, novelist Charles Chesnutt, writer Ida B. Wells, writer Booker T. Washington, writer W. E. B. Du Bois, writer James Weldon Johnson, to name but a few. Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901), written in the convention of the autographical slave narrative, adopts a reconciliatory attitude toward the continuous white supremacy in America, especially the South, whereas the essays in W. E. B Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk* (1903) manifest a more critical tone in its discontent with the condition of Afro-Americans after their emancipation.

Against a backdrop of the heated explorations of and debates over the racial consciousness, condition, formation and identity during the Post-Reconstruction Era, black Harlemite writers coming from the South, Midwest, Africa and the Caribbean not only enriched the daily life and local culture of the Harlem community but also sought to represent and explore the multifarious aspects and developments of blackness in the past and present. Jean Toomer, born in Washington, DC, in writing *Cane* (1923) directed his glance back to the South, which, for many, embodied the irreconcilable racial tension and inequality in the American soil. The poet Countee Cullen's poetry *Color* (1925) explores the meanings of Africa and its connection with African Americans. The Guyanese writer Eric Walrond brought the Caribbean into his

[1] Harlem, around two square miles at the northern tip of Manhattan, is located around the Manhattan streets between 110th and 158th streets and between the East River and Morningside Drive with Lenox Avenue being the center of this district. Harlem was originally a Dutch settlement "before it became German, then Irish, then Jewish, then black, after a considerable real estate war and subsequent white flight out of Harlem neighborhoods" (Bernard 32). During the period of the Great Migration from the late nineteenth century, diverse black populations moved to Harlem from all directions, creating a unique urban space made up of African American natives of New York, black folks from the South and even immigrants from the West Indies and Africa. Harlem in New York, among all the northern cities, gradually became the Promised Land of black people.

short story collection *Tropic Death* (1926). The female novelist Nella Larsen, whose works *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929), addresses the issues of passing and the complexity of black womanhood; whereas the anthropologist and writer Zora Neale Hurston not only contributed to understanding black American folkways through her field work but also wrote literary works such as the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), which, in vernacular dialects, contests black femininity and the relationship between the blacks and whites in the South.

In addition to writing about the diverse aspects of blackness in the South and places outside the United States, Harlem itself became "the operative leitmotif, a shared touchstone and image of black American life" (Lee 67). Born in Missouri and later traveling around Europe, Africa as well as Mexico, Langston Hughes, the most notable of all writers in Harlem, is a dedicated observer on the poor urban blacks and their precarious living in Harlem. His poetry *The Weary Blues* (1926), *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) and novel *Not without Laughter* (1930) all expose the dire conditions and consequences of living in poverty in the so-called Nigger Heaven. Another writer who exhibited the same penchant for writing the stories of the urban poor was Jamaica-born Claude McKay. Nevertheless, he was an outsider to the New Negro Movement, for he was a Jamaican immigrant, stayed in Europe most of the time during the 1920s, and was in disagreement with the leading black intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke on issues of aesthetics and representation. However, he did contribute to the flourishing of the Black Literary Renaissance by publishing plenty of literary works—his collections of poetry like *Harlem Shadows* (1922), novels such as *Home to Harlem* (1928), and proses like *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (1940)—during and after the Harlem Renaissance.

Sojourner in Harlem as he was, he attempted to represent the ordinary black people from different social and cultural backgrounds while facing criticisms from some black intellectuals like Du Bois, who did not share his passion for portraying a particular kind of low life in Harlem. The tension between artistic representation and reality is an aesthetic question that every artist must face; moreover, for a minority writer, the question of veritable representation is particularly difficult because s/he has to struggle with the given images and notions of what that minority is in the public mind and simultaneously strive to offer his or her supposedly more authentic versions without being trapped in the problematic prejudices and stereotypes again. As Tyrone Tillery points out in his *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (1992), the "hostile reactions of Du Bois, whites and other blacks to McKay's books stemmed in part from their disappointment with the black settings and characters he chose to depict (low-life instead of middle-class life), in part from hostility to McKay as a Western Indian who presumed to be an authority on black Americans and in part from

anger at his assault on middle-class blacks" (112). Therefore, McKay, a migrant black writer, has to confront not only racism in a white-supremacist society when arriving in the United States but also the rigid hierarchy within the black community in New York, which consisted of the black natives of several generations, new migrants from the American South and abroad, the black bourgeoisie, the black literati, the poor black masses, and so on.

Despite quite a few studies on McKay's poetry and other works, few paid enough critical attention to the contested relationships between the urban milieu and blackness when discussing the issues related to racial tension, mentality and formation in his poems. In this paper, I employ the relevant concepts and discussions of the modern urban figure of the *flâneur* and hence the concepts of walking to characterize the speakers of McKay's several poems about cities.[2] The speakers of McKay's poems can be regarded as anonymous black figures inhabiting and experiencing the urban milieu of Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s. As the poetic speakers walk around the city, they reveal the material spectacles and intricate histories of the great city, and furthermore, the peculiar roles the ordinary blacks play in the economic and cultural life. Several of McKay's poems hence delineate distinctive relationships between the ordinary blacks and the Harlemite urban landscapes, revealing the emotions and sensations perceived by the black folks. By studying some of McKay's lesser-known poems, I first seek to characterize McKay as an artist of the modern urban life in the early-twentieth-century New York, and then compare and contrast the qualities of the black *flâneur*-as-writer with the white *flâneur*-as-consumer during the Harlem Renaissance. Furthermore, I will continue to explore the black *flâneur*-as-writer who moves from the dreaming state to the multiple and overlapping realities and histories behind the urban phantasmagorias. Ultimately, I will conclude how the critically-minded *flâneur*-as-writer uncovers and charts the alternative Harlemite urban geography while intoxicated by the urban black crowd. By drawing on less conspicuous aspects of the *flâneur* in existing literature, I argue that the historical figure of the *flâneur* embodied by McKay the poet and his poetic speakers is

[2] Walking is never just a physical movement; rather, it can be an intellectual movement. Walking with a critical purpose in mind hence is not random loitering but an engaged observation and interpretation of the very environment where one saunters. Exposed to the forces and intensities of intersubjective, inhuman and anonymous conglomerations in the urban milieu, those who walk with a critical intention in mind endeavor to figure out what a city is, how it comes into being, and how the city and its inhabitants are constituted by discourses, practices and representations and vice versa in everyday life. Therefore, there are diverse types of walking in different times and places with multiple and even contradictory purposes and meanings. The phantasmagoric spectacles of the urban environment naturally attract the eyes of either natives or strangers as they move in the city. In addition to voyeuristic, consumeristic, touristic and aesthetic ways, there is always a possibility of a politically conscious and critically engaged approach to the city as it seeks to represent and challenge the taken-for-granted, given and naturalized, assumptions and practices within the urban environment through corporeal perceptions and experiences of dynamic swarms of affects, encounters, interactions and connections.

not just an idle loiterer in the streets but an intellectual laborer, an urban explorer and a cultural critic who develops an alternative reading and practice of black urban modernity, and embodies a kind of the emerging New Negro in the Negro Metropolis in the early phase of the twentieth century.

2. The Poet of Modern Urban Life

Moving from Jamaica to Alabama, Kansas and then to New York, McKay was transformed from a constable in Jamaica to an agricultural student and ultimately to a leftist writer in the USA who combined radical socialist ideas with literary experiments in different genres. Based on his radical political insight, he did not hesitate to explore the downside of the Harlemite black life through his appropriation of the traditional Italian and English sonnets. Creating a tension between violent contents and genteel poetic forms, McKay created his own unique poetic language to express his observations, ideas and emotions when representing the multiple facets of the life in Harlem. Refashioning traditional meters and rhythms to fashion his own modernist expression, which caused quite a few debates on its effects and problems, McKay found the best way for him to engage with both the established literary expressions of Anglo-American traditions and the unspoken social reality in white-supremacist America (Maxwell xxxi-xxxviii). However, what he represented rather than how he represented provoked controversy, especially among his fellow black literati. McKay could not help but moan about the ill reception of his works in his “A Negro Writer to His Critics” (1932): “A Negro writer feeling the urge to write faithfully about the people he knows from real experience and impartial observation is caught in a dilemma…between the opinion of this group and his own artistic consciousness” (133). In his complaint, McKay also described how he worked as a professional writer in modern New York when he sought to delineate the fleeting moments of black life in the hustle and bustle of an American metropolis.

The French poet Charles Baudelaire, a modern Parisian artist who is generally regarded as one of the examples of the *flâneur* through his artistic views and practices, in his renowned essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) elaborates his concepts of the modern artist exemplified by the French painter Constantine Guys. Although Baudelaire does not employ the term *flâneur* in this article, his painter of modern life bears resemblances to the *flâneur*, especially his relationship to the urban crowd in the public space. Baudelaire’s ideal painter of modern life is “the painter of the fleeting moment and of all that it suggests of the eternal” (Baudelaire 218). The duty of the modern painter is to captures what is in flight through his personal observations and experiences on the streets instead of painting the religious, historical and mythical subjects in his own studio like the former painters did. Constantine

Guys, for Baudelaire, is such an artist who "loves mixing with the crowds" and "loves being incognito" (Baudelaire 218). In addition, he is "a great traveler and very cosmopolitan" (Baudelaire 219) and "a man of the whole world, a man who understands the world and the mysterious and legitimate reasons behind all its customs" (219). Abandoning himself to the crowd as if intoxicated, the modern painter, whose passion is to "merge with the crowd" (Baudelaire 221) desires "[t]o be away from home and yet to feel at home everywhere" (221), and also "to see the world…and yet to be unseen of the world" (221) because as an observer, he is "a prince enjoying his incognito wherever he goes" (221). The modern painter by moving "into the crowd as though into an enormous reservoir of electricity" (Baudelaire 221) is in search of modernity; that is, he endeavors "to distil the eternal from the transitory" (223). The modern artist should seek to observe, register and express the essence of modern life in their own styles instead of emulating the classical or previous styles and subject matters.

The modern painter as the *flâneur*, hence goes botanizing on the streets incognito, feels homely and leisurely in his eager perambulation, abandons himself to the crowd, and at last, hurries back to draw what is registered in his memory and processed in his imagination—"hurried, vigorous, active, as though he was afraid the images might escape him, quarrelsome though alone, and driving himself relentlessly on" (Baudelaire 223). As Janet Wolff in her essay "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity" points out, Constantine Guys, the Parisian *flâneur*, is the modern hero who has "a freedom to move about in the city, observing and being observed, but never interacting with others" (39). Maintaining subtle proximity with the urban crowd that fascinates him greatly, the *flâneur* enjoys "the possibility and the prospect of lone travel, of voluntary uprooting, of anonymous arrival at a new place" (Wolff 39).[3]

[3] The gender issue of the *flâneur* has become a hotly debated topic since the rise of feminism in literary and cultural studies in the 1980s. For more elaborate discussions, please refer to the articles written by Griselda Pollock. In her study of two often neglected French impressionist painters Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot in "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" (1988), she traces the development of the gendered separate spheres of ideology and the male gaze both in the cultural consciousness and artistic practice of the late-nineteenth-century Paris. The subject matters of both Cassatt and Morisot are restricted because they cannot roam the streets and the public arenas at will and direct and enjoy their gaze like their male counterparts do. Janet Wolff in her article "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity" (1990), though providing a more historically nuanced representations of different kinds of women both in the private and public spheres, does not consider that it is possible to argue for a female version of the *flâneur* in the urban life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Elizabeth Wilson in "The Invisible *Flâneur*" contends that there is in reality no such a figure as the heroic *flâneur* depicted in the male-dominated literature of modernity. On the one hand, she criticizes that Wolff poses a too pessimistic picture of women in the public sphere in a big city; on the other hand, she further challenges the given, monolithic notion of the mythical, heroic *flâneur* by arguing that in fact the male *flâneur* is someone who tries to make a living on the streets and suffers financial, emotional and even sexual anxiety and insecurity. In short, it is not the *flâneuse* who does not exist but the *flâneur* who is from the very

McKay and his poetic speaker embody the wanderlust of the Baudelairean painter of modern life in several poems about New York. McKay is eager to roam the streets, observes the urban spectacles, perceives the external stimuli, immerses in the urban masses, captures the daily fragments and pens the materiality and spirituality of the metropolitan life through his artistic imagination. In other words, he is the modern artist committed to depicting the transient, the ephemeral and the contingent of the modern life in the urban milieu exemplified in the embodied experiences of ordinary citizens of an emerging global city. McKay is anonymous as an observing onlooker and a marginal black person, and the urban crowd is less an asylum for him than a narcotic or electric reservoir providing raw materials for him to ponder and understand the status quo of black life and its underlying operating logic and social structure. Through his engaged but distanced observation of and participation in the urban space, sometimes he feels at home in the streets, sometimes he feels alienated in the crowd, and sometimes he feels empowered by the urban landscapes and soundscapes of Harlem. Therefore, with all the economic, social and cultural difficulties, McKay was still dedicated to writing poems about the daily experiences of the black folks jammed in the small, overcrowded area of Harlem. In fact, he harbored a peculiar passion for depicting the urban experiences and phenomena in American and European metropolises. In the opening poem of the "Cities" group, the poetic persona of McKay declares his enthusiasm for the city:

> Oh cities are a fever in my blood,
> And all their moods find lodgement in my breast,
> Whether they sweep me onward like a flood
> Or torture me as an unwanted guest,
> With wormwood flavoring my scanty foods,
> I love all cities, I love their changing moods.
>
> I love all cities, I love their foreign ways,
> Their tyranny over the life of man,
> Their wakeful nights and never-resting days,
> Their mighty movements seeming without plan,
> Their pavement stones on which the broken fall,
> Their damning wickedness: I love it all. ("Cities" 1-10)

In this short poem, the speaker announces his love for all cities with all their moods

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beginning invisible in reality. Mica Nava in "Modernity's Disavowal: Women, the City and the Department Store" instead offers a very positive portrayal of women and the city, contending that there is the *flâneuse* in public urban life like the *flâneur* described in the traditional literature of modernity. The *flâneuse* in her daily life, especially during her shopping in department stores and her philanthropic work in the working-class slums, enjoys the autonomy, independence and sovereignty of the bourgeois, voyeuristic male seeking entertainment and self-exploration from urban spectacles.

and foreign ways despite the fact that what he enumerates is the negative and grim aspects and that he does not receive hospitality all the time. The cities and their urbanization are founded on capitalist industrialization and consumerism at the expense of the working-class proletarians, who like mere cogs in the economic and social machinery, suffer the tyranny of the cities in their restless and repetitive toil from home to work day after day; that is, they bear the brunt of the wickedness of the modern developments in the pursuit of enrichment and emancipation of human beings. But why does the speaker still love cities in spite of his awareness of the urban problems without retiring to the countryside and nature instead like so many of his literary predecessors did? His tone may be ironic, as he does not really love all the moods and foreign ways of all cities; or he might genuinely love what he witnesses in cities, as he still discovers the vitality, diversity and excitement underneath the bleak reality of city life.

Claude McKay, as a matter of fact, developed ambivalent attitudes to cities in his poems, for he was simultaneously impressed by the rapid and awe-inspiring infrastructural growth of big cities such as New York, disturbed by the abject living conditions of his fellow black folks, amazed by their spontaneous and sophisticated cultural developments, and frustrated by the inherent racism and racial violence in the city. McKay, in his poems about cities, hence observed, experienced and assessed the phantasmagoric experiences of the city life in New York, mostly in Harlem. In addition, he uncovered the unspeakable and unspoken experiences and cultures of the black masses beneath the glamorous cultural activities and nightlife of Harlem, and also exposed the vulnerable foundation of this New Negro Movement.

3. The Libertine *Flâneur*-as-Consumer and the Laboring *Flâneur*-as-Writer in the Labyrinthian Metropolis

McKay was the writer and artist of the modern urban life in New York during the early phase of the twentieth century. He emerged in the urban crowd and landscape so as to create manifold and contradictory images of the life in a big city by exposing himself to numerous urban encounters. Although his physical involvement and response in the creative process in the streets resembled the leisure and privileged activity of the *flâneur*, the modern writer in the street is also the urban loiterer who makes a living from the street too. In other words, the figure of the *flâneur* is not always a heroic modern figure as represented in the urban myth and dominant literature of modernity. The reader can have a more subtle and poignant understanding of the relationship between the black artists as the laboring *flâneur* and the white patrons as the idle *flâneur* during the Harlem Renaissance when reading poems such as “The Harlem Dancer” (1917).

The speakers in McKay's poems seek to not only map the ordinary experiences of people, especially blacks, in New York, characterized by restless movement and everyday transactions, but also delve into the social processes that support the temporary and ostensible prosperity of the Harlem Renaissance. Harlem in the 1920s was not only renowned for its artistic and intellectual activities and publications but also for its entertainment in the nightlife and the various material resources for artistic creation for both black and white artists and writers. In the novella *Passing* (1929), written by the black woman writer Nella Larsen, one of the two protagonists Clare asks the other one Irene why certain white people throng in Harlem. The latter answers that they are here "to see Negroes" (69), "to enjoy themselves" (70), and "to get material to turn into shekels" (70). Irene herself then is clearly aware of the ingrained racism under the seemingly equal interactions between the whites and blacks. Most of the whites came to Harlem because they were drawn by "the spectacle of Harlem nightlife" (Bernard 32) and sought pleasures from such places as cabarets, buffet flats, speakeasies, ball rooms and nightclubs where they were entertained by dancers, singers and musicians (32). It was the white interest and financial support that fueled the prosperity of the cultural and social life of the Harlem Renaissance. Furthermore, as Langston Hughes notes in his autobiography *The Big Sea*, "the strangers were given the best ringside tables to sit and stare at the Negro customers—like amusing animals in a zoo" (225). In a famous tourist site of urban pleasures, Harlem's Cotton Club, "a mob-owned center of Jim Crow entertainment with a plantation atmosphere" (Walkowitz 180), for example, white urban sophisticates could see Harlem luminaries such as Duke Ellington and "Cab" Calloway perform exclusively for white patrons (180).

In "The Harlem Dancer" (1917), the speaker vividly portrays the erotic relationship between the (white) customers and the black dancing girl:

> Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes
> And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
> Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
> Blown by black players upon a picnic day.
> She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,
> The light gauze hanging loose about her form;
> To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm
> Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
> Upon her swarthy neck black shiny curls
> Luxuriant fell; and tossing coins in praise,
> The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls,
> Devoured her shape with eager, passionate gaze;

But looking at her falsely-smiling face,
I knew her self was not in that strange place. (1-14)

This short poem presents a female Harlem dancer who displays her sexual charm to intoxicate the customers, while the latter indulges in their insatiable desire to consume the exotic and erotic other. However, the female singer and dancer, for the speaker, wears a "falsely-smiling face" (13) in "that strange place" (14) in contrast to the intoxication of the customers. The Harlem dancer and singer, compared to those black folks dancing and singing spontaneously and gleefully in the later poem "Lenox Avenue" (1938), earns her modest wages by selling her body and charm to the unquenchable customers in the process of commodification, and thus she becomes a kind of commodity fetishism, since she seems to embody the licentious nature of female blackness that meets the imagination of the white guests. The American philosopher and historian Susan Buck-Morss in her article "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering" (1986)[4] points out the importance of the figure of the prostitute and the activity of the prostitution in Benjamin's *The Arcade Project*. Prostitution is the symbol and embodiment of the operating logic of capitalist consumerism, for the prostitute is simultaneously the producer, seller and commodity and is embedded with advertisement, fashion and exhibition—all that glitters on the surface—and most important of all, with sexuality (120-21). The Harlem dancer through her bodily movement and performance willingly or reluctantly becomes the embodiment of the problematic object of sexuality, spectacle and commodity in the capitalist market. And for those eager to purchase and possess her temporarily, "[t]o desire the fashionable, purchasable woman-as-thing is to desire exchange-value itself, that is, the very essence of capitalism" (Buck-Morss 121). With her falsely-smiling face, the Harlem dancer might deliberately perform the role of the lascivious fallen woman responsible for the moral corruption of the white men, and thus creates and accepts her own exchange value as desirable, erotic and exotic blackness coveted by white male gazes and tastes in the urban wilderness.

The white consumers in this poem remind the reader of the urban *flâneur* as the figure of the loiterer, idler, fritterer and libertine in "the new urban pastimes of shopping and crowd-watching" (Wilson 75). Having leisure time and money, the *flâneur* is a prototype of the urban loiterer who is "the ultimate ironic, detached observer, skimming across the surface of the city and tasting its pleasure with curiosity" (78), as he is "a man of pleasure, but more, as a man who takes visual pleasure of the city" (78). The feminist cultural critic Sara Ahmed in *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000) delves into the peculiar

[4] Buck-Morss in this article does not use *flâneur* but flaneur instead.

psychological and cultural mechanisms of contemporary western subjects when consuming a foreign or exotic commodity. In fact, it is not only contemporary western subjects specifically but also generally the members of the dominant group in a given society who usually tend to receive, if not reject, the cultural differences and otherness without really accepting and understanding them. Those who belong to the predominant community have the leisure and privilege to consume and contain the exotic otherness embodied by certain authentic commodities in the process of consumption as if they were willing and able to challenge and even shatter the hierarchical binary between the self and other. However, in their close, bodily encounter with a distant other through consumption, the other is generally still imagined and produced as the figure of the stranger (Ahmed 114). Ironically, in the proximity of the distant other through consumption, the literal distance and cultural estrangement are not reduced but further reinforced, and the objects which are believed to "contain the 'truth' of the strange or exotic" (Ahmed 114) can be consumed from a safe distance. In their wild fantasy, those enjoying economic, political and cultural advantages in a given society transform differences into a "style that can be consumed" (Ahmed 117); in other words, any "difference is fixed onto the bodies of others," who "appear as strangers (with 'a life of their own') in order to enable the consumer to take on their difference, that is, to take on their style" (117). The right and power to gaze and enjoy the body of the other are reserved for the privileged whites, whereas the blacks are forbidden to saunter and stay in many places in New York, not to mention to gaze at the white folks there.

The sensual dancer who attempts to arouse the interest and desire of the spectator/consumer through her sexualized and commoditized body is also suggestive of the black writer and artist within the white-dominant sphere of artistic production. The *flâneur* who goes botanizing on the street is also making a living on the street through the production, promotion and advertisement of his artistic production. In fact, not only modern artists but also other urban figures who are seen walking and laboring on the street to transform their labor time and power to exchange value in certain domain of capitalist production and market. Benjamin in *The Arcade Project* claims that "[t]he sandwichman is the last incarnation of the flaneur" (qtd. in Buck-Morss 109). As one of the loiterers on the streets, the sandwichman seems far removed from the original Parisian *flâneur*, who takes to the street with leisure. However, the *flâneur* is not just those idlers who goes botanizing on the asphalt with impressionistic observations and daydreaming reveries. In other words, the *flâneur* is not just somebody who is in flanerie. There are actually many conspicuous loiterers in urban spaces who do not simply loiter. Compared to the Parisian *flâneur*, the sandwichman, who also goes botanizing on the asphalt, does not feel at home, or

literally does not have a home, in a big city and certainly does not have leisure to roam around the city. Compared to the Parisian *flâneur*, the gentleman of leisure "who indulge[s] in the perambulations of the *flâneur* only if as such as he is already out of place" (Benjamin, "Some" 129), The Parisian *flâneur* is simultaneously in the urban masses as well as out of them because he can maintain his own pace and space from the crowd. The sandwichman, also known as the urban nomad, wanderer, costermonger and lumpenproletariat, who also abandons himself in the crowd, is also out of it because the city does not belong to him. He advertises the commodities of a consumer society, taking part-time, unstable work, and hardly make a living in the city. Although these idlers-on-the-street are part of the urban landscapes, they are at the same time visible as human billboards and invisible as human beings.

The sandwichman and his like are not the only ones who make a life in the street by loitering around. The modern writer, for Benjamin, is another derivative or descendant of the original *flâneur*. The "flaneur-as-writer" is "not the aristocrat: not leisure but loitering is his trade" (Buck-Morss 111). He walks in the streets, observes the city and writes about what he sees, remembers and imagines. Therefore, The *flâneur*-as-writer is "the prototype of a new form a salaried employee who produces news/literature/advertisements for the purpose of information/entertainment/persuasion" (Buck-Morss 113) so as to "fill the 'empty' hours which time-off from work has become in the modern city" (113). Abandoning himself in the city in order to produce what they see and experience—though the writer may write "fiction" that does not reflect the reality of urban life but simply offers a reassuring picture of modern life—the *flâneur*-as-writer relies on the masses, the market, and "goes to the marketplace as flaneur, supposedly to take a look at it, but in reality to find a buyer" (Buck-Morss 112). And much like the sandwichman, the *flâneur*-as-writer ultimately has to advertise his own work as coming commodities to idle consumers who also wander in the street for pleasure, entertainment and even excitement.[5]

[5] Elizabeth Wilson in her article "The Invisible *Flâneur*" (2001) shares the similar perspectives on the ambivalent characteristics of the *flâneur* as a prototype of the urban loiterer. She first characterizes the *flâneur* as "the ultimate ironic, detached observer, skimming across the surface of the city and tasting its pleasure with curiosity" (78), as he is "a man of pleasure, but more, as a man who takes visual pleasure of the city" (78). However, the *flâneur* is more likely to be a male figure who suffers "emotional ambiguity" (86), that is, anxiety, melancholy, depression, and angst. Wilson argues that the heroic, mythical *flâneur* does not exist, or is invisible, because he is more "the embodiment of the special blend of excitement, boredom and horror evoked in the new metropolis" (87) than "a solid embodiment of male bourgeois power" (87). The more heroic the figure of the *flâneur* in the literature of modernity is, the more vulnerable he actually is in a big city. He is "actually working as he loiter[s] along the pavement or delve[s] into the underworld of the 'marginals'" (86) in order to survive in the commodity society. In addition, living in a metropolis as a labyrinth full of strangers, objects and events, he generally sees without really understanding what he witnesses, and under his impressionistic and voyeuristic perceptions, "life ceases to form itself into continuous narrative but becomes instead a series of anecdotes, dreamlike, insubstantial or ambiguous" (86). This results in

"The Harlem Dancer" represents the contradictory images of the figure of the *flâneur* in a white-supremacist city. On the one hand, there is the leisured and privileged class of white consumers who search for urban spectacle, commodity and pleasure in their chance encounters in the society of commercialization and commoditization of racial and cultural others in daily life. On the other hand, there is the laboring *flâneur*-as-writer represented metaphorically by the black Harlem dancer in a nightclub. The black *flâneur*-as-writer struggles to make a living by eagerly creating artistic works, entertainments and pleasures to seduce and satisfy the gendered and racialized gaze of the white patrons much like the lascivious black female dancer described in "The Harlem Dancer." Such representations of blackness may not respond to the bleak reality of the black folks in their daily life; on the contrary, these vivid, carnal, and textual performances—as suggested by the swaying bodies and seductive voices in the poem—might only offer "a rhapsodic view of modern existence only with the aid of illusion, which is just what the literature of flanerie—physiognomies, novels of the crowd—was produced to provide" (Buck-Morss 103). Moreover, the white audiences and readers in their voyeuristic and impressionistic viewing may be content with such illusory representations of black history, culture and community instead of confronting the dark social reality that makes illusory images and presentations possible. Under the avid gaze of the white consumers, who spends generously out of unquenchable curiosity and voyeurism, the black artists, who "depend for employment on those capitalist pleasure-industries which hold that audience captive" (Buck-Morss 113), are "in the privilege position of making the time for the production of his use value observable for public evaluation" (113). Like the black female dancer who both produces, commoditizes and advertises her own body and voice to entertain in a lecherous manner, the black artist not only creates works that cater to the racialized tastes of the white consumers but also exhibits the process of creation before their curious eyes. Ultimately, the black artist, though perhaps financially successful, like the sandwichman—the lowest and the

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fragmented and incomplete experiences, for as Benjamin claims in *The Arcade Project*, there is only "[t]he phantasmagoria of the flaneur: reading profession, origins, and character from faces" (qtd. in Buck-Morss 106). On the other hand, the anxious, melancholic *flâneur* in a labyrinthian metropolis not only confronts "the enormous, unfulfilled promise of the urban spectacle, the consumption, the lure of pleasure and joy" (86), but also is "always destined to be somehow disappointed, or else undermined by the obvious poverty and exploitation of so many who toil to bring pleasure to the few" (86). In consequence, the *flâneur* is sexually insecure, as the "voyeurism encouraged by the commoditized spectacle" (87) only "leads to the attenuation and deferral of satisfaction" (87). For Wilson, Benjamin's fragmentary but critical reading of the mythical figure of the *flâneur* in *The Arcade Project* debunks the myth of the *flâneur* who has "no material base, living on his wits, and, lacking the patriarchal discourse that assured of him of meaning, is compelled to invent a new one" (87). The more heroic and privileged the figure of the *flâneur* is represented in the urban myth, the more anxious and vulnerable he *de facto* is in the modern metropolitan life.

most unexpected *flâneur* on the street—cannot help but feel estranged and out of place in their proximity to the white patrons when wearing their weary, false smile to ingratiate themselves with these libertine *flâneur*-as-consumers.

In other words, the figure of the urban loiterer may not saunter in leisure and feels at home because such a figure is "actually working as he loiter[s] along the pavement or delve[s] into the underworld of the 'marginals'" (Wilson 86) in order to survive in the commodity society. The *flâneur*-as-writer "scan[s] the street scene for material, keeping themselves in the public eye and wearing their own identity like a sandwich board" (Buck-Morss 113). In order to cater to the need of the white patrons who cast their consuming gaze at alien attractions, the black artists like their fellow dancing entertainers cannot but wear false smiles in their representations of blackness, urban and rural, to strengthen the ingrained ideologies and discourses about the Negro. Finding themselves in the strange place of consumerism and commodification of black life and culture, the black writers and entertainers find it difficult to challenge the given notion and fixed reception of the blackness and the assumed authority on blackness displayed by the white sympathizers in their proximity and exposure to black communities and creations.

4. From Dreaming Phantasmagorias to Urban Social Realities

The speakers in McKay's poems represent the phantasmagorias of the urban life of New York as they walk, observe and record all kinds of fragments around the city, and therefore present New York as a place intersected by multiple social processes and cultural influences initiated and created by over-there others and back-then pasts. A phantasmagoria was originally referred to as a kind of magic lantern performance popular in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century (Pile 19). The audience could only see the movement of images without being able to see the lanterns, since the processes of production were hidden from the audience. Not able to know how these peculiar images were produced but enchanted by the moving images before the eyes, the audience hence had a dream-like and ghost-like visual experience. The phenomenon of a phantasmagoria is appropriate for describing urban spectacles, since a city is a fluid and shifting conglomeration composed of swarms of impressions, encounters, flows, interactions and connections. When Walter Benjamin employed the concept of the phantasmagoria, he intended to emphasize both the "new forms of experience visible in modern cities" (Pile 20) and "also the invisibility of the social processes that create the city's many spectacles" (20). Moreover, he used the phantasmagoria to delineate what he called "the dreaming collective" (Pile 20) as a "general condition of modernity in which people sleepwalk their way through their lives, unable to wake up to their desires" (20).

The poetic personae in McKay's poems, as they drift around New York, mostly in Harlem, experience multiple events and contradictory emotions in different areas at different times. For instance, in "On Broadway" (1920), the speaker broods over his detachment and segregation from certain areas of the city, where "young and careless feet / Linger along the garish street" (1-2) with the "bright fantastic glow / Upon the merry crowd" (4-5). There are those libertine and idle *flâneur*-as-consumers who roam in the pavements and boulevards to search urban spectacles, commodities and pleasures. In their fleeting and impressionistic encounters with urban novelties, they walk at will and experience the dream-like landscapes and soundscapes of a big city. As an invisible stranger to the merry atmosphere of the urban nightlife, the poetic speaker does not share this "illusory, false consciousness, a collective *un*conscious in which reality takes on the distorted form of a dream" (Buck-Morss 109):

> Desire naked, linked with Passion,
> Goes strutting by in brazen fashion;
> From playhouse, cabaret and inn
> The rainbow lights of Broadway blaze
> All gay without, all glad within;
> As in a dream I stand and gaze
> At Broadway, shining Broadway—only
> My heart, my heart is lonely. (9-16)

Contrasting between heaven and hell, greatness and triviality as well love and repugnance, the speaker in "On Broadway" contrasts the fun-seeking crowd in the incandescent sites with the lonely outsider. The physical and social boundaries between the insider and outsider reveal not only the class distinction but also the unequal power relations inherent in the racial relations in daily activities as indicated by the unequal right to enjoy a city. The pleasure-seeking individuals who go botanizing on the boulevard embody the "consumerist mode of being-in-the-world" (Buck-Morss 105), for they seek immediate gratification from their visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile and gustatory enjoyment from one place to another. These *flâneur*-as-consumers indulging their senses and desires feel homely and leisured as they try to escape urban boredom, alienation and blasé. In contrast, the poetic speaker in "On Broadway," who also inhabits in "the commodity-filled dreamworld of the flaneur/consumer" (Buck-Morss 107) develops the critical consciousness to "jolt people out of their dreaming state" (109) in his marginalized position defined by the racial and class hierarchies.

One of the challenges facing the *flâneur* is whether in his roaming and browsing of a city he is capable of reading beyond the urban surface. Baudelaire's modern painter commits himself to knowing and understanding what he sees when he

emerges with the crowd. Benjamin also notes that as the *flâneur* abandons himself in the crowd for whatever purposes, the crowd intoxicates the *flâneur*, but he is not oblivious to the dark social reality (“Paris” 59). However, Elizabeth Wilson in her “The Invisible *Flâneur*,” comments that the *flâneur* “spends most of his day simply looking at the urban spectacle; he observes in particular new inventions…although he understands nothing about them” (75). Is the urban figure *flâneur* simply a solitary onlooker of a city without really engaging with the urban developments? Susan Buck-Morss, in her seminal study of Benjamin’s *The Arcade Project* in “The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering” (1986), remarks that the figure of the *flâneur* who goes botanizing on the asphalt is the modern subject in his “consumerist mode of being-in-the-world” (105) through “the distracted, impressionistic, physiognomic viewing” (105). To the modern *flâneur* who strolls the streets in the commodity society, “things appear divorced from the history of their production and their fortuitous juxtaposition suggest mysterious and mystical connections” (Buck-Morss 106) because, for the *flâneur*, “[m]eanings are read on the surface of things” (106).

For Chris Jenks, in the article “Watching Your Step: The History and Practice of the *Flâneur*”, the *flâneur* is “the spectator and depicter of modern life” (29) when he “moves through space and among the people with a viscosity that both enables and privileges vision” (29). He is “an inquisitive *boulevardier*” (Jenks 29), that is, an urban loiterer who is “simultaneously with an inquisitive wonder and an infinite capacity to absorb the activities of the collective—often formulated as ‘the crowd’” (29). Furthermore, the *flâneur* is “the newly articulate pioneer explorers of the working-class districts” (Jenks 35) not for “seeking entertainment or self-exploration” (35) but to “shock and to awaken the public consciousness to the socially generated and socially reproduced evils within, to the threats subsequently presented to a stable civil society” (35). In fact, “[t]he *flâneur* sees and walks, and…is not fearful of (his) tread” (Jenks 36), as he maintains his passionate and invigorating vision, perception and interest in order to explore “the bizarre, the wholly unexpected, even the mysterious and spell-like occurrences within modernity” (37). Therefore, the *flâneur* becomes a “cultural critic” (Jenks 33) and stages his personal protest against the consumerist and commoditized way of living that shapes any urban life and spectacle.

Not sleepwalking in his daily life around the urban space, the poetic speaker of McKay’s poetry further endeavors to uncover the unspoken and unspeakable aspects of urbanism which exist side by side with the phantasmagorias of the urban spectacles. As “Cities” (1935) indicates, the speaker is fascinated by all the moods and foreign ways of all cities despite his awareness of the tyranny of the cities. The city is then imagined as a monster-figure, as the economic, political and social

mechanisms of a modern city tend to be indifferent to the predicaments of the masses in its pursuit of progress, mobility and expansion. Despite the dreary life in the city, the speaker does not recoil from the disagreeable sights before him; instead, he steps forward to gaze at them in order to register the peculiar moods and ambiances of the urban life staging before his eyes. In another poem "The White City" (1921), the speaker displays his "life-long hate" (3) in the "white world's hell" (7) despite the fact that he is impressed by the urban landscape before him:

> I see the mighty city through a mist—
> The strident trains that speed the goaded mass,
> The poles and spires and towers vapor-kissed,
> The fortressed port through which the great ships pass,
> The tides, the wharves, and the dens I contemplate,
> Are sweet like wanton loves because I hate. (9-14)

The latter six lines of this sonnet are incompatible with the former eight lines, which states clearly the speaker's "dark Passion" (6), that is, hate, that buttresses his will and determination to live in this racist city. For all his conspicuous aversion to this white city, the speaker cannot help but admit the greatness and abundance of this place, as manifested in the conglomeration of trains, masses, architectures, wharves, goods and so forth. The speaker sees and then contemplates what he witnesses in this white city on an ordinary day, and concludes that these urban phenomena are his sweet loves. He, on the other hand, cannot but hate this place and its prosperous transactions because he, as one of a racial minority and underclass, might not be able to benefit much from the booming activities and enjoy their products and outcomes as a member of "the goaded mass" (10), who instead has to struggle to make his "heaven in the white world's hell" (7).

Although he contributes to the urban spectacles, this "mighty city" (9) is a hell, from which he has to create a place of belongingness and comfort. Nobel Literature Laureate and Afro-American writer Toni Morrison in her essay "City Limits, Village Values: Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction" analyzes that: "Black people are generally viewed as patients, victims, wards, pathologies in urban settings, not as participants. And they could not share what even the poorest white factory worker or white welfare recipient could feel: that in some way the city belonged to him" (37). The speaker hates what he loves because he exists as a mere cog, which is easily replaceable and dispensable, in the economic activities. He hates what he loves because as a black he is not granted full citizenship even in the Northern cities away from the South dominated by discriminatory Jim Crow laws. Despite their contributions, the exploited blacks still live in poverty in the poorest areas of New York, and hence are regarded as mere pathologies of the great city instead of its

participants as white folks, both rich and poor. The more flourishing the white city is, the more abject the blacks might become. In short, the speaker of “The White City” moves in, looks over and contemplates on this beloved yet abominable city, and reveals the experiences and moods of the black minority in this place, which fails to meet their desire to lead a decent and respectable life.

5. Mapping the Negro Metropolis

The figure of the *flâneur* who strolls in the street may be an idle libertine seeking delight, entertainment and exploration, an anonymous detective in search of criminals, an unknown culprit taking refuge in urban masses, or a middle or working class person make a living on the streets. The *flâneur* in the midst of urban spectacles and dream-worlds might know nothing of what he sees and perceives, whereas he might seek to observe, know and understand what he encounters in order to gain knowledge of the social reality in the consumerist and commoditized world. Moreover, the urban figure of the *flâneur* may want to develop not only a critical perspective of urban realities but also a reformist zeal to challenge the status quo and offer alternative practices.

This critical concept of the *flâneur* is further developed later to challenge the dominant way of perceiving, understanding and practicing everyday life in the capitalist vein. Chris Jenks in “Watching Your Step: The History and Practice of the *Flâneur*” comments that Guy Debord and the Situationist International develop the methodology of psychogeography in order to have an alternative approach to urban milieu and living. The walker loiters the city without any prior plan and motif, and sees and then follows any clues on the street, that is, is “being drawn into events, situations and images by abandonment to wholly unanticipated attraction” (Jenks 37). This playful, perhaps risky and daring, way of strolling a city is one of the methods to develop alternative mappings of a city by uncovering “compulsive currents within the city along with unprescribed boundaries of exclusion and unconstructed gates of opportunity” (Jenks 37). Furthermore, this critically-minded *flâneur* then can “playfully and artfully see the juxtaposition of the elements that make the city in new and revealing relationships” (Jenks 38) through “a perpetual and infinite collage of imagery and a repository of fresh signification” (38). Jenks then links this kind of peculiar personal practice to a collective—not just individual wandering, mapping and creating—way of walking in the city elaborated by Michel de Certeau especially in his *The Practice of Everyday Life*. That is to say, the walkers, not the individual *flâneur*, “follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it” (Jenks 39). Ultimately, they together create, though unintentionally, the “networks of these moving, intersecting writings” which “compose a manifold story

that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and infinitely other" (Jenks 39).

In McKay's later poem "Lenox Avenue" (1938), the poetic speaker steps into the very heart of the Harlem district after years away from the city. The blacks in New York inevitably faced discrimination and segregation because they were not welcome or allowed to live in other areas, and had to pay higher rents for lower-quality tenements in the West Side of Manhattan. The region around Lenox Avenue was built later after a new subway line had been built, but it was quickly overcrowded as the West Side had been due to the over-flow of migrants from the South and overseas (Kahn 251-3). In "Lenox Avenue," the speaker, instead of registering the low quality of life due to the lack of proper urban planning and rush of immigrants from all sides, records the festive mood of this area and his merry feeling as he walks past this north-south thoroughfare in Harlem. In contrast to "On Broadway," instead of suffering intense desolation due to the (in)visible border drawn between him and the fun-seekers along the Broadway, here in Lenox Avenue, he experiences unprecedented gaiety and vibrancy as the whole road for him is like a "Negro theatre" (McKay, "Lenox" 2) performed by a race with "accents strong and colors of every hue" (3). During the Great Migration, black migrants from the South, the West Indies, Africa and elsewhere "mingled with African American natives of New York across culture and class lines, both outdoors—along the elegant avenues and broad sidewalks that characterized Harlem—and indoors—inside cabarets, buffet flats, speakeasies and ballrooms that dominated nightlife in Harlem" (Bernard 32). It is here that the speaker can develop a sense of belongingness as a participant of the city life, since he receives hospitality from the residents in their struggle to lead a joyous life with a strong political awareness. The speaker witnesses that "[m]eanwhile a white-and-black parade deploys / Its banners shouting for Scottsboro boys" (McKay, "Lenox" 9-10). The trial of the Scottsboro Boys was a cause célèbre during the 1930s when nine young black men were falsely charged with the rape of two white girls on a train in rural Scottsboro, Alabama. In the midst of the gratifying ambiance, the presence of the parade for the Scottsboro boys manifests the omnipresent racial imaginary about black masculinity and sexuality, white femininity and body, and the implacable hostility to racial crossing in both literal and metaphorical senses.

Compared to the speakers in "Cities," "The White City" and "On Broadway," the speaker in "Lenox Avenue" exhibits a rather different mood in this specific area of Manhattan. He observes the interactions between the black bodies, rhythms and spaces in this contact zone of Harlem, which features the hybridization of cultures of black immigrants from diverse roots and routes. The sounds of music of various kinds

ranging from “cloying chords and simple melodies” (McKay, “Lenox” 11) and “[n]otes old and modern classical and hot” (12) to “[d]uets and quintettes, choirs and symphonies” (13) fill the air and places of Harlem; therefore, “…Harlem sways its body dark and warm, Enthralled, enraptured by the medley charm” (19-20). Harlem as a whole is personified as a black dancer in his ecstatic mood as he is at ease when swaying his body attuned to varied types of music. Mixing residents from multifarious backgrounds, Harlem gradually develops its peculiar form of vernacular English as opposed to standard Anglo-English spoken by the middle-class whites and other types of English spoken by other groups, as the rapt speaker notes, “[f]rom pool-room and saloon the rich and rude / Vernacular of Harlem takes the air” (5-6). McKay in this poem provides an alternative vision of life in Harlem as opposed to the more conventional understanding. As the American historian Gilbert Osofsky describes in *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (1966):

> For those who remained permanently [in New York] the city was a strange and often hostile place—it was so noisy and unfriendly, so cold, so full of temptations and moral perils, a pernicious influence, a fast and wicked place. Many of those who come North complain of the cold and chills from the like of which they had not previously suffered. (31)

A meeting place intersected by lots of social forces and processes initiated and practiced by diverse individuals and social groups, the city is an amorphous assemblage of material developments and imaginary constructions. As shown by the previous discussions, New York City is definitely a malicious and problematic place for racial minorities as Osofsky later elucidates; nonetheless, in poems like “Lenox Avenue,” the reader gets a rare glimpse of the flourishing grassroots cultural developments of the New Negro Movement.

Langston Hughes in his autobiography *The Big Sea* (1940) recollected that he “had an overwhelming desire to see Harlem. More than Paris, or the Shakespeare country, or Berlin, or the Alps. I wanted to see Harlem, the greatest Negro city in the world” (62). The attraction of Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance consisted in not only the artistic and intellectual achievements of a handful of black artists and literati but also the cultural interactions and developments of folk music, dances and performances that seduced the white consumers to frequent Harlem over and again in order to enjoy racial and cultural alterity imagined to be exotic and erotic. Claude McKay in his *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (1940) likewise observes:

> Harlem is more than the Negro capital of the nation. It is the Negro capital of the world. And as New York is the most glorious experiment on earth of different races and diverse groups of humanity struggling and scrambling to live together, so Harlem is the most interesting sample of

> black humanity marching along with white humanity. (16)

The speaker in “Lenox Avenue,” while rambling through this thoroughfare, collects the fragments of the folk part of urban life and thus unsettles the accepted notions of black urbanism, for he discloses the unique black community existing in a modern urban milieu, where developments of individuality are generally considered a primal feature of urbanization. However, for a racial minority in a white-supremacist society,

> Harlem, the closest thing in American life as well as literature to a Black city, and a mecca for generations of Blacks, held this village quality for Black people—although on a grand scale and necessarily parochial. The hospitals, schools, and buildings they lived in were not founded nor constructed by their own people, but the relationships were clannish because there was joy and protection in the clan. (Morrison 38)

As a city of migrants, Harlem became a contact zone where diverse cultural forms and contents encountered and interacted. And in this home of settlement, black migrants strived to create a place called home in this alien and even hostile land by changing and creating the peculiar urban ambiance through music, dance and performances not only in specific locations of entertainment but also in the streets spontaneously and collectively. By doing so, they successfully constructed their Negro Metropolis, Black Mecca or Black Manhattan by means of their spatial practices and space of representations in their daily life.

The speaker in “Lenox Avenue” is so rapt that he exclaims that

> Here is a vaudeville that never stops!
> The radios sound, the youngsters start to shake
> Along the blocks, they execute neat hops,
> Taking with music every step they make. (21-24)

Experiencing the unique urbanism of the black metropolis, the speaker is hence intoxicated “to take the rhythm of Harlem’s moving feet” (30). Walking leisurely and feeling homely along Lenox Avenue, the poetic speaker resembles the idle *flâneur* who takes to the street to see, encounter and enjoy the peculiar urban spectacles and pleasures of Black Manhattan. Though politically conscious of the bleak reality of black life everywhere in the city, the poetic speaker, like the critically-minded *flâneur* discussed in Jenks’ article mentioned above, is drawn into the specific cultural landscape and soundscape of Lenox Avenue. Upon his meandering along the boulevard, he discovers and charts another kind of dreaming phantasmagoria, like a theatre, vaudeville and swaying body, by absorbing and giving fresh significance to diverse kinds of elements and images such as spontaneous black music, accents and dances in daily life. Unlike the erotic and exotic body depicted in “The Harlem

Dancer," the collective body made up of individual swaying bodies in the public and private spaces as well as at work and leisure is not the dreaming collective who just sleepwalk and cannot awaken to its true desire. Quite the contrary, this collective conglomeration of fragmented, swaying black bodies is energized by complex and multifarious music, dance and performances, all of which originate from elsewhere and flourish in the Black Mecca of Harlem. This kind of urban bodies embody and simultaneously write various and overlapping stories shaped by different migrant routes and cultural roots. The folks in the whole black community are simultaneously creators, performers and audiences of their daily corporeal performances; in other words, it is difficult to detect the line between the author and spectator. Unlike the commercialized and thus reified performances before the gaze of the white consumers, these daily, spontaneous and fragmented performances in the black urban village of Harlem are the more authentic, challenging otherness for the white consumer to read, appreciate and even accept. These performing practices are the everyday resistance that defines their right to the city while they are economically, politically and spatially disempowered and marginalized in the great American metropolis. By collecting and juxtaposing diverse urban fragments from his intoxicated observations, the poetic speaker is hence able to present a different collage and trajectory of black urbanism through his merging with the black crowd in his solitary, anonymous walk in Harlem.

6. **Conclusion: Reimagining and Reshaping the New Negro**

How do the poems discussed above shed new light on the identity of the New Negro and his or her relationship to the urban landscape during the early twentieth century? The New Negro is usually considered as "a special, elite group" (Gibson 45), most of whom are not "forced to the city by relentless economic necessity" (45), and hence has "leisure to learn to appreciate fine art and skills highly enough developed to produce art" (45). On the other hand, for Alain Locke, one of the leading intellectuals during that time, the New Negro cultural citizenship was "always…a dialectical engagement with whiteness and blackness in the formation of an alternative cultural idea" (Stewart 17). Besides, the New Negro was "a new kind of educated American subject, someone who had mastered both the culture of the masses and the culture of international modernism" (18), and hence embodies "an on-going complex transaction between a black sense of self and a sense of self as urban, industrialized, and also white" (18). More specifically, the New Negro, the "race cosmopolitan" (Stewart 19), "was an outstanding group of intellectuals as well as artists, men and women as comfortable in the white intellectual world as the black" (19), yet "remain committed to the race and the transformation of America through the culture of the black

community" (19).

How can the poetry of McKay intervene in this cultural debate from the quotidian, embodied experiences of everyday life in Harlem and New York? The New Negro as illuminated in McKay's poems is neither the emancipated slaves haunted by the colonial legacies of slavery nor the southern sharecroppers still imprisoned by the victim mentality caused by the perennial Jim Crow Law. The New Negro is neither the mimic man in his eagerness to desire assimilation into the white-supremacist society by adopting the essentialist and dualistic notions of blackness and whiteness nor the nationalist separatists, who in their exclusive imagination of blackness, seek to combat the unequal power relations by simply wishing to reverse the hierarchical structures of whiteness and blackness. Corresponding to Locke's vision of the intellectual New Negro committed to cultural intervention and transformation, the modern urban black poet McKay with his poetic personae, as an urban explorer, intellectual laborer and cultural critic, unlike the prototype, or perhaps stereotype, of the idle, white, middle-class *flâneur* in European metropolises, observes, experiences, maps and assesses the distinctive life of the black community in Harlem and New York as a whole. Unsettling the given perceptions of New York and unveiling the marginal and neglected aspects of this modern city, McKay and his poetic personae as the examples of the New Negro in his city poems endeavor to awaken the common blacks and their artists from the illusory, dreamy nature of the Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Movement, and thus urge them to recognize as well deliberate on the complex and multiple aspects and developments of the modern urbanism of New York in the early twentieth century.

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