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Brancusi's *Golden Bird* and Loy's "Brancusi's
Golden Bird": A Spinozist Encounter

Christopher Thomas

Abstract. The lack of any explicit engagement with art and aesthetics, coupled with his strong rationalism and naturalism, has led to the claim that the philosophy of Spinoza is actively "hostile" to art. Contrary to these claims, this essay brings together certain key principles of Spinozism and a poem by futurist poet Mina Loy. I argue that when viewed under Spinoza's ontology of power and through his relational theory of the individual, works of art and literature emerge as particularly active sites of relation that are both constitutive of, and constituted by, the wider affective field within which they find themselves.

While the work of Benedict de Spinoza has been a source of inspiration and curiosity for a variety of literary and artistic figures,¹ his grounding philosophical principles are often cited as a hindrance for a productive engagement with art and art theory. Certain commentators cite Spinoza's "naturalism" and "rationalism" as reasons for his philosophy's "hostility" to art and culture.² But these criticisms only prevail if: (i) one holds that works of art and literature ought to have an ontological ground other than the natural (i.e., a reinstatement of the nature-culture dualism), and (ii) if art and literature are given in opposition to reason and rationality. In contrast to such studies that focus on the potential ontological and epistemic problems that Spinoza's philosophy raises for art and literary theory, this essay considers a work of art—in this case a poem—through certain principles that are central to Spinoza's philosophy.

This essay therefore does not explain a work of literature in Spinozistic terms, nor does it attempt to find Spinozistic ideas in a literary work. Rather, this essay situates the work of art in a Spinozist theoretical framework and asks what

a particular literary work *does*. More specifically, this article treats Mina Loy's poem "Brancusi's Golden Bird" as an individual in the sense of the word outlined in Spinoza's philosophy, and asks: What are the effects of "Brancusi's Golden Bird" and what relations does it, as an active and reactive individual, set in motion? To this extent my piece functions as an ethology of a poem, and it suggests a Spinozist understanding of "Brancusi's Golden Bird" that highlights its effectivity, mutability, and heightened capacity for generating relations in the world.

I

As Spinoza presents our experience of things such as decoration, music, and theater in *Ethics* IVP45Schol,³ works of art and culture and our experience of them is first and foremost affective, understood as a relation of utility between two or more individuals. For Spinoza, the wise person must take pleasure in decoration, theater, music, and "other things of this kind" in order that the body be nourished and the mind be capable of understanding many things at once (IVP45Schol). This claim on the use value of cultural experience follows from Spinoza's wider metaphysics of power whereby all the affective relations an individual undergoes are either an aid (joyful affects) or a hindrance (sad affects) to the striving power that constitutes its actual essence (IIIP6-8).

What occurs when two things meet and affect each other is an exchange of power whereby out of the relation, each thing emerges newly constituted at an essential level. Moreover, each relation and exchange of power that occurs between individual things is unique (IIPDA1") and cannot be subsumed under a universal term that seeks to categorize such a relation. The affective relation that is my reading of Loy's "Brancusi's Golden Bird" this morning will be different to my reading the same poem next week, or even this evening. The way the poem and I affect and reconstitute one another's power will change according to the mutable conditions within which our relation takes place. Hence Spinoza is keen to undermine the various structures and universal images that might obscure an understanding of these primary affective relations, such as that between poem and person, that all things enter into and take as the ground to their individuation. This is why Spinoza states (in IVP45Schol) that only "a savage and sad superstition" forbids pleasure, for the latter is only a modification of the affect

joy—an increase in our power to strive—and should not be judged through a signifying regime that obscures the knowledge of the positivity inherent in the primary affect of joy (see also IIP11Schol). The universal, therefore, should not be the way through which we understand the particular affective experiences of an individual (IIP40Schol).

This critique of universal and normative prescriptions is most evident in Spinoza's critique of *moral* normativity, taken up and elucidated with particular acuity by Gilles Deleuze.⁴ Specifically, Deleuze distinguishes between an "Ethics," which he understands as a typology of immanent modes of existence, and a "Morality," which always refers immanent relations to a series of transcendent values (*SPP*, p. 23). On Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, a system of morality obscures the immanent and affective relations of bodies by "judging" them according to a fixed set of values that seek to organize and stratify. To judge singular relations by way of universal standards will serve only to obscure our knowledge of things and stymie the organization of encounters that are truly productive for our striving. As Deleuze notes, "Life is poisoned by the categories of Good and Evil" (p. 26), since these and other categories obstruct a lived form of experimentation that leads each to a knowledge of the particular relations that are truly productive for their striving.

But while Spinoza's critique of universal and normative prescriptions is most often cashed out in terms of morality and notions of good and evil, it also extends into the realm of aesthetic considerations, with Spinoza noting that when one makes a judgment of beauty or perfection, the perceiver inadequately universalizes through an *idea* what is always only a singular and changeable relation between bodies. As Spinoza notes, beauty is merely an inadequate idea of the affect joy; to name something as beautiful is to misattribute the productive motions of the object that are presented to the nervous system through sensation, as a fixed predicate of the perceived object (IApp). Likewise, the aesthetic judgment of perfection is said to follow from an inadequate idea that is composed in the imagination of the judging individual, and which bears no relation to the body of the object judged perfect or imperfect (IVApp). Here the aesthetic judgment of beauty or perfection seeks to universalize a singular bodily relation into a fixed idea of those relations and, in so doing, functions only to obscure the

immanent relations of bodies that constantly vary according to the changeable conditions in which the relations takes place.

It follows, then, that to take an inadequate idea of the beautiful into our affective relation with a work of art, to seek the idea of beauty in a body before a primary affective relation has taken place, is for the perceiver of an artwork to look for order and fixity beyond the immanence and variability of bodily relations. To seek beauty in bodies or harmony in the heavens is to search for depth in surface, the incorporeal in the corporeal, and fixity in flux. At one time a particular poem may be conducive in making “productive motions” and the joyful affects that follow (IApp), but in another time and under different circumstances that same poem may be deemed ugly and be debilitating for the individual’s striving. Neither of these affective relations with the poem is known in any certainty before the relation takes place; only through the experience of the poem will the reader or listener affirm either a positive or negative affective experience. To predetermine a type of relation between bodies is to ascribe an inherent predicate or disposition to both subject and object, and hold that the predicate, such as the positive sensorial effect we call beauty, is fixed and unchanging and will occur in the same way in each subsequent relation.

But for Spinoza any such universal determination, such as the inadequate idea of a thing’s beauty or ugliness, is to misunderstand the relational variability of two striving individuals that are always in a continuous state of change. To ascribe a fixed value outside of the immanent and changeable relations of things is to block the possibility of new and varying experiences by which we can know something of our continually shifting selves, and this holds equally for the aesthetic sphere as it does for the moral. As Rainer Maria Rilke notes on the experience of viewing a painting by Paul Cézanne: “I can tell how I’ve changed by the way Cézanne is challenging me now.”⁵ Rilke’s relation with the Cézanne elicits a change in his power by which he is able to measure his continuously varying person at that point in time. A painting by Cézanne challenges viewers and forces them to reveal their present disposition in affective experience, which cannot be predetermined or subsumed under general terms, for it will always be different to the multiplicity of past and future experiences the viewer has both undergone and will undergo. As Gatens and Lloyd note on the Spinozist critique of normative

modes of experience: we cannot know, “ahead of observation and experimentation, what are the capacities of this or that being, or the powers which it may come to possess.”⁶ I cannot know in advance how I will emerge from viewing a Cézanne or reading “Brancusi’s Golden Bird”; only in my varying experiences of them will I glean something about my continuously mutating person.

Following Spinoza, then, an affective relation, such as that between person and poem, ought not to be fixed under an idea that stands as a general representation of an always-singular relation, for such a representation arises “more from prejudice than from true knowledge of those things” (IVApp) and only serves to block the various new forms of relation that an artwork might engender. Rather, when entering into a relationship with a work of art, the Spinozist viewer, reader, or listener should aim to undermine the various habitual dispositions, arising from moral, aesthetic, or art historical structures, that obstruct our various potential relationships with, and experiences of, poems, paintings, and performances.

On these grounds of a critique of normativity, Deleuze describes Spinoza’s *Ethics* as an “ethology,” that is, a form of inquiry that considers things not through their correspondence to a proper name—be that name a species, genus, historical movement, or cultural determination—but through their capacity to affect and be affected. An ethology, then, asks after the *effects* of an individual; an ethology does not refer individuals to a series of preestablished values and categories but seeks to understand them through their activity, through the effects they give rise to as active and reactive individuals. It is in this respect that Deleuze and Guattari claim in *A Thousand Plateaus* that under Spinozism a workhorse might be understood to be more similar to an ox than it is to a racehorse.⁷ The authors interpret Spinoza as holding that the particular degree of animation, the particular capacity to affect and be affected, is the determining factor of an individual, and not the correspondence to a proper name or abstract idea. For Spinoza, things must be understood through their particular degree of affective power and never in relation to a kind. To judge an individual by correspondence to an idea such as “man” or “horse” is, in Spinoza’s words, to seek to “explain natural things by mere

images of things” (IIP40Schol1) and not to consider them via their own particular nature, that is, via their unique capacity to act in the world.

The understanding of ethology visible in Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Spinoza is sensitive to the *Ethics*’ critique of modes of experience that proceed from universal ideas, such as the ideas of good and evil from which we inadequately measure our actions. In the same manner, an ethological aesthetics suggests that, rather than proceeding from a given set of ideas or proper names, our experience and understanding of a work of art would be better placed if they proceeded from the complex of affective relations that the work of art gives rise to. To think art representationally, through a consideration of what idea its body points to outside itself, risks foreclosing the multiple affective possibilities that a performance or poem might set in motion. As Gatens and Lloyd noted above on the idea of an ethology: We cannot know “ahead of observation and experimentation” what situations and experiences a work of art might give rise to.

And so, before asking what Loy’s poem “Brancusi’s Golden Bird” refers to outside of itself—*what does this word signify, this sentence correspond to, this negative space indicate?*—an ethology of the poem will ask: What are the effects of its body? What has taken place in the experience of the poem and what is left of the body of both poem and perceiver after their relation? In this respect Loy’s poem is particularly significant because it is a poem whose subject refers the reader to a sculpture, to Constantin Brancusi’s *Golden Bird*,⁸ and hence it sets up a tripartite relationship between poet and sculpture, poem and reader, and reader and sculpture. I suggest that the particular effectiveness of Loy’s poem—what Loy’s poem does—lies in this increased ability to give rise to, and augment, affective relations.

The first relation that this poem calls forth—that between poet and sculpture—is expressed in the poem itself. The second relation—that between poem and reader—is a meditation on the relationship between sculpture and poet but it is also setting up a new relationship between poem and reader. The third relation is between Brancusi’s sculpture and the reader of the poem.

In what follows I consider the nonlinear complex of relations that Loy’s poem gives rise to. I attempt to unfold the complexity of relations that works of art and literature in general engender, how artistic bodies can accrue an increased

degree of affectivity over time, and finally how Loy's poem itself might be seen as a truly Spinozistic encounter with a work of art. To this extent the artistic body, whether poem, sculpture, performance, or intervention is understood through its existence as an acutely active site of relation and, I argue, it is exactly within this increased capacity for relation that lies its particularity *as a work of art*.⁹

II

A certain relationship of causality between Loy and Brancusi's sculpture *Golden Bird* gives rise to what might be called an artistic effect, that is, a poem: Loy is disposed by *Golden Bird* to compose a poem that she entitles "Brancusi's Golden Bird." Considered under a Spinozist ontology, the cause-effect relationship between substance and modes, as well as that between modes themselves, is not one of difference or distinction but one of relationality.¹⁰ In Spinoza's ontology the cause is never really distinct from its effect, but to some extent participates in the cause's being insofar as the latter is always relationally determined in its individuality through the effects it has in the world.¹¹ In the same manner Loy's poem, which is the effect of Brancusi's sculpture, never becomes really distinct from its cause but rather participates to a greater or lesser degree in the sculpture's individuality. Put differently, Loy enters into a relationship with the sculpture and then participates in the latter's individuation through the writing of her poem.

How does this occur? Firstly, it occurs at a very basic level. For Spinoza the existence of an individual, be that a person, poem, or planet, is always bound up with both the causes that brought it to be and the effects that it has in the world as a necessarily active cause. An individual cannot *be* if it is not caused to exist by some previous thing (IP28), but it will equally cease to exist if it stops having effects in the world. Hence Spinoza ends part 1 of the *Ethics* with one of the most important propositions of his ontology: *Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow* (IP36). This proposition writes activity into the definition of a thing's existence, and this activity qua existence of the individual is always constituted through the effects that it has in the world. Insofar as the individuality of a thing is bound up with the effects it has in the world, then the effects it gives rise to will be a measure of the activity, and thus the very being qua power

(IIIP7Dem), of the thing that they are the effects of. All individuals rely on being the cause of effects to sustain their being and define themselves in their individuality, and in being an effect of Brancusi's sculpture Loy's poem actively participates in the former's individuality by being a mark of the sculpture's activity.

This is the first sense in which the effect is always expressive of the individuality of its cause and therefore the first sense in which Loy's poem can be understood to have participated in the being of Brancusi's sculpture. But as well as this first sense I want to suggest a stronger sense in which Loy's poem can be said to participate in *Golden Bird*. The question then becomes: to what extent is Loy's poem involved in the individuality of Brancusi's sculpture and what does this reveal about the possibilities of literary-artistic experience and creation?

In the first instance, what Loy's poem reveals to us is negative: when experiencing Brancusi's sculpture Loy does not mediate her relation to it through ideas that are extrinsic to the initial relation between her and sculpture. Rather, Loy aims to preserve, extend, and complicate the primary affective relation set up between herself and the sculpture by responding to its presence in kind. Here I want to cite Spinoza's insistence in the *Theological-Political Treatise*¹² that the Holy Scriptures cannot be properly measured or understood through methods that are foreign to their own production. Going against Maimonides's rationalist interpretation of scripture, and against those theologians who sought to explain what is natural by appeal to the supernatural, Spinoza claims that scripture must be taken in its materiality, and read and explained in the same way that it was produced, that is, via the logic of affectivity and the operations of the prophetic imagination (*TPT*, ch. 1, p. 20). One cannot understand the narratives and miracles of scripture via the principles of reason, for to do so is to impose external models onto what must be taken, according to Warren Montag, in the materiality of its letter and through its immanent affectivity (*BMP*, p. 21).

In a similar way to how we ought to understand scripture under Spinoza's biblical hermeneutics, so Loy does not choose to respond to Brancusi's sculpture through a model of thought foreign to the sculpture. She does not compose a piece of criticism that measures or explains the body of the sculpture via normative aesthetic, cultural, or historical standards, for the latter would explain away the

sculpture and operate only to limit its capacity to generate new and as-yet-unknown affects. Rather, Loy responds in kind to *Golden Bird* via the logic of affectivity and the materiality of her poetics. Loy does not ask or aim to communicate what Brancusi's sculpture is about, what its reasons for existing are; she does not make a claim of universality upon its body and nor does she ask what it might eternally be said to represent. Instead, her poem appears as the immanent, unmediated, and affective response to Brancusi's *bird* that, through taking up certain of the sculpture's affective motivations, constitutes, extends, and alters the latter's body through its own active individuality. By being an effect of *Golden Bird* that expresses the sculpture's existence, Loy's poem participates in *Golden Bird's* individuality. But Loy's poem also extends *Golden Bird* by adding to and emphasizing the affectivity of the sculpture through, among other things, her particularly concrete use of language:

As if
some patient peasant God
had rubbed and rubbed
the Alpha and Omega
of Form
into a lump of metal

A naked orientation
unwinged unplumed
—the ultimate rhythm
has lopped the extremities
of crest and claw
from
the nucleus of flight¹³

The materiality of Loy's poetics, the sonic qualities of the words and word order she uses, sets up "Brancusi's *Golden Bird*" with an affective force that makes

itself felt in the body of the reader. The materiality of these words or sounds as they land on the reading or listening body refer the reader or listener back to an image of Brancusi's original sculpture. As Ellen Keck Stauder comments on these two stanzas, Loy uses repetitions of sounds ("b" and "p" in patient peasant rubbed rubbed, "m" and "l" in Alpha and Omega, Form, lump, metal) to create sound patterns that form an extremely tactile surface to the poem:

These many sound patterns overlap and are intertwined with each other, giving the effect of waves of sound patterns constantly curling back on themselves.

The effect of Loy's consonance and assonance is a web of interlocking sounds and resonances that gives the poem a surface texture much like the polished brass of Brancusi's surface.¹⁴

Loy responds in kind to Brancusi's sculpture because she creates affecting images that take up and extend the affective patterns that Brancusi's sculpture produces. The metallic surface that Loy's poetics give rise to, its resonance in the ear and taste in the mouth, is at once a vessel for *Golden Bird's* affective traits, but also an augmentation of *Golden Bird's* affectivity. The relationship opened up between Loy's poem and Brancusi's sculpture functions, therefore, as an extension, or complication, of the latter's affectivity. Loy's poem takes certain affective motivations of *Golden Bird* and extends them into a poetic body. To this extent Loy's poem does not aim to offer an intelligible description of Brancusi's sculpture but rather it aims to evoke and extend the former's affectivity through a particular use of language and sound.¹⁵ In this way Loy's extension of Brancusi's sculpture through the writing of her poem has the effect of complicating our own affective relation with *Golden Bird*. And since, under Spinoza's ontology, the effects define an individual rather than an individual defining its effects, then the effects that constitute *Golden Bird's* individuality are correspondingly changed through the reader's or listener's experience of Loy's poem. In other words, *Golden Bird* is altered in its individuality through our experience of Loy's poem: Loy's poem complicates our affective experience of Brancusi's sculpture and in so doing alters its individuality by transforming the effects it has in the world.

III

In the above I argued that under Spinoza's relational theory of the individual, Loy's poem actively participates in the individuality of *Golden Bird* by altering the latter's affectivity. But the mutability and relationality of works of art and literature are not unprecedented ideas in art theory, and nor are they historical anomalies. Loy is often considered a "futurist" poet, though with certain caveats to her commitment to various futurist theses.¹⁶ At the turn of the twentieth century, as modernity made itself increasingly present in everyday life, various avant-garde movements began to emerge and make themselves felt. These included such movements as futurism, Dada, surrealism, vorticism, imagism, and others, which sought to orientate and situate both artist and artwork in a developing modern world. Taking a stance against the symbolists' withdrawal from what they saw as the "coarseness" of modernity, the futurists aimed to immerse themselves in the immediacy of its technological revolution. As F. T. Marinetti writes in his essay "We Abjure Our Symbolist Masters, the Last Lovers of the Moon": "Our Symbolist fathers had a passion we consider ridiculous: a passion for eternal things, a desire for immortal, imperishable master works."¹⁷

Contrary to this love of the eternal and the unchanging, Marinetti continues, the futurists seek to immerse themselves in the unmediated presence of modernity and take up in their art "that of becoming, the perishable, the transitory, and the ephemeral" ("LMM," p. 75). From an adulation of the work of art as transcendent of the world and fixed in its being comes an engagement with the things and experiences of a rapidly evolving modernity that is changeable and perishable. The art of the futurists was volatile, fleeting, and open to constant modification from the active and fluctuating modern world that surrounded it. In short, the art of the futurists, whether poem, collage, or performance, was fundamentally relational.

While Loy's relationship to the futurist movement was complex and mutable, she is nevertheless often considered through the lens of futurism because of her linguistic technique, relationship with Marinetti, and her own "Aphorisms on Futurism." As I have suggested above, Loy's "Brancusi's Golden Bird" can be seen to emphasize a key tenet of all futurist manifestos, a tenet that can also be found in Brancusi's sculpture itself: that of dynamism and openness to

the world.¹⁸ The idea of the dynamic—distinguishable in both the poem’s form and content—situates Loy’s poem and Brancusi’s sculpture in relation to the futurists’ hostility toward the static and definable, and their reverence, like many avant-gardists at the time, for the open and contingent in the work of art. As the early Dada performances at Cabaret Voltaire showed, a common feature in much avant-garde art was not to think of a work of art as a record of a finished idea or thought. Rather, their works were to be seen as a dynamic and ongoing relationship of mutual affectivity between the artist and audience and, ultimately, between the artist and the ever-mutating modern world.

In this respect, the work of Loy and other avant-garde artists was radically “open,” in the sense that Umberto Eco theorizes the work of art in *The Open Work*. According to Eco, modern works of art are “open” insofar as they are in a continual process of completion by the perceiver who engages with them. But more than this, Eco suggests that the very nature of the modern work of art is that it actively seeks out participation in itself; that modern works of art somehow “invite” the viewer to insert something of themselves into the very being of the work of art.¹⁹ According to Eco, then, works of art are radically open, in the sense that they are in a continual process of completion by the perceiver; but they are also fundamentally active insofar as they actively seek out their completion through the various relations they undergo. Here the literary-artistic body is once again understood as relational and dynamic in its individuality, since it appears constituted in its being through the active relations its body gives rise to. This means that for Eco, and like Spinoza’s theory of the individual, as a site of relation the individuality of a work of art is never fixed and determinate but is continually modified by the various relations it stimulates and undergoes.

The dynamic nature of the work of art means that Loy’s poem participates in, extends, and alters Brancusi’s sculpture, and also it is possible in this way to understand Loy’s poem as a truly Spinozist encounter with a work of art. With “Brancusi’s Golden Bird” Loy does not set up any proper names or normative prescriptions between the art object and herself; she does not attempt to situate *Golden Bird* within strict normative parameters, the consequence of which would be to limit the work in its affectivity through a determination of it *as* this or that kind of thing. Rather, Loy’s poem actively seeks agreement and assimilation with

Golden Bird, and in so doing she achieves a participation with it that simultaneously complicates and extends the sculpture, poem, and perceiver.

In this essay I have argued that the understanding of a work of art in its dynamic individuality must be at the center of any Spinozist engagement with art. Under Spinozism, the work of art must be thought ethologically, that is, through the effects to which it gives rise as a particularly active and reactive site of relation. To ask what a work of art gives rise to, to ask what relations a poem or painting effects, is to engage with a work of art through the central principles of Spinozism; it is in this final sense that Spinoza's ethological ethics can contribute to aesthetics, art theory, and literary theory. Considered through certain key tenets of Spinoza's ontology, and particularly through his relational theory of individuality, works of art and literature can be seen as active parts of nature that are continuously shaped and reshaped by their surroundings, but which in turn shape and reshape the various things they relate to. Far from being a hindrance for a productive engagement with art, Spinoza's ontological framework allows Loy's poem and Brancusi's sculpture to emerge in their true relationality as individuals intimately involved in each other's being.

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¹ Edwin Curley, for instance, has argued that Spinoza's philosophy appealed to many poets, dramatists, and novelists, including Novalis, Heine, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, George Sand, George Eliot, Anatole France, and Somerset Maugham. See Benedict de Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol 1, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 401–2. This list can be extended further by highlighting the influence Spinoza had on Samuel Beckett (see A. Uhlmann, *Thinking in Literature: Joyce, Woolf, Nabokov* [London: Continuum [2011], p. 9) and Jorge Luis Borges, the latter composing two poems entitled "Baruch Spinoza" and "Spinoza."

² See J. Morrison, "Why Spinoza Had No Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47 (1989): 359–65.

³ I follow the standard abbreviations for the *Ethics*, whereby IP12Dem denotes the Demonstration to Proposition 12 of part 1 of the *Ethics*. The Physical Digression after IIP13, therefore, is referenced IIPD followed by the specific lemma, axiom, or postulate the citation refers to. All references to the *Ethics* are from Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), hereafter abbreviated *SPP*.

⁵ Rainer M. Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, ed. Clara Rilke, trans. Joel Agee (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), p. 49.

⁶ Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, (1999), p. 101.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1988), p. 283. Readers of Spinoza who follow this Deleuzian line regarding ethology include Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and his Contemporaries* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 68–69, hereafter abbreviated *BMP*; and Moira Gatens, “The Politics of the Imagination,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*, ed. M. Gatens (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), p. 201, hereafter abbreviated *FI*.

⁸ For an image of *Golden Bird* see: artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/91194?search_no=2&index=15.

⁹ For a contemporary reading that situates art’s “artisticness” in its existence as a site of relation, see Andrew Benjamin, *Art’s Philosophical Work* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

¹⁰ For an excellent reading of Spinoza’s relational theory of the individual, see Aurelia Armstrong, “Autonomy and the Relational Individual: Spinoza and Feminism,” in *FI*. p. 43–65

¹¹ In the first instance this is demonstrated at the level of substance itself, where substance’s effects—that is, the modes—are that which constitutes substance’s activity of self-causation (see IP25Schol). As Mogens Laerke puts it regarding the causal schema of Spinoza’s ontology: “The schema conveys that the divine nature (*natura naturans*) is not only present in the world through the effects it produces, as theology and traditional Scholastic philosophy would have it, but that the things of the world (*natura naturata*), including ourselves, participate immediately in divine causation as modifications of it (i.e. as *Deus quatenus*), or that we ‘share in [participes] the divine nature,’ as Spinoza puts it in EIP49S.” The effect, then, shares or participates (*participes*) in the nature (or being, or individuality) of the cause to the extent that it itself is an active cause, and this same model applies both for the substance-mode relation and for the mode-mode relation. Mogens Laerke, “Spinoza and the Cosmological Argument according to Letter 12,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (2013): 57–77.

¹² References to the *Theological-Political Treatise* are from Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. M. Silverthorne and J. Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); hereafter abbreviated *TPT* and referenced by chapter number followed by page number.

¹³ For the full poem, see Mina Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1997), pp. 79–80.

¹⁴ Ellen Keck Stauder, “Mina Loy on Brancusi and the Futurists,” in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, ed. M. Shreiber and K. Tuma (Oronno, Maine: The National Poetry Foundation, 1998), p. 359.

¹⁵ Ashley Lazevnick comes close to this reading of Loy’s poem when she argues that “the poem’s cacophonous noise recalls the origins of *enargeia* in oration, speeches that were meant to transport the act of listening into the world of seeing.” Here Lazevnick seems to be suggesting that the sonic quality of Loy’s poem does not aim to describe Brancusi’s sculpture but rather seeks to replicate the original visual experience of *Golden Bird* in the auditory affectivity of the poem itself. To this extent the relation is not one of representation, or *ekphrasis*, but one of affective extension and assimilation. See Ashley Lazevnick, “Impossible Descriptions in Mina Loy and Constantin Brancusi’s *Golden Bird*, *Word & Image* 29, no. 2 (2013): 192–202 (196).

¹⁶ While embracing the driving force of futurism, Loy was nevertheless critical of Marinetti’s heavily gendered futurist rhetoric, a concern that animated much of her

poetry. On this see A. Goody, *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy, and Gertrude Stein* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 42–43.

¹⁷ F. T. Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine: Selected Writings by F. T. Marinetti*, ed. R. W. Flint, trans. Arthur A. Coppotelli (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Classics, 1991), p. 75; hereafter abbreviated "LMM."

¹⁸ On the importance of the dynamic for futurism, see Stauder, "Mina Loy on Brancusi," p. 359.

¹⁹ Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. A. Cancogni (London UK: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), pp. 19, 85.