Loy and Cornell: Christian Science and the Destruction of the World

It is often suggested that spiritual values and religious belief do not find a ready place within modernist aesthetics. The centrality of processes of secularization to modernity; the consequential stress on negativity, irony and fragmentation in modernist writings – all these seem to marginalize the world of religion to conservative groupings within the period. This is a view which must be contested, however, since there are significant lines of influence connecting the exuberant religious innovations of the late nineteenth century to the abstraction of the twentieth. The influence of Theosophy is perhaps the best example: for painters like Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian and Bisttram, the hidden truth described by Madame Blavatsky helps their art release itself from the burden of representation; colours take on a symbolic weight and flood the eye with meaning. The music of Scriabin and Schoenberg shows similar impulses; and Theosophical notions of religious syncretism and vibrational energy enter literary modernism via Yeats, Jessie Weston and others.

This essay investigates what is for a number of reasons a difficult aspect of the subject of religion and modernism: Christian Science in the works of Mina Loy and Joseph Cornell. I say 'difficult' because Christian Science offers, for the outsider, a resistant discourse. The first major religious sect founded by a woman, Mary Baker Eddy, at its peak in the first three decades of the twentieth century Christian Science seemed to represent the future of religion, de-mythologized into a Hegelian idealism in which Christianity is folded into divine Mind. It expanded massively in America and Europe, garnering a largely middle-class constituency; it built large churches and attracted commentary from many admirers and sceptics (the latter famously included Mark Twain and Sigmund Freud; Aldous Huxley's satire in *Ape and Essence* is less often noted).[1] But it represents a highly conservative form of middle-class idealist piety, frozen into interpretive stasis by the peculiarly restrictive strictures issued by Eddy – who controlled its structures, scriptures, and forms of worship; attempting, with a fair degree of success, to prevent its development of a *midrash*, a living interpretive tradition.[2] Its writings are stultifying; formulaic; almost impossible to read for outsiders – indeed, they have a peculiar negativity which will be one topic of this essay. Moreover, for the artist a tension exists between Christian Science and iconography, since the sect de-emphasizes the actual body, whether that of Christ or the body of the person, and the material world generally. It seems indicative that a recent collection on *The Visual Culture of American Religions* does not have a single reference to Christian Science.[3] Given this unpromising set of premises, what is its significance for these two artists?

I will discuss Loy and Cornell in the years around the end of World War II – the period which sees the inception of the nuclear age. It is the period of Cornell and Loy's most intense friendship, with the exchange of letters, books and ideas; and some degree of mutual artistic influence (involving Cornell, for example, providing material for Loy's assemblages and a shared interest in *mappemodes*). For Cornell, Loy was one of his valued woman intimates; people with whom he could extend his dialogue with himself. She was the addressee of a letter often seen as central to his self-explanation, in which

he described his largest and most important dossier of materials, the 'GC 44' (or Garden Centre 1944) folder.[4] The artists were brought together, at least in part, by Christian Science, which seems to have cemented existing linkages through the New York art world of Duchamp and the Surrealists.[5] Cornell was a devote Christian Scientist; from his membership application in June 1926 until his death, his diaries record readings of weekly lessons and exchanges with practitioners.[6] Loy, who first made contact with the sect in Florence in 1912, placed its beliefs within a more eclectic understanding of the spiritual in which different elements compete; but certainly her work after her return to New York in 1936 begins to show a more intense interest in spiritual issues (her biographer reports that in the late 1940s she corresponded with the dissident Christian Scientist Joel Goldsmith).[7] Yet there are significant tensions in their adherence to the faith: Cornell, the obsessive collector and classifier of everyday materials; Loy, the poet whose work is often seen as expressing an embodied poetics. How is art reconciled with a religion which dismisses mere physical existence?

The Object-world and a Poetics of Reverie

One answer to that question involves seeing that Christian Science does not so much abolish the object as replace it with something different: a transfigured reality. In the most careful consideration of Cornell's Christian Science to date, Richard Vine relates the faith to a stress on the timeless, on a hidden order in which the clutter of the world may be reconciled in the mind of God. Vine suggests that Cornell's boxes carry an all-pervasive spirituality; a fascination with spiritual avatars like the actresses and shop-girls he worshipped; and with the transient, providing a memorialization which is 'a preparation for his inevitable forfeiture of the world itself'.[8]

This seems right: transcience is a quality we readily associate with Cornell's art, since his boxes incorporate the effects of weathering and often have a kinetic element (rattling balls, falling sand, drawers which demand to be opened). At the same time, his careful arrangements seem to retrospectively formalize and stabilize experience; representing the traces of mind as a fossilized representation of personal and historical memory. This method too may be enabled by religion. In the section of *Science and Health* entitled 'Christian Science versus Spiritualism' Eddy writes of what she calls 'Images of Thought', opening up a poetics of reverie:

> The mine knows naught of the emeralds within its rocks; the sea is ignorant of the gems within its caverns, of the corals, of its sharp reefs, of the tall ships that float on its bosom; or of the bodies which lie buried in its sands: yet these are all there. Do you suppose any mental concept is gone because you do not think of it. The true concept is never lost. The strong impressions produced on mortal mind by friendship or by any intense feeling are lasting, and mind-readers can perceive and reproduce these impressions. Memory may reproduce voices long silent. We have but to close our eyes, and forms rise before us, which are thousands of miles away or altogether gone from physical sight and sense, and this is not in dreaming sleep.[9]

In such formulae Eddy describes the world of mind as at once a Cornell-like collocation of objects, dreaming in the embrace of the sea; and as a cinematic image-bank, able to overcome time and distance. This is an opening to what Cornell, in a 1961 diary entry,

described as ‘dreams ever different ever varied endless voyages / endless realms ever strange ever wonderful’.[10] His own preoccupation with flotsam and sailor’s boxes reflects this Sargasso of the imagination, in which historical resonance – the lost world of nineteenth century ballerinas, sentimental narrative, toys, natural philosophy – may be part of a reverie which, in Christian Science, is accorded an absolute reality. Thus in his letter to Loy on ‘GC 44’ he describes the contrast between the poverty of the present moment – the ‘shabby and uninspired’ reality of the delivery truck he saw a few days ago – and the same truck with its advertising logo, transfigured by layers of memory incorporating both an earlier sighting and rural wanderings dating back a decade (*TM* 135-6).

What does Loy make of this de-materialized and essentially retrospective poetics of Mind? Loy’s work in the 1940s, which she intended to publish in a volume entitled ‘Compensations of Poverty’, seems to be written in a dialogue with the Christian Science view that Mind can transcend the material – and indeed often suggests an intense struggle to sustain that belief. The title comes from ‘On Third Avenue’, which meditates on the kind of images – popular glamour; parts of mannequins stacked in a trolley – that Cornell celebrates. Loy writes of ‘a ten-cent Cinema’:

> a sugar-coated box-office
> enjail a Goddess
> aglitter, in her runt of a tower,
> with ritual claustrophobia.
>
> Such are the compensations of poverty,
> to see ----------
>
> Transient in the dust,
> the brilliancy
> of a trolley
> loaded with luminous busts ….
> (*LB96* 110)

Here is the surrealism of a redeemed object-world; a fetishism which Loy nonetheless undercuts – and this undercutting is something of a keynote of this essay – as a ‘mirage’; less stable even than Cornell’s arrangements, because observed in passing. The box itself is a less than celebratory image; indeed it would be quite easy to read these lines as a indirect critique of Cornell and his rituals of enclosure.

Perhaps Loy’s most obviously Cornellesque poem, in terms of the capture of a resonant moment and the transfigured object, is ‘Ephemerid’, with its description of a girl wrapped in ‘white muslin curtain’, pushing a doll’s perambulator erratically, seen from a distance against the iron girders of the El.[11] That this vision seems like an insect, an ‘imp-fly’, is intended as an illustration of how ‘The Eternal is sustained by serial metamorphosis’ – Mary Baker Eddy was fascinated by the butterfly as a symbol of an idealized form of reproduction, which she initially conceived in terms of parthenogenesis.[12] Loy creates of this gauzy figure a ‘nameless nostalgia’, a vision of ‘fictitious faery’ like those in Cornell’s boxes. But the use of that term and the fact that the vision of the girl is self-consciously described as an overlayering of reality for the

spectator – ‘penury / with dream’ – also suggests the obdurate weight of the material world: that which ‘soars’ in childish fantasy must also push a ‘heavy child’ in the stalling vehicle; the viewer who which wishes to idealize the child must ‘kidnap’ this image.

It is, perhaps, with the moving meditation of ‘Letters of the Unliving’ that the burden of memory is heaviest, as Loy handles her dead lover Arthur Cravan’s letters, now decades old, and must declare that his failure to live renders them mere dead material:

> The present implies presence
> thus
> unauthorized by the present
> these letters are left authorless—
> have lost all origin
> since the inscribing hand
> lost life — — —
> (*LB96* 129)

This is a position no elegist – no human, perhaps – can sustain, and Loy goes on to consider what traces of desire *are* contained in what is dryly described as ‘this calligraphy of recollection’. She does so in dialogue with the Christian Science belief in the persistence of spirit. Eddy writes: ‘Though individuals have passed away, their mental environment remains to be discerned, described and transmitted. Though bodies are leagues apart and their associations forgotten, their associations float in the general atmosphere of human mind’ (*SH* 87). Loy asks why she should be forced to communicate with a lover frozen in the past, since ‘This package of long ago / creaks with the horror of echo / out of void’. The bodily metaphors seem to negate the Christian Science belief that Spirit transcends fleshly reality, offering healing for any ill: ‘No creator / reconstrues scar-tissue / to shine as birth-star’.

In the period we are examining, the most compelling example of the pressure of the reality is of course the second world war. Christian Science was generally pacifist in tendency, seeing war and its polarization of the world as a failure of understanding. While the *Christian Science Monitor* reported the war assiduously, the in-house magazine, the *Christian Science Sentinel*, referred to it only sporadically, and while it eventually included a column of reports of healing in the armed services alongside general testimonies, the effect was to distance the war; to stress the business of healing as usual. Again there is something of a contrast between Loy and Cornell here. Cornell makes few comments on it, whereas u its horrors are registered by Loy in various poems. They include ‘Aid of the Madonna’, which she sent Cornell in 1943 (*LB96* 209). Madonnas, the poem suggests, are symbols of motherhood outside time, offering a respite for those who have begotten heroes who have fallen into war, into ‘skies once ovational / with celestial oboes’ which now see ‘in clamour / of deathly celerities, / the horror / of diving obituaries’. If the idea of the Madonna as an ‘island in memory’ appealed to Cornell, Loy was in contradistinction indicating, I think, the islanded nature of such ideas; the fact that in a world in violent conflict an enclosed box might be their only suitable locus. A difficulty in dealing with the violent presence of history is, I would suggest, visible in Cornell’s distant reaction to the war, and eventually in Loy’s

way of reading his work – a reading which takes up the issue of nuclear energy raised by the end of the war in the Pacific.

Denial: 'the nothingness that it really is'

The second and more important aspect of Christian Science I wish to focus on is denial – a topic generated by Eddy's absolute insistence of Spirit's transcendence of the material, and a curious set of attitudes it engenders. Christian Science is founded on the notion that pure Spirit is the only important aspect of existence; sickness is a mistake founded on misapprehensions about embodiment. In Eddy's writing and in Christian Science periodicals there is a constant preoccupation with what is labelled 'error': error about the origins and authorship of Eddy's writings; about mesmerism or animal magnetism; about 'suggestion' as a mechanism for cure; about understanding of doctrine; and above all about the material itself.[13] Errors are constantly and voluminously cited and denied in the correspondence of the *Christian Science Sentinel*; errors which Eddy would return to obsessively while also issuing rules about not repeating 'untruth' any more than was needed for its refutation (the negative error – the error in correcting an error – was something of a specialty for Eddy). The terms covering this semantic field in Christian Science are suggestive: error (materialist explanation) is *denied*, *repudiated* or *refused*; it is *uncovered*, *banished* and *excluded*; it is even *annihilated* or *destroyed* – though it constantly returns as attack from outside the movement or backsliding from within. As an article entitled 'Denial in Christian Science' attested in 1924, the negative is a central principle of the movement.[14] At the limit, what must be denied is connection with the world and with others.

Yet paradoxically, despite the denial of the importance of physical life in Christian Science, the body is the ground where its power must be proved – the body must, to adopt Freud's formula from the *Studies on Hysteria*, 'join the conversation' (*mitsprechen*); it must, in its return to health, testify to the primacy of Spirit, to its own finitude and negation.[15] Denial in this context is close to the Freudian mechanism of 'disavowal': not doubt or repression, but a negation which does not allow the 'real' to be admitted to consciousness, which refuses to even repress it. You are not ill or infirm, the Christian Science practitioner insists; you only think you are; and if you can only understand your error the illness will go away. In this paradoxical situation, the subject both knows and does not know about the status of her body; its materiality is both transcended and returns as evidence. One could see both the workings of Cornell's boxes and poems like Loy's 'An Aged Woman' in this way: on the one hand the boxes offer a perfected arrangement of the image-world; on the other they contain worn, broken, rattling objects and cracking paintwork, like the ageing body.

The negativity which is so central to Christian Science can compared be loosely to one defining impulse of Surrealism: the abolition of the world in favour of a transfigured reality, a universe of desire.[16] Compare 'The Destruction of the World' as it is imagined by Pierre Mabille in an 1942 essay in which he meditates on catastrophe and deluge:

> May it cease to exist, this world of pain, may the fire of the earth, the water of oceans with an ultimate convulsion put an end to this miserable creation capable only of bringing to birth unhappiness … And if the terrestrial mechanism, too unchangeable in its equilibrium, cannot explode and abolish humanity, if the

> universe will not consent to disappear, the actual state of things, at least, must be destroyed … The slave knows that nothing can be saved from the ancient dwelling and its masters; the smallest objects are cursed; he feels that any contact with them will corrupt him in turn.[17]

The context here is clearly that of the war; a which was to end indeed with fire and destruction, founded on the abolition of matter and its rendition into energy, at Nagasaki and Hiroshima. It is worth pausing over the meaning of nuclear weaponry. Christian Science writers often compared the de-materialized world of modern physics – in which even matter could be dissolved into energy – to the world of pure Mind.[18] Cornell acknowledged this line of thinking in a note of 1947: 'Christian Science thoughts – spirituality of world of Romance of Natural Philosophy tie in with new *Einstein* ones?' (*TM* 138). The atom bomb, with its destruction of matter, thus touches awkwardly on the Christian Science world-view, with its sense of an ever-present eschatology (if only we could realize that the world is Mind, the error which is material existence would dissolve before us).

In looking at the end of the war, we can begin a letter Cornell wrote on 17 August 1945 to Marianne Moore – another poetic correspondent interested in Christian Science. He refers to his worst moments, and adds: 'but in spite of the compensations of moments of deep peace and beauty in the midst of this oftentimes cruel claustrophobia there are occasions enough when its whole illusory mesmeric nature is exposed for the nothingness that it really is.'[19] 'Mesmeric' here places the text in the Christian Science mainstream: for Eddy, 'mesmerism' represented the disavowed origins of Christian Science in nineteenth-century Spiritualism; 'Malicious Animal Mesmerism' (MAM), the subject of a chapter of *Science and Health*, became a source of paranoid concern in her later life, when she thought she was under attack from enemies using MAM.[20] Mesmerism represents the obsessive return of the body; the idea that what might be involved in Christian Science healing is a kind of occult biology rather than the operations of Spirit or Mind; she characterizes it typically as 'mere negation', a denial of truth (*SH* 102). Cornell had already used the term 'mesmerism' in an earlier letter to Moore, in May 1945:

> Let me say simply that if the welter of the material that I work with (matched too often by a like confusion of mind) seems too often like endless and hopeless chaos – there are times enough that I can see my way through this labyrinth and feel at home enough among its many 'by-paths of romance' (to quote your apt phrase) to be grateful. When I think of the unspeakable things that have been visited upon so many countless thousands during this same period of time I don't have too many misgivings about not having 'produced' more. While realizing that this thought is not a solution to my problem, still it has not been so easy to stay free of its mesmerism. (*TM* 123)

Here again 'mesmerism' represents the influence of the world; a dwelling on the traumatic actuality of outside events. 'Unspeakable things' include the war with Japan, and Cornell's ambivalence about Japan can be gauged by his quite frequent positive references to 'Japanese qualities' (*TM* 108); and the feeling of the 'Japanese masters' (*TM* 153) – associated with an art of nuance and self-effacement.

The 17 August letter was written two days after the ending of the war in the Pacific, as Cornell notes in his diary entry that morning ('Christian Science Holiday ─ second V-J Day'. The diary records:

> A beautiful feeling of gratitude for atmosphere of garden and woods in the back of garage and of being rid of a feeling or always wanting to be somewhere else. Observed tiny insect like a miniature darning needle but wings (transparent) more like a butterfly. Tiny ball shaped head red – undulating black tail – only about an inch long – maybe Miss Marianne Moore will know its name – rare feeling of calm similar to morning a week ago Sunday when this spot as alive with birds – went through the whole lesson on SOUL in Christian Science Quarterly and enjoyed it more than I can remember a similar session. (*TM* 120)

This is followed by 'One of most transcendental experiences [I] ever remember', an account of watching a young girl riding her horse bareback. Being where one is; rejecting the nothingness that is – between these formulae is the space of Cornell's work, a space in which mind, in binding material into remembrance, achieves a balance. The 'gratitude' here is part of a pattern constantly reiterated in Cornell's Christian Science lexicon – 'tension' or a 'crowded' mood resolved in a 'clearing' followed by 'gratitude' (most baldly 'Gratitude for MIND', *TM* 454).

Denying mesmerism; denying the tug of the world; of events – the necessity and difficulty of negation in a turbulent world is registered in these letters. Consider the following meditation on reality and memory, written a few years later in the autumn of 1947:

> Going through the G.C. notes without enough enthusiasm to get into the spirit or catch up the thread noticed to-night (Oct. 4.47) the notation of Psalm 31:7 on 'the little dancer section' lying open on my bible at exact place but no relationship to all this. Last section of the lesson in the Christian Science Quarterly and had not been closed. Subject: UNREALITY. Little 'coincidences' are so often the occasion of making these experiences live again in the present in a way most pleasurable and significant in their unexpectedness + appropriateness. (*TM* 146)

One link to 'G.C.44' is suggested by the 'responsive reading' specified in the lessons for that week printed in the *Christian Science Quarterly*, Isaiah 41: 15-16, with its apocalyptic references to threshing: 'Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff. Thou shall fan them, and the wind shall carry them away …'[21] The threshing of grasses down to their 'pulverized essences' (*TM* 130) was an important part of the preparation of Cornell's Owl boxes in this period, described in his diaries as a re-creation of the tactile immediacy and sense of Keatsian fruition of the original experience: 'the transcendent experiences of threshing in the cellar, stripping the stalks into newspapers, the sifting of the dried seeds, then the pulverizing by hand and storing in boxes' (*TM* 117). As the world is harrowed, destroyed, revealed as 'the nothingness that it really is', it falls into shape in the retrospection of art. In this sense, the avaries represent both a negation of and a response to the war, offering destruction and recovery held at an allegorical distance.

Loy and actuality

We will deal with Loy's response to Cornell's aviaries in a moment. It is worth noting, first, the traces of mesmerism in her own work. It permeates her novel *Insel*, written in the 1930s, for example. As David Ayers suggests in this volume, Christian Science inflects the description of the eponymous central character in terms of the 'magnetic tides' which surround him. Ayers argues that her usage of these terms is eclectic and seems to evoke a more general context of mind-cure discourse and popular thinking about radioactivity (the 'rays' emitted by Insel). But the negative depiction of mesmerism in the novel has, I would suggest, a fairly direct relation to Christian Science, for which mesmerism represents the dangerous leakage of energy between bodies – as opposed to the desired direct relation of the (disavowed) body to God. Also rejected, again as in Christian Science discourse, is the notion of mesmeric sympathy and flow: the novel's progress involves the narrator gradually realizing 'how unsuccessfully I had succoured him' and refusing any further exchange of bodily energies.[22] Similarly in Loy's poem 'Revelation' we have the rather orthodox Christian Science thought that sin is error:

> The agony of Gethsemane
> was that hour when Genius
> disillusioned comprehended
> the incommensurable idiocy
> (as you would say,
> sin) of the world. (*LB82* 203)

The way in which *Insel* repudiates its central character and the movement from Insel's death-obsessed 'Sterben – man muss' to the narrator's declaration of self-reliant health 'man muss reif sein – one must be ripe' is, as Elizabeth Arnold notes, central to the novel; it is also central to Christian Science.[23]

Like Cornell, Loy could depict the fall into history as a succumbing to a kind of mesmeric influence, as in 'Hilarious Israel', her rather ambivalent poem about the Jewish musical hall. Here the title figure is described as

> Magnet to maniac
> misfortune
> History inclines to you
> as a dental surgeon
> over the sufferer's chair. (*LB82* 207-8)

Given the Christian Science distrust of health professionals, this seems to characterize history as error. In contrast, 'Hilarious Israel' investigates the 'self-sought anaesthesia' of the music hall; a description which recalls the song which 'anaesthetizes all sense' of Loy's poem for her daughter, 'Maiden Song' (*LB82* 237). We could relate that aesthetic anaesthesia to a recurrent term in Loy's poetry in the 1940s: *coma*. There is the 'coma of logic' of 'this poem; the 'coercive as coma' of 'Moreover, the Moon ———' (*LB96* 146); the 'state of animated coma' in 'I almost Saw God in the Metro' (*LB82* 248); and the 'lenient coma' of 'Letters of the Unliving'(*LB96* 132). Coma signals a desired

escape from the pain of memory; it represents the flesh which cannot be escaped or transcended; it could even be described as a state of pure embodiment; embodiment without mind. As a term for the suffering of the Jew, 'anaesthesia' is anything but the serene transcendence aimed for by the Christian Scientist.

One might also see a Christian Science inflection in Loy's 'Hot Cross Bun' (1949), her major sequence of the post-war years, describing bums and winos in the Bowery. The poems are linked to the sculptural assemblages depicting street life she made in the period – which themselves insisted on including 'dirty' reality spilling from their surfaces, in contrast to Cornell's fastidiously alienated items.[24] A central stylistic characteristic of the sequence is an Eddy-like stress on negatives, often formulated as obscure neologisms: Loy uses 'irrhythmic', 'inideate', 'irreal', 'illenience', 'indirigible', 'unavailing', 'infamous', 'impious', 'indecision', 'impersonal', 'inattentively', 'unfuture', 'inobvious' – and even a curious (un)negativing of the negative in 'flammable timber'. This stylistic habit is to some extent shared by other poems of the period, as in the 'uncolor of the unknown' of 'Ephemerid'. Cumulatively, these terms suggest an area of creative negation akin to that of Cornell's boxes: the Bowery as the zone of exclusion, in which the workaday world of reality is annulled, language reduced to babble.

But here I think we need to register an important difference between Loy and Christian Science, and arguably also between Cornell and Loy. Instead of stressing the 'error' of any belief in the material, Loy retains a fascination with the actuality of her subjects; their refusal of the kind of transcience which signals another reality. The characteristic movement of 'Hot Cross Bun' is upward-downward, ecstasy-disgust, sky-street – a transcendence, that is, paradoxically rooted in the waste and presence of the body. One of the sequence's main topics is a refusal of distance; a stress on the 'close-up of inferno face' (*LB96* 139) as opposed to the 'down-sight from tall tower' in which the nobility of the bum is (in another curious negative) lost 'in grey dis-synthesis // of our adamic insects' / collision with confusion' (*LB96* 140). The distant view which might cleanse the bums of detail is rejected. Indeed, Loy, in 'On Third Avenue', seems to willingly join these bodies, just as she joined the bums below her New York apartment, seeking 'to share the heedless incognito // of shuffling shadow-bodies' (*LB96* 109).

'Hot Cross Bum' allows us to explore this ambivalent, paradoxical relation to the body and reality generally. As we have seen, her work of the war years and immediately after seems to resist the Christian Science tendency to privilege mind or spirit over the illusory real. The poem has a steadfast insistence on the real, while also registering the attraction of exchanging it for a alcohol-fuelled dream:

> Bum-bungling of actuality
> Exchanging
> An inobvious real
> For over-obvious irreal (*LB96* 134)

In such formulae, Loy celebrates the 'shrunken illuminati' (139) of the Bowery, who rightly reject the world but fail to rise to a proper alternative. The 'exoteric redemption' and 'illenience' of Catholicism is rejected for a future reconciliation. It is only 'Evolution' – an orientation towards the future – that will solve this conundrum,

breeding people 'more amenable / to ecstasy' – more able to reconcile pleasure and discipline.

At the end of the period we have been considering, in December 1949, Loy visited Cornell's exhibition of Avaries at the Egan Gallery in Manhattan; a visit which produced the short unpublished prose piece 'Phenomena of American Art'.[25] Loy's essay might be considered a summation of many of the somewhat paradoxical issues examined above: it represents a response not only to Cornell's work in a Christian Science context, but to the fact that time has been fractured by the nuclear age, its progressive impulse shattered, leaving the artist with the kind of isolated, spatialized perception one might place in a box.

Loy firstly praises Cornell for moving beyond the 'ingenuity of Evil' and the 'finale of figuration' she associates with Surrealism; and for reintroducing the sublime (which 'does not solidify') into the everyday (2, 3). The result is an 'Optic music' (6); something akin to the 'anaesthesia' of music in Loy's poems: 'Music is the only transcendancy communicable to us all, here in this bird cage diocese prevailed an optic music sedative as juvenile voices of Bach choristers' (3). Cornell achieves this by replacing making with an art of Mind, working under the sign of reverie: 'A contemporary brain wielding a prior brain is a more potent implement than a paint-brush'; or again, 'the birds in the Aviary, had not to be made by Cornell, they were elected by Cornell, <u>located</u> by Cornell' (4, 5).

Loy also, crucially, sees Cornell's work as a rupture with the dialectical development of art, in which the 'great sculptures formed in the dim past were vast enough to absorb the centuries of their duration' (5). In this classicizing view, all art derives from the ancients, and is measured by their standards. In contrast, Cornell's work represents an leap into the future, paradoxically 'placing' all previous art in its retrospective gaze. His works represent a stabilized temporality, 'outlasting all passing, instantaneously returning to the potential emptiness of their status quo' (11). Why has this 'evolutional mutation' happened? The reason Loy gives is the coming of nuclear fission. She writes: 'Man's scientific use of the creational "natiere" as a medium for smashing creation has reduced the future to a hypothesis' (5). The result is a fundamental set of questions: 'What knowing? What making?' (6). Cornell's art of mind answers this call, bypassing the monumental art of the past for an 'evolutional conscience' (Loy is using the word in the French sense, I think: consciousness) which, as prophesied in 'Hot Cross Bum', might be 'more amenable / to ecstasy'. Art in this view might begin to achieve a realization of the pure mind, and the reduction of matter to mind, prophesied by Mary Baker Eddy.[26]

Loy analyses Cornell's art in terms of the end of art – in so doing returning it to the history of the twentieth century, and its destruction of the both matter and the future. She gives us a way to read Cornell as presenting the stabilized world of Christian Science, a world held still in the reverie of mind. In terms of her own work, we are left with a fascination with the ideal categories of Christian Science, in which the world might fall away into illusion. But both as poet and as critic Loy also registers, more acutely than her friend ever does, the persistent, seemingly ineradicable linkage between

that hope and the 'coma' of nescience, and the presence of both historical reality and the obdurate actuality of the body in the margins of the text.

Notes

[1] A psychoanalytically-inflected reading of Christian Science would need to note both Freud's preoccupation with the movement's success, and his diagnosis of its failings in terms of denial: for example in his comments in 'The Question of Lay Analysis' on it representing 'a regrettable aberration of the human spirit' in its denial of 'the evils of life'.

[2] The most recent assessment of Eddy is Gillian Gill's *Mary Baker Eddy* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1998). The movement's recurrent internal fractures have often concerned the place of Eddy in its theology, the status of her will, and the extent of the persistence of her influence.

[3] David Morgan and Sally Promey, *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[4] In fact there are two letters, since Cornell revised and expanded the 1946 version in 1950).They are dated 21 November 1946 and 27 Feb. 1950 by Lindsay Blair, *Joseph Cornell's Vision of Spiritual Order* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 54; the 1946 letter appears undated in the November 1946 section of *Joseph Cornell's Theatre of the Mind: Selected Diaries, Letters and Files*, into. and ed. Mary Ann Caws, foreword by John Ashbery (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 135-6 (subsequently cited in text as *TM*). 'GC 44' is a folder over 1,000 pages long relating to various epiphanies Cornell had while working in a garden centre in Flushing, NY in 1944.

[5] As Carolyn Burke points out they were connected before they met via Loy's son-in-law the art dealer Julian Levy; Loy and Levy had searched for watch-parts for Cornell in Paris and Cornell had seen Loy's paintings. *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), 379, 404.

[6] On Cornell and Christian Science, the best study is Richard Vine, 'Eterniday: Cornell's Christian Science "Metaphysique"', in *Joseph Cornell: Shadowplay Eterniday* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 36-50; Cornell's devotion is also discussed by his biographers, by Lindsay Blair (cited below), and by Sandra Leonard Starr in *Joseph Cornell: Art and Metaphysics* (1982).

[7] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 414-16. Writings on Loy and Christian Science include Maeera Schreiber, 'Divine Woman, Fallen Angels: The Late Devotional Poetry of Mina Loy', in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, ed. Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 19980, 467-83; Richard Cook, 'The "Infinitarian" and her "Macro-Cosmic Presence": The Question of Loy and Christian Science', *ibid* 458-65; and David Ayers's piece in this collection. Goldsmith – in this period at least – remained a fairly orthodox Christian Scientist, and I can see little argument for a specific influence from his rather bland writings.

[8] Vine, 'Eterniday', 44.

[9] Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1994), 87-88. The text was stabilized in 1910 and later editions are printed with the same pagination. Subsequently referred to as *SH*.

[10] *TM* 285; also in Joseph Cornell, 'Some Dreams, 1947-1969', *Surrealist Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 2001), 485.
[11] Mina Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), 116-18. Loy's poems are cited from this edition where possible (abbreviated *LB96*); otherwise from the earlier selection in *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Highlands, N.C.: Jargon Society, 1982), abbreviated *LB82*.
[12] The importance of parthenogenic thought – that is, the presence of unassisted, idealized motherhood – in Christian Science is noted by Frank Podmore, *Mesmerism and Christian Science: A Short History of Mental Healing* (London: Methuen, 1909), p.295. Editions of *Science and Health* up to 1906 claimed that 'generation rests on no sexual basis' and provided the butterfly, bee and moth as examples.
[13] The central example is the much-revised 'Animal Magnetism' chapter of *Science and Health*, but other texts also provide plenty of evidence of the preoccupation with error, for example the many corrections issued both to the church and its critics collected in *The First Church of Christ Scientist and Miscellany* (Boston: The Trustees, 1913).
[14] M. J. Turner, 'Denial in Christian Science', *Christian Science Sentinel* 27:11, 15 Nov. 1924, 207.
[15] Sigmund Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*. *Case Histories II*, Penguin Freud Library, vol. 9, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1990), 312.
[16] See Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), ch.12.
[17] Pierre Mabille, 'The Destruction of the Word' (1942), *Surrealist Painters and Poets*, 273-4.
[18] For examples see Robert Peel, *Christian Science: Its Encounter with American Culture* (Harrington Park, NJ: Robert H. Soames, 1958).
[19] *TM* 122. My attention was directed to this passage by reading an abstract of Philip Cowell's paper 'From Joseph Cornell to Marianne Moore: Negation, Nothingness and the Art of Not Saying', delivered at the 2003 UEA Cornell conference, which also examined negation in Sartre.
[20] See the chapter on MAM in Gill, *Mary Baker Eddy*.
[21] *Christian Science Quarterly* 58:4 (1947), readings for 5 Oct. 1947 (subject: UNREALITY).
[22] Mina Loy, *Insel*, ed. Elizabeth Arnold (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1991), 138.
[23] *Ibid*., introduction.
[24] Because Loy's artworks are not in public collections, and are accessible only in poorly-reproduced illustrations in the texts of Burke, Conover and others, I have not discussed them here – though certainly they were produced in dialogue with the collage-assemblages of both Duchamp and Cornell.
[25] This exists in different versions. I am using that in the Loy Papers, Beineke Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 6, box 6, folder 172 (11pp, mixed TS and MS); by page number. I am grateful to Alex Goody for allowing me to consult her transcription of this essay.
[26] 'Consciousness' (rather than Spirit or Soul) is the term stressed by the Christian Science writer Peter V. Ross, whom Cornell read, seen as a form of artistic *making*: 'Consciousness is not only the builder but the building material. It is at once the sculptor and the marble. Serene in tempo and possessed of divine substances – integrity, animation, wisdom, affection – consciousness becomes spiritual and thus is equipped to rear a princely structure'. Peter V. Ross, *Lectures on Christian Science* (New York: Hobson Press, 1945), 215-6.