

'We Wear the Mask': Modern 'Masks,' Reflexivity, and Black Practices of Comparing in the Harlem Renaissance

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Abstract

This article examines practices of comparing by writers and artists from the Harlem Renaissance. Highlighting reflexivity and an awareness of subaltern positioning at the very basis of practices of comparing by black writers and artists in the early 20th century, the article directs the reader's attention to context, personal, and group positioning as well as emotional conditioning of the comparing actors. The article explores African American and Afro Caribbean masking strategies like the mastery of form to show how the comparata 'The Old Negro' and 'The New Negro' are negotiated and lead to an understanding of complex entanglements between black cultures, a tertium of blackness beyond colonial histories, and their racial baggage during the Harlem Renaissance.

Keywords: practices of comparing, mask, blackness, reflexivity, The New Negro

Reflexivity is *en vogue* again. Established in modernity as a concept to reflect the relation of the self to the social, reflexivity has gained new prominence in the contexts of contemporary postcolonial and decolonial approaches to social relations. American pragmatism shaped the understanding of the concept in the 1920s and 30s, when reflexivity was comprehensively defined by George H. Mead as "the turning back of the experience of the individual upon [oneself]" (134). In late modernity, Sara Delamont explained reflexivity as "a social scientific variety of self-consciousness" (8). Critics like Margaret Archer have developed the concept further by introducing the idea of "internal conversation." The latter notion theoretically reflects the permanent self-confrontation of the individual and its dialogical interaction with an ever-changing social and cultural environment.

While Anthony Giddens' theory of reflexive modernity prominently continues in current studies on the self, social, and their interrelations, more recent postcolonial and decolonial thinkers oppose the Western and Eurocentric conceptualization of the rational self as well as the Western-centered definition of social experience in Giddens' discourse. In theories like Nicos Mouzelis's apophatic reflexivity, special attention is paid to the emotional, spiritual, and therapeutic

side of self-reflexivity. As Eugene Halton puts it, "Being human involves feeling, dreaming, experiencing, remembering and forgetting, and not simply knowing" (273). It is Hortense Spillers who pushed for new approaches to reflexivity in the feminist and postcolonial discourse of Black Studies of the late 20th and early 21st century. Badia S. Ahad reminds us of "Hortense Spillers's call for attention to deeper modes of self-reflexivity" (133).

To further reflect on a fundamental 'twoness' (black self, 'American' self) in African-American cultural analysis, Spillers introduces her idea of "interior intersubjectivity" (713) as a possible interpretative strategy and practice of resistance. While her reflections emerged in the context of late modernity, similar to those of Giddens, Delmont, and Mouzelis, they serve as a point of departure for a journey to reach a better understanding of 'The New Negro' as a comparative metaphorical construct within Harlem Renaissance identity politics in the 1920s. "If by substitutive identities . . . we mean the capacity to represent a self through the masks of self-negation[,] then the dialectics of self-reflection and the strategies of a psychoanalytic hermeneutic come together at the site of a 'new woman/man'" (711-12). Spiller's discourse emphasizes three key markers that illustrate the complexity of black

identity formation and reformation in the 1920s: the mask, self-negation, and self-reflection. With Spillers' words in mind, echoing the modernist discourse on blackness, I will turn to the historical period of the early 20th century, the 'African craze,' and the first black arts movement in Harlem.

Historical Context and the Emergence of 'The New Negro'

At the turn of the 20th century, a call for a gathering of intellectuals in London in order to explore the situation of peoples of African ancestry living in Africa, North and Latin America, the Caribbean, and on the African homelands captured the attention of black activists, artists, and intellectuals. Along with the hope for overcoming allegations of 'Negro inferiority' in scientific circles, a Pan-African movement emerged to confront global issues of colonial discrimination against peoples of African descent. Involved thinkers from different peoples of African ancestry shared the belief that historical experience, cultural values, social anxieties, and strong hopes united many black cultures around the globe. London's Pan-African conference echoed the impact of the 'American Negro Exhibit' that had taken place a few months prior at the Rue des Nations in Paris. This exhibit combined books, visual art, photography, industrial, and fine arts products to celebrate black cultural and industrial production of the post-slavery period of the U.S. The common tenor among black intellectuals celebrated the evidence of black equality and productivity "once the veil of slavery had been lifted" (Powell 24).

Pan-African ideas gained momentum and encountered a new exotic fascination with the black continent and its diasporic offspring in the so-called 'African craze'. A somewhat ambiguous embracement and clichéd representation of African cultural expression pushed artistic expression in music, cabaret, visual arts, and literature to new horizons. U.S. America found itself in the middle of reinventing modernity, nourished by the desire for a truly 'American' aesthetic and vernacular. The Harlem Renaissance, also called the New Negro Movement, formed an important black

contribution to this new American aesthetic. The 'New Negro' seemed the perfect metaphor for a society and culture at a moment of intense rupture, change, and transition. While the Harlem Renaissance cherished many artistic collaborations between poets, painters, photographers, and musicians, for many, the 'New Negro' entity was first of all a "mood, or a sentiment" in which black cultural workers were acknowledged as equal partners in the world of cultural production (Powell 42).

The term 'New Negro' emerged from the progressive race rhetoric of thinker Booker T. Washington and black woman rights activist Fannie Barrier Williams for the black magazines *Voice of the Negro* and *Crisis* in the late 19th and early 20th century, with illustrations done by John Henry Adams Jr. Taking off from original sociopolitical connotations, the term 'New Negro' entered the discourses of aesthetic progress and racial redefinition with Alain Locke's *The New Negro: An Interpretation* and "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," a special issue of the magazine *Survey Graphic*. Both were published in 1925 and popularized the term in artistic, intellectual, and cultural market circuits (Powell 42).

'The Old Negro' versus 'The New Negro'

The emergence of 'The New Negro' as a powerful metaphor was the result of practices of comparing in intellectual, political, and artistic circles of the time. The metaphorically constituted other, 'The Old Negro,' provided the backdrop against which 'blackness' entered into dialogue and was renegotiated in juxtaposition with the *comparata* 'Old Negro' versus 'New Negro.' As a metaphorical construction, both terms held the potential for multiple significations and were exposed to different performative, theatrical, artistic, and literary interpretations during the early decades of the 20th century, particularly in the manifold cultural productions of the Harlem Renaissance. On various levels, 'The Old Negro' signified what Butler and Athanasiou refer to as "the dispossessed," while, in different ways, 'The New Negro' suggested agency and empowerment. On a political level, 'The Old Negro' stood for political conservatism and social accommodationism, while 'The New Negro'

represented renewal and change (Bernhart 273). The basic metaphorical constitution of these *comparata* signals the complexity of a new synthesis of “blackness” (*tertium*). Comparisons between the ‘The Old Negro’ and ‘The New Negro’ inevitably involved questions of tradition and innovation. It also meant drawing comparisons between imaginaries of African, African American, and Euro American cultures to undo long lasting paradigms of difference and hierarchy. Reflectivity was always positioned in conjunction with these practices.

The question of the self and how to relate to identity, the social, and the other was even more complex for the modern black subject. Writers like Countee Cullen and Jean Toomer wanted to transcend race, even refusing the label ‘black writer.’ On the other hand, Langston Hughes completely embraced his blackness. His poetry nevertheless gave voice(s) to the involved conflicts in the process of reflecting what it meant to be a poet in Harlem of the 1920s, what it meant to be a *black* poet, and what it meant to manage the spaces in between communities. Reflectivity meant looking at the self, but also at the black self’s often ‘disenfranchised’ and ‘dispossessed’ positioning in comparison to others. After all, the publication of works by black authors still largely depended on white publishing policies and priorities of white publishing houses (Bernard 269-71).

Reflectivity also involved a continuous comparing of the self with the floating metaphors of ‘The Old Negro,’ ‘The New Negro,’ and society at large, which meant white hegemony, censorship, and selection. The act of writing and subsequent comparisons took place from a peripheral or (invoking Spivak) “subaltern” positioning. In spite of the optimistic spirit of renewal, black writers had to manage the colonial baggage of anxiety, dispossession, displacement, and anger in their acts of writing, singing, and painting of ‘The New Negro.’ This varied spectrum of emotional complexity shaped their reflectivity, as well as the act of comparing beyond a pure cognitive understanding. There were (and still are) specificities of black culture that have been marked by a distinct difference to white mainstream culture. Even in the works of W.E.B. Du Bois, an African American intellectual

educated at Humboldt University in Berlin and one of the bastions of Western thinking in the late 19th and early 20th century, a spiritual reflectivity is highly noticeable. His works mark African American culture as a strongly spiritual culture, quite different from the white mainstream which is based upon rational principles.

Practices of comparing during the Harlem Renaissance must be observed in a relational way: how the cultural actors related themselves to history, to a past and contemporary social context, and to the other (whiteness in general terms). The positioning of actors was of key importance for the ways in which they did or un-did comparisons, articulating their relation to signifying practices beyond Euro-American standards, such as in the African, Caribbean, and African American cultural traditions. Practices of comparing occurred in local, national, and, most of all, transcultural networks (inter-American and trans-Atlantic). They built on colonial and emancipatory processes and were fundamentally conflictive.

Colonial and Peripheral Practices of Comparing

It is commonly agreed among historians and critics that practices of comparison played a central role in the processes of colonizing the New World. Comparisons veiled under the guise of science and universal knowledge helped establish structures and hierarchies based upon white supremacy and racial discrimination. At the beginning of the 20th century, this meant that, for the black subject in the Americas, by and large one still spoke from a peripheral locus of enunciation. For the black subject in the Harlem Renaissance (and in the Americas at large), practices of comparing were first of all a way to order one’s own position—one’s own place in society and cultural practices. These practices frequently included references of the self with the dominant structure, the canon, the established art world, or the successful music industry. They served as tools for self-positioning, self-reflection, and further self-empowerment. They also included dissident and trickster strategies based upon black oral cultures.

What differentiates them from mainstream

practices of comparing is the high degree of reflexivity about the group and the self, which is at the core of black thinking during the Harlem Renaissance. In Alain Locke's manifesto of *The New Negro*, it is a local, national, and global consciousness of black history and cultures that he locates in the reflective quality of African American culture that makes the latter the spearhead of a global black liberation movement. "One is the consciousness of acting as the advance guard of the African peoples in their contact with Twentieth Century civilization; the other, the sense of a mission of rehabilitating the race in world esteem from that loss of prestige for which the fate and conditions of slavery have so largely been responsible" (Locke 14). Similar to Locke's historical consciousness, Langston Hughes reflects on a long trajectory of black 'high' culture in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," linking African and Black-American cultures (256). In a self-reflexive way, he contemplates the freedom of the black writer and compares him to the vanguard, experimental, and ground-breaking group of artists and writers in his literary manifesto "The Negro and the Racial Mountain" (1926). "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame.... We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves" (95).

Hughes' reference to the "top of the mountain" has biblical and secular connotations; it compares the black artist to the prophet Moses on the mountain and to John Winthrop and his futurist model of a city upon a hill. By comparison, Hughes relates the black self to larger theocratic and secular imaginaries of America, thus inscribing the black poet into an 'American' modernist and progressive discourse. Through acts of comparing, writers and intellectuals like Locke and Hughes challenged the ruling geopolitics of knowledge from their peripheral positioning.

The Mask and Practices of Comparing in African American Cultural Production

As a cultural and political movement, the Harlem Renaissance resisted fixed structures.

The writers, activists, and intellectuals worked within networks and searched for new dialogical ways of interaction. In this way, the first Black Arts Movement developed a self-reflexive dimension in which identity, social structures, cultural expressions, and ways of being were discussed and questioned. By confronting the power hierarchies of the literary and cultural industry and filtering the colonial baggage and stigmatization of 'black inferiority,' these black thinkers and artists had to act boldly, becoming inventive and playful to challenge the mainstream. 'Masking' manifested itself as a central practice through which self-positioning and comparative ways of thinking unfolded in the Harlem Renaissance. Already in 1895, Paul Laurence Dunbar had written his poem "We Wear the mask," a reflection of the cultural dissembling that is at the core of this practice. The poem gives voice to decades of black masking during times of conquest, slavery, and reconstruction.

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask! (n.pag.)

Dunbar's meditation on masking gives voice to what African Americans have experienced from slavery, through Jim Crow, and until the contemporary period. Psychological masking is a way to protect one's inner self and the thought system of one's group (cf. Hills 217). The practice of masking is shared by other colonized people, e.g. in the Caribbean. Frantz Fanon explained the whitening efforts among his countrymen in the Antilles through cultural displacement. Once

the black subject starts moving among white people, he becomes self-conscious that he is measured by different norms than those in his community. Fanon's thought bears similarities to W.E.B DuBois "double consciousness"—an awareness of constantly looking at one's self through the eyes of the other.

This self-reflexive attitude is at the very base of black thinking in the Americas and influenced the practices of comparing at work in Harlem Renaissance cultural production. In Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s, masks as material artefact occupied a special place in the community. Exhibitions of African masks, sculptures, and ornamentation were regularly mounted at the 135th street branch of the Public Library, as well as in the galleries of midtown and downtown Manhattan. To artists and intellectuals like Alain Locke and Aaron Douglas, African masks not only made reference to ancestral legacy, but were also signs of the African importance for the development of modernist art throughout the Western world (Hills 210). In reference to Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Henry L. Gates Jr. explains that "[t]he Cubist mask of modernism covers a black Bantu face. African art—ugly, primitive, debased in 1900; sublime, complex, valorized by 1910 was transformed so dramatically in the cultural imagination of the West" (163). The mask became a touchstone for African American art from the Harlem Renaissance into the contemporary period. However, it is the *reinvention* of the mask as an abstract literary and artistic tool to *do* and *un-do* comparisons in the works by the Afro-Caribbean poet Claude McKay, the African American poet Langston Hughes, and the African American painter Aaron Douglas that marked the most distinctive challenges to white culture and power 'from within': actors.

Claude McKay, Jamaican poet and leading literary figure of the Harlem Renaissance, published "If We Must Die" in 1919 in the July issue of *The Liberator*. McKay wrote the poem in response to mob attacks by white Americans on African American individuals and communities during the race riots of the so-called Red Summer. The riots were the outcome of post-World War I social tensions in numerous cities throughout the United States. The return of

African American soldiers from Europe and increasing competition in the job market lead to another racist, violent explosion. McKay used the literary mask of the sonnet to address the violent tensions and challenge white norms and standards. The poem's language is the iambic pentameter and it consists of 14 lines with a complex rhyme scheme. It has three quatrains: the first of a,b, a,b rhyme scheme, the second of c/d, c/d, and the third of e/f, e/f, and a concluding couplet of g/g. The intricate and strict form mimics order and control. The poem's opening line repeats comparative practices of the white supremacists comparing black people to "hogs." The poetic speaker echoes white racism. The comparisons shifts from animals to humans as blacks become humanized: "Oh Kinsmen..." "like men." In contrast, white people turn from being compared to hunters into "mad dogs."

McKay includes direct and indirect suggestive practices of comparing; he masters the form of the sonnet but changes its content. The conventional theme of love in the sonnet tradition turns into a social, cultural, and political appeal. McKay's sonnet is a call to resist. On the level of reflectivity, McKay compares himself, through the mask of the Shakespearian sonnet, to the canonized writers of the Anglo-Saxon tradition. However, this comparison implies a reversal of power. McKay masters the form skillfully, but transfers it to new levels of meaning. The Shakespearian sonnet dwells on love, courtship, and romance; the sonnet by McKay focuses on oppression, negation, and violent resistance. The love it expresses is for a black brotherhood goes beyond national boundaries. It is a call for black Pan-African nationalism, as the calling to "kinsmen" highlights. 'The New Negro' in McKay's vision is a collective movement connecting multiple black cultures:

If we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry
dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be
shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy

Shall be constrained to honor us though
 dead!
 Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common
 foe;
 Though far outnumbered, let us show us
 brave,
 And for their thousand blows deal one
 deathblow!
 What though before us lies the open
 grave?
 Like men we'll face the murderous,
 cowardly pack,
 Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting
 back! (290)

Langston Hughes's poem "I Too" was first published in 1926. Similar to McKay, Hughes also chooses a masking strategy to challenge the white modernist discourse of Anglo-Saxon America. In the poem, practices of comparing work on the level of authorship and citizenship are embedded in a reflective mode. Hughes' title already refers to Du Bois' notion of twoness and double consciousness. Declaring himself the darker brother, the black poetic voice claims blood ties, citizenship, and communal belonging. As the short poem unfolds, Hughes describes a ubiquitous scene of domestic racism, against which he sets an initial comparison. In free verse form, the black poetic voice of a seemingly domestic servant addresses his master household. The comparison expressed through "darker brother" is simple and powerful. 'The New Negro' is conceived in communal, political, and aesthetic terms: "How beautiful I am." (257) Hughes continues a step further from the familial/social/aesthetic to comparisons on the level of authorship. Writing through the mask of Whitmanesque self-celebratory expression and adopting the latter's free verse style for African American poetry, Hughes compares himself to Walt Whitman as a poet and citizen, the canonically acclaimed founding father of modern poetry. The domestic servant's poetic voice not only claims black equality, it celebrates the beauty of blackness in Whitman's style of self-embrace.

The Whitmanesque mask provides an authorial space for bold cultural and social claims. Hughes uses it to refer to the blackening of America through music from the slavery to the Jazz age.

"I, too, sing America" claims black authorship for Modern American artistic expression (257). At first glimpse, merely a simple intertextual reference to the famous opening of Whitman's "Song of Myself," the verb in the context of the Harlem Renaissance actually expresses a celebration of African American oral and musical culture. Hughes' textual practice of comparing lifts African American folk culture into the realm of modernist American literature and culture. His singing voice is as biblical as Whitman's, but his sources are spiritual, blues, and jazz. Underneath the surface of the Whitmanesque modern American utopia, Hughes inserts dissidence (laughter) and expands utopian ideals with a strong belief in social change.

I, too, sing America.

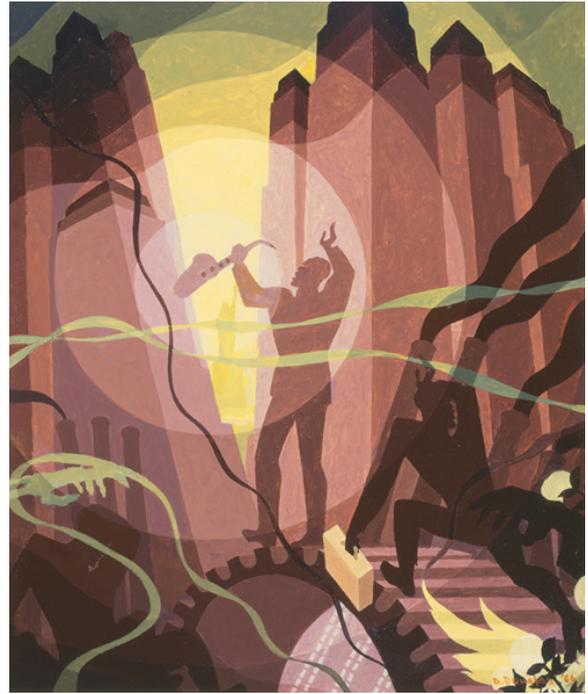
I am the darker brother.
 They send me to eat in the kitchen
 When company comes,
 But I laugh,
 And eat well,
 And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
 I'll be at the table
 When company comes.
 Nobody'll dare
 Say to me,
 "Eat in the kitchen,"
 Then.

Besides,
 They'll see how beautiful I am
 And be ashamed— (257)

These examples from Hughes and McKay reveal that the literary mask, at the level of form and voice, serves multiple purposes. The mask provides a safe aesthetic space to claim mastery of knowledge and form in order to push the comparison of the self with the accomplished master in the field of cultural production. The abstract literary mask 'tongue-in-cheek' allows the poet to subvert and expand the acknowledged and canonized literary expression for his own aesthetic, cultural, and political claims. It also provides a superb medium to designate reflexivity on blackness as a public concern.

Strategies of ‘masking’ and the use of masks shared an equally powerful presence in the Harlem music and cabaret scene (double entendre) and especially in the visual arts. The painter Aaron Douglas was arguably the most prolific African American painter to use masks and develop ‘masking’ strategies as a counterpoint to white hegemonic visions of blackness. ‘The New Negro’ in Douglas’ work came in hybrid African American/African attire. Aaron Douglas’ artistic inclinations included experimental modernist forms like Braque’s and Picasso’s cubism, Winold Reiss’ modernization of folk painting, and African art. Many black figures in Douglas’ paintings show faces modelled on masks of the Dan people of Liberia in Africa, their personality concealed, silhouettes of strong bodies represented in a rather abstract artistic expression. Douglas concealed individuality to let a collective narrative and history emerge. He cherished cubist dynamics of form and Cubism as well as a modern and avant-garde style; this served Douglas as a painted mask to look beyond Eurocentric visions of modernity to comparisons of contemporary black culture with African culture, particularly Egyptian culture. Commercially, the cubist mask opened a path into the American art world and he was subsequently commissioned to paint murals for the New York Public Library. The murals demonstrated that Douglas saw himself equally capable of adapting African art as the European masters of cubism at the time, Picasso and Braque. Yet Douglas was not paying homage to Western modernist art. Douglas used the mask in cubist style to celebrate black art and history from ancient Egypt to present black art of Harlem. His figures of African and African American art and folk art merge in mask and silhouette-like presentations of blackness. His painterly practices of comparing built on the *comparata* Egypt and Black America(s), not on the *comparata* Black America(s) and Europe. Douglas created a complex vision of ‘The New Negro,’ presented in *Aspects of Negro Life*, a series of four murals sponsored by the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA). *Song of the Towers* (1934) is arguably the most modern of the four.



(image Aaron Douglas Song of the Towers)

The murals collectively outline black history from its African roots through the Great Migration; *Song of the Towers* tells a story of the conflicted black struggle with modernity. Complex and multi-layered, *Song of the Towers* relies on graphic designs as well as patterns of geometric shapes and, thus, speaks through the practices of cubist painting. People and things appear in abstracted fashion. Dominating the mural’s center are concentric circles, framed by jutting rectangular prisms. Through this careful improvisation of various forms, Douglas unfolds a narrative that catapults the black figures into the whirlwind of modern, urban machinery. In a comparative yet relational way, cubist abstraction shows the dispossessed and the rising, the human and the machine, the left behind ‘Old Negro’ and the rising ‘New Negro’ in the center. In setting his black figures in a mix of Cubist inspired dynamic forms, Douglas reflects the black origins of modernist art. The black figures, albeit, are still struggling to claim their position in the setting of modern metropolis.

Song of Towers wistfully celebrates the triumph of black artistic expression in the Harlem Renaissance. Douglas shows himself mastering Cubist modernism, the black musician in the center alludes to the musical blackening of Harlem and America during the heydays of Race

Records in the 1920s. Nevertheless, the struggle against history, the wheel of modernization, and the over-towering presence of metropolitan architecture- the upward-gazing central black figure- suggests that a complete black arrival is still “a dream deferred” (Hughes 221). This interpretation is further supported by the contours of The Statue of Liberty rather removed in size and position. The mural intricately compares dream and reality, myth and history; the result is abstraction and ambiguity. Like McKay and Hughes, Douglas displays mastery of form. Like other literary figures, he used the master form to unfold a self-reflexive discourse on blackness—noting that all murals manifest of diversity within blackness and relate different shades of blackness with a long trajectory of African diaspora history. The mastery of form gives Douglas the authority to speak for the modernist community, yet raises a racial critique on modernity. In the state-commissioned mural *The Song of Towers*, Douglas cannily inserted a critical yet self-empowering black modernist vision. By comparing and relating different figures and stages of African American history with the emergence of the modern metropolis, Douglas reveals the cracks within modernist American utopian design; he continues to push a concept of ‘the New Negro’ that lies outside of Euro-American practices of comparing white versus black. His black figures demonstrate a difference within blackness in terms of history and identity. Africa and the African diaspora in the Americas serve as *comparata* reference points.

Concluding Remarks

Resulting from an editorial board meeting of the Harlem magazine *Fire!!*, Aaron Douglas penned an artistic statement in 1925:

We are group conscious. We are primarily and intensely devoted to art. We believe that the Negro is fundamentally, essentially different from their Nordic neighbors. We are proud of that difference. We believe these differences to be greater spiritual endowment, greater sensitivity, greater power for artistic expression and appreciation (qtd. in Kirschke 122).

Reflexivity characterizes Douglas’s manifesto.

The gaze is inward. It is a reflection on the black self, the black collective, and their relatedness. His comparison between black and white cultures is based on gradual difference and he concludes an affirmation of black superiority. Douglas’s emphatic message signals a difference along the lines of emotion, spirituality, and aesthetics, while presenting a radical reversal of white supremacy paradigms. The above quote from Douglas also shows that the emphasis on black differences as an essentialist strategy helped to challenge normative practices of comparing that order the world. While ‘masking’ strategies meant an appropriation of white master models, the performativity within it allowed for in-group reflectivity, a multitude of affirmative ‘New Negroes,’ and a chance for new comparative models within black cultures. This created an understanding of deep and complex entanglements between black cultures and a *tertium* of blackness beyond colonial histories and racial baggage.

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