KU LEUVEN
FACULTY OF ARTS
BLIJDE INKOMSTSTRAAT 21 BOX 3301
3000 LEUVEN, BELGIË

Molly Spotted Elk (1903-1977) and the Surrealists

Transatlantic Modernisms in Interwar Paris

Charlotte Victoria Greenaway

Presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Art History

Supervisor: dr. Laurens Dhaenens

Academic year 2022-2023

245 229 characters

KU LEUVEN
FACULTY OF ARTS
BLIJDE INKOMSTSTRAAT 21 BOX 3301
3000 LEUVEN, BELGIË

I hereby declare that, in line with the Faculty of Arts' code of conduct for research integrity, the work submitted here is my own original work and that any additional sources of information have been duly cited.

Summary

Molly Spotted Elk (1903-1977) was a Penobscot dancer, writer and actress. She travelled from New York to Paris in 1931 to dance at the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale*. Her diaries from when she was in Paris, from 1931 until 1934, highlight how this transatlantic travel influenced her dance and vision on what it means to be modern. As a Native-American woman her dance was greatly appreciated in Paris, even though her person was exoticized by its audiences. Her accounts reveal that she spent time at and had considerable influence on Paul Rivet (1876-1958) and Georges Henri Rivière's (1897-1985) renovation of the ethnographic museum at the Trocadéro palace, and Marcel Mauss' (1872-1950) *Institut d'Ethnologie*. Both were institutions at which French Surrealists also held a growing stake in the 1930s and that were elementary in the development of their vision on the discourse of "primitivism".

This thesis asks why a profound interaction between Molly Spotted Elk and Surrealism never occurred and what this reveals about either's "modernism". In the first place, I show how Molly Spotted Elk's vision on modernity developed from her stay in Paris. I argue that she established a counter modernism in her dance practice which united French frameworks and her Native-American roots. This counter modernism, in which a "double consciousness" is implicated, reveals the value of looking beyond classic narratives of "modernism" in art history. French Surrealism to me makes up such a classic narrative. This argument is further developed through taking up examples of other "outsider-modernist" female artists in interwar Paris: Brazilian painter Tarsila Do Amaral (1886-1973) and African American/Narragansett painter and sculptor Nancy Elizabeth Prophet (1890-1960). Secondly, I ask where Molly Spotted Elk's existence and dance practice intersected and diverged from French Surrealism and what this shows about the latter's engagement with Native-American form and myth. This question becomes the basis for a critical analysis of French Surrealist "primitivism".

Table of Contents

Bibliography

Primary sources

Unpublished primary sources

Breton, André. “The Hopi Notebook.” Nevada, 1945. BRT101. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.

Coze, Paul. “Album Paul Coze.” Paris, 1939-1929. PA000514. Archives du musée du quai Branly, Paris.

Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner. “Dossier: Spotted Elk: Katah-Din.” Paris, June 15, 1939. Box 2, folder 12. Molly Spotted Elk Collection (MF079). Fogler Library Special Collections and Archives. Maine University, Orono, Maine.

Paalen, Wolfgang. Letter to André Breton. “Ta lettre de Vermillieu me parvient à Vancouver...” Vancouver, August 21, 1939. BRTC2232. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.

Prophet, Nancy Elizabeth. “Letter from Elizabeth Prophet to W. E. B. Du Bois, November 14, 1931.” W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives. University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, Amherst, Massachusetts. https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b060-i352.

———. “Paris Diary of Nancy Elizabeth Prophet,” 1922-1932. Brown Archival & Manuscript Collections Online. Library of Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:786291/.

Spotted Elk, Molly. *Molly Spotted Elk’s Diaries from 1929-1933*. Box 7. Molly Spotted Elk Collection (MF079). Fogler Library Special Collections and Archives. Maine University, Orono, Maine.

Published primary sources

Archambaud, Jean. “Cependant qu’on inaugure la Maison de Washington à Vincennes.” Paris Soir, May 27, 1931. Gallica.

———.“Une mission française va partir pour tenter de sauver des races condamnées.” Paris-Soir, March 18, 1931. Gallica.

Au grand air: guide du campeur et du touriste. “Pour la première fois, une Indienne consent à dévoiler les ‘secrets’ de l’endurance physique de sa race.” May 25, 1939. Gallica.

Breton, André, Paul Eluard, Benjamin Péret, and Georges Sadoul. “Ne Visitez-Pas l’Exposition Coloniale,” May 1, 1931. Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou.

———. “Premier bilan de l’exposition coloniale,” July 3, 1931. Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou.

Doumergue, Gaston. "Annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 31 mars 1931: Projet de loi adopté par la chambre des députés autorisant le ministre de l’Instruction publique et des Beaux-Arts à participer aux frais de l’organisation de la mission Dakar-Djibouti", Pub. L. No. 410, Publicized formally in *Impressions: projets, propositions, rapports...* (1931). Gallica.

G., Georges. “Peaux-Rouges d’Hier et Aujourd’hui.” *Record: grand journal hebdomadaire*, May 23, 1931. Gallica.

Griaule, Marcel. “La mission Dakar-Djibouti.” *Bulletin mensuel de l’Association française pour l’avancement des sciences*, January 1, 1934. Gallica.

La Critique cinématographique. "Echos sur le C.I.C." September 24, 1932. Gallica.

Mauny, Jaques. "Cleaning Up the Paris Trocadero." *The New York Times*, January 4, 1931. New York Times Archive.

Omer, Georges. "L'auteur d'Impressions d'Afrique fait don de 10.000 francs à la mission Dakar-Djibouti." *Paris-soir*, February 15, 1931. Gallica.

Paris-Midi. "Les Arts: Peinture Exotique." June 10, 1926. Gallica.

Paris-soir. "Sous l'oeil des agents." April 29, 1931. Gallica.

Richard, Marius. "L'art Indien va-t-il remplacer l'art nègre?" *La Liberté*, October 20, 1932. Gallica.

Rivet, Paul. "Wakanda, cercle d'art et d'études Peaux-Rouges." *Journal de la Société des américanistes* 26, no. 1 (1934): 203.

Robert, Artus. "Le Pavillon Américain." *Le Journal de l'Exposition Coloniale*, June 1, 1931. Gallica.

Rondelet. "Le boxeur nègre Al Brown..." *L'Écho de Paris*, November 22, 1930. Gallica.

Saurel, Louis. "Les Vedettes de Couleur." *Les Dimanches de la Femme*, December 25, 1932. Gallica.

Shör. "Spotted Elk 'L'Elan Moucheté.'" *Pour Vous/ L'Intran: L'Hebdomadaire Du Cinéma*, September 17, 1931. La Cinémathèque de Toulouse.

The New York Herald (European edition). "Indians on the Tower." August 10, 1889. Gallica.

The New York Times. "Buffalo Bill Returns with His Sioux Braves." October 2, 1906. New York Times Archive.

Unknown. "Les boxeurs s'intéressent à la mission Griaule." *Les Annales coloniales: organe de la "France coloniale moderne,"* April 13, 1931. Gallica.

Secondary sources

Articles

Adamowicz, Elza. "Surrealizing Wifredo Lam?" *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 58, no. 1 (January 1, 2022): 106–19. https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqac008.

Altman, Meryl. "Was Surrealism a Humanism? The Case of Michel Leiris." *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 67, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 47–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/00397709.2013.762855.

Anderson, Stephanie. "Manhood, Literary Heroes and Ethnographic Expeditioning In Michel Leiris's *L'Afrique Fantome*." *Canberra Anthropology* 21, no. 2 (October 1, 1998): 60–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/03149099809508366.

Andrade, Oswald de, and Stella M. de Sá Rego. "Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry." *Latin American Literary Review* 14, no. 27 (1986): 184–87.

Bannan, Helen M. "Review of *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, by Bunny McBride." *American Indian Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (1998): 515–17. https://doi.org/10.2307/1184851.

Berliner, Brett A. “Dancing Dangerously: Colonizing the Exotic at the Bal Nègre in the Inter-War Years.” *French Cultural Studies* 12, no. 34 (2001): 059–075. https://doi.org/10.1177/095715580101203404.

Blake, Jody. “The Truth about the Colonies, 1931: *Art Indigène* in Service of the Revolution.” *Oxford Art Journal* 25, no. 1 (2002): 35–58.

Bollenot, Vincent. “ « Ne Visitez Pas l’exposition Coloniale! » La Campagne Contre l’exposition Coloniale Internationale de 1931, Un Moment Anti-Impérialiste.” *French Colonial History* 18 (2019): 69–99.

Britton, Celia. “Ethnography as Relation: The Significance of the French Caribbean in the Ethnographic Writing of Michel Leiris.” *French Studies* 66, no. 1 (2012): 41–53. https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/knr201.

Clarck-Taoua, Phyllis. “In Search of New Skin: Michel Leiris’s *L’Afrique Fantôme*.” *Cahiers d’études Africaines* 42, no. 167 (2002): 479–98. https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafricaines.153.

Clifford, James. “On Ethnographic Surrealism.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (1981): 539–64.

Conley, Katharine. “Value and Hidden Cost in André Breton’s Surrealist Collection.” *South Central Review* 32, no. 1 (2015): 8–22.

Cowling, Elizabeth. “The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists.” *Art History* 1, no. 4 (1978): 484–500. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.1978.tb00029.x.

Debaene, Vincent. “Les surréalistes et le musée d’ethnographie.” *Labyrinthe*, no. 12 (June 30, 2002): 71–94. https://doi.org/10.4000/labyrinthe.1209.

Foster, Hal. “The ‘Primitive’ Unconscious of Modern Art.” *October* 34 (1985): 45–70. https://doi.org/10.2307/778488.

Geis, Terri. “Myth, History and Repetition: André Breton and Vodou in Haiti.” *South Central Review* 32, no. 1 (2015): 56–75.

Henderson, Mae G. “Josephine Baker and La Revue Nègre: From Ethnography to Performance.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (April 1, 2003). https://doi.org/10.1080/1046293032000141338.

Hodeir, Catherine. “La « Fée électricité » à l’Exposition coloniale de Paris (1931).” *Outre-Mers. Revue d’histoire* 89, no. 334 (2002): 55–69. https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.2002.3924.

Horton, Jessica L. “Performing Paint, Claiming Space: The Santa Fe Indian School Posters on Paul Coze’s Stage in Paris, 1935.” *Transatlantica. Revue d’études Américaines. American Studies Journal*, no. 2 (December 31, 2017). https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.11220.

Kavky, Samantha. “Authorship and Identity in Max Ernst’s Loplop.” *Art History* 28, no. 3 (2005): 357–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0141-6790.2005.00468.x.

Kealiinohomoku, Joann W. “Review of *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, by Bunny McBride.” *Dance Research Journal* 29, no. 2 (1997): 92–95. https://doi.org/10.2307/1478737.

Kucich, John J. “Lost in the Maine Woods: Henry David Thoreau, Joseph Nicolar, and the Penobscot World.” *The Concord Saunterer* 19/20 (2011): 22–52.

Larson, Ruth. “Ethnography, Thievery, and Cultural Identity: A Rereading of Michel Leiris’s L’Afrique Fantôme.” *PMLA* 112, no. 2 (1997): 229–42.

Leclercq, Sophie. “Le Colonialisme Mis à Nu. Quand Les Surréalistes Démythifiaient La France Coloniale (1919-1962).” *Revue Historique* 310, no. 2 (2008): 315–36.

Lento, Mzukisi. “Rethinking the Concept of Double Consciousness in Du Bois’ The Souls of Black Folks (1903).” *Journal of Literary Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 52–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/02564718.2021.1959761.

Lemaire, Marianne. “Deborah Lifchitz, une carrière d’ethnologue française dans l’entre-deux-guerres.” *Revue d’histoire des sciences humaines*, no. 35 (December 15, 2019): 197–213. https://doi.org/10.4000/rhsh.4247.

Lottini, Irene. “When Buffalo Bill Crossed the Ocean: Native-American Scenes in Early Twentieth Century European Culture.” *European Journal of American Culture* 31, no. 3 (October 18, 2012): 187–203. https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac.31.3.187_1.

Majluf, Natalia. “‘Ce n’est Pas Le Pérou,’ or, the Failure of Authenticity: Marginal Cosmopolitans at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1855.” Critical Inquiry 23, no. 4 (1997): 868–93.

Mathews, Nancy Mowll. “Gauguin, Buffalo Bill, and the Cowboy Hat.” *Transatlantica. Revue d’études Américaines. American Studies Journal*, no. 2 (December 31, 2017). https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.10968.

Mathur, Saloni. “Response: Belonging to Modernism.” *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 558–60.

Mauzé, Marie. “Trois Destinées, Un Destin. Biographie d’une Coiffure Kwakwaka’wakw.” *Gradhiva: Revue d’histoire et d’archives de l’anthropologie*, no. 7 (2008): 100–119.

———. “Odes à l’art de la côte Nord-Ouest. Surréalisme et ethnographie.” *Gradhiva. Revue d’anthropologie et d’histoire des arts*, no. 26 (December 6, 2017): 180–209. https://doi.org/10.4000/gradhiva.3467.

———. “Totemic Landscapes and Vanishing Cultures.” Journal of Surrealism and the Americas, no. 2 (2008): 1–24.

McEvilley, Thomas. “Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief: “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art” at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984.” Artforum 23, no. 3 (November 1984): 54–61.

Meethan, Kevin. “Touring the Other: Buffalo Bill’s Wild West in Europe.” *Journal of Tourism History* 2, no. 2 (August 1, 2010): 117–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/1755182X.2010.498588.

Mitter, Partha. “Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery.” *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 531–48.

Oberholtzer, Cath. “Review of *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, by Bunny McBride.” *Ethnohistory* 44, no. 1 (1997): 143–44. https://doi.org/10.2307/482906.

Price, Sally, and Jean Jamin. “A Conversation with Michel Leiris.” *Current Anthropology*, February 1, 1988. https://doi.org/10.1086/203622.

Rabate, Jean-Michel. “Loving Freud Madly: Surrealism between Hysterical and Paranoid Modernism.” *Journal of Modern Literature* 25, no. 3–4 (June 22, 2002): 58–76.

Rosaldo, Renato. “Imperialist Nostalgia.” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 107–22. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928525.

Savage, William W. “Review of *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, by Bunny McBride.” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (1997): 556–57. https://doi.org/10.2307/2171004.

Becker, Alida. “Books In Brief: Nonfiction; A Native-American In Paris.” *The New York Times*, October 29, 1995, sec. Books. New York Times Archive.

Simioni, Ana Paula Cavalcanti. “Primitivisms in Dispute: Production and Reception of the Works of Two Brazilian Artists in Paris in the 1920s.” *Modernism/Modernity Print Plus*, August 23, 2021. https://modernismmodernity.org/articles/simioni-primitivisms-in-dispute.

Stokes, Charlotte. “Surrealist Persona: Max Ernst’s ‘Loplop, Superior of Birds.’” Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art 13, no. 3/4 (1983): 225–34. https://doi.org/10.2307/3780542.

Vizenor, Gerald. “The Ruins of Representation: Shadow Survivance and the Literature of Dominance.” *American Indian Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1993): 7–30. https://doi.org/10.2307/1184777.

Books

Aleiss, Angela. *Making the White Man’s Indian: Native-Americans and Hollywood Movies*. Westport: Praeger, 2005. Internet Archive.

Amaral, Aracy A. *Tarsila, Sua Obra e Seu Tempo*. 3rd ed. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2003.

Aragon, Louis. "Mars op Vincennes (1931)." In *Koloniale inspiratie*, edited by Marieke Bloembergen, 234-239. Amsterdam: Brill, 2004. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004489172_040.

———. "De Keerzijde van 1931 (1977)." In *Koloniale inspiratie*, edited by Marieke Bloembergen, 233-234. Amsterdam: Brill, 2004. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004489172_040.

Bataille, Georges. “The Notion of Expenditure.” In *The Bataille Reader*, edited by Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, 167-181. Blackwell Readers. Oxford/ Malden: Blackwell, 1997.

Belting, Hans, Andrea Buddensieg, Peter Weibel, and Peter Weibel. *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*. Karlsruhe: ZKM, Center for Art and Media, 2013.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Birnbaum, Phyllis. *Glory in a Line: A Life of Foujita: The Artist Caught between East & West.* New York: Faber and Faber, 2006. Internet Archive.

Bloembergen, Marieke. “De antikoloniale tentoonstelling, 1883–1932.” In *Koloniale inspiratie*, 217–23. Amsterdam: Brill, 2004. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004489172_040.

Bogdal, Klaus-Michael. “‘Eine Zigeunerin ist keine Konkurrenz für dich’ Der vergessene französische Filmstar Tela Tchaï/ Martha Winterstein. Eine Spurensuche.” In *Ästhetik(en) der Roma*, edited by Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf and Kirsten von Hagen, 185–201. München: Akademische Verlagsgemeinschaft München, 2020.

Bois, W. E. B. Du. *The Problem of the Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780823254576.

———. *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co. Gutenberg.

Bold, Christine. *Vaudeville Indians On Global Circuits, 1880s-1930s*, 177–92. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300264906.

Bordewich, Fergus M. *Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing of Native-Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1996. Internet Archive.

Bouvet, Vincent, and Gérard Durozoi. *Paris, 1919-1939: Art et Culture*. Paris: Hazan, 2009.

Breton, André. "The Second Manifesto of Surrealism (1930)." In *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, 117–95. Ann Arbor Paperbacks 182. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972.

_____, Roger Caillois, René Char, René Crevel, Paul Eluard, J-M Monnerot, Benjamin Péret, et al. "Murderous Humanitarianism." In *Negro: An Anthology*, edited by Nancy Cunard, translated by Samuel Beckett. New York: F. Ungar Publishing Company, 1970.

Bureau, Jacques. "La Mission Dakar-Djibouti (1931-1933)." In *Marcel Cohen et ses successeurs ou Cent ans d'études éthiopiennes en France*, 11–15. Bulletins de la Maison des études éthiopiennes. Addis Abbeba: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2016. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.cfee.524.

Burke, John M. "*Buffalo Bill" from Prairie to Palace: An Authentic History of the Wild West*, 1893. Gutenberg.

Burns, Emily C. *Transnational Frontiers: The American West in France*. The Charles M. Russell Center Series on Art and Photography of the American West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018.

Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674503724.

———. "Mixed Feelings." In *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, edited by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, 362–70. Cultural Politics Series 14. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998.

Coleman, William S. E. *Voices of Wounded Knee*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. Internet Archive.

Créteur, Pauline. "Etre Une Artiste Étrangère à Paris Dans Les Années 1920." In *Pionnières: Artistes Dans Le Paris Des Années Folles*, edited by Camille Morineau and Lucia Pesapane, 40–66. Paris: Musée du Luxembourg Sénat, 2022.

Décoret-Ahiha, Anne. *Les danses exotiques en France: 1880 - 1940.* Recherches. Pantin: Centre national de la danse, 2004.

Delpuech, André, and Christine Laurière, eds. *Les années folles de l'ethnographie: Trocadéro 28-37*. Collection archives. Paris: Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, 2017.

Deutch, Miriam, and Jack D. Flam. *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History.* The Documents of Twentieth Century Art. Berkeley: University of California press, 2003.

Eburne, Jonathan P. "Decolonial Surrealism." In *Surrealism*, edited by Natalya Lusty, 342–62. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108862639.020.

Ellingson, Ter. *The Myth of the Noble Savage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520925922.

Eluard, Paul. “Savage Art (1929).” In *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, edited by Miriam Deutch and Jack D. Flam, 209–11. The Documents of Twentieth Century Art. Berkeley: University of California press, 2003.

Ezra, Elizabeth. *The Colonial Unconscious. Race and Culture in interwar France*, 97–128. New York: Cornell University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501724046.

Farrington, Lisa E. *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Fawcett, Melissa Jayne. *Medicine Trail: The Life and Lessons of Gladys Tantaquidgeon*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000. Internet Archive.

Foster, Hal. *Compulsive Beauty*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. 6th print. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Goldwater, Robert. *Primitivism in Modern Art*. *Primitivism in Modern Art*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

Gombrich, E. H. *The Preference for the Primitive: Episodes in the History of Western Taste and Art*. London/ New York: Phaidon, 2002.

Greenhalgh, Paul. *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World’s Fairs 1851-1939.* Studies in Imperialism. Manchester: Manchester University press, 1988.

Greet, Michele. “‘Exhilarating Exile’: Four Latin American Women Exhibit in Paris.” In *Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris between the Wars*, 122–45. Newhaven/ London: Yale University Press, 2018.

———. “For French Eyes: Tarsila Do Amaral’s Brazillian Landscapes.” In *Tarsila Do Amaral, Cannibalizing Modernism*, edited by Adriano Pedrosa and Fernando Oliva, Revised edition., 116–31. São Paulo: MASP, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 2019.

Habermas, Jurgen. “Modernity: An Unfinished Project.” In *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, edited by Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib, 1–38. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997.

Harney, Elizabeth, and Ruth B. Phillips. *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*. Objects/Histories: Critical Perspectives on Art, Material Culture, and Representation. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822372615.

Hodeir, Catherine, and Michel Pierre. *L’exposition coloniale: 1931*. Mémoire du siècle 58. Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 1991.

Jessup, Lynda, ed. *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

Junyk, Ihor. *Foreign Modernism: Cosmopolitanism, Identity, and Style in Paris*. *Foreign Modernism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442662018.

Kai, Mikkonen. “Out of Europe: The African Palimpsest in Michel Leiris’s *L’Afrique Fantôme*.” In *Narrative Paths: African Travel in Modern Fiction and Nonfiction*, 240–65. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2015. https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/30/oa_monograph/book/38735.

Leininger-Miller, Theresa A. *New Negro Artists in Paris: African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light, 1922-1934*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001. Internet Archive.

Leiris, Michel. *L'Afrique fantôme: De Dakar à Djibouti, 1931-1933*. Paris: Gallimard, 1968.

———. "The Sacred in Daily Life (Le Sacré Dans La Vie Quotidienne), 1938." In *The College of Sociology, 1937-39: 41*, edited by Denis Hollier. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Lemke, Sieglinde. *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism*. Oxford /New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Internet Archive.

Lepecki, André. *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. New York/ London: Routledge, 2006. Internet Archive.

Lifchitz, Deborah. *Textes éthiopiens magico-religieux*. Paris: Institut D'Ethnologie, 1940. Gallica.

MacDougall, Pauleena. *The Penobscot Dance of Resistance: Tradition in the History of a People*. Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2004. Internet Archive.

Maddra, Sam. *Hostiles?: The Lakota Ghost Dance and Buffalo Bill's Wild West*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006.

McBride, Bunny. *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.

McLean, Adrienne, and David Cook. *Headline Hollywood: A Century of Film Scandal*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001. Internet Archive.

McNenly, Linda Scarangella. *Native Performers in Wild West Shows: From Buffalo Bill to Euro Disney*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012. Internet Archive.

Mitter, Partha. *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922-1947*. London: Reaktion books, 2007.

Morton, Patricia. *Hybrid Modernities : Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000. Internet Archive.

Nadeau, Maurice. *The History of Surrealism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. Internet Archive.

Nochlin, Linda. "Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation." In *Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation*, 37–58. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822379829-004.

Noland, Carrie. *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*. *Agency and Embodiment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Norindr, Panivong. "3. The 'Surrealist' Counter-Exposition: La Verite Sur Les Colonies." In *Phantasmatic Indochina*, 52–71. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822379799-005.

Pedrosa, Adriano, and Fernando Oliva, eds. *Tarsila Do Amaral, Cannibalizing Modernism*. Revised edition. São Paulo, Brazil: MASP, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 2019.

Peltier-Caroff, Caroline. "Un Potlatch Au Trocadero. Paul Coze Indianiste Ethnographe." In *Les années folles de l'ethnographie: Trocadéro 28-37*, edited by André Delpuech and Christine Laurière, 481–538. Collection archives. Paris: Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, 2017.

Penny, H. Glenn. “Not Playing Indian. Surrogate Indigeneity and the German Hobbyist Scene.” In *Performing Indigeneity Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences*, edited by Laura R. Graham, 169–205. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015.

Phillips, Ruth B. “Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture.” In *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, edited by Lynda Jessup, 26–50. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

Phipps, Peter. “Michel Leiris: Master of Ethnographic Failure.” In *Celebrating Transgression: Method and Politics in Anthropological Studies of Cultures*, edited by Ursula Rao and John Hutnyk, 183–95. New York/ Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005. Google Books.

Rentzou, Effie. “The Surrealist World.” In *Surrealism*, edited by Natalya Lusty, 31–45. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108862639.002.

Rushing, W. Jackson. “TEN Being Modern, Becoming Native: George Morrison’s Surrealist Journey Home.” in *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*, edited by Ruth B. Phillips, 259-281. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822372615-014.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Scee, Trudy Irene. *Dancing in Paradise, Burning in Hell: Women in Maine’s Historic Working Class Dance Industry*. Camden: Down East Books, 2016. Internet Archive.

Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300153569.

Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean. *Bricktop’s Paris: African American Women in Paris between the Two World Wars*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015. Internet Archive.

Silver, Kenneth E. *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Spies, Werner. *Max Ernst - Loplop: The Artist’s Other Self.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1983.

Spotted Elk, Molly. *Katahdin: Wigwam’s Tales of the Abnaki Tribe and a Dictionary of Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Words with French and English Translations. by Molly Spotted Elk*. Northeast Folklore v. 37. Orono: Maine Folklife Center, 2003.

Stansell, Amanda. “Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of ‘Reason’: Whiteness, Primitivism and Négritude.” In *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is about You.” In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 123–51. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Troutman, John W. “Joe Shunatona and the United States Indian Reservation Orchestra.” In *Indigenous Pop: Native-American Music from Jazz to Hip Hop*, edited by Jeff Berglund, 17–32. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2016. Google Books.

Turner, Elizabeth Hutton. *American Artists in Paris 1919 - 1929.* Studies in the Fine Arts: The Avant-Garde 62. Ann Arbor: Umi research press, 1988.

Tythacott, Louise. *Surrealism and the Exotic*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Vizenor, Gerald. “4. Native-American Irony: Survivance and the Subversion of Ethnography.” In *Race and Cultural Practice in Popular Culture*, 76–88. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.36019/9781978801349-006.

———. “11. Native-American Narratives: Resistance and Survivance.” In *A Companion to American Fiction, 1865-1914,* edited by Robert Paul Lamb and Gary Richard Thompson. Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture. Malden/ Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2005.

Warren, Louis S. *Buffalo Bill’s America: William Cody and the Wild West Show.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Internet Archive.

Weaver, Jace. *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000 - 1927*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Welch, Shay. *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System*. New York/ Berlin/ Heidelberg: Springer, 2019.

Wolff, Janet. *Resident Alien: Feminist Cultural Criticism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. Internet Archive.

Chauncey Yellow Robe, “The Menace of the Wild West Show”, 1914. In *Legends of Our Times: Native Cowboy Life*, edited by Morgan Baillargeon and Leslie Heyman Tepper, 211-212. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998.

Catalogues

Ades, Dawn, Simon Baker, and Fiona Bradley, eds. *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*. London/ Cambridge: Hayward Gallery/ MIT Press/ Cambridge Press, 2006. Exhibition Catalogue.

Amaral, Aracy A., and Jordi Sanguino. *Tarsila Do Amaral*. Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2009. Exhibition Catalogue.

Baldassari, Anne. *Picasso Cubiste: Paris, Musée National Picasso*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux/ Flammarion, 2007. Exhibition Catalogue.

Castro, Maria. “Both Paulista and Parisian: Racial Thinking in A Negra.” In *Tarsila Do Amaral: Cannibalizing Modernism*, edited by Adriano Pedrosa and Fernando Oliva, 54–67. São Paulo: MASP, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 2019. Exhibition Catalogue.

Dubois, Daniel. *Paul Coze, Wakanda: archives, collection Daniel Dubois : vente, Paris, Drouot-Richelieu, vendredi 10 avril 2015*. Paris: Tessier-Sarrou, 2015. Auction Catalogue.

Labrusse, Rémi. “Miró et Potlatch.” In *Joan Miró 1917-1934: La Naissance Du Monde*, edited by Agnès De la Beaumelle, 33–50. Paris: Editions Du Centre Pompidou, 2004. Exhibition Catalogue.

Maurer, Evan. “Dada and Surrealism.” In *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, edited by William Rubin, Second volume, 535–94. New York: Museum of modern art, 1985. Exhibition Catalogue.

Peltier-Caroff, Caroline. “Paul Coze, Un Scout Ethnographe Au Musée d’Ethnographie Du Trocadéro.” In *Le Scalp et Le Calumet: Imaginer et Représenter l’Indien En Occident Du XVIe Siècle à Nos Jours*,

edited by Annick Notter and Camille Faucourt, 220–21. La Rochelle/ Paris: Mah! musées d'art et d'histoire de la Rochelle/ Somogy Éditions d'art, 2017. Exhibition Catalogue.

Rubin, William. *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. Second volume. New York: Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), 1985. Exhibition Catalogue.

Conference proceedings

Di Gregorio, Luca. "Wild West France L'évolution de La Réception Française Du Western d'une Tournée de Buffalo Bill à l'autre (1889-1910)." In *L'Amérique Au Tournant. La Place Des Etas-Unis Dans La Litterature Française (1890-1920)*, 57–70. Classiques Garnier, 2020.

Unpublished

Greenaway, Charlotte V. ""Everything gets devoured": sporen van de Frans Surrealistische visie op potlatch in het werk van Beau Dick." Bachelor's thesis, KU Leuven, 2022.

Webadresses

Penobscot Nation Museum. "Molly Spotted Elk." Penobscot Nation Museum. Accessed May 29, 2023. https://www.penobscotculture.com/molly-spotted-elk.

Tate. "Surrealism Beyond Borders: Symposium | Tate Modern." Tate. Accessed March 28, 2023. https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/Surrealism-beyond-borders/Surrealism-beyond-borders-symposium.

Haselstein, Ulla. "Ghost Dance Literature: On Recent Debates in Native-American Literary Criticism." John-F.-Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien, April 27, 2009. https://www.jfki.fu-berlin.de/information/newsletter/07/jfki_essay.html.

Online archive overviews

Daviau, Monique, Jennifer Hecker, and Catherine Stollar. "Archive overview - William A. Bradley Literary Agency Records (MS-00491), 1909-1982," 2005. Harry Ransom Center. The University of Texas, Austin. https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/fasearch/findingAid.cfm?eadid=00300.

Sunshine, Louise. "Archive Overview - Yeichi Nimura and Lisan Kay Nimura Papers 1903-2006 [Bulk 1927-1990]," 2011. (S) *MGZMD 194. Jerome Robbins Dance Division. The NY Public Library, New York. https://archives.nypl.org/dan/22251.

Interview

Interview with McBride, Bunny. About *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, February 19, 2023.

Preface

What does being modern mean? At first glance, it's a simple question. Ask a passerby on the street and you will certainly receive a straightforward answer. Terms implicated in that reply could be technology, the speed of historical developments, globalism, rationality, civilisation, … The modern is always now and always here, and above all, it's always more. Still, the modern is not a unanimously positive experience. For as long as a modern consciousness has existed, people have questioned the incessant, rapturous nature of modernity. Modernity is a storm raging without care. Even those who take on arms against modernity are swept up by its winds. Their cries of protest then become an essential part of the discourse of modernity itself.

In this thesis, I ask Molly Spotted Elk, a Penobscot artist who lived one hundred years ago, how she mediated being a part of modernity. This question is not self-evident. The modernity rhetoric of her time was versed though the explicit exclusion of Indigeneity. When Native-Americanness *was* seen to be part of modernity, it would only be their art objects. The people themselves were either metonyms of these objects or negative spaces entirely. French Surrealism looked at Native-American art and story to construct its vision on the modern, but they did not look at Molly Spotted Elk or the stories she had to tell. Today, in art history these Indigenous voices that experienced modernity and expressed it through art are continuing to be relegated to the periphery. Despite post-colonial emphasis on differing stories of modernity, Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg's 2011 intro to *Contemporary Art as Global Art*, *still* contests that "*In developing countries, art can only be contemporary because locally it has no modern history*."[1] Yet, colonized countries comprised modernity from its very beginning. The narrative that the colonized have been the victims only of modernity, has silenced their stories and artistic expressions. With this thesis, I offer a corrective to this vision and reveal how a Native-American woman experienced and expressed modernity in parallel to a classic component of art history, French Surrealism.

Telling a story, as Molly Spotted Elk would know, involves the help of a lot of people. I am grateful to my friends and family for their continued support in my writing process and would like to thank anthropologist Bunny McBride, who first uncovered the story of Molly Spotted Elk 26 years ago, for the interview she agreed to do and answering my many questions in between. I'd like to thank the Maine University library team, especially Kimberly Sawtelle, for speeding up the digitization of Molly Spotted Elk's 1929-1933 diary for me. Finally, I am extremely thankful towards my thesis supervisor, dr. Laurens Dhaenens, for his reading recommendations, reviews of my drafts, but most of all for his continued enthusiasm about my subject.

[1] Hans Belting et al., *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (Karlsruhe: ZKM, Center for Art and Media, 2013), 6; Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips, *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism, Objects/Histories, (*Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 1.

Introduction

Molly Spotted Elk (1903-1977) was a Penobscot American dancer, choreographer, writer and actress, who was born in Old Town on the Penobscot Indian Island Reservation in Maine. When she was fourteen, she first started leaving the island to perform all over America. These performances as part of wild west shows, vaudeville theatre or night club programmes, sparked a deeper desire within her to find true expression in her dancing. I will argue this became a driving motivation for her decision to go to Paris in 1931. Paris at that time was going through its post-war *années folles*, both being the centre of cosmopolitan diversity and a rampant imperialist mindset. Once there, Molly Spotted Elk built out a network through "Indianists", French people who felt a close, spiritual connection to what they thought of as Native-American. She tied herself to the ethnographic museum in the Trocadero Palace, which at this exact moment was undergoing a major overhaul. With her own interest in ethnography, she brought ideas and diversity to the museal mindset. At the exact same moment in the city of Paris, another group was becoming increasingly invested in Native-American and Canadian First Peoples' art; French Surrealism. The Surrealists in their critique of all that was Western and rational, collected Indigenous objects and were inspired by Indigenous myth and meaning making, in particular totemism. Molly Spotted Elk and French surrealists were part of the same institutions several times and inhabited the same space, but they never interacted. In this thesis I will ask why this interaction never took place and what it reveals about both Molly Spotted Elk and French Surrealism.[2]

I want to address this subject to deliver a pointed critique on the appropriation of Native-American Indigenous imagery by members of French Surrealism in between the wars, but mostly a reappraisal of Molly Spotted Elk's modernism. Critiques on French Surrealist appropriation, often as part of wider study into avant-garde "primitivism", has been numerous for the past twenty years. Further, I will offer an overview of this research. However, the tendency is still there to place Surrealism at the heart of this research. Authors, such as Jody Blake, rightly criticize Surrealist anti-imperial critique for not giving agency to the authors of the myths and objects they appropriated, enforcing centre/periphery

[2] Jessica L. Horton, "Performing Paint, Claiming Space: The Santa Fe Indian School Posters on Paul Coze's Stage in Paris, 1935," *Transatlantica. Revue d'études Américaines. American Studies Journal*, no. 2 (December 31, 2017): 32–39, https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.11220; Marie Mauzé, "Trois Destinées, Un Destin. Biographie d'une Coiffure Kwakwaka'wakw.," *Gradhiva : Revue d'histoire et d'archives de l'anthropologie*, no. 7 (2008): 103; Elizabeth Cowling, "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists," *Art History* 1, no. 4 (1978): 486–96, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.1978.tb00029.x; Elizabeth Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), 2-4, https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501724046.

power dynamics.[3] Yet, in their attempts to do so never themselves think to decentralize the narrative and give agency back to the people who made those objects or to who the ceremonies and myths belonged. In doing exactly that, I will develop the notion of Native-American modernism. That is, while "primitivist" appropriation is relegating Indigeneity to the past, there are people such as Molly Spotted Elk who are crafting their own responses to the situation of modernity. Modernity for Native-American people was, or even is, often fragmentizing and traumatic. However, that doesn't negate that they *do* find their own expressions in it, particularly through dance. Too often in the past these singular expressions of modernity, countercultures in a sense, have been neglected, and stories such as that of Molly Spotted Elk have ultimately been forgotten. This thesis is a continuation of the works of other authors who have already shortly taken on her story such as Ruth B. Phillips, Jessica Horton and Christine Bold, but also contemporary art interpretations of her story such as by the Turtle Gals or Cree artist Kent Monkman.[4] What I ultimately aim for in this thesis is a reversal of the process of forgetting and a revalorization of Molly Spotted Elk's alternate modernism against classical accounts of modernism.

My methodology takes up an explicitly post-colonial and intersectional framework. In the first place, I was deeply influenced by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). His notions of counterculture modernities and hybrid identities in the transatlantic space, while versed for a Black-diaspora context, have been seminal to my understanding of what constitutes Molly Spotted Elk's modernism. To overcome the specificity of his context, I also looked towards Jace Weaver for his development of the notion of a "Red Atlantic".[5] The second post-colonial author who frames this thesis is Homi K. Bhabha and his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). This work examines the power dynamics at play when we speak of such things as "modernity" or "modernism" from a Eurocentric perspective. It is particularly revealing for this art historic context because of its

---

[3] Jody Blake, "The Truth about the Colonies, 1931: Art Indigène in Service of the Revolution," *Oxford Art Journal* 25, no. 1 (2002): 56–57.

[4] Christine Bold, "3rd Vaudeville Number: Molly Spotted Elk Does the Charleston with John Ford's the Iron Horse," in *"Vaudeville Indians†? On Global Circuits, 1880s-1930s* (Yale University Press, 2022), 177–92, https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300264906; Horton, "Performing Paint, Claiming Space"; Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips, *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*, Objects/Histories: Critical Perspectives on Art, Material Culture, and Representation (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 2–3, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822372615; Ruth B. Phillips, "Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture," in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. Lynda Jessup (University of Toronto Press, 2001), 26–50.

[5] Jace Weaver, *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000 - 1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 6th print. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

focus on the "visuality" of colonial rhetoric. I use his concepts to understand the notion of avant-garde "primitivism" and Native-American performance culture.[6] His work relates to the theoretical framework of James Clifford, the third author who has been undeniably fundamental to this thesis. His concept of "cosmopolitanism" and focus on the importance of cultural exchange have been crucial to my approach towards Molly Spotted Elk's transatlantic presence in Paris.[7] But even more than this, his 1981 exploration of "Ethnographic Surrealism" was a fundamental driver for my general understanding of both French Surrealism and ethnography.[8] His constructive approach, although I am sometimes critical of it, inspired me to include the rehabilitative potential of Eve Sedgwick's notion of "reparative reading" into this work. Reparative reading is the practice of reading problematic rhetoric and recognising how, despite its inherent flaws, it still allows for positive meaning-making. This term, which I borrow from queer studies, allows for a critical reworking of the victimhood myth of modernity as built through imperialism.[9] Finally, when I analyze the agency within Native-American dance and the negotiation it establishes I am indebted to Chippewa author Gerard Vizenor for his concept of "survivance". That is the Native-American apparent complacency with colonial script to make meaning survive despite forced assimilation.[10]

Although Molly Spotted Elk's story has recently been taken up several times already, I aim to reconstruct her story from the primary source material again. As I mention in the literature review in more detail, Bunny McBride's 1997 book *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris* has been the sole basis for all academic work on Molly Spotted Elk. Despite the book being impressively encompassing, it has a few critical flaws. For this thesis, I therefore went back to the primary sources about and by Molly Spotted Elk: correspondence, newspaper and magazine articles, but mostly her 1929-1933 diary.

---

[6] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Repr. (London: Routledge, 2002).
[7] James Clifford, "Mixed Feelings," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, Cultural Politics Series 14 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 362–70.
[8] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674503724; James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (1981): 539–64.
[9] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–51.
[10] Gerald Vizenor, "4. Native-American Irony: Survivance and the Subversion of Ethnography," in *Race and Cultural Practice in Popular Culture* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 76–88, https://doi.org/10.36019/9781978801349-006; Vizenor, "11. Native-American Narratives: Resistance and Survivance," in *A Companion to American Fiction, 1865-1914*, ed. Robert Paul Lamb and Gary Richard Thompson, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (Malden/ Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2005); Vizenor, "The Ruins of Representation: Shadow Survivance and the Literature of Dominance," *American Indian Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1993): 7–30, https://doi.org/10.2307/1184777.

I use the diary to reveal what comprised the expression of modern consciousness in her dance of which there is no filmed documentation available. The diary also serves as the basis to construct the Parisian space she inhabited in which I actively look for intersections and exchange between her and Surrealism. Moreover, I contextualize the arguments I make with primary source material related to other "*artistes-étrangères*" in Paris versing their own modernisms, namely Brazillian painter Tarsila Do Amaral (1886-1973), who was influenced by French Surrealism in her works, and African American/Narangasett sculptor Nancy Elizabeth Prophet (1890-1960). Finally, I will also use primary source material related to French Surrealism, such as published pamphlets in which their ideological approach to "primitivism" becomes apparent.

I have decided to limit the scope of my archival work to the context of Molly Spotted Elk's first period in Paris. That means chronologically I limit myself to the years 1931 to 1934. Because of the art historic approach of this thesis, I also restrict my analysis to Molly Spotted Elk's dancing, in so-far as it is a visual art form. I don't include her published poems and short stories. In the parts where this thesis goes into my second subject, French Surrealism, I will highlight specific events, groups and members in so far as they pertain to Molly Spotted Elk's narrative only. This means I consider both Breton Surrealism of the thirties and dissident Surrealism. Furthermore, I want to stress the limits posed by my own positionality as a Belgian student in art history. I am not Native-American and didn't get to travel to the Penobscot Indian Island Reservation to learn more about the meaning making processes specific to Molly Spotted Elk's identity. I cite a lot of Native-American authors, but undoubtedly, I enlighten her story from the frameworks I am familiar with, so there will be preconceptions that underly my analysis. I can only ask of you as a reader to be critical towards these biases and view them for what they are.

Arguments in this thesis have been constructed into two parts, each consisting of three chapters. The first part examines Molly Spotted Elk's presence and performance in Paris. In the first chapter, I contextualize Molly Spotted Elk's dance in the broader history of Native-American performance culture. The second chapter analyzes the frameworks in Paris, its tastes for "exoticism" and self-fashioning as a cosmopolitan hub, which would have negotiated Molly Spotted Elk's self-presentation. These first two chapters lead into the subject of the third chapter, the crucial question for this thesis: What does Molly Spotted Elk's modernism constitute? The second part then is where the Surrealists first become actors in the story of Molly Spotted Elk. The two first chapters of this part research occasions where Molly Spotted Elk's activities intersected with French Surrealism. The fourth chapter therefore details the 1931 Colonial Exposition and the political opposition between Molly Spotted Elk

and Breton's Surrealist group. The fifth chapter highlights Molly Spotted Elk and "dissident surrealist" Michel Leiris' (1901-1990) activities and thoughts surrounding the Dakar-Djibouti mission, and the ethnographic museum steering that expedition. The sixth and final chapter of this thesis hypothesizes why clear-cut interaction never took place and what this reveals about either iteration of modernism.

Critical Literature Review

Literature on Molly Spotted Elk

Molly Spotted Elk has been the subject of three texts in the last two decades, pointing to a growing relevance of the history she represents. Most recently she featured in cultural historian Christine Bold's *Vaudeville Indians on Global Circuits, 1880s-1930s* (2022) a book surveying the history of Native-American vaudeville performance between 1880 and 1940 and placing particular emphasis on underrepresented female performers. This book also notes the critical role Molly Spotted Elk has played in inspiring contemporary Native-American art, including Turtle Gals' *The Only Good Indian* (2007) and Kent Monkman's *The emergence of a legend* (2006).[11] Secondly, Molly Spotted Elk features in an article by Jessica Horton, published in 2017. Horton writes about her in the context of the group around Paul Coze (1903-1974).[12] Thirdly, she features in a chapter in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* (2001), a collection of essays on twentieth century artistic pursuits of "authenticity". Ruth B. Phillips, an art historian who deals with issues of Native-American restitution, takes Molly Spotted Elk on as a subject to prove the complexity of such "authenticity" discourse.[13] All three of those sources do not refer to primary sources, but rely on the archival work done by Bunny McBride in *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris* (1997), a romanticized biography of Molly Spotted Elk based on her personal archives. These archives were then held by her daughter Jean Archambaud Moore (1934-2011).[14] After her passing the archives went to Maine University's Folklife Center where they are currently being described and digitized. This means that studies henceforth will be able to rely on the original primary sources to develop understandings of Molly Spotted Elk's legacy.[15]

This is a welcome development as Bunny McBride's 1997 book is impressive, but not without its faults. McBride expertly arranged the large archive, consisting of seven boxes including seventeen diaries, into a cohesive narrative. She also includes relevant contexts, such as the presence of Native-Americans in early twentieth century popular culture. But it does this in a decidedly romantic format.

---

[11] Christine Bold, *Vaudeville Indians On Global Circuits, 1880s-1930s*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 2, 177-192, https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300264906.
[12] Horton, "Performing Paint, Claiming Space", 32-38.
[13] Phillips, "Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture."
[14] Bunny McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).
[15] Molly Spotted Elk Collection (MF079), Fogler Library Special Collections and Archives, Maine University, Orono, Maine. https://archives.library.umaine.edu/repositories/5/resources/3006.

McBride fills in gaps in the narrative with her imagination.[16] In my online interview with her, the author told me that she wanted to make the story comprehensible to diverse audiences, including Native-American ones.[17] Indeed, the book's accessibility is one of its important feats.[18] Nevertheless, McBride consciously leaves out some of Molly Spotted Elk's words revealing her participation in racist discourse, slight antisemitism and use of pejorative terms towards sex workers and people in same-sex relationships.[19] For example, Molly Spotted Elk describes her encounter with jazz dancer Josephine Baker: "*Miss Baker is charming with oodles of personality, but not so attractive for a high-yellow*."[20] In McBride's biography the last part of the sentence is left out. This is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it impacts the larger historical picture. For example, in her diaries Molly Spotted Elk raises suspicions about fellow performer Charlie Oskomon's (1897- ?) Native-American descent, but these should be contextualized. Molly Spotted Elk's distaste for his homosexuality and own implication in a racist evolutionist discourse which holds Native-Americans to a higher esteem than African Americans, mean her skepticism is insidious.[21] This piece from her diary, however, is taken

---

[16] An example of this is in the final paragraph of the book. McBride poetically reimagines Molly Spotted Elk's 1977 death after a fall from the stairs. "Tripping over the brightness, she fell. Down, down the narrow stairway… out the kitchen door, along the stream that crossed the island past old Joe Hemlock's shack, and into the Penobscot River. […] Tumbling down the mountside into a flower-strewn valley, she finally lay still beneath a canopy of ice-chip stars in a pitch-black sky. She looked up at the moon, a crescent light bending near the earth. Neebowset smiled. She took his hand and they walked toward a forest remarkable, where cypress, pine and every arboreal form imaginable stood together and reached for the sky. Then Molly turned and danced her way home."
McBride asserts in a footnote that this passage came to her after having a vision and feeling connected to the soul of Molly Spotted Elk. I don't want to deny the powerful nature of irrational encounter, but the inclusion of this vision *is* quite jarring as it almost seems to romanticize her passing. Bunny McBride, *A Penobscot in Paris*, 286-287.

[17] Interview with Bunny McBride, about *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, February 19, 2023.

[18] Indeed, many scholarly reviews praise Bunny McBride for these qualities: Helen M. Bannan, "Review of *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, by Bunny McBride", *American Indian Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (1998): 515–17, https://doi.org/10.2307/1184851; Joann W. Kealiinohomoku, "Review of *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, by Bunny McBride", *Dance Research Journal* 29, no. 2 (1997): 92–95, https://doi.org/10.2307/1478737; Cath Oberholtzer, "Review of *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, by Bunny McBride", *Ethnohistory* 44, no. 1 (1997): 143–44, https://doi.org/10.2307/482906.
The exception is William Savage's review, which I discuss at the start of chapter 1. William W. Savage, "Review of *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, by Bunny McBride", *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (1997): 556–57, https://doi.org/10.2307/2171004.
A non-scholarly review in the New York Times by Alida Becker provides the view which I myself am most inclined to as well. She concludes: "[…] you almost forget Molly Spotted Elk was a real person, not the star of a particularly inventive made-for-television mini-series. That may not be a tragedy, but it's certainly a shame." Alida Becker, "Books In Brief: Nonfiction; A Native-American In Paris," *The New York Times*, October 29, 1995.

[19] See for example the following diary entries: *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* August 19, 1931; April 28, 1933; October 3, 1933; December 3, 1933.

[20] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, June 6, 1933.

[21] Moreover, McBride even implies that it is jealousy of her Native-American descent that drives Oskomon to dislike Molly Spotted Elk. See: McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 193
For a critique on this aspect of McBride, see: Adrienne McLean and David Cook, *Headline Hollywood: A Century of Film Scandal* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 124..

on by succeeding sources. For example, it leads Jessica Horton to call Oskomon a "*self-identified Yakima chief*".[22] Secondly and more abstractly, this characterization of Molly Spotted Elk as free from flaws feeds into the trope of the "noble Native-American".[23]

Literature on Surrealist "primitivism"

While the studies on Molly Spotted Elk are easily summarized, the same cannot be said about Surrealist "primitivism". Studies on the theme have been numerous and diverse in their critical modes. They follow the general evolution of the discourse on avant-garde "primitivism". The first author to do an extensive study on avant-garde appraisal and appropriation of non-Western objects was Robert Goldwater. His *Primitivism in Modern Art* (1938) was published around the same time Molly Spotted Elk came to Paris the second time. It is clearly written contemporaneously with the ideas of Surrealists and reveals their same reverence for the objects described. Nevertheless, the book is not in any way critical of the power dynamics within "primitivism" and doesn't object to the comparison between children's art and its non-Western objects.[24] The first real follow-up on this work came more than forty years later, with William Rubin's MoMA exhibition and extended, two-part, multi-authored catalogue *Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984). This work leans into the formalism of Robert Goldwater and amplifies the idea that the worth of these objects is determined by their relation to European avant-garde art expression, and that they are metonyms for the peoples they were taken from.[25] More than the book itself, however, the critical response to it is relevant as it reveals a resounding shift in the discourse. Thomas McEvilley, for example, in his response "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian, Chief" for ArtForum lays bare the eurocentrism at the heart of the MoMA expo and in fact the whole institution.[26] James Clifford in "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern" (1985) criticizes the formalism underlying the concept of "affinities", that is visual

---

[22] Horton, "Performing Paint, Claiming Space," 28, 46.

[23] Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native-Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport: Praeger, 2005), 142; Fergus M. Bordewich, *Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing of Native-Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century*, 1996, 324.
The last source *does* itself relay the notion that Jean-Jacques Rousseau lays at the heart of the European fascination with the 'Noble Savage' which -as I discuss further- is an enduring primitivist misreading of his work. See: Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (University of California Press, 2001), 382, https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520925922.

[24] Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, *Primitivism in Modern Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013, originally published 1938), https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674281882.

[25] William Rubin, *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, second volume (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1985). Exhibition Catalogue.

[26] Thomas McEvilley, "Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief: "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984," *Artforum* 23, no. 3 (November 1984): 54–61.

similarities between avant-garde works and the objects displayed. Moreover, he writes how the exhibition failed to do its due diligence in exploring historical context and implicit power balances.[27] These critiques still stand and are currently being taken up as the base-line for new critical work on "primitivism". This research aims to decentre the term, examples are Partha Mitter's emphasis on Indian "primitivisms" or Sieglinde Lemke's exploration of African American "primitivisms".[28]

The discursive evolution of the study of Surrealist appropriation and appraisal of African, Oceanic, Pre-Columbian and North-American follows largely the same line. Goldwater mentions to a small degree the Surrealist interaction with ethnography and collecting.[29] This line of thinking, is then followed up by Elizabeth Cowling in "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists" (1978).[30] This article clearly leads into the "affinities" approach on appropriations that will be taken by Evan Maurer in his addition to the MoMA exhibition catalogue, "Dada and Surrealism" (1984).[31] James Clifford's "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981) radically changes the perspective on Surrealist "primitivism". The article shows where his critiques of the MoMA exhibition come from as it takes a more historically contextualized approach to the issue. His text is not concerned with formal equivalencies, but rather with intellectual borrowings of the Surrealists from the method of ethnography. Clifford, here, promotes the idea that Surrealist borrowings, with their focus on the strange and magical, reveal a path for anthropology to be more culturally inclusive. This idea is a total fiction that, while constructive for the practice of anthropology, paints a far too pretty picture of Surrealist "primitivism".[32] Other articles, such as Hal Foster's "The "Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art" (1885) or later, Amanda Stansell's "Surrealist Racial Politics at the Border of Reason" (2003), take on this same approach of finding within Surrealist cultural relativism a reprieve for the decontextualized borrowings of the earlier avant-gardes.[33] Indeed, the Surrealists were the first avant-

---

[27] The article is incorporated in his book *The Predicament of Culture*, but was published originally in 1985 in *Art in America.* James Clifford, "Histories of The Tribal and The Modern," in *The Predicament of Culture* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1988), 189–215, https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674503724.
[28] Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922-1947* (London: Reaktion books, 2007); Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[29] Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, 294.
[30] Cowling, "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists."
[31] Evan Maurer, "Dada and Surrealism," in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, ed. William Rubin, second volume (New York: Museum of modern art, 1985), 535–94.
[32] Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism."
[33] Amanda Stansell, "Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of 'Reason': Whiteness, Primitivism and Négritude," in *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003); Hal Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," *October* 34 (1985): 62, https://doi.org/10.2307/778488.

gardes to combine their "primitivism" with anti-imperialist politics and ethnographic methodologies. However, they weren't consistent about it. They partook in relegating Native peoples to the past and were self-aggrandizing in their approach. Current research, I believe, is concerned with navigating these paradoxes. For example, Louise Tythacott's *Surrealism and the Exotic*, clearly still relies on Clifford's methodology, but she also concerns herself with untangling the colonialism present in Surrealism's appraisals of non-Western art and people.[34] Considering the extent to which global art movements took on Surrealism, a decentralizing perspective is also prevalent in the discourse. For example, studies on the Surrealist interaction with the *Négritude* movement, such as by Terri Geis or Elsa Adamowicz, are particularly compelling, although outside of the chronological scope of this thesis. They reveal the complexities of anti-imperial Surrealist primitivism from a perspective that has the possibility to break free from its discourse.[35]

[34] Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (London: Routledge, 2003).
[35] Elza Adamowicz, "Surrealizing Wifredo Lam?," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 58, no. 1 (January 1, 2022): 106–19, https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqac008; Terri Geis, "Myth, History and Repetition: André Breton and Vodou in Haiti," *South Central Review* 32, no. 1 (2015): 56–75.

Part 1: Between Cosmos and Cosmopolitan: Molly Spotted Elk's modernism in Paris

Chapter 1: Performing Indigeneity (1889-1934)

> *"Sorry to be alone here – maybe I am foolish - with no money, but little, and hopes galore. But I do want to do something with my Indian dancing here in a serious artistic way - and I'm willing to take a great chance to accomplish it. I am staying for only my work and purpose."*[36]

In a review of McBride's *Molly Spotted Elk,* William Savage calls the book "*little more than a show business biography of a tragic figure who happened to be a second-rate performer.*" and Molly Spotted Elk "*a professional Indian*".[37] Native-American performance and its embeddedness in mass entertainment and colonial curiosity makes it an ambiguous artistic mode. Therefore, it is often barraged with the exact criticism Savage applies to Molly Spotted Elk; lack of "authenticity", lack of political agency. In the following, I will highlight this ambiguity and the imaginaries and stereotypes it historically resulted in. However, I will argue that being a "professional Indian" does not imply complicity in colonial discourse, and most importantly does not negate, as pointed out by Molly Spotted Elk herself in the above quote, artistic and political purpose within the performance.

Molly Spotted Elk: a name made for the stage

Throughout her life Molly Spotted Elk gathered a wide array of names under which she was known. When she was born on November 17, 1903, the name given to her was Mary Alice Nelson, but very quickly her family lovingly shortened it to Molliedell or Mollie Dellis. When she was first performing she chose the name Princess Neeburban (Northern Lights) as a stage name, perhaps as an ode to an earlier Penobscot performer with the same name.[38] She would swap this stage name for "Molly Spotted Elk" in 1927, a name she received while touring on the 101 Ranch wild west show.[39] But, she'd refer to it again later in life when it became the endearment she'd use for her husband Jean Etienne Archambaud (1904-1941). She called him Neebowset, the male version of Neeburban. Her husband then gave her the last name she'd go by throughout her life: Archambaud. This marriage gave her the official name she has in documents, Mary Alice Nelson Archambaud. Although that is her "real" name,

---

[36] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* June 11, 1931.
[37] Savage, "Review of *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, by Bunny McBride," 556.
[38] Bold, "3rd Vaudeville Number: Molly Spotted Elk Does the Charleston with John Ford's the Iron Horse," 182–83.
[39] In an interview Molly states she got the name after winning a dance competition and being adopted by the Cheyenne. Bunny McBride and the articles following her, take Molly Spotted Elk's word on this. Shör, "Spotted Elk 'L'Elan Moucheté,'" *Pour Vous: L'Intran: L'Hebdomadaire Du Cinéma*, September 17, 1931.

throughout this paper I continuously refer to her by her *nom de théatre* Molly Spotted Elk (*Élan Tacheté,* in French). While this was her artist's name it also snuck through in personal correspondence. Letters by Archambaud for example were consistently addressed "to princess Molly Spotted Elk".[40] I believe it's a name that characterizes her ambiguity; throughout her life she consistently struggled between where her art became artifice and her "authentic" self began.[41] As will become clear from this first chapter, this struggle is deeply characteristic for the complexity of Indigenous American performer identities as a whole in the late nineteenth century to twentieth century.[42]

Molly Spotted Elk was drawn to dancing from an early age. Dance was embedded in her local Penobscot community of Indian Island near Old Town, Maine. Not only was it a vital part of Penobscot events such as weddings, holidays, church events or local ceremonial events, it was essential to the Penobscot economy of the early twentieth century.[43] Bunny McBride mentions how Molly Spotted Elk's father Horace Nelson was part of Indian pageants, organized to draw buyers and investors for the local economy.[44] The Penobscot economy had switched in the late nineteenth century from an economy, reliant on fishing, hunting and logging, to an economy in which basketry and thus touristic interest in local goods became central. This evolution points to a documented "quest for authenticity" present in the U.S. at the time, stimulating inland tourism.[45] Even young children would be employed in this economy. They'd spontaneously do performances for the hoards of tourists that would visit the island in Summer, in exchange for a few coins.[46] It is very likely that Molly Spotted Elk too started

---

[40] For the digitized correspondence between Jean Archambaud and Molly Spotted Elk, see: The University of Maine, MF079 The Molly Spotted Collection, box 2, https://archives.library.umaine.edu/repositories/5/archival_objects/369962, last accessed 2023/03/22.

[41] In literature about Molly Spotted Elk, she is often referred to only by her first name, see: McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*; Trudy Irene Scee, *Dancing in Paradise, Burning in Hell: Women in Maine's Historic Working Class Dance Industry* (Camden, Maine : Down East Books, 2016), 86; Phillips, "Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture," 41; Bold, "3rd Vaudeville Number: Molly Spotted Elk Does the Charleston with John Ford's the Iron Horse," 180, 181.

[42] On this subject see for example: Bold, *Vaudeville Indians on Global Circuits, 1880s-1930s*, (Yale University Press, 2022).

[43] On Penobscot culture, resistance and commodification: Pauleena MacDougall, *The Penobscot Dance of Resistance: Tradition in the History of a People* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2004), 183, 188–89.

[44] McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 32 and 34.

[45] This late nineteenth, early twentieth century sentiment of turning away from modernity in favour of a more natural and "authentic" existence and the stream of tourism it entailed, is exemplified by the person and writings of Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau wrote extensively on his encounter with two Penobscot guides while hiking the Katahdin Mountain. Likewise, he also represents the ambivalent nature of this form of Native-American tourism. John J. Kucich, "Lost in the Maine Woods: Henry David Thoreau, Joseph Nicolar, and the Penobscot World," *The Concord Saunterer* 19/20 (2011): 23.
For more on the history of tourism and its role in the U.S. self-understanding, see: Daniel Boorstin, *The image: a guide to pseudo-events in America*, New York: Vintage Books, 2012.

[46] The author cites an interview Gilbert Ketchum, one of Molly's contemporaries as the source for this. McBride, 33.

her performance career in this way. While dance had thus always been a livelihood for her, it was also something related to happy events, spontaneity and self-expression. Moreover, she showed ambition to improve her dancing from an early age. When she was nine, she would receive ballet lessons from an instructor called Rosanna Odiorne in exchange for housework and would travel all the way to the closest city, Bangor, to receive these lessons.[47]

Molly Spotted Elk officially started performing in shows at age fourteen. Two years later in 1921, she'd leave high school to join a road show. The diaries from this period do not survive, but it is likely that for Molly Spotted Elk - as for many Indigenous performers – the decision to give up on secondary education was based on what would rationally be most profitable to her and her family. For example, she had already started high school late because she was helping to support her family by taking a job as a governess in Swampton.[48] Contrary to working as a governess, being a performer would have offered her more mobility and a chance to proudly represent her Penobscot roots.[49] Nevertheless, Molly Spotted Elk *did* have an interest in education. On the road, she'd tour colleges and universities. Possibly through these shows or through her hometown community, she met anthropologist Frank E. Speck (1881-1950).[50] He offered her the opportunity to apply to the university of Pennsylvania, considered an Ivy League school. From 1924 to 1925, she would take classes on anthropology and literature on an auditing basis, as she hadn't finished high school. Despite her interests, she left university to join the 101 Ranch Wild West Show. The cost of tuition and the exhaustion, combining performing for income and studying, had become unbearable.[51] However, this experience would shape her self-understanding, experience in Paris and ambitions for her dance to convey her "*authentic and true spirit*".[52]

---

[47] McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 33; Bold, "3rd Vaudeville Number: Molly Spotted Elk Does the Charleston with John Ford's the Iron Horse," 181.
[48] McBride, *A Penobscot in Paris*, 39-40.
[49] On Indigenous motivations for joining road shows, see: H. Glenn Penny, "Not Playing Indian. Surrogate Indigeneity and the German Hobbyist Scene," in *Performing Indigeneity Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences*, ed. Laura R. Graham (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2015), 181, http://www.gbv.de/dms/sub-hamburg/79194882X.pdf; Linda Scarangella McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows : From Buffalo Bill to Euro Disney* (Norman, OK : University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 68.
[50] McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 58.
[51] McBride cites from the 1926 diary: "*Maybe I will save faster to help the school fund*". This implies that while Molly returned to performing, she had ambition to finish her studying. McBride, 77.
[52] A description by her Native-American classmate Gladys Tantaquidgeon (1899-2005) is particularly revealing. From a taped recording of her words Melissa Fawcett quotes: "*Molly after two or three years continued to study dance and went on to the Sorbonne in Paris*." This isn't exactly true. Molly only attended some lectures at Sorbonne and never 'studied dance' as such. However, in the fiction Gladys creates of Molly's life is contained the value she saw in Molly Spotted Elk's dancing and experiences in Paris. Melissa Jayne Fawcett, *Medicine Trail: The Life and Lessons of Gladys Tantaquidgeon* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 71.

Native-American performance: Buffalo Bill brings the big bucks

Native-American performance is a complex notion. From its beginnings it was tied to exploitation and colonial curiosity. Its first roots can be traced to Christopher Columbus and the Native-Americans he brought with him to the European continent. These people were forced to perform aspects of their - in anachronistic terms - "identity" to satisfy the interests and even lust for spectacle of those who viewed them. That paradigm remained the governing principle of Native-American performance for the years to come.[53] After centuries of steady growth, the performance culture gets significantly upscaled in the nineteenth century. Several factors add to this exponential growth. For one, after declaring independence in 1776, the U.S. starts the expansion of its territory to the West. This results in a new wave of settler colonialism and aggressive campaigns against the people Indigenous to these lands. The impact of this can be described in several terms, but for this narrative the economic and cultural disaster for Native-Americans that it entailed, is most relevant. Finding their livelihoods threatened many communities turned to performance to make ends meet. The Indian Pageants in which the Penobscot community partook are an example of this.[54] But it wasn't just financial motivations which drew Native-Americans to life as a performer. Performance such as in wild west or vaudeville shows also allowed them crucial mobility and thus resistance against the system of allocated reservations. The myriad of technological improvements of the nineteenth century are the final element to the rapid upscaling of performance culture. As audiences grew, the demand for Native-American performance, including in film, skyrocketed and mobility for Native-American performers improved further.[55]

While film is significant, as film historian Angela Aleiss shows, no medium for Native-American Indigenous performance was more widespread and impactful than the wild west show.[56] Wild west shows were a phenomenon that originated around 1865, roughly around the same time as the Plains Wars ended. These were a series of conflicts between the United States and Native-Americans between 1850 and 1870. That context for their creation was significant as wild west shows, in so-far as they had a narrative structure, always portrayed Native characters as the villains to American progress and the "American way of life". Therefore, wild west shows shaped a stereotypic understanding of Native-Americans. They also did so on a never-before-seen scale as they coincided with a moment in time of

[53] Weaver, *The Red Atlantic*, 189.
[54] MacDougall, *The Penobscot Dance of Resistance*, 183–93.
[55] Bold, *Vaudeville Indians On Global Circuits, 1880s-1930s*, 2.
[56] Bold, "3rd Vaudeville Number: Molly Spotted Elk Does the Charleston with John Ford's the Iron Horse," 179; Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian*, xviii, 4.

greater mobility for touring theatre troupes. Moreover, these shows consciously spectacularized and romanticized the American expansion to the West and the assimilation of Indigenous peoples. Despite in every way being spectacles, the shows were never promoted as such. Leading men, such as famously William Frederick Cody (1846-1917), better known as "Buffalo Bill", claimed their shows to be completely life-like. From its inception, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show only hired "real" Native-Americans, often going out of their way to reservations to cast these actors. The ability these shows had to convey the "authentic truth" about Native-Americans living on the Great Plains corresponded with their popularity. This is why Buffalo Bill was so immensely popular from the 1860s until the late 1930s.[57] Moreover, not only were these shows in demand among white American audiences, Native-American audiences too enjoyed them greatly.[58] And, importantly, they were also very prevalent across the Atlantic Ocean; in Europe.[59]

The French imagined Native-American: "There's Indians on the Eiffel tower!"

Almost from their onset wild west shows vied for the attention of transatlantic audiences. This tendency has been well-described.[60] The wild west show was not the first mode of Native performance to cross the Atlantic, but just like in the U.S. the impact of it was much larger than earlier more elite forms of Native display or circulation of ideas on Native-Americans through print media. After all, the

---

[57] See for example: John M. Burke, "*Buffalo Bill" from Prairie to Palace: An Authentic History of the Wild West*, 1917, Gutenberg.
This hugely popular book published by Buffalo Bill's publicist John Burke is an excellent example of how much the popularity of the wild west shows relied on conveying the authenticity of Cody's experiences.

[58] That they were well-liked by Native audiences, was eyed with suspicion by both Indian agents overseeing the reservations and some Native-American intellectuals. For example, Chauncey Yellow Robe, Molly Spotted Elk's co-star in The Silent Enemy, warned against the 'danger of wild west shows'. He spoke before the 1914 conference of the Society for American Indians: "The Indians should be protected from the curse of the wild west show schemes, wherein the Indians have been led to the white man's poison cup and have become drunkards." Chauncey Yellow Robe, "The Menace of the Wild West Show", 1914 in *Legends of Our Times: Native Cowboy Life,* edited by Morgan Baillargeon and Leslie Heyman Tepper (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 211.
See also: McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows*, 5, 50.

[59] Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 164-165; 210; Kevin Meethan, "Touring the Other: Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Europe," *Journal of Tourism History* 2, no. 2 (August 1, 2010): 122, https://doi.org/10.1080/1755182X.2010.498588; McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows*, 5, 24; Irene Lottini, "When Buffalo Bill Crossed the Ocean: Native-American Scenes in Early Twentieth Century European Culture," *European Journal of American Culture* 31, no. 3 (October 18, 2012): 188, https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac.31.3.187_1.

[60] For this research, I've focused on France through Emily C. Burns, *Transnational Frontiers: The American West in France*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018). The case for the U.K. was made compellingly in Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776-1930*, while the German interest in wild west shows was analyzed in, among others, Gemunden Gerd, et al., *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections,* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press), 2002. To my knowledge no specific study on the impact of Buffalo Bill on the Belgian cultural imagination has been undertaken yet, other than broader European studies. This would be particularly interesting considering Belgian scout culture and the enduring image of Buffalo Bill in, for example, football club KAA Gent's self-fashioning.

wild west shows promised to show "the real thing". Still the entrepreneurs behind these shows made certain to build on those earlier circulations of an "imaginary Indian" in Europe to ensure success. Buffalo Bill, for example, who was one of the first to tour Europe in 1887, made conscious choices to adapt his shows to European preconceptions.[61] In France, the "noble savage" archetype was particularly enduring. This is the idea of "The Indian" as the epitome of unspoiled humanity, despite or even because of his lack of civilization. The relevance of this idea for the French imaginary is often cited to have originated in the eighteenth century with philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but was in fact a nineteenth century application of romantic colonial discourse to his ideas.[62] Whatever its origin, it is exemplified by the widespread and enduring popularity of books such as *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) by Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851).[63] Because of these preconceptions, French audiences, more so than American ones, felt sympathetic to Native-American actors. Besides this, they treated the Wild West show with its claims of "authenticity" as an opportunity to learn more about non-Western peoples in an "ethnographic" way. That did not of course mean that French audiences didn't also explicitly look out for signs that confirmed their European, "civilized" supremacy. Such thinking, unlike in America, didn't just apply to the "savages" being shown, but also the rough and uncouthly American frontier men, such as Buffalo Bill.[64]

Conversely, Elizabeth Hutton Turner argues that the Buffalo Bill Wild West show in the early twentieth century also functioned in the French imaginary as a part of the distinctly "modern", progress-oriented spirit of the United States that was inspiring for French modernists. Avant-gardes, such as Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and his circle at the Bateau-Lavoir, looked towards Buffalo Bill as

---

[61] Lottini, "When Buffalo Bill Crossed the Ocean," 189; Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 302.

[62] As Ellingson points out the mythical nature of attributing this trope to Jean-Jacques Rousseau is particularly dominant not only in popular writing, but also in academic writing. For example, William Rubin, seminal author on primitivism, misquotes Rousseau in his introduction. Possibly, the origins of the 'noble savage' are so often misrepresented because of what Rousseau represents. Rousseau as an author is almost a metonym for the French spirit. Thus, through evoking the 'noble savage' stereotype authors on primitivism want to point out how this romantic mode of 'acceptance' is quintessential to French intellectual consciousness. The misrepresentation then points to how authors such as Rubin in turn romanticize a French spirit of 'forwardness' that teleologically evolved from its philosophical tradition. See: Rubin, *Primitivism in 20th Century Art*, 6; Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*.

[63] For more on the influence of James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) on French idealisations of Native-Americans, see: Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, 378; Luca Di Gregorio, "Wild West France L'évolution de La Réception Française Du Western d'une Tournée de Buffalo Bill à l'autre (1889-1910)," in *L'Amérique Au Tournant. La Place Des Etas-Unis Dans La Litterature Française (1890-1920)* (Classiques Garnier, 2020), 61, https://doi.org/10.15122/isbn.978-2-406-10156-7.p.0057.

[64] Emily C. Burns, *Transnational Frontiers: The American West in France*, The Charles M. Russell Center Series on Art and Photography of the American West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 13; Lottini, "When Buffalo Bill Crossed the Ocean," 192; Di Gregorio, "Wild West France: L'évolution de La Réception Française Du Western d'une Tournée de Buffalo Bill à l'autre (1889-1910)," 63.

part of a crucially modern culture of play and mass entertainment. Picasso for example gave his friend, painter Georges Braque (1882-1963), the nickname Buffalo Bill. He immortalized this nickname in an analytical cubist portrait titled *Buffalo Bill* (1911-1912, private collection, illustration 1).[65] Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) also fashioned himself after the image of Buffalo Bill, sporting long hair and a wide brimmed felt hat. As the ultimate man of the frontiers, Buffalo Bill was an emblem for avant-garde masculinity to embody.[66] In this designation of the Wild West show as an epitome of U.S. modernity there seems to be no explicit exclusion of the Native-American actors. An article, published August 10, 1889 in the European edition of The New York Herald, describes how Native cast members from Buffalo Bill's Wild West show mounted the Eiffel tower. It notes especially that their French entourage was more afraid of the lifts than the performers were. Such imagery subtly points to Indigenous Americans being "modern", which countered the perception as antiquated Indigeneity.[67] Moreover, as Emily C. Burns posits, no distinct separation, between Buffalo Bill and the Native-Americans participating in his show, existed in the French cultural imaginary. U.S. posters mostly emphasized the frontier men in Buffalo Bill's shows. On the contrary, French promotional material almost always included Buffalo Bill and his "wild riders" right next to Native-Americans on horseback. An example of this can be seen in illustration 2, which is the front of a programme leaflet for a 1928 tour.[68] In these posters the cowboys and "the Indians" therefore belonged to the same spectacle of mass-entertainment that fascinated the avant-gardes and informed their notions of modernity.[69]

---

[65] One of Pablo Picasso's friends, Folco de Baroncelli, was also involved in organising the 1905 Paris performances of Buffalo Bill, and kept up enduring communications with the Lakota performers he'd met through the show. Elizabeth Hutton Turner, *American Artists in Paris 1919 - 1929.*, Studies in the Fine Arts : The Avant-Garde 62 (Ann Arbor: Umi research press, 1988), 50; Anne Baldassari, *Picasso Cubiste: Paris, Musée National Picasso* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux/ Flammarion, 2007), 69. Exhibition Catalogue; Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 350.

[66] Nancy Mowll Mathews, "Gauguin, Buffalo Bill, and the Cowboy Hat," *Transatlantica. Revue d'études Américaines. American Studies Journal*, no. 2 (December 31, 2017), 1, 15, https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.10968.

[67] "Indians on the Tower," *The New York Herald (European edition)*, August 10, 1889.

[68] Burns, *Transnational Frontiers*, 3.

[69] Luca di Gregorio makes the interesting distinction between Buffalo Bill's 'historic body' and his 'media-oriented body', the same is true for the Native-Americans featured in his show. Simultaneously they answered to the historicizing interest and yet they also functioned as distinctly modern bodies producing the high-paced mass-entertainment modernity demanded. Bold, "3rd Vaudeville Number: Molly Spotted Elk Does the Charleston with John Ford's the Iron Horse," 178; Di Gregorio, "Wild West France L'évolution de La Réception Française Du Western d'une Tournée de Buffalo Bill à l'autre (1889-1910)," 59.

Wild West shows as an ambiguous performative mode

Homi K. Bhabha notes in *The Location of Culture* the importance of visuality for upholding stereotypes. The seeing and being seen produces a fixity and a clear power dynamic that takes away the inherent instability of the stereotype.[70] This idea is certainly present within the wild west show and later modes of codified Native-American performance, such as the vaudeville show, both of which Molly Spotted Elk partook in. The images produced by these forms of mass entertainment and through the conscious participation of Native actors have created a relentless array of tropes which subsist in both popular culture and "high art" until today. Nevertheless, Native performance is also continuously noted by scholars to be *the* space in visual culture where consistent Native-American resistance to American expansionism and assimilation strategies can be found.[71] This is for one because of the important role dance has always had as a total form of spirituality in Native-American tradition.[72] On the other hand there is the bodily presence implicit within performance. This means that even if, like in the case of the wild west show, actors have to be complicit in colonial discourse, they are always participating in a renegotiation of that form. Simply by the act of being a body present in time and space, a prerequisite for performance, actors are already resisting tropes such as the "vanishing Indian".[73] Lastly, dance is an inherently ambiguous art mode, especially when it comes to politics.[74] It offers a strategy for "survivance". Introduced by Chippewa scholar Gerard Vizenor, "survivance" is a portmanteau of survival and Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance* or the delayed changing of meanings. The term denotes how Native-Americans went along with dominant transcripts in an effort

---

[70] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 76.

[71] Phillips, "Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture," 32.

[72] See for example the importance of dance as resistance for the Penobscot people. MacDougall, *The Penobscot Dance of Resistance*.
Or, in general: *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System* (New York: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2019), 1–2, 94-95.

[73] Not only does bodily presence denote presence in time, Carrie Noland also quotes Frantz Fanon to argue that colonial discourse fundamentally disembodies its object. Here, the argument may be made, as it is by Shay Welch, for Native performance as a mode for taking back agency and reembodying Native-Americans in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Indeed, the mobility offered by becoming part of the wild west show was an important argument for Molly Spotted Elk to pursue dancing. On the other hand, as I detail further, on several occasions she also noted a sense of feeling her bodily autonomy compromised by the audiences. Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*, *Agency and Embodiment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 199; Phillips, "Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture," 36; Welch, *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System*, 53–56.

[74] While not explicitly stated in Lepecki, I think his writings encapsulate the political ambiguity of dance. He sees movement as denoting modernity and its constant need for more of which the colonial destruction is an example. Yet dance can still hold the potential to also counter and resist this modernity. André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance : Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York ; London : Routledge, 2006), 9, 106-107.

to help their cultures "survive". Through their complicity in these often harmful, stereotypic scripts, they were hoping to change their meanings from within.[75]

A widely published example of this sort of resistance is the Ghost Dance movement and how Native-Americans interpreted it for Western popular culture. The Ghost Dance Movement appeared both in 1870 and 1890, just after the Plains Wars. It united the heterogenous Native-American peoples of the Western United States through spirituality. The emphasis on building national ties across Native Peoples offered a mode of resistance to the U.S.'s "divide and conquer" strategies. Moreover, the dance grew from a vision by spiritual leader Wovoka that performing it could bring about an end to the American westward expansion. The principal place of dance in this "pan-Indian" movement is no coincidence. As I detail further, dance makes up an epistemological basis which fundamentally ties Native-American communities to each other. While the aggressive nature of this resistance is debated, the movement still aroused suspicion and later even panic among U.S. Indian agents, federal agents then tasked with ensuring the "civilizing" of groups of Native-Americans.[76] Consequently, the Office of Indian affairs asked to have the U.S. army deployed to put an end to the movement. On December 29, 1890, this resulted in the genocide of 153 people at Wounded Knee, mostly women and children.[77] Notably, some of the imprisoned members of the Ghost Dance movement were given the choice to join Buffalo Bill's 1891 European tour instead of going to jail. The idea was that Europe would be a chance for the Native-Americans to become more "civilized". A New York Times article from 1906 for example reads: "*Buffalo Bill has been the medium of making teachers out of those that never went to school*".[78] But Buffalo Bill's primary motivation was how the inclusion of these actors would aid the show's historic "authenticity". While the Ghost dance thus became clandestine after the Wounded Knee massacre, the Wild West show unwittingly made it part of the repertoire of popular culture.[79]

---

[75] Vizenor, "4. Native-American Irony," 81; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 15, https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300153569.

[76] For example, Indian Agent Daniel Royer wrote an alarming telegram to the Federal Office of Indian Affairs on November 15, 1890: "The Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy. I have fully informed you that employees and government property at this agency have no protection and are at the mercy of these dancers. Why delay further investigation? We need protection, and we need it now." William S. E. Coleman, *Voices of Wounded Knee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 88.

[77] These were certainly not the only murders committed because of panic about the Ghost Dance. There were also smaller instances of killings by Indian agents. For more on this I refer to Coleman's detailed account. William S. E. Coleman, *Voices of Wounded Knee*, 1, 9, 65, 119, 297–310, 317; Bold, *Vaudeville Indians*, 186.

[78] "Buffalo Bill Returns with His Sioux Braves," *The New York Times*, October 2, 1906.

[79] Meethan, "Touring the Other," 123–24; Sam Maddra, *Hostiles?: The Lakota Ghost Dance and Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 23.

In 1926, almost thirty years after the Wounded Knee Massacre, Molly Spotted Elk performed a "Ghost dance of the Sioux" at the Aztec Theatre (San Antonio, Texas). She danced there as the only Native-American woman part of the chorus line known as the Aztec Girls. Her "Ghost Dance" was the culminating solo before the start of a movie called "The Last Frontier" (1926). This Western movie had a Native-American villain character. Moreover, it boasted ideas of Natives as "savage" plunderers, whose ravaging ways had to be overcome to establish "civilization". The explicit implication that the Ghost Dance referred to a period of Native-American resistance and subsequent genocide, was lost by this point. Generations upon generations of Native-American dancers had been performing "Ghost Dances" without being prosecuted. Despite the dance being technically illegal, it was allowed as long as it entertained American audiences. The argument could be made that through this popularizing of the movement, its original political aims became detonated to the point of becoming "politically neutral". Such an argument, however, does not consider the central storytelling role of dance for Native-Americans. Here the element of "survivance" becomes evident. Through Native-American performance culture the resistance of the Ghost Dance movement was kept alive and even allocated a central place in Western popular culture. Even if Molly Spotted Elk was performing in an "exoticized" setting, she paid an embodied homage to her ancestors. Knowingly or not, she proved that Native-Americans were not "vanishing", as the film she performed in front of would have implied, but had stories that were central to modern American experiences of the twentieth century.[80]

[80] Bold, "3rd Vaudeville Number: Molly Spotted Elk Does the Charleston with John Ford's the Iron Horse," 186; Vizenor, "11. Native-American Narratives: Resistance and Survivance," 229-230; Vizenor, "The Ruins of Representation," 27.

Chapter 2: Marketing Indigeneity in the Paris of "*le jazz*"

> "*So my life begins anew in Paris. Am so eager to learn, to grasp the best, to absorb what is beneficial and to really know myself as a woman. I am not afraid, for I know what fight means - and I want to return home with some satisfaction of my work. It means so much to me - yet, maybe I was born too soon for it, but I hope not. At least, I can have been a pioneer in it.*"[81]

In the following, I look at the structures of "primitivism", "exoticism" and the "taste for the foreign" which framed Molly Spotted Elk's performances in Paris. These abstract concepts established a general cosmopolitan sphere, which drew artists like Molly Spotted Elk to interwar Paris. But, the glitzy outward appearances, were often upon arrival harder to negotiate. Through highlighting the story of Tarsila Do Amaral's (1886-1973) first solo-show and how she negotiated audience expectations, I argue that Molly Spotted Elk engaged with these structures in a similar hybrid way. This hybridity, at once being true to herself, and learning from the environment she is in, is represented by the diary quote above.

Cosmopolitan Paris: fashion or fable?

> "*Paris a rare old mirror which flashes many pictures - pictures of tradition, ultra modernity, everything - such a "melting pot". But all your glamour and beauty couldn't compare to some places I have lived and dreamed.*"[82]

By 1931, the year Molly Spotted Elk arrives in Paris, Paris counted 2,700,000 "foreigners", 7% of its population.[83] This has led authors, such as James Clifford, to mark interwar Paris as a "cosmopolitan" sphere of influence, that is a spatial node where transcultural exchange became vital to the city's landscape of ideas.[84] Other accounts also testify to this. On April 19, 1923, Tarsila Do Amaral wrote to her parents:

---

[81] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, May memoranda, 1931.
[82] Idem, February 3, 1933.
[83] Of course, such numbers are questionable. While France had a developed foreigner administration service, there are, as is the case today in 2023, always people who reside in the city unregistered or might be "foreigners" only by definition. This number also does not include people from France's overseas colonial territories. See: Ihor Junyk, *Foreign Modernism: Cosmopolitanism, Identity, and Style in Paris*, *Foreign Modernism* (University of Toronto Press, 2013), 13, https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442662018.
[84] Clifford defines "cosmopolitanism" as following in his closing essay to the book *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*: "It recognizes something important: worldly, productive sites of crossing; complex, unfinished paths between local and global attachments." And further: "It points towards alternative notions of "cultural" identity. It undermines the "naturalness" of ethnic absolutisms, whether articulated at the nation-state, tribal or minority level." To say that interwar Paris is a cosmopolitan space, thus means it is a locus where nationalism and ethnic absolutism are

> "[W]*hat they want here* [in Paris] *is for each person to bring a contribution from their own country. This explains the success of the Russian dances, Japanese prints, and black music. Paris has had enough of Parisian art.*"[85]

Indeed, a 1929 map, published in surrealist writer Paul Eluard's (1895-1952) essay "Savage Art" for the magazine *Varietés* confirms this (illustration 3, currently at Tate Modern). The map shows France reduced to just Paris, while Russia, Alaska and the islands in the Pacific Ocean are enlarged.[86] As Ihor Junyk writes, in continuation of Kenneth Silver, there is a tendency within art historical literature to idealistically construct interwar Paris as a deeply progressive space. "[A]*n innocent modernity emerges from the apparently happy social relations that graced post-Enlightenment life in Paris, Berlin, and London*," Paul Gilroy puts it more pointedly.[87] Often the fashion for jazz and the happy, free atmosphere it constituted are cited as examples of this joyful, transcultural sphere of existence.[88] In reality, "cosmopolitanism" was a performative mode. The roots of French society's acceptance of the foreign lied in self-fashioning mechanisms, of which "primitivism" is a clear example. In this thesis, I consider "primitivism" to be the broad tendency in French culture to romanticize, glorify and ultimately appropriate a constructed idea and aesthetic of "inferior races". These actions then reaffirm

---

negotiated and undone by the myriad of transcultural intersections happening. While it is not completely untrue, it *is* ignoring the very real relevance of nationalism to the political climate of especially 1930s Paris. See: James Clifford, "Mixed Feelings," 360, 365.

[85] Maria Castro, "Both Paulista and Parisian: Racial Thinking in A Negra," in *Tarsila Do Amaral: Cannibalizing Modernism*, ed. Adriano Pedrosa and Fernando Oliva (São Paulo: MASP, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 2019), 55.

[86] This map is often quoted when it comes to assessing the Surrealist world view and the complexity of their primitivism. Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 2; Effie Rentzou, "The Surrealist World," in *Surrealism*, ed. Natalya Lusty, Cambridge Critical Concepts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 32, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108862639.002; Cowling, "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists," 485; Tate, "Surrealism Beyond Borders: Symposium | Tate Modern," Tate, accessed March 28, 2023, https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/Surrealism-beyond-borders/Surrealism-beyond-borders-symposium;
Michele Greet, *Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris Between the Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 231; Miriam Deutch and Jack D. Flam, *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History.*, The Documents of Twentieth Century Art (Berkeley: University of California press, 2003), 210.

[87] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 44.

[88] This is for example what Leininger-Miller argues created the right milieu for pan-Africanism and contesting colonial discourse. See: Leininger-Miller, "New Negro Artists in Paris", xvi, 76.
Nevertheless, there were also other voices. The surrealists around André Breton for example were critical of the widespread bourgeoisie vogue for jazz, for example in their essay "Murderous Humanitarianism" (1932), written in collaboration with Caribbean intellectuals. This essay paints a complex picture of the vogue for the exotic and its complicity in colonial rhetoric, amplifying the "Great France" myth. This is not to say that Surrealism did not partake in this rhetoric too and I don't want to give too much credit to Breton, as other texts by him imply that he didn't use or like to buy African art, simply because it was "too commercial". See: André Breton et al., "Murderous Humanitarianism," in *Negro: An Anthology*, ed. Nancy Cunard, trans. Samuel Beckett (F. Ungar Publishing Company, 1970); Stansell, "Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of 'Reason,'" 119; Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 127.

and produce a "fixity" for that deemed inferiority.[89] Acceptance of the "Other" was always in function of creating a French identity; tolerant and Enlightened. Yet the clear boundaries between what was "Other" and what was French were always painstakingly kept up, for example by Dada members knowingly *wanting* to shock through using African imagery.[90] Importantly, this is the point in time where French colonialism reached its summit. So for example, while at the *Ball Nègre* night club French and Black people freely danced together, La Grande France held strong anti-miscegenation politics in all of its colonies.[91] The general rule was that the Other was only consumed and appropriated for the purpose of fashioning the idea of a "free Paris". This veil of tolerance in turn defused decolonial politics and forced the self-expression of minority groups to adhere to French expectations.[92]

Parisian interwar "cosmopolitanism" being an ahistoric notion that ignores the power dynamics at play, does not mean the myth of Paris as a multicultural city of acceptance was not powerful. Already in 1929, Molly Spotted Elk expressed the idea that "Enlightened Europe" would allow her free expression: "*The more I dance the more I want to interpret my emotions without any limitations. Maybe some day I will have that chance. If not in America, then in Europe.*"[93] Further, I detail how Paris in particular became the centre of those hopes for her. Scholars of varying fields stress the utopian quality of interwar Paris for artists. Michele Greet in her book *Transatlantic Encounters* reveals how Latin-

---

[89] This obviously means I do not take into account some of the broader definitions of "primitivism" the term has sparked. I stick quite close to how Goldberg defined the term in 1938. However, I want to stress that this "primitivism" in the context of 1930s Paris went broader than the avant-garde artistic schools. Moreover, I add the emphasis that "primitivism" shares an epistemological basis with racism and evolutionism. Even though, many of the artists who took on the term tried to undo racist preconceptions, they ended up affirming them. I do not take into consideration here, what Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simoni calls "classical primitivism". That is, in accordance with Ernst Gombrich, the idea that "primitivism" is a more general tendency in the West to draw back to prior aesthetic examples. Goldwater also mentions this variant in his definition, but notes the particular value judgement that is different in the second case. Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, 252–54; Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni, "Primitivisms in Dispute: Production and Reception of the Works of Two Brazilian Artists in Paris in the 1920s," *Modernism/Modernity Print Plus*, August 23, 2021, para. 10, https://modernismmodernity.org/articles/simioni-primitivisms-in-dispute.

[90] Thytacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic,* 29.

[91] Vincent Bouvet and Gérard Durozoi, *Paris, 1919-1939: Art et Culture* (Paris: Hazan, 2009), 228, 392.

[92] I am referring to ideas formulated by Edward Said in his seminal book for post-colonial theory, *Orientalism*. Specifically, I refer to Edward W. Said, "Style, Expertise, Vision: Orientalism's Worldliness" , in *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 227. This chapter is on orientalist scholars, but it provides the structure to understand how worldliness (in my terms: cosmopolitanism) and othering mechanisms can exist in the same frame and even feed upon each other.

See also: Junyk, *Foreign Modernism*, 6–7, 128; Bouvet and Durozoi, *Paris, 1919-1939*, 228–34; Anne Décoret-Ahiha, *Les danses exotiques en France: 1880 - 1940.*, Recherches (Pantin: Centre national de la danse, 2004), 161–69; Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 107, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928525; Elizabeth Ezra, "The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France," in *The Colonial Unconscious* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), 3, https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501724046; Brett A. Berliner, "Dancing Dangerously: Colonizing the Exotic at the Bal Nègre in the Inter-War Years," *French Cultural Studies* 12, no. 34 (February 2001): 60, 69-70, https://doi.org/10.1177/095715580101203404.

[93] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* November 30, 1929.

American artists were drawn to the city after it proved to be an unlimited source for transgressive and provocative ideas. These in turn aligned with and developed Latin-American revolutionary ideals.[94] Moreover, Theresa Leininger-Miller argues that the city served as a political haven crucial for the artistic development of the African American artists of the Harlem Renaissance. The communities, formed at Black jazz bars and nightclubs in Paris, provided spaces in which African American artists could negotiate and heal their split subjectivities.[95] Just the idea of this would have been, in Janet Wolff's term, "exhilarating" to artists. It pushed them to go beyond previously imagined boundaries of gender, identity and "race", and create new meanings and expressions.[96] Therefore, even though it was a myth, the construction of Paris as hybrid and progressive would have been a very real and creative force in the minds of artists crossing the Atlantic space to reside in Paris. [97]

Nevertheless, when artists came to Paris they certainly experienced the power dynamics of *La Grande France*. Molly Spotted Elk for most of her 1931 to 1934 period in Paris was struggling financially and at times physically ill and starving when she couldn't find jobs.[98] The Great Depression and its effects on the European economy were no doubt a factor in this. But it also points to the harsh nature of the fashion for foreign, requiring artists to apply themselves to the French market within the recognizable structures of its othering mechanisms, or starve when they refused. It was not enough to be foreign to elicit the attention of audiences, artists had to perform the ways in which their national identities were "exotic". *Artists-étrangers,* such as Tarsila Do Amaral, but also for example Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957) or Tsuguharu Foujita (1886-1968), who I discuss further, had to clearly emphasize their "Otherness". They did so, for example, through the construction of personality myths and the

---

[94] Greet, *Transatlantic Encounters*, 5.
[95] Leininger-Miller, "New Negro Artists in Paris", xvi, xviii; Berliner, "Dancing Dangerously," 62-63.
[96] With this use of the term "exhilarating" I am also referring to ideas formulated by Janett Wolff and extended on by Linda Nochlin in her formulation of an "exhilarating exile". Wolff posits the hypothesis that female artists were more productive when they were strangers in another country because this position offered them an opportunity to break free from previous dominant hierarchical structures and expectations. Thinking of this hypothesis intersectionally I believe it could certainly also be applied to artists from American minority communities, such as African American and Native-American communities. New structures of meaning-making being possible within a colonial discourse that as Bhabha describes it relies on the fixity of its notions, will immediately undo some of that "fixity" and therefore undo the stereotypes. The condition of 'being a stranger' would allow, for a limited time at least, that fixity to be countered. See: Michele Greet, "'Exhilarating Exile': Four Latin American Women Exhibit in Paris," in *Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris between the Wars* (Newhaven/ London: Yale University Press, 2018), 122–45; Linda Nochlin, "Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation," in *Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation* (Duke University Press, 1998), 37–58, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822379829-004; Janet Wolff, *Resident Alien : Feminist Cultural Criticism* (New Haven, CT : Yale University Press, 1995), 14.
[97] Junyk, *Foreign Modernism*, 4; Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton (N.J.): Princeton university press, 1989).
[98] For example, *Molly Spotted Elk's Diary 1929-1933,* December 24, 1933.

conscious mining of the cultures of their home countries, according to the expectations of the Parisian audience.[99] However, these constructions of national identity stood on fragile footing. Generally avant-garde artists had always promoted "artistic brands" through commercial self-mythologizing. But, the market, and arguably art historical scholarship in the twentieth century, was especially sensitive to "foreign artists" doing so. The label of "inauthentic" got applied and became a death mark for artists who were too "derivative" of European avant-gardes or who commercialized their national identity too blatantly.[100] Although self-expression of foreign artists in Paris was no less genuine, they did have to walk a particularly narrow tightrope of audience expectations. In turn, this certainly influenced some of their artistic choices, a process which will become particularly clear through highlighting Tarsila Do Amaral's career in Paris.[101]

Tarsila Do Amaral, A Negra *and making a name for one's Self in Paris*

Tarsila Do Amaral was a Brazilian painter who was seminal to the development of Brazilian modernism. Born in a wealthy family that owned a coffee plantation, she had the opportunity to travel back and front on the Atlantic Ocean numerous times. This meant her art education and career took place between Paris and São Paolo, as she stayed in Paris intermittently between 1920 and 1929.[102] Her art of these years tows the line between the cubism of her teacher Fernand Léger, abstract Surrealism's experiments with spontaneous, organic form and figurative Surrealisms's symbolism.[103] Tarsila Do Amaral's Parisian career really took off when from June 7 to June 26, 1926, she was offered a solo exhibition at the Galerie Percier. The opportunity for this exhibition came partly through Swiss-French poet Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961), her friend and mentor in Paris. Cendrars was the author of

---

[99] For example, Romanian sculptor Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957) chose to tell the story of his arrival in Paris in terms of an artistic pilgrimage. This heightened the drama and proved the 'authenticity' of his desire to create art. Junyk, *Foreign Modernism*, 14; Simioni, "Primitivisms in Dispute," para. 4.

[100] Natalia Majluf, "'Ce n'est Pas Le Pérou,' or, the Failure of Authenticity: Marginal Cosmopolitans at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1855," Critical Inquiry 23, no. 4 (1997): 868.

[101] For more on this negotiating framework and the power hierarchies implicit in it, see also: See also: Pauline Créteur, "Etre Une Artiste Étrangère à Paris Dans Les Années 1920," in *Pionnières: Artistes Dans Le Paris Des Années Folles*, ed. Camille Morineau and Lucia Pesapane (Paris: Musée du Luxembourg Sénat, 2022), 41; Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni, "Primitivisms in Dispute: Production and Reception of the Works of Two Brazilian Artists in Paris in the 1920s," *Modernism/Modernity Print Plus*, August 23, 2021, para. 4, https://modernismmodernity.org/articles/simioni-primitivisms-in-dispute.

[102] It is important to note that like Molly Spotted Elk, Tarsila Do Amaral kept a substantial archive, including correspondence and publicity, and albums in which she assembled her memories and artistic inspirations. For an overview of Tarsila Do Amaral's biography, see: Aracy A. Amaral and Jordi Sanguino, *Tarsila Do Amaral* (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2009), 67–84.

[103] About Surrealist influences, see: Adriano Pedrosa and Fernando Oliva, eds., *Tarsila Do Amaral, Cannibalizing Modernism*, Revised edition (São Paulo, Brazil: MASP, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 2019), 127, 156.

Anthologie Nègre (1921), a book that had been seminal in broadcasting the avant-garde love of African culture to a mass audience. Cendrars was, particularly, a fan of Do Amaral's painting *Morro Da Favela* (Shantytown Hill, 1924, private collection, illustration 4), which ended up being pivotal to the decision Galerie Percier took to give her a solo exhibit. This colourful painting clearly capitalized on the Parisian interest in Black culture. Simultaneously, it provided a happy image of living together in the São Paulo melting pot of ethnicities, which "cosmopolitan" Parisians could relate to. Other works, for example *A Negra* (The Negress, 1923, São Paulo, MASP, illustration 5), which I discuss further, more clearly rely on a cubist "primitivizing" visual language. The exhibition was met with a lot of positive press.[104] A look at the way she approached and was told to approach this exhibition makes the case that she was very consciously interacting with Parisian tastes. She marketed herself through her perceived "otherness" and even "primitiveness", while simultaneously negotiating those audience expectations.

Leading up to the exhibition, Cendrars wrote several letters to her and her friend, later husband, Oswald De Andrade (1890-1954) with commercial considerations about how to frame and publicize the event. When Do Amaral was contemplating where to do the show, he stressed the need for a trustworthy and reputable gallery with the right connections in the art world.[105] These comments would not have been new to Do Amaral. Like Molly Spotted Elk, her writings about her presence in Paris showed she was deeply analytical about the people she approached. Moreover, she consciously mined her "Brazilianness" to attract a network.[106] Yet, although her *Brasilidade* brought an array of artists to her doorstep, Cendrars discouraged her from relying on it for the Percier solo exhibit. In a letter to De Andrade on April 1, 1926, he recommends Tarsila do Amaral to "*utilise her Indian flair*" with an emphasis on what "*PARISIAN*" audiences wanted, rather than doing a "*South American*

---

[104] Michele Greet, "For French Eyes: Tarsila Do Amaral's Brazillian Landscapes," in *Tarsila Do Amaral, Cannibalizing Modernism*, ed. Adriano Pedrosa and Fernando Oliva, Revised edition (São Paulo: MASP, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 2019), 121; Greet, "'Exhilarating Exile,'" 123–25.

[105] Greet, "'Exhilarating Exile,'" 124.

[106] In a 1938 remembrance about Blaise Cendrars, Do Amaral writes: "In my studio on the Rue Hégésippe Moreau in Montmartre would meet all of Paris's avant-garde artists. We had frequent Brazillian lunches there. *Feijoada*, compote of *bacuri*, *pinga a*nd straw cigarettes were essential to give that exotic note. And I took great care to diplomatically create similar groups [of artists to bring together at these events]. The first team: Cendrars, Fernand Léger, Jules Supervielle, Brancusi, Robert Delaunay, Vollard, Rolf de Maré, Darius Milhaud, the black prince Kojo Tovalu (Cendrars loves black people). Some of the aforementioned passed on to the group containing Jean Cocteau, Erik Satie, Albert Gleizes, André Lhote and so many other interesting people. Picasso, chained to his work almost never went out; Jules Romains and Valéry Larbaud were also good friends."
This quote shows Tarsila Do Amaral consciously creating an "exotic note" in her studio and diplomatically arranging the artists that would attend these Brazillian affairs. Quoted in full: Amaral and Sanguino, *Tarsila Do Amaral*, 37.

demonstration".[107] This letter reveals how he viewed mining Indigeneity as the most commercially viable action for Tarsila do Amaral to take. In a context in which African and pre-Columbian art were in vogue, this would make the show answer to the demands of "primitivism" and simultaneously steer her image away from the pitfalls of nationalism. In Cendrars' mind, the French had already appropriated Indigeneity. Therefore, it wouldn't offend them and wouldn't pose a risk to Do Amaral's career.[108] The Parisian audience Cendrars expected is characterized here as selectively global, expecting "Otherness", but not accepting obvious nationalism.[109]

As an artist from Brazil, Do Amaral would have been considered to have had unique access to the Indigenous art worlds coveted and appropriated by Parisian avant-gardes. Yet, she wanted to prove that Brazil was not the "primitive" and "exotic" site this French imaginary had made it out to be. Brazil was a modern country with a blossoming artistic community. Here a tension arises because to speak to the French audience, artists were expected to - as seen in Cendrars' comments – relegate themselves to its expectations. As Michel Greet writes "*Primitivism is what gave her legitimacy in Paris.*"[110] In a way, she was therefore obliged to use the paradigm for her paintings. Yet, possibly through the passionate lectures of her friend writer Mario De Andrade (1893-1945), she also saw her own implicit value in primitivism. To these Brazilian modernists Black American and Indigenous American peoples held the key to breaking the Eurocentric spell on Brazil.[111] *A Negra* shows the complexity of this doubly-directed primitivism. The painting depicts a woman with a small head and a large, naked body in front of an abstracted background with horizontal lines. Her face is characterized by a wide nose, small upwardly slanted eyes and large lips. Her body folds in on itself uncomfortably and one of her breasts spills over her forearm. In this work, Do Amaral clearly relies on a "primitivizing" visual

---

[107] Own translations, original: « *Faites une exposition FRANCAISES, PARISIENNE et non pas une manifestation sud-Américaine. Le danger pour vous c'est l'officialité.* […] *C'est une affaire de doigté. Use cette fois-ci de ton flaire d'Indiens et n'oublie pas ce que je t'ai dit à ce sujet.* » ("Do a FRENCH, PARISIAN exhibition and not a South-American manifestation. The danger for you is in the officiality […] it's a question of tact. Use your Indian flair this time and don't forget what I told you on this subject.)
This letter, dated April 1, 1926 and sent to Tarsila's partner Oswald de Andrade is cited in full in: Aracy A. Amaral, *Tarsila, Sua Obra e Seu Tempo*, 3a ed. (São Paulo: Editora 34/ Edusp, 2003), 388.
[108] This interpretation of the letter is offered in: Greet, "'Exhilarating Exile,'" 125.
[109] This is not saying that reviews didn't manifestly determine Tarsila do Amaral's solo exhibition in terms of national Brazillian identity. See for example: "Les Arts: Peinture Exotique," *Paris-Midi*, June 10, 1926, 2.
[110] Greet, "For French Eyes: Tarsila Do Amaral's Brazillian Landscapes," 119; Simioni, "Primitivisms in Dispute," paras. 17–21.
[111] For example, Oswald de Andrade writes in his Manifesto for Pau Brasil poetry: "The counter-weight of native originality to neutralize academic conformity." This sentence points to the mining of Indigeneity to break free from the European influence of the academy. See: Oswald de Andrade and Stella M. de Sá Rego (translator), "Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry," *Latin American Literary Review* 14, no. 27 (1986): 187.

language. The face is stylized in such a way that it undoubtedly refers to African and Pre-Columbian masks. Still, Maria Castro points out, how similar the pose is to an earlier self-portrait called *Manteau Rouge* (Red Coat, 1923, illustration 6). This implies a much closer relationship to the figure, than the faraway fetishization of European cubist primitivism. In a city where Do Amaral herself was a "primitive Other" to the French, she related to the woman in *A Negra*.[112]

The implication of self in the other does not justify how *A Negra* contributes to a fixity of stereotype for a minority group to which she did not belong. However, it does point to the complexity of primitivist evocations by foreigner artists in Paris. In his much-discussed think piece for *The Art Bulletin* "Decentring Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery", Partha Mitter attempts an explanation for why "primitivism" was such a prevalent paradigm in art produced by artists considered to be geographically "peripheral" to the European avant-garde. He writes: "[P]*rimitivism provided the colonized a singular weapon with which to interrogate the capitalist/colonial world of modernity, enabling them to produce a counter modern discourse of resistance*."[113] Calling a Brazillian artist "the colonized" is unnuanced of course, but the process and negotiation of "primitivism" in the case of Tarsila Do Amaral and Brazillian modernism is exactly what Mitter described. The space between counter and modern is important here too, as these artists through their own implication of the "primitive" consciously posit a modern discourse of itself, one that diverges from the Eurocentric view, something I discuss in the next chapter. It is clear from the example of Tarsila Do Amaral that while "primitivism' is in the first place a European art historic vogue, it is also a tool for people oppressed by the designation as "primitive" to resist this word. Her example also shows that the uptake of a "primitivist" mode was a means to an end. Therefore, I want to propose that "primitivism" was not just any weapon against the Othering mechanisms of colonial discourse; in the hands of foreigner artists in Paris, it was a crowbar, used to pry open closed doors and develop modes of resistance from within.[114]

"A Penobscot in Paris"

After working for the 101 Ranch Wild West show for a few years, Molly Spotted Elk spent four years in New York and Arizona, dancing in night clubs and vaudeville theatres.[115] The year 1929, she spent

---

[112] Castro, "Both Paulista and Parisian: Racial Thinking in A Negra," 59.
[113] Partha Mitter, "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 543.
[114] For the African American taking on of the primitivist visual language, see: Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism*, 47.
[115] On Molly Spotted Elk's life from 1927-1930: McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 72-127

in Northern Canada filming for the movie "The Silent Enemy" (1930), directed by H.P. Carver. The experience of being with the Ojibwa people there was enlightening to her about her purpose and artistic intent. The film made her have big hopes for the future. But, it didn't do well and upon return to New York, she felt dissatisfied with American audiences again. [116] She despised their eroticizing demands for revealing costumes and "sex appeal", and accused them of having no interest in genuine expressions of her heritage within her dance.[117] In the same year as she penned these laments, she met anthropologist and founder of the French "scouts", Paul Coze Dabija (1903-1974).[118] Coze was an Algerian-French minor celebrity in Paris, who was known as an authority on all things Native-American. Paul Coze's knowledge on this subject came partly from childhood fascinations for Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull and partly from actual experiences in America as an ethnographer tied to the ethnographic museum at the Trocadéro Palace.[119] Yet, it was not always clear where the former ended and the latter began. In Paris, Coze made sure to become the central point of contact for Native-American performers who came to the city. In a biographic insert written by Coze about another Native-American, Yakima/ Mi'kmaq performer, Charlie Oskomon, Coze stressed the "*vivifying air*" and "*intelligent sympathies*" of Paris.[120] France, according to Coze, unlike America allowed Native-American performers to express themselves "authentically". Possibly, his appraisals of the city inspired Molly Spotted Elk to look to Paris as the locus for her own artistic purpose.[121]

---

[116] See Molly Spotted Elk's last page of the 1929-1933 diaries, quoted partially below in the section about the colonial exposition. *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* final page.

[117] For example, on May 30, 1930, she writes about her costumes: "Rehearsals again - something new once in a while to be done. But mostly nude parades- I am a river (?) and an Injun in the flesh parade. Feel terrible about being bare and walking around. But I must work."
And on June 6, 1930: "My golly I think I'll be a universal Injun as Dean Cornwell [American illustrator who she modelled for] said and Jimmy - when they want a Sioux, oop I'm one - When they need a Mex, I am one - so there one is. what a face I must possess, at least its funny looking." *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* May 30, June 6, 1930

[118] When she met Coze is not entirely clear, however, she certainly met him sometime before 1930. See: Daniel Dubois, "Paul Coze, Wakanda: archives, collection Daniel Dubois : vente, Paris, Drouot-Richelieu, vendredi 10 avril 2015," (Paris: Tessier-Sarrou, Hôtel Drouot, 2015), 69. Auction catalogue.

[119] Horton, "Performing Paint, Claiming Space", 3-5; Peltier-Caroff, "Un Potlatch Au Trocadéro", 483-490; Caroline Peltier-Caroff, "Paul Coze, Un Scout Ethnographe Au Musée d'Ethnographie Du Trocadéro," in *Le Scalp et Le Calumet: Imaginer et Représenter l'Indien En Occident Du XVIe Siècle à Nos Jours*, ed. Annick Notter and Camille Faucourt (La Rochelle/ Paris: Mah! musées d'art et d'histoire de la Rochelle/ Somogy Éditions d'art, 2017), 220–21. Exhibition Catalogue.
Molly Spotted Elk also confirms his love for Buffalo Bill, as she notes that she received a postcard from him with Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull depicted on it. *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* November 12, 1933

[120] "Paris seemed to favor him [Oskomon] with its vivifying air, its curiosities, its intelligent sympathies, its artistic forces which make it the birthplace of art and the crucible of thought [...]" Charlie Oskomon and Paul Coze, *Green Corn Offering: Twenty-Two American Indian Poems*, Paris: Wakanda, 1936, 2-8, quoted in: Horton, "Performing Paint, Claiming Space," 30.

[121] For more on Coze's appraisals of Paris as a centre for Native-American personal development, see: Peltier-Caroff, "Un Potlatch Au Trocadéro", 497, 501.

Molly Spotted Elk's chance for taking the transatlantic trip came in the form of an invitation to be part of the "Indian Jazz Band" sent by the United States to the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale*, the circumstances of which I detail in chapter 4. The moment she arrived in Paris, on May 2, 1931, Molly Spotted Elk and the band were greeted by Paul Coze and his wife at Le Havre.[122] In 1929, Coze had co-founded *Wakanda, Cercle d'art et d'études Peaux-Rouges*. In a 1934 *annonce* for the circle, it is characterized as a society for "*those who loved and admired the Red Race*" and wanted to "*promote in Europe the artistic, literary and poetic traditions of the Indians of North-America*".[123] While the objectives of the club seem to include Native-American agency, in reality it was an erudite "Indianist" society. This means members dressed up "Native-American", partook in supposedly "authentic", but actually spectacle-oriented ceremonies and created Native-American material culture based on "traditional techniques". A "surrogate Indigeneity" was created.[124] Illustration 7, for example, shows Paul Coze dressed up in a self-made supposedly genuine Sioux costume and headdress. In essence, the phenomenon, which exists until today, is a form of cultural "primitivism". "Indianists" appropriate Indigeneity because they see it as a better way of being inside of modernity, more spontaneous and closer to the true fundaments of existence. Native impersonation allowed for nostalgic escapism.[125] The *Cercle Wakanda* counted a wide variety of members; from director and vice-director of the Trocadéro museum, Paul Rivet (1876-1958) and Georges Henri Rivière (1897-1985), about whom more in chapter 5, to above mentioned Native performer Charlie Oskomon and his sponsor, "primitivist" composer Jeanne Herscher-Clément (1878-1941).[126]

Through her contacts with Coze, Molly Spotted Elk immediately tied herself to this network of "Indianists", although she wasn't always fond of it. In particular, she almost immediately disliked Charlie Oskomon (Maïs Vert), the central figure, other than Coze, in Wakanda. She found his

---

[122] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* May 2, 1931.

[123] Own translation, original full text: « Wakanda fondé en janvier 1934 est un mouvement dont les membres se proposent:
1. De grouper autour d'eux ceux et celles qui aiment et admirent la Race Rouge
2. D'acquérir la connaissance de l'histoire, des traditions et des coutumes des Indiens de l'Amérique du Nord.
3. De faire connaître en Europe les traditions artistiques, littéraires et poètiques qui se rattachent aux Indiens Peaux-Rouges.
4. De répandre ces idées par des applications artistiques (expositions, réalisations scéniques, cinématographiques ou musicales, œuvres littéraires et poètiques, conférences etc.), des applications pratiques (jeux, camps et vie de plein air, voyages et ethnographie, bibliographie).» Paul Rivet, "Wakanda, cercle d'art et d'etudes Peaux-Rouges," *Journal de la Société des américanistes* 26, no. 1 (1934): 203.

[124] Caroline Peltier-Caroff, "Un Potlatch Au Trocadero. Paul Coze Indianiste Ethnographe," in *Les années folles de l'ethnographie: Trocadéro 28-37*, ed. André Delpuech and Christine Laurière, Collection archives (Paris: Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, 2017), 498–501.

[125] Penny, "Not Playing Indian," 193–95.

[126] Peltier-Caroff, "Un Potlatch Au Trocadero. Paul Coze Indianiste Ethnographe," 499.

performances shallow and too showy.[127] As contextualized in the literature review, she questioned his legitimacy to be considered one of the foremost Native-American performers of Paris at the time. This tension came to a head in May 1933 when Oskomon and Molly Spotted Elk brawled over a music hall performance.[128] She kept up contacts with Coze even after this, but it is notable that *Wakanda* published twenty-two poems supposedly written by Oskomon in 1936. After all, publishing ethnographic material from Native-Americans was one of *Wakanda's* objectives. On the other hand, Molly Spotted Elk, who had been writing poems and short stories since New York, did not get published by the *cercle*.[129] It seems she was hesitant to tie herself into the sphere of Indianism too profoundly. Yet, her later husband, journalist Jean Archambaud was an "Indianist". In his first article about Oskomon and Molly Spotted Elk for the Paris-Soir, he describes himself as a "*wretched pale-face*" in comparison with the noble nature of the Native-Americans. Moreover, he was also part of Coze's French Scouts. [130] Illustration 8 shows Archambaud "playing Indian", perhaps to assist in one of Molly Spotted Elk's dances as a "tomtom" player or be a translator for her lectures.[131] She addresses a note to Coze in 1930, affirming his "Indianism": "*To Paul Coze, Under whose fair skin there beats the heart of an Indian*" (see illustration 9).[132] In general, therefore, it seems she tolerated French Indianism because it provided a framework for her to share her love for her own culture.[133]

As I've detailed above, interwar Parisian audiences were obsessed with jazz, Black American dance culture and African objects.[134] Conversely, the fascination for and romanticization of all things Native-American had gone through the mentioned slower evolution: from literary ideas to wild west shows to select groups, such as Coze's, appropriating Native-American culture in more fundamental ways. Yet, for the general French audience of the 1930s, the taste for "Black culture" bled into expectations for Native-American dance, music and art as well. On October 20, 1932, *La Liberté* tellingly titled an

---

[127] "Don't think I'd care to dance more than for three times with Oskomon - he strikes me a good show man but ignorant of real Indian art; music, dances and mythology. He knows nothing!" *Molly Spotted Elk's Diary 1929-1933,* July 3, 1931.
[128] "Charlie in a stew. He swore, fussed and was vintable - disagreeable thing - on account of a tom-tom and his jealousy. I told him to shut up and he choked me. We created a panic." Ibid, May 1, 1933.
[129] Horton, "Performing Paint, Claiming Space," 30; McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk,* 77, 134;
[130] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries,* August 14, 1931; Jean Archambaud, "Cependant qu'on inaugure la Maison de Washington à Vincennes," *Paris Soir*, May 27, 1931, 3.
[131] McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 206.
[132] Daniel Dubois, "Paul Coze, Wakanda: archives, collection Daniel Dubois: vente, Paris, Drouot-Richelieu, vendredi 10 avril 2015," (Paris: Tessier-Sarrou, Hôtel Drouot, 2015), 69. Auction catalogue.
[133] This parallels the positive attitudes described by Glenn Penny of Native Americans visiting the German hobbyist scene, although attitudes are currently changing as Native-Americans come to see dominant impersonation narratives as a threat to their agency and cultural survivance. Penny, "Not Playing Indian," 193.
[134] Thytacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 117-120.

article about Molly Spotted Elk and Oskomon's performance at the ethnographic museum: "*The Indian's art, will it surpass the Negro's art?*".[135] An important aspect of the vogue for African and African American music, art and dance was eroticism. That is the idea that "savages" could experience the erotic, free from "western societal conventions". The popularity of exotic African- and Native-American dancer Josephine Baker (1906-1975) exemplifies this. In 1926, Baker had kickstarted her career in Paris dancing topless in a skirt made from banana-shaped jewel pieces at the Folies-Bergère.[136] This eroticism also had an impact on "Indianism". For example, Paul Coze hired an Asian erotic actress "princess Dao" for his movie project *Wakanda*. Through this, he meant to entice a larger French audience to join his *cercle*. In his albums, held at Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, she is portrayed sometimes fully nude and otherwise dressed "Native-American" (see illustration 10).[137] So while Molly Spotted Elk had come to Paris to avoid dancing nude, she certainly encountered further eroticizing there. October 14, 1931, Molly Spotted Elk auditioned for Folies-Bergère, just like Baker had. This audition went well, but she refused the offer because they wanted her to "*dance with less clothes on*".[138]

Although she never danced bare again against her wishes, she did take other measures that ensured her a place in the hearts of Parisians outside of the select Indianist group. Mostly, she relied on the nostalgic nature of French appreciation of Native-Americans for publicizing herself.[139] For example, it seems, when she was in New York, she'd still sometimes use the Penobscot name Neeburban.[140] Conversely, in Paris she was always Spotted Elk or *Elan Moucheté/tacheté* in publicity.[141] This name with its

---

[135] Marius Richard, "L'art Indien va-t-il remplacer l'art nègre?," *La Liberté*, October 20, 1932.
This assertion is meant to be inflammatory, but also not untrue as the Surrealists at this very moment are turning to Oceanic and Native-American art as an alternative for African art because the latter had become too mainstream. See: Thytacott, *Surrealism and The Exotic*, 122.

[136] Elizabeth Ezra, "A Colonial Princess Josephine Baker's French Films," in *The Colonial Unconscious* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), 99, https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501724046; Mae G. Henderson, "Josephine Baker and La Revue Negre: From Ethnography to Performance," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (April 1, 2003): 113, https://doi.org/10.1080/1046293032000141338; Berliner, "Dancing Dangerously," 63.

[137] Paul Coze, "Album Paul Coze" (Paris, 1939 1929), 50, PA000514, Archives du musée du quai Branly.

[138] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, October 13, 1931; October 14, 1931.

[139] A review of Paul Coze's exhibition "Peau-Rouges d'Hier et Aujourd'hui" for which Molly Spotted Elk performed at the opening makes this nostalgic appeal evident. It starts off by evoking childhood dreaming about Native-Americans: "Large forests of Canada, peopled by Indians, everlasting campers, which boy of fifteen years old hasn't dreamed of you one evening after turning the last page of a romance novel by Fenimore Cooper with regret?" Georges G., "Peaux-Rouges d'Hier et Aujourd'hui," *Record: grand journal hebdomadaire*, May 23, 1931.

[140] For example in the 1930 note to Paul Coze cited here in footnote 60, see: Dubois, "Paul Coze, Wakanda: archives, collection Daniel Dubois", 69.

[141] Archambaud, "Cependant qu'on inaugure la Maison de Washington à Vincennes"; G., "Record"; Louis Saurel, "Les Vedettes de Couleur," *Les Dimanches de la Femme*, December 25, 1932; Shör, "Spotted Elk 'L'Elan Moucheté'"; "Pour la première fois, une Indienne consent à dévoiler les 'secrets' de l'endurance physique de sa race," *Au grand air : guide du campeur et du touriste*, May 25, 1939; "Echos sur le C.I.C.," *La Critique cinématographique*, September 24, 1932.

totemic reference consciously called into memory the "noble Indian" characters from adventure novels and childhoods spent "playing Indian". In the few newspaper interviews she got, she always stressed her "full-blood" descent, a marker of "authenticity", as I explore further in this thesis. These articles also clearly evoked the "noble savage" character of the French imaginary. Molly Spotted Elk was always characterized as the private, shy Native-American girl with a heart of gold.[142] Paul Coze posed "princess Dao" naked or in compromising poses with Oskomon.[143] But, he used Molly Spotted Elk as his model for a portrait of Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680), a Native-American girl who at the time was being considered as a candidate for beatification, see illustration 11.[144] Moreover, Molly Spotted Elk herself was also acutely aware of how much her career depended on her ability to seem "authentically Penobscot". She even weaponized this "authenticity" in her arguments with Oskomon, when she threatens "*if he gets too mouthy, I'll tell him* [I know] *what he really is*".[145] A picture emerges of Molly Spotted Elk as quite willing to go along with stereotypes of the "Native-American" as long as it didn't compromise her self-expression in her dance and bodily autonomy.

Despite "exoticizing", eroticizing demands and the fragile balancing act involved in the "authenticity" discourse, Molly Spotted Elk *did* often find that in Paris she was allowed more freedom to express herself than in the U.S. For example, in 1932, she connected with William Bradley (1878-1939), an American publisher. Bradley was known for working with Gertrude Stein and was part of the distinct American-expat network in Paris.[146] He motivated her to work on a novel; a fictionalized autobiography about her early years living on Indian Island. His feedback on her first, rushed draft of the story was negative and Molly Spotted Elk wrote to her diary:

> "*Called Bradley - sorry I did as he criticized that chapter mercifully - too much religious thoughts - too drawn out - quick change for Piel - etc. not enough conversation - so I told him*

---

[142] Shör, "Spotted Elk 'L'Elan Moucheté'"; "Au grand air"; Saurel, "Les Dimanches de la femme."
[143] Coze, "Album Paul Coze," 43, 46, 50; Carinne Peltier-Caroff, "Un potlatch au Trocadero," 523.
[144] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries 1929-1933,* December 9, 1932.
[145] July 2, 1931: "Can't understand why he [Charlie Oskomon] knows so little of Indian dances. Studied Oskomon, saw pictures of his father - typical negro type, must be from the Carolinas or the southern Atlantic sea board. Anyway he's no more chief than I nor a Yakima. He's a good bluff anyway - so won't disturb him with it."
April 18, 1933: "his temperament isnt Indian and if he gets too mouthy, I'll tell him [I know] what he really is, maybe that will shut him up." *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* July 2, 1931; April 18, 1933.
See also: McLean and Cook, *Headline Hollywood*, 123.
It's also very telling that if Oskomon *weren't* Native-American he *would* want to perform it for French audiences. Despite how fashionable African American culture was at the time, the sheer number of African American artists coming to Paris meant he *would* have had better luck trying to fit into a niche with growing potential, such as Native-American culture was. Décoret-Ahiha, *Les danses exotiques en France*, 150, 193.
[146] See: William A. Bradley Literary Agency Records (MS-00491), 1909-1982, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas, Austin. https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/fasearch/findingAid.cfm?eadid=00300.

to wait wait until I had it down to the way I wanted it. He likes the style - "Apid" etc. - but he is so critical! Miserable about how I shall continue - Hope I don't have to make it a literary idea of Injuns!"[147]

"I suppose one has to cater to the general American idea of an Indian, a literary kind and mine seem quite, well not like fiction and I'll be damned if I change my characters. They're Injun and they stay Injun!"[148]

These two entries, with a day in between, show how Molly Spotted Elk took Bradley's criticism to mean that he wanted the story to be more in line with expectations of Native-Americans. Her determined response, unwilling to compromise for audience preconceptions, is very telling. She never published a novel under his auspices. The book deal she *did* get, came on June 15, 1939, roughly three months before the beginning of the Second World War. Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner agreed to publish her book of short stories and myths *Katahdin: Wigwam's Tales of the Abnaki Tribes.* The Penobscot are a smaller group within the Eastern Abenaki peoples. The book was to be part of their "Jewels of the Orient" series, and the French publishing house asked Molly Spotted Elk to actively be part of its press campaign. In interviews, she'd have to emphasize her ancestry as the daughter of a chief, that she'd collected the stories on Indian Island and that the book was to be a contribution to "ethnography".[149] Through the French publishing house, Molly Spotted Elk *did* get to deliver an uncompromised product. Although the book deal fell through because of the war, Maine University Press published *Katahdin* in 2004.[150] Yet, the marketing around it was still to be clearly framed by the Parisian context; orientalism, nostalgic "Indianism", "primitivism" and "ethnography".

.

---

[147] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries 1929-1930,* April 12, 1933.
[148] *Molly Spotted Elk's diaries from 1929-1933,* April 14, 1933.
[149] Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, "Dossier: Spotted Elk: Katah-Din," June 15, 1939, 1, Box 2, folder 12, Maine University - Molly Spotted Elk Collection.
[150] Molly Spotted Elk, *Katahdin: Wigwam's Tales of the Abnaki Tribe and a Dictionary of Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Words with French and English Translations. by Molly Spotted Elk*, Northeast Folklore v. 37 (Orono: Maine Folklife Center, 2003); McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 256.

Chapter 3: Making sense of modernity through Indigeneity

> "*Life, am I weary already because I've become civilized only on the surface – and still I'm just a savage underneath?*"[151]

In the previous two chapters I have argued that despite pre-existing conditions governing the way Molly Spotted Elk was perceived, she had an invested stake in the political nature of her dance and the self-expression her dance embodied. In this chapter, I will draw that argument to a conclusion by demarcating what made up Molly Spotted Elk's existence in and expression of "modernity".

"Traditional" vs. "modern" dancing: a meaningful lack of meaning

Anne Décoret-Ahiha, author of *Les Danses Exotiques en France,* by my knowledge the only book on exotic dancers in France, posits the existence of a binary between "traditional" and "modern" dancing. She relegates Molly Spotted Elk to the first group and Japanese dancers such as Toshi Komori and Sakae Ashida, both of whom incorporated Western modern dance elements, to the second group. because only *they* partake in experiment with their performances. She doesn't further explain how she defines "modern dancing".[152] Paul Gilroy in his book *The Black Atlantic* delivers a pointed de- and reconstruction of the concept of "modernity". He argues that the many debates held around this notion, until the writing of his book in 2000, were inherently imbued with an ideological undertone. "The modern" had always been only what American and European intellectuals had constructed it to be.[153] Although it is outside of the scope of Gilroy's writing, a similar tendency had been present in art history. The notion of "modernism", when discussed, was always constructed in terms of its European artistic contributors.[154] Non-Europeans could only be "modernist" in so far as they related to these avant-garde experiments. Décoret-Ahiha is not taking up a European perspective in her subject matter. Yet, her designation of what constitutes "modern dancing", still reveals how the theoretical framework for the "modern" has been constructed from the Western view only. She reaffirms what Gilroy calls "*the bold, universalizing claims of occidental modernity*".[155] That is, that which is "modern" can only be found within experimental dance that has ties to the European avant-gardes and *their* experiments.

---

[151] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, November 17, 1930.
[152] Décoret-Ahiha, *Les danses exotiques en France: 1880 – 1940*, 172.
[153] Gilroy, *The Black* Atlantic, 41-45.
[154] Mitter, "Decentring Modernism", 531-532; Saloni Mathur, "Response: Belonging to Modernism," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 560.
[155] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 43.

This common Eurocentric framework for modernism means the danger exists that an examination of Molly Spotted Elk's modernity continues the European universalizing project of the modernity discourse. Its construction, such as by scholar Jurgen Habermas, has always been a thinly veiled attempt at pronouncing the continued viability of the Enlightenment project.[156] Through this, its definition also ties intrinsically into Enlightenment's "civilizing" ideals and racist evolutionist rhetoric. It makes Indigeneity the antonym of the modern again and again.[157] Molly Spotted Elk's diary writing attests to how this dichotomy affected her. She is modern only if she gives up her "savage ways" and is constantly battling emotionally about whether this is worth it.[158] Accounts cited in this thesis, such as by Paul Gilroy, Ruth Phillips, Partha Mitter, Jace Weaver and Sieglinde Lemke, reconstruct the meaning of "modernity" from within. They point out how "modernity" and "modernism" were from the beginning codependent on those same people it rejected. They show that modernist artists and intellectuals from the "periphery" are not derivative of modernism, but construct their own modernisms. This is a logical step as the historical situation of modernity has always included them. Modernity as a historical period is defined by an increasingly globalized world and technological improvements embedded in colonial extraction. To focus on the global nature of modernisms does not deny the term's rootedness in colonial discourse. However, it offers a renegotiation of the term in favour of the people it has outwardly always excluded, but inwardly exploited. These artists *them*selves always saw their expressions as mediations of their modern experiences, but who were not seen by occidental modernism to be either modern at all or creating self-mediated modernisms. In continuation of Ruth Phillips and Elizabeth Harney, I propose to call their expressions "simultaneous modernisms", rather than Mitter's "peripheral modernisms", which reinforces centre/periphery power dynamics.[159]

---

[156] Jurgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, ed. Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 9.

[157] Although not consciously, Ernst Gombrich takes the same root as Habermas unveiling the tendency of a fashion for the 'primitive' as a recurrent paradigm from ancient history until now. But, through this deeply Eurocentric view, he undertakes insufficient efforts to deconstruct the colonialism evident in the term and his own reappraisal of classic modernity, or reveal how the term could be relevant for a scope outside of the West. This unfortunately leads to him implicitly affirming the tradition/modernity dichotomy which ended up dehumanizing Indigeneity in the first place. See: Ernst Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive: Episodes in the History of Western Taste and Art* (London ; New York: Phaidon, 2002), 11, 269.

[158] *Molly Spotted Elk's diaries from 1929-1933*, September memoranda 1929; November 17, 1930; November 18, 1930; November 15, 1933; last page of the journal.

[159] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 45; Harney and Phillips, *Mapping Modernisms*, 6-7; Lemke, *Primitivist Modernisms*, 7; Weaver, *The Red Atlantic*, 11; Mitter, "Decentring Modernism", 532.

Dual identity and the wholeness of modern artistic expression

It is important to point out the role of "double consciousness" and "hybridity" in these simultaneous modernisms. The term "double consciousness" derives from African American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois. In 1965, he describes it as "*this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of other*".[160] The term thus refers to a subjectivity into which the cultural norms and racist rhetoric of colonial discourse have become integrated. For Du Bois this duality is absolutely irreconcilable, "*twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body*".[161] This twoness introduces a sense of not-belonging into the self. Homi K. Bhabha implies such an interiorization of racist discourse is the result of "*mimicry, almost white but not quite"*.[162] That is, the colonizer hangs up an empty visuality of itself that *seems* to include the colonial subject. However, at every turn this visuality is destabilized and the emptiness of the image is emphasized. This then produces an integration of not-belonging into the very identity of the colonial subject. An example could be the Victorian-inspired train station in Mumbai. Through this building, Britain implied that India was part of the empire's progress. Yet, at every turn, quite literally in the space around the station, such an imitation reveals that it is not the real thing and doesn't aim to be, destabilizing any sense of belonging.[163] Therefore, in the view of Bhabha, the uptake of avant-garde modernist visual languages in places where they didn't originate could be seen as "mimicry". "Exotic dance" is a result of the opposite motion. It is the colonized culture being imitated for the colonizer. Phillips chooses to call this mimicry as well.[164] For Bhabha, however "*mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask*".[165] While, I do think mimicry's dualizing impact on subjectivity is applicable to exotic dance, I highly disagree with the latter element.

---

[160] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1996, chap. 1, par. 3, Gutenberg.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 89.
[163] Ibid, 85–90.
Du Bois as well points to such empty visual imaginary and its links to ambiguous national belonging. He uses the term "the veil" to refer to how the U.S. produces an image of national unity, which upon further inspection is built on othering mechanisms. Mzukisi Lento, "Rethinking the Concept of Double Consciousness in Du Bois' The Souls of Black Folks (1903)," *Journal of Literary Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 53–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/02564718.2021.1959761; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Problem of the Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 24, 68, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780823254576.
[164] For more on this, see: Phillips, "Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture," 43. However, Phillips in this article diverges from Bhabha's original meaning of "mimicry" to include the taking up of colonial modes by colonized peoples, while as I've detailed Bhabha considers it more in the sense of the opposite movement.
[165] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 88.

When Paul Gilroy takes up the concept of "double consciousness", he provides it with the much more productive interpretation of "hybridity". Through this term, he means to bridge the unwholeness implied in Du Bois' double consciousness. It is relevant to quote the first few paragraphs of his *The Black Atlantic*. They highlight the argument that I think is most applicable to Molly Spotted Elk's modern consciousness and the "counterculture of modernity" within her dance:

> "*Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that taking on either or both of these unfinished identities necessarily exhausts the subjective resources of any particular individual. However, where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space: between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination.*
>
> *The contemporary black English, like the Anglo-Africans of earlier generations and perhaps, like all blacks in the West, stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations. At present, they remain locked symbiotically in an antagonistic relationship marked out by the symbolism of colours which adds to the conspicuous cultural power of their central Manichean dynamic-black and white. These colours support a special rhetoric that has grown to be associated with a language of nationality and national belonging as well as the languages of "race" and ethnic identity.*
>
> *Though largely ignored by recent debates over modernity and its discontents, these ideas about nationality, ethnicity, authenticity, and cultural integrity are characteristically modern phenomena"*[166]

The emphasized text reveals the complex subjectivity of hybrid wholeness Gilroy proposes and the political implications of highlighting it. The sentiment of "double consciousness" establishes a whole modern consciousness in itself, which should be studied as a counterculture of occidental modernity, not as a result of it.

Of course, the theoretical works of Du Bois, Bhabha and Gilroy are case-specific for African American, Indian-English, and African diaspora-English experiences respectively, and I don't want to

---

[166] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 1–2.

deny this. However, their arguments are also relevant for Native-American self-understanding, at once "American" and Indigenous.[167] As Jace Weaver revealed, Native-Americans were similarly present in the Atlantic space, albeit in smaller numbers. "Double consciousness", at once being and being seen, and a veiled insistence on non-belonging can also be read in the evolution of Native-American performance culture as described in chapter one. The image of the Native-American as represented in Buffalo Bill, film and vaudeville theatre was fundamental to American progress rhetoric. Native-Americans through being shown as vanishing "primitives", antonyms of future-oriented modernity, were essential parts of American self-understanding. This produced a split image in their consciousness of at once belonging to the Unites States and not at all. Belonging to "modernity" and being consigned to its outskirts. The Atlantic space, then, offered new ways of thinking outside of these binaries. This exhilarating transatlanticism is detailed above for Molly Spotted Elk. The approach Gilroy proposes therefore also radically shifts the perspective on interwar Native-American performance. It allows Native-American dance to be its own modernism that is a result of dual identity, and creates a space of wholeness from inside of that duality.[168]

Uniting two halves

When Molly Spotted Elk decided to stay in Paris, she wrote to her diary: "*Am almost decided to remain and gamble – yes, gamble for a stake - sink or swim*."[169] In the previous months she'd built out a network among the French Indianists, American producers in Paris and had built a stake in the *Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro*. Yet, the quote above shows she was still nervous about her decision. While Paris appreciated dancers and entertainment, they often weren't paid well. Nevertheless, things moved fast for her in Paris. Ten days after deciding to stay, she was already rehearsing for a French Red Cross Benefit in the Ritz hotel on the place Vendôme, at the time an extremely prestigious location for dancing. Although Molly Spotted Elk did not note which dances she performed, she noted the audience reaction: "*An ovation for my dances, had to do encores. First time I heard, "bis", thought they were calling me beast?* […] *received a bouquet of roses*".[170] The reaction to the audience calling

[167] There is debate about the implication of broader postcolonial critical theory into Native-American theory. Some authors, such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, propose the idea that applying ideas of hybridity and alienated subjectivities to Native-American studies, reinforces the fragmenting of sovereign power of Native peoples. For a survey on this discussion, see: Ulla Haselstein, "Ghost Dance Literature: On Recent Debates in Native-American Literary Criticism," John-F.-Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien, April 27, 2009, https://www.jfki.fu-berlin.de/information/newsletter/07/jfki_essay.html.
[168] Jace Weaver, *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000 - 1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 5, 7, 17, 209-215.
[169] Quoted from: *Molly Spotted Elk's diaries from 1929-1933*, June 7, 1931.
[170] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* June 18, 1933.

for an encore, a "bis", is a funny anecdote. It is likely that Molly Spotted Elk wrote this in her diary as just such. Her diaries often contain these instances of situational humour. However, it was also a noteworthy event as it signalled to earlier receptions and internalized racist discourse from them. Molly Spotted Elk in her diaries called herself a "savage" numerous times and insistently used the term "Injun" to refer to herself.[171] This is a derogatory term that mocks the Native-American pronunciation of "Indian".[172] It's possible that by using the term she was enacting the repossession of its derogatory nature.[173] However, her use of it still significantly points to a split subjectivity in which she looked at herself through the eyes of a racist American discourse.

The places she performed at in Paris ranged from night clubs such as L'Aeroport to official instutions, such as the Ministry of Justice.[174] While none of her dances were recorded, her diary entries allow for a partial reconstruction of the material.[175] The star of many of the venues she danced at, her dance programmes would have usually been longer than four songs, but not constructed along a central narrative. They'd be accompanied by piano, tom-tom and sometimes even a full band. In her diaries she names them according to central themes expressed by them: Bear Dance, Hoop Dance, Deer Dance, Whoop Dance, War Dance, Cloud Dance, Corn Dance, Warrior Dance, Eagle Dance, Squaw Dance. Notably, she never mentions performing a Ghost Dance again in Paris.[176] The titles of these dances allude to them expressing the sacred relation from human to nature, a theme that is abundantly present in her diaries as well. As such, it is clear that while Molly Spotted Elk's writing enacted the local specificity of Abenaki myth, her dances are founded on a more generally Native-American belief system. Her costumes too, for example, would have been pan-Native.[177] Shay Welch's arguments in

---

[171] Instances of calling herself a "savage": *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* Nov 17, 1930; Nov 15, 1933. I can't note precise diary entries where she calls herself an "Injun" because she uses the word more than twenty-eight times.
[172] The derogatory nature of the term, for example, becomes clear from how it is used by general William Tecumseh Sherman, who encouraged the Unites States to partake in the "Indian Wars". Moreover, he was seminal to the eradication of bisons to weaken Indian peoples and provoke assimilation. During an 1890 press conference, he says: "Injins must either work or starve. They won't work now, and they never will work." Coleman, *Voices of Wounded Knee,* 148.
[173] There is a real indication that she *is* reclaiming the word in her diaries as she consistently writes it with a capital letter, implying it to be her nationality. She also uses it appreciatively and never in a demeaning way whenever she refers to her roots, for example: "Only Injun philosophy for me!" or "But - I could write more of myself at this time than last year - for I have learned much about myself as a person, a woman and an Injun, and I am glad." In contrast to this, when she uses the word "savage" to refer to herself, it is almost always from an outside perspective,
Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933, September memoranda, 1929; February memoranda, 1933.
[174] See my selected timeline (annex 1) for more major locations where Molly Spotted Elk danced.
[175] She mentions that Archambaud had helped her by sketching out the position for her dances, but none of these sketches have survived. *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* November 8, 1933
[176] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* July 2, September 23, 1931; March 10, May 29, December 7, 1932; October 17, 33.
[177] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* February 1, 1930; October 17, 1933.

The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System show that this does not make her dance a culturally "inauthentic" expression, despite what a classic narrative of "local tradition" would imply. The epistemology underlying Native-American dance shares its inherent capacity for relating the dancer and the universe, regardless of local specificity. Welch writes: "*Dance can tell the story of tribal history and values or dance can be used as a way to find oneself back to them*."[178] Thus Molly Spotted Elk's dancing featured in a system which enhanced her understanding of her "double consciousness". Moreover, she found a way to reunite it through dance. Therefore, her dances allowed Molly Spotted Elk to express states of being within "modernity", even if they were based on traditional dance.

Nevertheless, the audience appreciation, stimulating atmosphere and dancers, musicians and art critics she met in Paris also inspired her to experiment further As I show in the next part, this searching for self-expression outside of her own culture included mining ethnographic and ethnological content, just like the French Surrealists were doing.[179] From her diaries it becomes clear too that certain connections inspired her to experiment more with her own particular transatlantic dance practice. I want to focus on three specifically. The first, is dancer Anita Patel (?-?). From what can be gleaned about Patel from Molly Spotted Elk's diaries, she was of Indian descent and interpreted Hindu and Javanese dances for audiences all over Europe and India. She was particularly popular in London. Through her influence, Molly Spotted Elk took to experimenting with Hindu dance and costume (see illustration 12).[180] The second influence was Yeichi Nimura (1897-1979). He was a Japanese-American dancer, who'd travelled from Japan to New York when he was twenty-one. As a choreographer, he mixed European and Japanese dance styles. She probably met him back in New York, but caught up with him and his later wife Lisan Kay (1910-2006) in Paris.[181] She got to be part of his production "Life Perpetual" at

---

[178] Shay Welch, *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System* (New York/ Berlin/ Heidelberg: Springer, 2019), 13.

[179] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries 1929-1933,* December 30, 1933

[180] Anita Patel is described by fellow dancer Lisan Kay as "a wonderful performer who had her own troupe." Mcbride believes she was the daughter of Indian prime minister Vallabhbhai Patel, as Molly Spotted Elk notes: "J and I chatted - Anita is the daughter of Patel - I thought so. But she never disclosed who she was." However, my own research has discounted this, as Molly Spotted Elk also notes Anita had a sister who died in 1933. Vallabhbhai Patel's only daughter was Maniben Patel who kept a diary that was recently published, meaning unless she hid the existence of two more sisters, Anita cannot have been the daughter of Vallabhbhai Patel. It's remarkable and perhaps even symptomatic to a larger problem how little is known about Patel, since in her own time she was more popular than Molly Spotted Elk. Décoret-Ahiha, *Les danses exotiques en France*, 192., McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 186*; Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, May 14, 1933. See also: Maniben Patel, *Inside Story of Sardar Patel: The Diary of Maniben Patel,* (New Delhi: Visions books, diary from 1936-1950, published 2001.)

[181] *Molly Spotted Elk's diaries 1929-1933,* October 16, 1933; Louise Sunshine, "Archive Overview - Yeichi Nimura and Lisan Kay Nimura Papers 1903-2006 [Bulk 1927-1990]," 2011, ii–iii, (S) *MGZMD 194, The NY Public Library: Jerome Robbins Dance Division, https://archives.nypl.org/dan/22251; Décoret-Ahiha, *Les danses exotiques en France*, 215.

the Vieux Colombier in 1932. He taught her techniques which she, not having been trained classically in ballet other than when she was nine, hadn't learned before. At time he made her feel insecure, but she was mostly inspired by his presence. For example, she considered weaving his "*modern*" methods into her routine for a squaw step dance and called him "*one of the best artists of dance*".[182] The last influential figure is Fernand Divoire (1883-1951), a Belgian art and dance critic, who she consistently noted as an attendant to her performances. Through his writings, Divoire had helped launch Isadora Duncan's career in France. Thanks to his support, Molly got an offer to become a lifetime member of the prestigious Cercle Internationale des Arts in 1934. He describes Molly Spotted Elk's dancing as "*warlike and solemn*".[183]

In 1929, Divoire published a text called "Le Rythme dans tous les arts". The text has been to my knowledge lost. Yet, the title in combination with the knowledge that Divoire was an avant-gardist and an avid dance writer on so-called "exotic dance", points to a research project that perhaps affirms dance critic André Lepecki central thesis in *Exhausting Dance.* Lepecki posits that rhythm, as a "*being-towards-movement*", constitutes the very base line of modernity and modernism.[184] Lepecki's "modernity" is inherently Western. He delivers a pointed decolonial critique on the condition's flattening effects on diversity. Yet, he does not allow for the idea that modern dance is not just Western-owned. This is remarkable because to place rhythm and continuous motion at the heart of "modern dance", as he does, is to place (the appropriation of) non-Western music and dance there. It is no coincidence that one of Molly Spotted Elk's first major performances was at the Fontainebleau Conservatory for Music, where such "primitivist rhythm" musicians as Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) taught.[185] The bodily expression of rhythm, the rhythm of her ancestral connection to the cosmos, but also of coming to terms with her own fragmented, always moving, sense of identity in modernity are the very basis of Molly Spotted Elk's modernism. So, while Nimura inspired her to "modernize" her squaw step dance, the squaw step dance, as was acknowledged by primitivism to some capacity although in an appropriative and remorphing manner, was already "modern".

---

[182] *Molly Spotted Elk's diaries 1929*-1933, December 5, 7, 1932; January 3, 1933.
[183] McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk,* 202; Décoret-Ahiha, *Les danses exotiques en France*, 269.
[184] Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 7.
[185] *Molly Spotted Elk's diaries 1929-1933,* July 4, 1931.

Part 2: Positional Modernities: Intersections between Molly Spotted Elk and French Surrealism

Chapter 4: The Exposition Internationale Coloniale: differing readings of a colonial text

In the following, I point to some crucial differences between Molly Spotted Elk and the Surrealists. I do so by shining a light on the controversy surrounding the 1931 *Exposition Coloniale Internationale*. While the Surrealists heavily opposed this colonial world fair, Molly Spotted Elk was decidedly enthusiastic about it. This opposition in opinions on imperial display will reveal deeper political and methodological antagonisms between the two.

A matter of perception: the Colonial Exposition's political and cultural rhetoric

As mentioned above, Molly Spotted Elk came to Paris as part of the United States Indian Band, set to perform at the 1931 *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* (The International Colonial Exposition). This world fair was held from May 6 until November 15, 1931 in the Parisian suburb of Vincennes. It was a marked occasion for the celebration of Western imperialism and the "advancements" it had brought. Promotional material promised a "tour of the world in one day" to visitors with pavilions dedicated to all imperial territories of France, and participating nations such as Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Italy and the United States. Great Britain was a notable absence. The fair was the apogee of a tradition of imperial display on world fairs. An evolution in which France in particular had been growing its stake since the 1889 *Exposition Universelle,* which had brought Buffalo Bill to Paris. As such it glorified and defended imperialism from its critics. Through its displays, it reasoned that imperialism had eradicated "savagery" and brought "civilization" and "modernity" to all regions of the world.[186] As Patricia Morton illustrates through an analysis of the architecture of the exhibition, two paradoxical elements lay at the heart of its colonial rhetoric. Firstly, participating nations argued that the regions under their care had benefited from colonial rule, since it had brought "modernity" to these countries. Secondly, the organizing committee stressed the ethnographic veracity of the displays, and therefore the cultural diversity of the colonized nations.[187] The following analyzes critically how this rhetoric was applied to the Indian Jazz Band and thus also Molly Spotted Elk.

---

[186] Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs 1851-1939.*, Studies in Imperialism (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1988), 69; Catherine Hodeir and Michel Pierre, *L'exposition coloniale: 1931*, Mémoire du siècle 58 (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexes, 1991), 11; Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 3.
[187] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, 5, 69, 112, 117, 172; Henderson, "Josephine Baker and La Revue Negre," 110.

Among the "modern" benefits of colonialism exhibited at the show were electricity, infrastructure, but also crucially education.[188] Education was particularly central in the imperial rhetoric of the United States. They were the only country to not put up an "Indigenous" building as their pavilion. Instead, the United States showed a replica of George Washington's house at his Mount Vernon estate (see illustration 13).[189] This architecture represented the rationality and democratic values underlying the United States empire. It fit within the "mission of U.S. imperial rule"; short term imperial commitments, which allowed countries to benefit from education on democratic values before becoming independent, just as the U.S. had done.[190] Of course, in the case of Native-Americans this ideology becomes complicated. Settler colonialism doesn't allow independency for Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, letters by manager of the Indian Jazz band Thomas O'Brien (? - ?) to the Exposition committee stress how the band could fit into the narrative of "education". On February 7, 1931, he suggests:

> "[We should] *have an old buck and his squaw accompany the band, thereby showing the true type of the first early American just before you show the present highly talented and educated Indian that comprises this band.*"[191]

According to O'Brien, education had thus helped modify and elevate the "true type" of the Native-American. This comment is symptomatic of how education in the U.S.'s position was an aid for ameliorating "inferior races". It points more generally to the blatant racism of the Colonial Exposition's attempts at showing how "countries were becoming civilized."[192]

The second side to the rhetoric of the Colonial Exposition is its focus on "ethnographic veracity". Organizer Maréchal Hubert Lyautey (1854 – 1934) had an invested stake in the ethnographic museum at the Trocadéro palace and was a founding member of Coze's "scouts", if not of *Wakanda*.[193] He wanted the exhibition to stay away from the "exoticism" of earlier iterations. For this, he relied entirely on following the model of an "ethnographic" museum, with its focus on material cultures. The fair

---

[188] For how crucial electricity was in the narrative of 'la mission civilatrice' on the 1931 Colonial Exposition, see: Catherine Hodeir, "La « Fée électricité » à l'Exposition coloniale de Paris (1931)," *Outre-Mers. Revue d'histoire* 89, no. 334 (2002): 55–69, https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.2002.3924.
[189] Artus Robert, "Le Pavillon Américain," *Le Journal de l'Exposition Coloniale*, June 1, 1931.
[190] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, 63–64; Hodeir and Pierre, *L'exposition coloniale*, 11.
[191] Thomas O'Brien to Bascom Slemp, head of the U.S. exhibit for the 1931 exposition, February 7, 1931, quoted in McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 153.
[192] See also: John W. Troutman, "Joe Shunatona and the United States Indian Reservation Orchestra," in *Indigenous Pop: Native-American Music from Jazz to Hip Hop*, ed. Jeff Berglund (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 25–27.
[193] Carinne Peltier-Caroff, "Un potlatch au Trocadéro," 492.

also applied this demand to the human beings involved. A postcard from the Exposition shows that the Jazz Band used a drum with the words "the United States Indian Reservation Orchestra" (illustration 14) on it, implying that members had been picked straight from the reservations. O'Brien also used a generous sum of the budget to acquire "authentic" costumes for the band. In his correspondence with the organiser of the U.S. pavilion and the Office of Indian Affairs, he repeatedly stressed the "blood quantum" of his performers. This focus on their full-bloodedness was to prove that they "authentically" represented the "Indian race". Above, I've already shown how the French interest in "ethnography" tied to an appropriative system of pronouncing European superiority. Here, these interventions of O'Brien, all done to ensure the popularity of the band in France, reveal how the Exposition's focus on "ethnography" forced performers into antiquating structures. This disavowed their actual identities and stories. Therefore "ethnography", in this case, was not only appropriative, but also became a mode of oppression.[194]

Molly Spotted Elk and Nancy Elizabeth Prophet's response

The Colonial Exposition's paradoxical rhetoric synthesizing "modernity and civilization" with "tribal authenticity" would not have been unfamiliar to Molly Spotted Elk. In articles, she often emphasised her own university education and full-blood heritage.[195] Yet throughout her diary, on numerous occasions she expresses the value of being "savage" and "uncivilized".[196] In an amusing example, on November 15, 1933, she writes about the French burying their pets in designated cemeteries: "*Silly civilized things - this savage can smile in ridicule*".[197] It is no coincidence that the very last page of her diary is a long contemplation on just this dichotomy. Although it was written while filming "The Silent Enemy" in the Canadian woods, its rhetoric is applicable to the Colonial Exposition too. An excerpt from it reads:

---

[194] Troutman, "Joe Shunatona and the United States Indian Reservation Orchestra," 22–27; McBirde, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 153.

[195] Interesting is for example, that while in her diaries she sees herself as decidedly distinct from the Ojibwa people with whom she films 'The Silent Enemy' in interviews in France she is careful not to make that distinction too radical, for example: "[…], we were almost seven hundred Indians there working, and in this mass of people there was just the old wise man Yellow Robe, the hunter, chief Long Lance and me who knew what a camera was." (own translation) Shör, "Spotted Elk 'L'Elan Moucheté.'"
Articles in which she mentions her 'university education' and 'lineage as the daughter of a chief' include: the article above; Barbara Johnson, "Maine Indian Princess with Many Talents Wins Fame in Motion Picture" in the Portland (Maine) Telegram, June 8, 1930; Saurel, "Les Dimanches de la femme"; Archambaud, "Cependant qu'on inaugure la Maison de Washington à Vincennes."

[196] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, November 18, 1930, August memoranda, 1933.

[197] Ibid, November 15, 1933.

> "*For them there is "something" higher and stronger than the mere mad scramble of modernism. There is none of that depressing influence of our so-called American civilization with its ceaseless worry about money here. [...] In the bush each person is different and all people alike. Contact with them challenges curiosity - stimulates admiration and interest or it breaks insolence.*"[198]

This statement reveals antimodernism, anticapitalism and even some "primitivism", in the sense that Molly Spotted Elk was romanticizing her contacts with Indigenous peoples. There are strong parallels between this text, penned on the backpage of her diary, and Surrealist ideas and opinions. In his 1938 lecture "The Sacred in Everyday Life", surrealist poet Michel Leiris (1901-1990) in fact made a similar distinction between society and "bush", as a space for transcending the limits of civilization. He called the bush: *"A place apart, extremely taboo, an area heavily marked by the supernatural and the sacred, so different from the parks, where everything was planned, organized, raked."*[199]

Despite her contemplations on the value of modernity and civilization, Molly Spotted Elk did not mirror the Surrealist anti-imperialist stance against *the Exposition Coloniale* that can be summarized as: "*Do not visit the Colonial Exposition*".[200] She was decidedly impressed by the fair, writing:

> "*Inaugural opening of the colonial exposition by the French government. It was wonderful. All the pomp, color, beauty of the foreign buildings, people and things around me. It was colossal and impressive.*"[201]

Even more, the exhibition convinced her of the virtues of French imperialism, as she writes in a letter published in the Portland Sunday Telegram: "*Forest, plain, farm and factory, primitive arts and people unite in a tribute to the power of the French*."[202] She is not alone, amongst foreign artists in Paris, celebrating the 1931 Colonial Exposition. Nancy Elizabeth Prophet (1890-1960) was a painter and sculptor of African American and Native-American, Narragansett descent. She stayed in Paris from 1922 until 1932. Her diaries and correspondence detail remarkably similar struggles to Molly Spotted

---

[198] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* last page.
[199] By calling it the 'bush' both Leiris and Molly Spotted Elk are referring to primitivist language. In fact, higher in the same text Leiris himself denotes the 'bush' as a spatial concept for 'savages' in particular. He writes: "Contrasted with the bourgeois world of houses, just as the village—for those belonging to so-called savage societies—can be contrasted to the bush." See: Michel Leiris, "The Sacred in Daily Life (Le Sacré Dans La Vie Quotidienne), Originally Published in 1938," in *The College of Sociology, 1937-39: 41*, ed. Denis Hollier (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 27.
[200] André Breton et al., "Ne Visitez-Pas l'Exposition Coloniale," May 1, 1931.
[201] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, May 6, 1931.
[202] "Beautiful Maine Indian Princess Receives Great Praise in Paris", in *Portland Sunday Telegram*, June 14, 1931, cited partially in: McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 157.

Elk, struggles with illness, money, identity and her desire for recognition.[203] When she visited the Colonial Exposition, she, like Molly Spotted Elk, was raving about the displays. Moreover, she was convinced by its imperial rhetoric. In a letter to W.E.B Du Bois, on the day before the exposition's closing ceremony, she writes:

> "*Beautiful Paris! And wonderful France! and all because of the greatness of the French. It is the only well poised nation of the day.* […] *It is a people with the power of reason and it is that that has put them in their superior position. It is a Nation Elite.*"[204]

These two women were more than just impressed by the Colonial Exposition, it inspired them. In another letter to W.E.B. Du Bois, Prophet notes the overwhelming beauty of the African busts on display in the Belgian pavilion and stresses their "noble" qualities. "*Heads of thought and reflection, types of great beauty and dignity of carriage*."[205] As a result of the encounter with these powerful portrayals, Theresa Leininger-Miller believes Prophet created her best-known work *Congolais* (1931, currently in, illustration 15). This cherrywood head of a Maasai warrior is noble and strong, but has an air of melancholy about it.[206] Like Tarsila Do Amaral's *A Negra,* it is a statue that refers to a primitivist trope, that of the "noble savage". It does so in order to appeal to -or at least not offend- the French audience. Yet, the statue also holds significant personal value. Leininger-Miller even posits the possibility that it could be a self-portrait to some extent, just like Maria Castro hypothesized for *A Negra*.[207] For Molly Spotted Elk, it is harder to determine to what extent she was inspired by her encounters during the Colonial Exposition. However, her diary entries for the months she was part of

---

[203] While Molly Spotted Elk's diary is documentary and quite consistent, Elizabeth Prophet writes only every few months and especially when she is struggling. Nevertheless, the sentiments expressed within these diaries are very similar, sentiments of hope for a Parisian career and ultimate 'desespoirs' when these attempts fail in the harsh economic climate of the Great Depression. Elizabeth Prophet, "Paris Diary of Nancy Elizabeth Prophet," 1922-1932, Library of Brown University, https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:786291/.
See also: T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris: African American Women in Paris between the Two World Wars* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 129; Theresa A. Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris: African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light, 1922-1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 20-60.
[204] Elizabeth Prophet, "Letter from Elizabeth Prophet to W. E. B. Du Bois, November 14, 1931," accessed April 14, 2023, http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b060-i352.
[205] Letter from Elizabeth Prophet to W.E.B. Du Bois, August 8, 1931, quoted in: Theresa A. Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris*, 56.
[206] Maasai peoples live in the Tanzanian and Kenyan region and are therefore not Congolese. Prophet probably just applied the term to this statue without much knowledge about who the Maasai actually were. Ibid, 56.
[207] Leininger-Miller, 56-57; Lisa E. Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 112.

the fair are almost all ecstatic.[208] She feels that in Paris her dance can finally truly be appreciated and feels real rapport with other highly-educated dancers at the Exposition, such as Indian dancer Anita Patel, Malaysian dancer Aloma and Roma-French dancer Tela Tchai (Martha Naomi Winterstein, 1909-1993).[209] They inspired her to keep on dancing as she writes "*All of us must have something to strive for*".[210]

The Surrealist response

While Elizabeth Prophet and Molly Spotted Elk's enthusiasm are a testament to the general public's elated response to the fair, there were also negative responses. The French surrealist group around André Breton (1896-1966) published two pamphlets in protest to the *Exposition*.[211] The first, "Ne Visitez-Pas l'Exposition Coloniale" (May 1, 1931) was published four days prior to the opening ceremony. It pointed out how the Colonial Exposition, the "*Lunapark of Vincennes*", promoted a glamorous myth of "*La Grande France*".[212] This image intended to distract from the crimes being committed in the colonies. The pamphlet can be considered a critique of what I've called "the first part of the exhibition's rhetoric". That is, its intention to show how colonized people had benefited from the *mission civilisatrice* and modernity. The surrealists called out this hadn't been the case. The second pamphlet "Premier Bilan de l'Exposition Coloniale" (First Balance of the Colonial Exposition, July 3, 1931) was published after the Dutch Pavilion went up into flames on the night of June 27. It critiques the reactions of the organizing committee to this disaster, saying that the burning of the artefacts was just the last step in their destruction under capitalism. It is also a critique on the ethnographic and/or

---

[208] An entry about dancing at the Exposition theater conveys this excitement: "At the exposition theater. All the natives were there was the first one on, did my "corn and warrior dance" the audience liked them immensely - so happy. Pictures made on the stage. By the Intrasigeant - Divoire to see me. Wonderful day! The cannibal and his ready knee - he understood everything, bless his heart, black and savage as he is." *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, Sep 23, 1931.

[209] McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 186; *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, May 14, 1933; Klaus-Michael Bogdal, "'Eine Zigeunerin ist keine Konkurrenz für dich' Der vergessene französische Filmstar Tela Tchaï/ Martha Winterstein. Eine Spurensuche," in *Ästhetik(en) der Roma*, ed. Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf and Kirsten von Hagen (München: Akademische Verlagsgemeinschaft München, 2020), 185–86.

[210] *Molly Spotted Elk's diary from 1934-1939*, June 28, 1934, cited in Bunny McBride, *A Penobscot in Paris*, 186.
Another diary entry from September, 1931 also recounts how Molly Spotted Elk feels strengthened by the social connections she has made through the exposition: "Wonderful month - progress coming. Am happy - but have patience and strength to attempt the impossible. Friends, real friends too have added to my outlook - lonesomeness , yes, but not so that it makes me weep. Life is rounding out its fullness with hard but truthful forcefulness and it seems I am all the more stronger by it. Health, happiness and struggle!" *Molly Spotted Elk's diary from 1929-1933*, September memoranda, 1931.

[211] In addition to these two pamphlets, Louis Aragon also published a poem in protest. *Mars à Vincennes* tellingly ends with the line: "It's raining, the rain is coming down hard at the Colonial Exposition." Louis Aragon, "Mars op Vincennes." in *Koloniale inspiratie*, edited by Marieke Bloembergen (Amsterdam : Brill, 2004), 219, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004489172_040.

[212] André Breton et al., "Ne Visitez-Pas l'Exposition Coloniale," 1-2.

art historical approach of these objects.[213] The group writes that the study of these objects is purely a function of capitalism and Western civilization. It doesn't contribute to the colonized countries' cultures in any way. This text therefore deconstructs the second rhetorical element of the Exposition: its focus on ethnography and "authenticity" in function of the French audience.[214] The text also points out the inherent commercialism within "authenticity" claims by referring to the "authentically rebuilt" Angkor temple sold to a movie company. The two texts can therefore be read as poignant critiques of the latent and paradoxical messaging of the Colonial Exposition and its events.[215]

The two pamphlets and Surrealism's visibility as a group led the Parti Communiste Française (PCF) and the Ligue Anti-impérialiste (LAI) to ask them to join a counter-exhibition to the Colonial Exposition. This exhibition, titled "*La verité sur les Colonies*" (The truth about the colonies), was organized in three sections. The first section exhibited Native-American, Oceanic and African objects.[216] The second pointed out the atrocities being committed by the French Empire in their colonies. Finally, the third section actively tried to recruit people for the communist party. The PCF had been losing membership due to interparty tensions and fracturing, and had found within this counter-exhibit a means to publicize itself. For this paper the first section is the most relevant. The surrealist curator of this section, Louis Aragon (1897-1982), consciously parodied the way the Exposition presented ethnographic objects as if the cultures had significant worth, but the people remained to be elevated. They juxtaposed objects from their own collections with what they called "European fetiches". A picture from the Surrealist revue *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* reveals how an eroticized statuette, a statue used by Christian missionaries for collecting tithes, and a Black Madonna, were presented as *fétiches Européens* (see illustration 16). Through such ironic

---

[213] This is particularly interesting because of the relationship of Surrealism, especially Bataille's group, to ethnography. Perhaps in this critical approach of ethnography by the group around Breton, we could also find a dig at Bataille's *Documents*, which explicitly included essays on ethnography. For more on the ties between ethnography and Surrealism see the seminal: Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism."

[214] My distinctions here are for the clarity of my argument, but of course the second pamphlet also critiques *la mission civilisatrice.* The group writes: « [*I]ls [les missionaires] mutilent habituellement les fétiches et […] entrainent les indigènes dans leurs écoles à reproduire les traits de leur Christ selon les recettes de l'art européen*. » This sentence could easily be applied for example to the Jazz Band's inclusion in the Colonial Exposition. After all, all of theme were artists trained in the European tradition, being made to perform Indigeneity, despite having themselves been forbidden to practice some of their traditions. "Premier bilan de l'exposition coloniale," July 3, 1931, 1, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou.
In the same vein, the first pamphlet also critiques the 'authenticity'-discourse of the exhibition, by pointing out how all works together as a publicity scheme. André Breton et al., "Ne Visitez-Pas l'Exposition Coloniale," May 1, 1931.

[215] Breton et al., "Ne Visitez-Pas l'Exposition Coloniale"; "Premier bilan de l'exposition coloniale"; Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, 97–103; Blake, "The Truth about the Colonies, 1931," 38; Marieke Bloembergen, "De antikoloniale tentoonstelling, 1883–1932," in *Koloniale inspiratie* (Brill, 2004), 219, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004489172_040.

[216] Louis Aragon, "De Keerzijde van 1931 (1977)," in *Koloniale inspiratie*, edited by Marieke Bloembergen, 233-234. (Amsterdam: Brill, 2004,) 234. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004489172_040.

juxtaposition, the provenance of "ethnographic objects" and the value they had for French collectors was questioned (see illustration 17). Yet, as Jody Blake pointed out these works still featured as part of an ideologically driven exposition. Thereby, the counter-exposition all the same voided them of their own meanings. Moreover, it treated the objects as metonyms for the peoples they derived from. Paradoxically, despite questioning the economic value French collectors gave to these "fetiches", Breton and Aragon themselves successfully sold their collections in July of 1931, at the height of the *Exposition Coloniale*. Similarly, the counter-exhibition questioned "exotic" performance culture, but it did so through staging ridiculous performances of their own. Thereby the surrealists entirely negated any agency for these performers and aided in their further disembodiment.[217]

It is this overtly ideological approach to anti-imperialism in Surrealist racial politics, that in part estranged Molly Spotted Elk from Surrealism. Vincent Bollenot rightly points out how anti-imperialist actions in Paris crystallized around the communist party.[218] While Molly Spotted Elk was not extensively politically engaged in her art, she was certainly vocal about injustices she saw happening, both in her hometown of Old Town, Maine and in Paris.[219] For example, after sending a letter to the local paper protesting the reduction of logging rights for the Penobscot, she wrote in her diary: "*We want our rights, we are human like the rest of mankind. We want action, not promise*."[220] When things turn sour for the Indian Jazz Band due to the financial mismanagement of Thomas O'Brien she writes:

> "*It's a shame the way the thing was handled and someday I'm going to write about it. The French are all right, but the American end of the Exposition are all wrong. Too much politics and* [Charles] *Burke* [, commissioner of Office of Indian Affairs,] *and* [Bascom] *Slemp* [, head of the U.S. organizing committee, have mismanaged the pavilion]."[221]

---

[217] Blake, "The Truth about the Colonies, 1931," 56–58; Vincent Bollenot, "Ne Visitez Pas l'exposition Coloniale! » La Campagne Contre l'exposition Coloniale Internationale de 1931, Un Moment Anti-Impérialiste," *French Colonial History* 18 (2019): 73, 76; Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, 102; Panivong Norindr, "3 The 'Surrealist' Counter-Exposition: La Verite Sur Les Colonies," in *Phantasmatic Indochina* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 60, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822379799-005; Henderson, "Josephine Baker and La Revue Negre," 110.
[218] Bollenot, "Ne Visitez Pas l"exposition Coloniale! » La Campagne Contre l"exposition Coloniale Internationale de 1931, Un Moment Anti-Impérialiste," 70–71.
[219] Sometimes both at once, for example when she writes about her brother, Bunty's passing while she is in Paris, she is adamant that is an injustice caused by the mismanagement of the Indian agent in charge of the Indian Island reservation, writing: "Wonder how I can get [the one who is responsible for killing] my Piel to land in jail - ah to knock the hell out of the agent and the doctor. That's what I'd do if they were around and I was at home after my brother's death - poisoned by bad meat + neglected by the doctor." *Molly Spotted Elk's diaries from 1929-1933*, February 29, 1933.
[220] *Molly Spotted Elk's diaries from 1929-1933*, December 24, 1929.
[221] Ibid, June memoranda, 1931.

Yet, despite her activism paralleling the PCF's rallying cry "*Imperialism is the last stage of capitalism*", Molly Spotted Elk didn't veer towards the PCF in any way. In the circles she engaged with, she met many people who had been traumatized by the Russian Revolution, which convinced her of its atrocities.[222] Additionally, Archambaud despite being a centrist at first, became part of the French socialist party (PSF) in 1933. The PSF was the polar and aggressive opponent of the PCF. From her diary entries, it seems Molly Spotted Elk was interested in the PSF as well.[223]

Reading a colonial subtext

The value that Molly Spotted Elk and Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, women who had suffered the consequences of racism in America, saw in the *Exposition Coloniale* is at odds with its inherently racist imperial script, as criticized by Surrealism. This creates a paradox. In 1995, Eve Sedgwick wrote an essay called "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is about You". The essay was written for queer studies and literary criticism. However, the discursive power of its premise goes beyond those fields to include all of critical theory, concerned with revealing hidden power dynamics within "texts" in the broad semiotic sense. It is in this broadened sense that I will be using the concepts of "reparative and paranoia reading" to relate to Molly Spotted Elk and Surrealism, respectively. In her essay, Sedgwick noted the abundance of paranoia as a critical method in contemporary cultural and historical studies. This is a mode where the scholar immediately assumes the worst of any text. The reader is defensive and attempts to unearth hidden violence in the text. Often, this is done from a moral high ground, which is hard to criticize and not transparent. This practice is understandable, considering the often insidious nature of harm to

---

[222] Molly Spotted Elk's comments on communism from 1929 to 1933 include: "Hiked to St. Vincent, to the Communist place. Not in the mood for this silly place." (May 14, 1932) "Read the papers such news this NRA Communist envoy Libinov - and the letter of the white russians - sent by general Miller who is in the pay of the communists! Incredulous. To the president. My God and white people call all this "CIVILIZATION" - and a new deal." *Molly Spotted Elk's diaries from 1929-1933,* November 5, 1933.
But her rampant hatred for the ideology really comes to full force when she writes in 1940: "France should have rid herself of the Communists long ago. Everything that has happened is due to [their] internal machinery working to ruin the country." See: McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 264.

[223] Jean gets fired from his Paris Soir job on August 1, 1931, according to Molly Spotted Elk because of 'political strings'. On December 31, 1933, she writes: "J for dinner. He is off for the party social tonight. Am interested in this new activity - France needs a good house cleaning - and she ought to get it." *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, Aug 1, 1931; Dec 1, 1933.
Additionally, in 1934, according to McBride, she pens that this New Socialist Party Jean belongs to is "Neither left nor right but inbetween" and a mix of "Socialism and near Fascism". Indeed, the socialist party Jean belonged to had some fascist leanings and in the aftermath of the notorious 1934 Stavinsky affair, the murder of a general investigated for tax fraud, life in Paris for the both of them would get increasingly grim as the city became more polarized. So bad that when eventually, Jean died during World War II Molly Spotted Elk always kept blaming communism for her husband's death. See: McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 202.

minorities, and has value. Certainly, my own analyses of "modernity discourse" and the Colonial Exposition also build on revealing what is veiled by these narratives. However, Sedgewick proposes the added value of "reparative reading". She doesn't explain what this practice would entail practically. However, the baseline seems to be focusing on what a text *does*, rather than *how* it does it. In other words, the reparative reader approaches a text by seeking and even producing, value in it. This position is not concerned with hidden meanings, but creates new meanings regardless of the violence embedded in the text.[224]

Applying these terms to Surrealism and Molly Spotted Elk is somewhat ahistorical, as the positions Sedgewick describes are related to "postmodern" research methods from the 1970s onwards. However, as Hal Foster notes much of critical and "postmodern" theory today has informal ties to the intellectual experiments of the surrealists.[225] Surrealists aimed to transgress binding structures of Western rationality. They did so through use of ironic juxtapositions and an intrinsic relativist attitude to any text, including their own. Both are crucial elements of paranoia reading for Sedgwick.[226] Salvador Dali (1904-1989) even literally endorsed the practice of employing a paranoia position. He declared in "The Moral Position of Surrealism" (1930): "*The particular perspicacity of attention in the paranoiac state must be insisted upon*."[227] This paranoia allowed them, for example, to efficiently expose the veil created by the glamour of the Colonial Exposition. Therefore, the surrealist pamphlets about the exhibition reveal an enduring criticism on the event. However, their counter-exposition also clearly showed the problems with paranoia reading. As they imitate the Colonial Exposition, they are unable to break free from its harmful structure.[228] They mercilessly criticized "exotic dancers" and employed non-Western objects for their own communist narrative. Therefore, their ironic approach did sparse

---

[224] Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," 123–26; 149.
[225] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), xiii–xiv.
[226] The first element is characterized by Sedgewick as "camp". Camp can be considered a "queer parody", disrupting aesthetics that question the binaries of heteronormative society. This is certainly also the case for Surrealism, if not on a broader scale, as Surrealism questions all binaries through aesthetic subversion. The second element is exemplified by Breton for example being an extremely paranoid reader of any text, especially Freud. Through this meticulous activity he wanted to create what Sedgewick calls "a strong theory". Surrealism as a theory which was bulletproof. This is also why Surrealism is so hard to analyze critically because of the way these texts anticipate any critique. Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," 133–34; 143; 149; Jean-Michel Rabate, "Loving Freud Madly: Surrealism between Hysterical and Paranoid Modernism," *Journal of Modern Literature* 25, no. 3–4 (June 22, 2002): 62.
[227] Jean-Michel Rabaté argues: "[T]he second decade of Surrealism [after the crisis of 1929] was dominated by the concept of paranoia, much as the first had been by automatism and hysteria." Rabate, "Loving Freud Madly," 66.
[228] Imitation is for Sedgewick part of what she calls paranoia's "mimetic and reflexive" qualities. Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," 131.

allow more agency for non-Western peoples than the Colonial Exposition had. Additionally, their overt anti-imperialism makes their own insidious "primitivism" harder to assess. Certainly, Surrealism did aid in formulating constructive post-colonial critique, which later partly inspired by the *négritude* movement, but that doesn't negate the harm done by their practices of parody and appropriation.[229]

Conversely, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and Molly Spotted Elk can be characterized as reparative readers of the event. Mae Henderson asserts for Josephine Baker that she engaged with the structures of imperial France through a mode of parody, thereby subverting it.[230] Such parody is not present in the writings of either Prophet or Spotted Elk. They didn't engage with the Exposition through a mode of suspicion for the underlying power dynamics and hierarchies, like the Surrealists, PCF and LAI did. Being foreigners in Paris, they were probably also less receptive to these imperial messages. Instead, they found hope in the imperial spectacle. This hope is paralleled more broadly by the hope that drove them to migrate to Paris in the first place. Hope is also in the case of Sedgewick's "reparative reading" a driving primary force. She writes:

> "*Hope, often a fracturing, even traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates*."[231]

In other words, these women chose to find in the colonial subtext what they could reorganize into positive meanings. *Congolais* powerfully shows this. They'd been confronted with the reality of judgements of racial inferiority their whole life. Through going to Paris, they felt they were breaking free from some of these boundaries of place.[232] Within such an exhilarating momentum, they chose to see the inspiring within the imperial text, rather than how it in its own way created a system of violence. Their assessment of the Colonial Exposition is therefore not naïve, but reveals a conscious choice to relate to a subtext productively.[233]

---

[229] Stansell, "Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of 'Reason,'" 125–26; Jonathan P. Eburne, "Decolonial Surrealism," in *Surrealism*, ed. Natalya Lusty, Cambridge Critical Concepts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 344, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108862639.020; Sophie Leclercq, "Le Colonialisme Mis à Nu. Quand Les Surréalistes Démythifiaient La France Coloniale (1919-1962)," *Revue Historique* 310, no. 2 (646) (2008): 325–26.
[230] Henderson, "Josephine Baker and La Revue Nègre," 124.
[231] Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," 146.
[232] Nochlin, "Art and the Conditions of Exile," 38.
[233] Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris,* 129; Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris*, 16; McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 147–61; Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," 149–50.

Chapter 5: The Dakar-Djibouti mission: ethnography between dream and nightmare

Above I have argued that Molly Spotted Elk's dance practice brought forth a counterculture within modernity based on her double subjectivity. She did so through embracing the hybridity within her dance and reading the colonial subtext of her presence in Paris reparatively. Moreover, I have made it clear that Molly Spotted Elk and Surrealism didn't see eye to eye ideologically. In the following, I argue that, in her seeking for a coming to terms with double subjectivity, Molly Spotted Elk nevertheless turned to the same methods as "dissident Surrealism": ethnography. I show this through looking at her response and Leiris' response to the Dakar-Djibouti mission.

Collecting from Dakar to Djibouti

The Dakar-Djibouti mission was an ethnographic mission organized by the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. It took place from 1931 to 1933 and was headed by ethnographer Marcel Griaule (1889-1956). The museum motivated this mission with arguments about its "scientific" purpose. The team included everything from linguist Deborah Lifchitz (1907-1942) to ethnomusicologist André Schaeffner (1895-1980), and was tasked with collecting as much data as possible. However, from the beginning it was evident that material data were preferred over immaterial knowledge. In essence, the mission was a collecting mission. The ethnographic museum had been famous for its messy and outdated displays prior to 1930. But from 1928 onwards, ethnologist Paul Rivet and socialite Georges Henri Rivière, Rivet's assistant director, started a major overhaul. Rivet aimed to "modernize" the museum and turn it into an education center for the general French public. In 1924, he had founded L'Institut d'Ethnologie together with Marcel Mauss (1872-1950). As a director at the Trocadéro, he wanted to apply this new sociological theory for ethnography to the museum's activities. This aim was ideological for Rivet. He considered ethnology to be the solution to human intolerance. To spread this message widely, together with Rivière, he aimed to turn the museum into one that was up-to-date and popular. Rivière, a jazz artist by training, knew like no other how to play into popular culture phenomena without loosing scientific gravitas.[234] This is very clear in the case of the Dakar-Djibouti mission. A bigger collection of African objects would answer to the demands of the Parisian craze for "*Négrophilisme*". Additionally, being the first explicitly "ethnographic" expedition in French history,

[234] Jaques Mauny, "Cleaning Up the Paris Trocadero," *The New York Times*, January 4, 1931; André Delpuech and Christine Laurière, eds., *Les années folles de l'ethnographie: Trocadéro 28-37*, Collection archives (Paris: Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, 2017), 14, 19, 27; Vincent Debaene, "Les surréalistes et le musée d'ethnographie," *Labyrinthe*, no. 12 (June 30, 2002): 76, https://doi.org/10.4000/labyrinthe.1209; Clifford, *The predicament of Culture,* 122; Thytacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 99.

it was a great way for the museum to publicize its new scientific direction. Yet, despite these scientific aims, events to finance the mission still played to "exotic" fascinations.[235] They, for example, included a gala boxing match with famous Panamaian boxer Al Brown, attended by Josephine Baker, of which press coverage was extensive.[236]

Other than private investors for the mission attracted through such gala-events, the French state was also a major benefactor. The French ministry of education and fine arts billed a law in 1931 that made it possible for the mission to be financed for up to 1.100.000 francs.[237] Considering, as I discuss further, Griaule paid 10 francs for a sacred object acquired in 1931, this budget is considerable in times of nearing economic crisis. The similarities between the Dakar-Djibouti mission and the Colonial Exposition are clear. Both played into exoticist fascinations. Both maintained an aura of significancy through reliance on science. Both, crucially, were organized by the French state to advance its imperial project. A map of the expedition's route (illustration 18) shows that about half of the territories the mission travelled through were under French rule. Timewise, however, the expedition spent the longest time in Ethiopia, then still a country under sovereign rule. Although the Senate's motifs for the financing of the Dakar-Djibouti mission are unknown, it's evident that to improve knowledge on a country makes it easier to control. While this was the case for all the countries the Dakar-Djibouti

---

[235] A 1931 article in the Paris-Soir delivers a great example of how media portrayals really mixed Africanist fascinations, the Trocadéro museum, scientific missions and the avant-gardes. The article discusses how Raymond Roussel, the author of *Impressions of Africa,* gifted money to the Dakar-Djibouti mission. He says it would be a great thing to know more about the continent, yet his own book had been a total fiction based on no knowledge of the continent. In the same breath, the author of the article mentions how seminal Roussel's own work was for the understanding of Africa in the minds of avant-gardes. This is indeed true because Leiris mentions it as one of the books constituting his African imaginary in *L'Afrique Fantôme.* The article testifies to an intricate colonial epistemology, underlying French ethnography at this time, in which factual fieldwork and colonial imaginaries exist in the same sphere of knowledge making. Georges Omer, "L'auteur d'Impressions d'Afrique fait don de 10.000 francs à la mission Dakar-Djibouti," *Paris-soir*, February 15, 1931. For more on Leiris and Roussel, see also: "Out of Europe: The African Palimpsest in Michel Leiris's L'Afrique Fantôme," in *Narrative Paths: African Travel in Modern Fiction and Nonfiction*, by Kai Mikkonen (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2015), 260–63, https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/30/oa_monograph/book/38735.

[236] Rondelet, "Le boxeur nègre Al Brown...," *L'Écho de Paris*, November 22, 1930; Unknown, "Les boxeurs s'intéressent à la mission Griaule," *Les Annales coloniales: organe de la "France coloniale moderne,"* April 13, 1931; Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 204–5; Jacques Bureau, "La Mission Dakar-Djibouti (1931-1933)," in *Marcel Cohen et ses successeurs ou Cent ans d'études éthiopiennes en France*, Bulletins de la Maison des études éthiopiennes (Addis Abbeba: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2016), paras. 5–7, https://doi.org/10.4000/books.cfee.524; Ruth Larson, "Ethnography, Thievery, and Cultural Identity: A Rereading of Michel Leiris's L'Afrique Fantôme," *PMLA* 112, no. 2 (1997): 230; Phyllis Clarck-Taoua, "In Search of New Skin: Michel Leiris's L'Afrique Fantôme," *Cahiers d'études Africaines* 42, no. 167 (January 1, 2002): 480, https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafricaines.153; Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 55–56; Norindr, "3 The 'Surrealist' Counter-Exposition," 57.

[237] Gaston Doumergue, "Annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 31 mars 1931: Projet de loi adopté par la chambre des députés autorisant le ministre de l'Instruction publique et des Beaux-Arts à participer aux frais de l'organisation de la mission Dakar-Djibouti," Pub. L. No. 410, Publicized formally in *Impressions : projets, propositions, rapports*... (1931), 3.

mission crossed into, it's particularly relevant for Ethiopia. As a sovereign country, it offered a real alternative to colonialism and was thus a dangerous power in the region. Knowledge gathering in the country was therefore vital.[238] The Dakar-Djibouti mission thus explicitly featured in a colonial programme just like the Colonial Exposition did. Yet, whereas surrealist voices openly criticized the latter for its imperialism, a surrealist partook in the Dakar-Djibouti expedition: Michel Leiris. Leiris had defected from Breton's Surrealism in 1929, but surrealist methodology and anti-imperial politics remained the basis for his ethnography.[239]

Ethnographic self-exploration in Michel Leiris' L'Afrique Fantôme

Leiris had originally joined the surrealists in 1924 through his friendship with André Masson (1896-1987), but had always felt apprehensive towards the leadership of Breton. He officially broke off from the group during the "crisis of 1929" and joined *Documents: doctrines, archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie* (1929-1930), Georges Bataille's (1897-1962) infamous magazine. Additionally, he started studying ethnology at the Institut d'Ethnologie, situated within the grounds of the Trocadéro palace. Here, he met Rivière, who invited him to become the *sécretaire-archiviste* for the Dakar-Djibouti mission. While Leiris had broken off from Surrealism as a group, his spirit remained surrealist. He kept up its anti-rational, anti-Western stance and focus on psychoanalytical themes, such as oedipal anxieties. Through him, this surrealist mindset bled through into the methodology and research questions of the Dakar-Djibouti mission.[240] In a scientific rapport about the mission, Griaule mentions circumcision as the first research question in his enumeration. He does so before going into much broader themes such as "*the society of adults*", clearly a sociological question in accordance with the ethnological practice.[241] The specific focus on circumcision reveals the theme of a castration complex, a common Freudian theme in surrealist works. This castration complex and more general sexual frustration also come though in Leiris' published account of the mission: *L'Afrique Fantôme* (1935).[242] Moreover, Griaule repeatedly mentions how the mission aimed to unveil hidden structures

---

[238] Bureau, "La Mission Dakar-Djibouti (1931-1933)," paras. 9–12; Marcel Griaule, "La mission Dakar-Djibouti," *Bulletin mensuel de l'Association française pour l'avancement des science*s, January 1, 1934, 416–20.
[239] Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 2021, 169.
[240] This is to such an extent that Robert Goldwater in fact even calls Marcel Griaule a surrealist himself. Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, 294.
[241] Griaule, "La mission Dakar-Djibouti," 414.
[242] On psychoanalysis, masculinity and eroticism in *L'Afrique Fantôme*, see: Stephanie Anderson, "Manhood, Literary Heroes and Ethnographic Expeditioning in Michel Leiris's *L'Afrique Fantome*," *Canberra Anthropology* 21, no. 2 (October 1, 1998): 67-70, 74-75, https://doi.org/10.1080/03149099809508366.

and magical realities.[243] James Clifford writes that this was in fact one of the mission's and French ethnology's great accomplishments; the openness towards a less empirical, visual fact-oriented approach. While American anthropology at this time was recording only what it could understand from its own cultural positionality, French ethnography under the influence of Surrealism, was explicitly looking for the strange, paradoxical and hard to understand.[244]

James Clifford also praises Leiris' subjective approach to recording his travels. He lauds it as the ultimate critical genre for fieldwork, exploring the self before the other.[245] *L'Afrique Fantôme*, is both an ethnographic account and a surrealist stream-of-consciousness diary. It relates its author's every feeling and particular being-in-place. This allows for a self-criticality and transparency which is uncommon in field work diaries. For example, in the case of how the ethnographers robbed objects from local populations. On September 6, 1931, Leiris details how Griaule and he robbed a Kono mask, a powerful spiritual vessel for the Bambara peoples of Mali (then: French Sudan). The account is revelatory of the absolute disdain and drunkenness on power Leiris experienced as a colonial *fonctionnaire.* The group at first asks to just see the Kono mask. The village head responds to this that they must perform a sacrifice for the ancestors if they want to see it. Unwilling to do this, Griaule resorts to attempting to "buy" the mask for 10 francs. He adds that if the head is unwilling to comply, he will be taken to the police station. Leiris aptly ends the paragraph calling out "*Awful extortion!*".[246] He is thus clearly aware of the unequal power dynamic governing the sale, but too exhilarated by the event to truly object. He further details how Griaule and he retrieve the Kono mask:

> "*Griaule and I ask the men to go and retrieve the* Kono*. Everyone refusing, we go there* [to the hut] *ourselves, wrapping up the saintly object in protective tarp and exiting like thieves* […] *The 10 francs were given to the chef and we leave in a haste, in the middle of the generally stunned environment and adorned by a halo of demons or particularly powerful and reckless bastards*."[247]

---

[243] See for example, Marcel Griaule's *exposé* surrounding Ethiopia, the country which in his words was « *le pays d'election de la magie* » : ibid, 419.
[244] Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," 564; Peter Phipps, "Michel Leiris: Master of Ethnographic Failure," in *Celebrating Transgression: Method and Politics in Anthropological Studies of Cultures*, ed. Ursula Rao and John Hutnyk (New York/ Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), 1184-185; Anderson, "Manhood, Literary Heroes And Ethnographic Expeditioning In Michel Leiris's *L'Afrique Fantome*," 62.
[245] Ibid, 555; Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 2021, 89–90; 142; 167–68.
[246] Own translation, original: « *Affreux Chantage !* » Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme: De Dakar à Djibouti, 1931-1933*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 81.
[247] Own translation, original: « *Griaule et moi demandons que les hommes aillent chercher le Kono. Tout le monde refusant, nous y allons nous-mêmes, emballons l'objet saint dans le bâche et sortons comme des voleurs. […] les 10 francs sont*

The passage details one of the main atrocities of the Dakar-Djibouti mission: its disregard for property. Clifford would read it – in the surrealist spirit - as an ironic reflection on the damages of colonial collecting. Yet, as I've already detailed above, irony and parody are not faultless routes for critique. In *L'Afrique Fantôme*, Leiris' ironic, self-deprecating "*subjectivism of the dreamer*" (itself also of course a term Leiris alludes to ironically) is a voice that is unable to deconstruct or even engage with the colonial violence.[248] So while Clifford praises the exploration of self before "other" in *L'Afrique Fantôme,* I believe it's important to continue to highlight the following: it is this prioritizing of the self among avant-gardes that was in the first place complicit in colonial trauma. Leiris until at least 1988 continued to defend the routine robbing on the Dakar-Djibouti mission, saying: "[…] *the ends justified the means,* […]"[249]

L'Afrique Fantôme with its focus on self-exploration provides general insights into the structures that governed surrealist looking at ethnography and non-Western myth and objects. Leiris' descriptions reveal how he started the mission off sexually frustrated, sickly, intellectually unstimulated and generally exhausted of modernity's demands. He looked towards his travels across Africa as a reprieve from these emotions. Leiris before this trip had mythologized the continent into one where "authentic" expression was possible, as opposed to Europe. However, from his very first arrival in Dakar this image was shattered. He is surprised by the fact that life in Dakar is not so different from life in Paris: "[…] *same paltry existence, same vulgarness, same monotony, and the same systematic destruction of beauty*. *I feel the urge to be in the bushes. Cockroach*."[250] However, as the last sentence also indicates, this does not mean he gave up on his search for "authenticity". Instead, he moved away from the metropolitan centres for it. Once there, he berated locals who had adjusted to touristic demands to keep their economies afloat.[251] For Leiris, it was these people who had turned Africa into a ghost of itself, and ultimately played a large part in his disappointment with the trip. These were general themes in

---

donnés au chef et nous partons en hâte, au milieu de l'ébahissement général et parés d'une auréole de démons ou de salauds particulièrement puissants et osée.» Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 82.

[248] Clarck-Taoua, "In Search of New Skin," 494, 496; Larson, "Ethnography, Thievery, and Cultural Identity: A Rereading of Michel Leiris's L'Afrique Fantôme," 235; Anderson, "Manhood, Literary Heroes And Ethnographic Expeditioning In Michel Leiris's *L'Afrique Fantome*," 76.

[249] Sally Price and Jean Jamin, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris," *Current Anthropology*, February 1, 1988, 170, https://doi.org/10.1086/203622.

[250] Own translation, original: « […], *même existence mesquine, même vulgarité, même monotonie, et même destruction systématique de la beauté. J'ai grand'hâte d'être en brousse. Cafard*. » Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, 20.

[251] A revealing passage occurs for example on page 105. Leiris has an interaction with a member of the Dogon people. The man is willing to show his home to Leiris. Leiris in turn finds offence in the way the man has adapted to European demands. Yet, for the man this is undoubtedly a "survivance" mechanism and Leiris shows no understanding of that. See: Ibid, 105-106.

the Surrealist interest for ethnography. The "other" was always approached from the expectation to find within this "other" a resolution or at least analysis for the fractured self. In this splintered subjectivity irrational desires for adventure and eroticism battled with the unconscious imperial mindset of an upbringing in "La Grande France". This then resulted in mythologizations, such as the title of "Ghostly Africa" implies, which did not allow room for actual Indigenous peoples or the way *they* governed and hybridized their traditions.[252]

Molly Spotted Elk: idealizing ethnography

The Dakar-Djibouti expedition was, as I've detailed, simultaneously the central instigator and sign of a renovating Trocadéro museum. In this renovation, Molly Spotted Elk had a small, but considerable stake. The years of the mission, 1931-1933, were exactly the years Molly Spotted Elk was also active at the Trocadéro. Although she first performed at the museum on May 23, 1931, it seems Molly Spotted Elk was only introduced to Rivière on June 9, 1931. It was Charlie Oskomon who took her to first meet him at the Trocadéro, as she would later also introduce other Native performers to Rivière.[253] Oskomon was already a regular in the museum, having most famously performed dances and songs for the March 14, 1930 inauguration of a Tsimshian totem pole, the first in the museum. This event, orchestrated by Rivière and Coze, was a publicity stunt and a spectacle meant to evoke audience fascination, similar to the gala evenings for the Dakar-Djibouti expedition. Among the attendants of the event were surrealists, Leiris, Masson, Joan Miró (1893-1993) and Robert Desnos (1900-1945).[254] Molly Spotted Elk after this initial meeting became close to Rivière, who in turn was an important link for the Trocadéro museum to these later dissident surrealists.[255] Perhaps her relationship with Archambaud also played a role in furthering this connection. As a writer for the Paris-Soir, he was tasked specifically with publicizing the Dakar-Djibouti mission from 1931 onwards and became

[252] To his credit, as I mention further, this is something Michel Leiris moves away from in his later life. After travelling to Martinique and becoming friends with Aimé Césaire, he realizes the value of hybridity and diaspora culture. Bringing these themes into the focus of cultural anthropology is one of Leiris' great accomplishments for the field of anthropology. But he too admits that this was not at all present in *L'Afrique Fantôme*. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 2021, 89; Price and Jamin, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris," 157, 161.
[253] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries 1929-1933*, June 9, 1931; September 2, 1932.
[254] Peltier-Caroff, "Un Potlatch Au Trocadero. Paul Coze Indianiste Ethnographe," 504–8; Rémi Labrusse, "Miró et Potlatch," in *Joan Miró 1917-1934: La Naissance Du Monde*, ed. Agnès De la Beaumelle (Parijs: Ed. Du Centre Pompidou, 2004), 36.
[255] Dawn Ades, Simon Baker, and Fiona Bradley, eds., *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, (London/ Cambridge: Hayward Gallery/ MIT Press, 2006), 13.

friends with Rivière because of this.[256] Consequently, Molly Spotted Elk was asked several times to perform at promotional events for the museum. Yet, through her own profound interest in ethnography, she also aimed for closer involvement with the museum's scientific missions and its adjoining ethnological institute.[257]

In 1932, roughly one and a half years since the Dakar-Djibouti mission had left, Molly Spotted Elk expressed her desire to become a part of it, or more generally participate in ethnographic fieldwork. She writes: "*Interested in the Dakar Djibouti expedition, how I would love to join it. But South America interests me more. From Paris many things will come - so far many have and who knows?*"[258] Less than a year later, she'd be helping out at the Dakar-Djibouti mission exhibition with Marc Richard (?-?), an industrial who had funded a 1931 mission to French Guyana.[259] Her ethnographic interest did not come out of left field. As mentioned, she took anthropology courses in Philadelphia and these courses profoundly changed the way she approached her dances and life in general.[260] Her diaries show how the Parisian stay is clearly approached from this lens of ethnographic fieldwork at times.[261] She writes long entries about the different neighbourhoods, books, cultural practices and architectures that mark the city and its people.[262] Her engagement at the Trocadéro allowed her to partake in Marcel Mauss' classes at the Institut d'Ethnologie, where she even lectured on two occasions. The first lecture was on Native-American music and the second lecture was on her education and experiences growing up as a Native-American woman. Other than this, in the preparation of her novel, she also scoured the French archives for information and read ethnographic books she found at the Trocadéro.[263] Interest in anthropology and fieldwork among Native-Americans in the early twentieth century is common. Again, Vizenor's concept of "survivance" is relevant here. Anthropology was a way for Native-

---

[256] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries 1929-1933,* October 11, 1931; Jean Archambaud, "Une mission française va partir pour tenter de sauver des races condamnées," *Paris-Soir*, March 18, 1931.
[257] McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk*, 182; Horton, "Performing Paint, Claiming Space," par. 53.
[258] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, November 2, 1932.
[259] Ibid, May 27, 1933; Delpuech and Laurière, *Les années folles de l'ethnographie: Trocadéro 28-37*, 582.
[260] For example, she goes to the Heye Foundation in New York to get inspiration for her costumes and beadery, and profoundly enjoys the Penobscot gallery there. *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* February 1, 1930
[261] For example, in the following entry, she details how she is approaching her Paris trip: "To classify a group of people, justice must be given [to] them by understanding how, what, when and the why of things, training, etc. One must, to absorb thoroughly the Gallic mind, the Parisian culture (Shall we call it that?) and understand the economical, moderate life etc. of the people, live with and among them, after all, I want to learn and absorb all I can while here." *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* June 16, 1931
[262] For example, on the Parisian Palaces: "Palais Bourbon or Chambres des Deputies - palais de l'Elysées, where the president lives - Grand Palais, on Champs Elysees, where all the large fairs and exhibitions are held - Petit Palais, use for about same purpose - Palais de Justice, Blais of the Senate - Palais of Trocadero (two museums, a theatre and an aquarium) -- There seems to be many Palaces of no value!" *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* August 7, 1931.
[263] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* August 13, 1932; August 19, 1933.

Americans to take back the narrative within colonial structures.[264] Molly Spotted Elk's second lecture for the Institut d'Ethnologie, "Indian Woman", although not recorded, is a great example of this. In her diaries, she mentions that she would never be able to hold such a lecture in the US.[265] I want to argue, however, that it was not just "survivance" which made ethnography appealing to Molly Spotted Elk, ethnography - as Leiris proves - could be a means to come to terms with a splintered subjectivity, to understand and express one's Self.

Molly Spotted Elk's stake in ethnography and attraction towards it, become evident from the following diary excerpt about how much she enjoys being at the Trocadéro museum:

> "*Even the sight of primitive things and real pictures of natives does me good. It always makes me feel that civilization does not mean so much after all—that there are still some people who can live without it or even knowing about it,* […]"[266]

The "self" that looks towards an "other" is obviously splintered along entirely different axes for Leiris and Molly Spotted Elk, yet the force that does the splintering is the same: "modernity". Ethnography to Molly Spotted Elk offered a reprieve from the cultural inferiority narrative her American education and the audiences she danced for had embedded in her. After all, Rivet had built *his* Trocadéro on the dream of trying to eradicate such myths of racial inferiority. Through her presence at the museum, Molly Spotted Elk truly started to believe in this capacity for ethnography to bring about positive change in racial disparities. This is most pointedly exemplified by her writing of *Katahdin,* the abovementioned book with Abnaki myths and a Penobscot-Passamaquoddy vocabulary list. In the way it solidifies myth and language, this book is entirely in line with the work done by Deborah Lifchitz in Ethiopia.[267] The expedition also influenced her dance. In 1933, the year where she helped out with setting up an exhibition of the objects acquired on the mission, she ponders to include ceremonial dances, recorded on the Dakar-Djibouti expedition, in her own dance. She writes:

---

[264] This interest in anthropology was for example also the case for Molly Spotted Elk's little sister Eunice Nelson-Baumann. According to the Penobscot Nation Museum, she was the first Penobscot to earn a PhD and she did so in anthropology. See: Penobscot Nation Museum, "Molly Spotted Elk," accessed May 29, 2023, https://www.penobscotculture.com/molly-spotted-elk.

[265] "Finished my lecture in notes it's a mess but I know what I have to say - my own school lifes + Blun's is good and anyway it will all be truth. I couldn't give this lecture in the States. My dear!! Lecture tonight at Salle Odyan - "Indian Woman"." *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933,* March 2, 1932.

[266] McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk,* 182.

[267] Molly Spotted Elk, *Katahdin*; Marianne Lemaire, "Deborah Lifchitz, une carrière d'ethnologue française dans l'entre-deux-guerres," *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines*, no. 35 (December 15, 2019): paras. 16–18, https://doi.org/10.4000/rhsh.4247; Deborah Lifchitz, *Textes éthiopiens magico-religieux*, (Paris : Institut D'Ethnologie, 1940).

> "*Worked with J on the Dakar-Djibouti thing* [article]. *Interested in the primitive negro ceremonial dance. If a white girl can do what one is doing about Indian dances* [probably referring to Hindu dances in this case], *then I don't see why I cannot continue with my work. Maybe the coming year will be better.*"[268]

Nonetheless, Molly Spotted Elk, here, made the same appropriative decision as surrealists did. She related within ethnography to her own perception of the rituals and wanted to incorporate them. If she had done so, she would have not cared for the power imbalances of such an act. Yet, the diary entry implies that she was held back by something or someone. The Surrealists never faced backlash for appropriating Indigenous culture, Leiris even looked to gain "authenticity" from appropriation and acculturation. Yet, for Molly Spotted Elk appropriation would make her loose "authenticity" as a dancer.[269]

---

[268] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries,* December 30, 1933.

[269] For a survey on this specific subject, see for example: Cowling, "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists."
I don't generally point out concrete cases of Surrealist formal appropriation in this thesis. This is because -as I showed in the literature review- to do so is to rely on the concept of "affinities". This is not a productive term for any critical analysis of "primitivism", even though Cowling is certainly not wrong in seeing these formal appropriations within Surrealism, as it had been for earlier avant-gardes as well.

Chapter 6: Missed encounter or conscious ignoring?

The previous two chapters have analyzed the spaces where Molly Spotted Elk's activities in Paris intersected with the activities of the Breton group of Surrealists and the "dissident" surrealists at the Trocadéro museum. Through these chapters it has become clear that Molly Spotted Elk and French Surrealism simultaneously fundamentally opposed each other and shared some similar attitudes to using appropriative meaning-making and having a fundamentally anti-modernist disposition. In this last chapter, I analyze the factors that meant a true encounter between the two never occurred.

"Idealists of Freudian whims"

Molly Spotted Elk and the Surrealists were never part of the same circles. The only reference she makes to the avant-garde groups in her vicinity, is in a diary entry detailing the sorts of people who frequent her hotel on the Rue L'Arcade:

> "*What a conglomeration of races one finds even in a hotel or pension. People of the old and new regimes, nobility and bums - everything from the survivor of the Russian Revolution, the riots of Nuremberg; the Armenian [illegible] to idealists of cubism and Freudian whims. All breathing the same kind of air, as others of all colors, creeds and intelligences. Paris, the mother of all races*."[270]

The nickname "idealists of Freudian whims" reveals a lot about Molly Spotted Elk's value judgement of the surrealists. Furthermore, when she frequents the "arty" neighbourhoods of Montmartre, Montparnasse and Quartier Latin, she is quick to call the crowd there "bohemians", "freaks", "bums" and "queers", people who she finds "entertaining" to watch.[271] On this superficial level, it's not hard to see why Molly Spotted Elk disliked Surrealism. From what she'd read in the papers and saw for herself in the cafés, they were wholly different from her.[272] She found their experiments whimsical

---

[270] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, May 18, 1933.

[271] August 2, 1931: "Montmartre - on heights of Paris - familiar night life, restaurants, night clubs and cafes - cosmopolitan crowds, dancing bals. Place blanche, Pigalle and its dinky streets. Fontaine, des Matyrs. Church of Sacre Coeur is beautiful - its long stairway and little tram that runs from top to bottom of hill. Old, quaint and bohemian - but at night better than day. Many queer people about."
August 4, 1931: "Montparnasse - another student district - popular centre of night life, bohemian, arty colonies, studios, orgies and bums. Americans have made it commercial, living expensive there now. Dome, Coupole and Select the most conspicuous cafes, while others are equally frequented. Its the Greenwich village of Paris. Anyway its worth sitting at a cafe to see freaks pass." *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, August 2, 4, 1931.

[272] For example, it's very likely that Molly Spotted Elk read the Paris-Soir newspaper in 1931 as Archambaud was working there. This newspaper would characterize surrealists as frowny-nosed idealists, frequenting the Montmartre bars, with quips such as "*Ca sent mauvais! Il y a ici des vedettes des cinema!* » ("It smells bad! There's movie stars in here !") "Sous l'oeil des agents," *Paris-soir*, April 29, 1931.

and "silly", missing the realism that life had imbued in her own spirit.[273] She was aware that they'd struggled financially in their own ways. She mentions in her diary that all artists know the struggle of wanting to make great art and having little money to do so.[274] But, certainly in the way she approaches these artistic neighbourhoods, she is highly suspicious of the privileged nature of avant-garde experiment.[275]

Her diaries and correspondence only mention two physical meetings with people broadly affiliated with the surrealist mindset. The first was with Japanese visual artist Tsuguharu Foujita (1886-1968). Foujita in the 1930s lived together with surrealist poet Robert Desnos and was experimenting with incorporating the visual language of Surrealism into his own art. He falls under the category of *artists-étrangers* who were experimenting with the "othering" boundaries of French perception. His iteration on Surrealism, like in the case of Tarsila Do Amaral, was an exercise in finding a balance between perceived and expected French "otherness".[276] Molly Spotted Elk met him at the café du Dôme in Montparnasse through mutual friend Anita Patel. Her comments in her diary about this encounter are decidedly scathing:

> "*Up at the Dome - saw Foujita, the funny looking Japanese artist - Anita there so we talked. His first wife looks like a painted ahem from the burlesque - baggy eyes, black tux and wrinkled skin, extremely sophisticated. Freaks everywhere.*"[277]

The second encounter is with Leiris. On May 27, 1933, she met him at a dinner hosted for all the people helping at the Musée d'Ethnographie for the exhibition on the Dakar-Djibouti mission.[278] Her

---

[273] It would seem that Molly Spotted Elk simply didn't find artistic experiment with form to be aesthetically pleasing either, as she writes in her diary about illustrator Dean Cornwell, who took camera studies of her in New York: "A very precise and concientious [sic] artist, his poetic visions lessen by modern attempts to establish new form." *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, May 27, 1930.

[274] *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries 1929-1933,* January 12, 1933.

[275] This privileged nature is something that Michel Leiris for example underlines in a 1988 interview, saying that there was a carefree spirit which allowed intellectual experiment in between the wars. Certainly, Molly Spotted Elk was everything from carefree in the 1930s. She was aware of the Great Depression, had experienced fundamental racial inequality and was distinctly certain that war would break out again soon, as she writes: "[W]ar is inevitable in this day and age and such complicated civilization." *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, November 11, 1932; Price and Jamin, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris," 160.

[276] Phyllis Birnbaum, *Glory in a Line: A Life of Foujita: The Artist Caught between East & West* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006), 5, 7, 155.

[277] The connotation of 'sophisticated' is in Molly Spotted Elk's case negative as she notes throughout her diary the virtue of simplicity and lack of sophistication. *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, November 5, 1932.

[278] The full diary entry reads: "At Trocadéro to help for the Dakar-Djibouti Exposition - worked with Richard, the South-American explorer. Lots of fun - all of the bunch are there, Griaule, Leiris and that funny jewess miss Lipschit - she's funny. Home + had dinner with Johnny at [illegible]. Anita phoned but busy. At Sorbonne, saw the President and a gala - good!" *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries from 1929-1933*, May 27, 1933.

diaries don't mention Leiris again after this first meeting. She also doesn't detail how she feels about meeting the surrealist. Other than these physical encounters, in her studying lists she mentions a Bataille, possibly Georges, and Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), both not surrealist authors, but closely associated to the movement.[279] In this list, she is naming important French authors in general, but doesn't imply she has met or read any of them. So while it is clear that Molly Spotted Elk encountered some surrealists in her time in Paris, she shows no interest in learning from them at all.

"A really sad purity"[280]

On the other hand, there is the Surrealist ignorance of Molly Spotted Elk. Firstly, in the case of Breton and the group around him there is a general disdain for entertainment culture. This also became clear from their critiques on the *Exposition Coloniale*. That sentiment would have held them back from ever really showing interest in a Native-American dancer.[281] Nevertheless, there were also surrealists, such as Leiris, Desnos, Miró, and even Breton's second half Aragon, who revelled in the interwar culture of jazz and dance.[282] There is a high chance that these surrealists saw Molly Spotted Elk dance, either at the various nightclubs she performed at or simply at the Trocadéro museum. Secondly, Breton was not a fan of Rivet's Institut de l'Ethnologie and renovations of the Trocadéro museum. He criticized the hyper rationality which governed the displays and how vice-director Rivière had turned the

---

[279] In fact, Bataille was quite opposed to Surrealism as he called them "*des emmerdeurs idealists*" ("idealistic pain in the asses"). Still, he was responsible for the large break in Surrealism from 1929 onwards and many surrealists contributed to his magazine *Documents*. Therefore, he is generally considered surrealist still. Vincent Debaene, "Les surréalistes et le musée d'ethnographie," 77; Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 155.
Cocteau too is more surrealist by association and mindset, than he was actually part of the Surrealist group. He associated closely with the Dadaists and shows the same irreverence to Western civilization as Surrealism. In his 1926 essay "In Legitimate Defense", Breton however clearly attacks Cocteau for his "patriotic poems", so suffice to say the relationship is problematic. Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 87; Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 248.

[280] Own translation, original: "*Pureté très triste*". This is a quote without context from André Breton's visit to the Hopi reservation. For me it encapsulates Surrealist "primitivism" quite well. It points to an imagined "pureness", which at the same time is connotated to be "vanishing". André Breton, "The Hopi Notebook," Nevada, 1945, BRT101, Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet, Paris, 4.

[281] This disdain derived from the communist, anti-imperialist leanings of the Breton group. For example in the pamphlet anti the Exposition Coloniale, Breton and others argue that the spectacles put a veil over the imperial atrocities committed by France. Moreover, according to Leiris, Breton also just really disliked music. See: Price and Jamin, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris," 160; Breton et al., "Ne Visitez-Pas l'Exposition Coloniale."

[282] No doubt, it's no coincidence that the majority of these artists ended up quitting Breton's group and becoming "dissident surrealists". The culture of play of Dada and its Cabaret Voltaire had always been somewhat at the heart of these avant-gardes and Breton's authoritarianism didn't mix well with that. See for example Breton's reproaches to these "dissidents" in: André Breton, "The Second Manifesto of Surrealism (1930)," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, 1. ed., Ann Arbor Paperbacks 182 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 182.
See also: Berliner, "Dancing Dangerously," 61; Price and Jamin, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris," 160, 163; Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 116-118.

museum from a temple into a circus with his benefit evenings.[283] Conversely, after the 1929 "crisis in Surrealism" many of the surrealists who had broken off from the Breton group, including Leiris and Desnos, became part of Bataille's *Documents*. In this magazine, closely tied to the Trocadéro museum, Bataille, Rivière and the "dissident" surrealists, endorsed the mixing of ethnography and jazz for example. In this hybridity the surrealist spirit of breaking down boundaries between perceived opposites, was evident.[284] This surrealist appraisal of ethnology came with an interest in partaking in the lectures at the Institut de L'Ethnologie of Marcel Mauss. Here again, they could have heard Molly Spotted Elk speak and seen her dance.

Such possible meetings between Molly Spotted Elk and the surrealists, do not mean they showed any interest in her. Certainly, Leiris was, as mentioned above, contemptuous towards what he called "*évolués*".[285] This racist term contains the idea that inferior races could "evolve" to become more superior through education and racial mixing. In the case of Leiris and "primitivist" discourse, such evolution was perceived negatively as it took away the "authentic" and "spontaneous" nature of "primitive expression". For example, in 1920, art critic Félix Féneon (1861-1944) asked the question: "*Will they* [non-Western objects, metonymically non-European artists] *be allowed into the Louvre?*". The response by Dr. René Verneau (1852-1938), then a curator at the Trocadéro, went:

> *"If you visit the galleries of the ethnographic museum* [Trocadéro], *you will easily notice that in ancient Mexico, the Yucatan, Guatemala, Peru, etc. there certainly once existed artists worthy of the name. In Africa, you will find an equally artistic sensibility among the modern Negroes. Visit our Oceania gallery and you will agree that Polynesians manifest a taste that I would not hesitate to call artistic, notably in the décor of certain objects, and in their tattoos, with which, in the Marquesas Islands, they used to cover their bodies.*
>
> *And I am only alluding to spontaneous original art, and not to that which has been affected, often unfortunately, by the Europeans. The ancient Mexicans, the Mayans, the ancient*

[283] Debaene, "Les surréalistes et le musée d'ethnographie," 76.
[284] Dawn Ades, Simon Baker, and Fiona Bradley, eds., *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, 67; Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 101.
[285] Price and Jamin, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris", 162-163; Thytacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 13; Meryl Altman, "Was Surrealism a Humanism? The Case of Michel Leiris," *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 67, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 55, https://doi.org/10.1080/00397709.2013.762855.

inhabitants of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru or Bolivia were, from this point of view, quite superior to modern Indians who have undergone European influence."[286]

Here, it is clear that Verneau believed European influence, transculturation and assimilation of Native-Americans compromised their ability to make "good art". Later "primitivist" accounts expressed the same broad sentiment towards Native-Americans, emphasizing how their true expressions were "vanishing". For example, surrealist poet Paul Eluard (1895-1952), stressed in the abovementioned 1930s *Variétés* article "Savage Art": "*you* [European/American settlers] *annihilate the savages through love of logic, and also by shame, and by charity*".[287] Certainly, from the perspective that through modernization Indigenous art was being "annihilated", it is evident why the surrealists lack interest in modern experiences and expressions of Native-Americans such as Molly Spotted Elk.

Nevertheless, surrealists in the 1930s were very actively collecting Native-American art and in the case of Bataille stressing the importance of knowing the "lived experience" of these objects.[288] This was what inspired for example, visual artists Kurt Seligmann (1900-1962) in 1938 and Wolfgang Paalen (1905-1959) in 1939 to travel to Vancouver Island.[289] However, as Leiris attested, Surrealism in these years was also essentially Paris-oriented.[290] If something could be gleaned from these objects, it only served to enrich the surrealist bibliography. Ethnographic objects were a source of dissent to Western rationality. Even the rituals performed around objects, for example the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch, could be appropriated only to serve as critique towards the West.[291] There was never any real dialogue with or implication in the realities of these far-away peoples. This shifted in the wake of World War II as many surrealists were forced to live in exile abroad. Leiris, upon meeting and becoming friends with Martiniquan poet Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), changed his authoritarian

---

[286] René Verneau, response to the 1920 survey "Seront-ils admis au Louvre?" quoted in Deutsch and Flam, *Primitivism and twentieth-century art: a documentary history*, 154.
[287] Quoted from: Paul Eluard, "Savage Art (1929)," in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History.*, ed. Miriam Deutch and Jack D. Flam, The Documents of Twentieth Century Art Series (Berkeley: University of California press, 2003), 209.
[288] Debaene, "Les surréalistes et le musée d'ethnographie," 81-82; Thythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 154.
[289] Seligmann took the trip as part of another ethnographic mission for the Trocadero museum, then no longer at the Trocadéro. Paalen was probably inspired by Seligmann's "successful" expedition to go for himself. The art of the peoples of the North-West Coast always enjoyed particular interest for the Surrealists because their cultures have distinct totemic practices. Freudian Surrealism of course had a particularly vested interest in totemism, after Freud's book *Totem and Taboo.* Marie Mauzé, "Odes à l'art de la côte Nord-Ouest. Surréalisme et ethnographie," *Gradhiva. Revue d'anthropologie et d'histoire des arts*, no. 26 (December 6, 2017): 184, 190, https://doi.org/10.4000/gradhiva.3467; Marie Mauzé, "Totemic Landscapes and Vanishing Cultures," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, no. 2 (2008): 4.
[290] Price and Jamin, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris", 161.
[291] See: Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," in *The Bataille Reade*r, ed. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, Blackwell Readers (Oxford/ Malden: Blackwell, 1997), 172.

perspective on "*évolués*" and became one of the first ethnographers to study hybridity.[292] Breton on his boat trip to Martinique became well-acquainted with anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009). In New York, he bought extensively from the collections of the Museum of the American Indian and authored articles on his interpretations of North-West Coast American transformation masks. Certainly, there was still a critique on ethnography evident within these articles, but Breton also became convinced that Surrealism hadn't been ethnographic enough. Finally, in 1945, he went to Nevada to visit the Hopi, Zuni, Navajo, Apache reservations.[293] Yet, even when surrealists broached the distance that had separated them from the Indigenous peoples of America in their Parisian years, there remained a fundamental disconnect. Surrealists, such as Breton, but also Paalen for example, continued to rely on tropes of the "vanishing Indian". They continued to view the cultures they encountered as mines to extract knowledge-making systems from.[294] Fundamentally also, like in Breton's Hopi notebooks, in the face of actual Indigenous people being repressed, there was no trace left of the earlier anti-imperialist stance.[295] Therefore, it is not hard to imagine that Molly Spotted Elk bridging the transatlantic gap between Surrealist imaginaries of Native-Americans and "the real thing" – a little under ten years before Surrealists actually started travelling to America- unfortunately did not leave much of an impact on Surrealist "primitivism".

---

[292] Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 2021, 89; Price and Jamin, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris," 157, 161; Celia Britton, "Ethnography as Relation: The Significance of the French Caribbean in the Ethnographic Writing of Michel Leiris," *French Studies* 66, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 50, https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/knr201.

[293] Thythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 156; Mauzé, "Odes à l'art de la côte Nord-Ouest. Surréalisme et ethnographie," 202; Katharine Conley, "Value and Hidden Cost in André Breton's Surrealist Collection," *South Central Review* 32, no. 1 (2015): 16.

[294] Paalen went to Vancouver Island with his wife, poet and artist Alice Rahon, in 1939. A letter to Breton shows how his insights on this trip are obviously governed by the « vanishing Indian » trope. This trope is then turned into a metaphor for his own existential anxieties about the political situation in Europe.
For example, he writes: « *Quelques documentations, quelques trouvailles, et, je pense, des aperçus nouveaux sur cet art* [Of the North-West Coast Indigenous peoples], *infiniment plus grand que tout ce qu'on peut en supposés en Europe, le sentiment d'une longue marché dans une pénombre plus profonde que celle de la forêt, qui permettait tout juste d'apercevoir le dernier rayon d'une culture des plus étrangement splendides sous une nature impérissablement sauvage – […]* » (My translation: "Some documentations, some new findings and, I think new insight on this art [of the North-West Coast American peoples], infinitely more grand than what we could think of it in Europe, the feeling of a long walk in a shadow, darker than that of the forest, which allows only to just about perceive the last ray of a culture of the most strange splendidness under an eternal savageness – […]")
Wolfgang Paalen to André Breton, "Ta lettre de Vermillieu me parvient à Vancouver...," August 21, 1939, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris. BRTC2232.
See also: Mauzé, "Totemic Landscapes and Vanishing Cultures," 19-20.

[295] Breton's Hopi Notebook describes mostly the physical characteristics of the people and art he encounters. He mentions cultural struggle between Navajo and Hopi, but doesn't question the U.S.'s politics of division in any way. Moreover, the notebook reveals instances of the nostalgic literary tropes influencing his perception. For example, Breton creates a "Noble/Ignoble Indian" trope with the way he contrasts between Hopi, hospitable and pacifist, and Navajo, hostile and aggressive. Breton, "The Hopi Notebook," 13.

Conclusion

This thesis has asked the question: What does the lack of interaction between Molly Spotted Elk and French surrealists show about either's iteration on modernism? Implied in that research question are two paths of investigation. For one, I had to find out what constituted Molly Spotted Elk's modernism as expressed through her dance practice while in Paris. And then from there on out, I researched what her expressions of modernity mean for the way art history theorized French Surrealist "primitivism", dealing with modernity through appropriation of Indigenous objects and myths.

Both parts of this thesis were concerned with answering the first question, although the first part was most explicit about it. Here, I researched the frameworks which governed Molly Spotted Elk's modern expressions. I argued that she had an invested stake in the way she expressed herself through dance. This was in spite of the "exoticizing" and "primitivizing" American settler colonialist and French imperial frameworks she encountered. However, governing these structures of power, *did* mean her expressions of modernity were plagued by a "double consciousness". Always at once being, and being seen. Molly Spotted Elk struggled with that duplicity. However, through the productive approach towards double consciousness of Paul Gilroy, I argued that her hybridity was constitutive to the way she versed a "counter modernism" in her dance practice. This counter modernism in her case brought together what I called "cosmos and cosmopolitan". These two terms constituted paradoxical knowledge systems, the narrative and enduringly resistant epistemology of dance in Native-American cultures and the "primitivist" desires of the city of Paris. This forging of a wholeness from polar opposites forms a modernist act akin to Surrealist juxtaposition, which is why the second part of this thesis revealed further insights into Molly Spotted Elk's modernism. I argued that she was a "reparatively" positioned artist within modernity. This is in contrast to French Surrealism which aimed to unveil and unhinge modernity, anticipating its harms. Unlike Surrealism, Molly Spotted Elk made conscious efforts to repair fragmentedness caused by the juxtaposition she embodied. In her turning to ethnography too, she at first glance seemed to act in the exact same way as French Surrealism. That is she studied and appropriated for self-analysis and -expression. However, surrealist Michel Leiris, for example, fundamentally continued to question the Self through ethnography's Other, defragmenting the Self again and again. In stark contrast to this, Molly Spotted Elk turned to ethnography to reconstruct her Self and deal with the trauma of double subjectivity.

The second question correlated roughly with the second part of this thesis. Nevertheless, the frameworks I revealed in the first part were undoubtedly also implicit in French Surrealist "primitivist" modernisms. I've shown that Surrealist "primitivism" is an aspect of the group that is hard to analyze.

It can be deconstructed into three part-elements: Surrealist anti-imperialist politics, Surrealist interest in ethnography and the Surrealist penchant for collecting, sometimes concerned with the meanings of the objects collected, sometimes not. These part-elements are at times taken on in highly contradictory ways by surrealists, as they are part of the equally contradictory discourse of "primitivism". For example, in the case of the counter-exhibition to the Colonial Exposition, a surrealist critique on imperialism was versed by the group around Breton. This anti-imperial vision had real value, but the implication of ethnographic objects, bought from some of the biggest merchants in Paris, into this protest complicated its critique. Additionally, ethnographic and collecting interests of the Surrealists reinforced colonial structures of power. In this thesis, I pointed to this in the case of Leiris' activities with the Dakar-Djibouti mission. More than this, the Surrealist appropriation itself relied on a discourse, "primitivism", which did not allow for Indigenous peoples, including Native-American, to construct modernisms for themselves. Surrealism chained them to the past and only allowed them to be part-objects of their cultures at best. I argued that the methodology of parody and ironic juxtaposition, so prevalent among Surrealism, lied at the basis of this inability to not perpetuate structures of imperial violence.

To conclude with a short answer to my research question. Molly Spotted Elk constructed a counter modernism in Paris. Integral to this modernism was that it became a hybrid blend of her Indigenous traditions and the frameworks of her transatlantic travel. Yet, such a modernism was not of interest for French Surrealism. For them, it would have seemed at once too commercially tradition-oriented to be truly either "modern" or anti-modern in spirit, and not "primitive" enough to be employed as a vessel for their own self-expression.

Further questions for research

While this thesis has aimed to deliver an answer to its own questions, it has uncovered areas which deserve further research. First, in Molly Spotted Elk's narrative there are still many open-ended questions. Her book *Katahdin: Wigwam's Tales of the Abnaki Tribe,* certainly needs further exploration. Moreover, it is clear from the recent interest in her story from contemporary Indigenous artists that there is a real contemporary relevance to her transatlantic modernism. The expressions of the Turtle Gals and Kent Monkman, raise additional questions: What constitutes their interest and fascination for Molly Spotted Elk? Is it something within her self-expressed modernism or is it a structure outside of this, for example broader fascination for the cultural life of interwar Paris? Also practically, there were loose ends triggered by her diaries, both small and large, that neither Bunny McBride, nor I could uncover. For example, who is her Indian friend Anita Patel and what was her impact on the London and Parisian dance scene. If she *is,* as Molly Spotted Elk thought, Indian prime minister Vallabhai "Sardar" Patel's daughter. Then, why is her existence not mentioned in his only known daughter's biography?[296] Her forgotten story points to the need for further historical uncovering of female, non-Western stories in interwar Paris. Moreover, Molly Spotted Elk mentions having her portrait painted by a contemporary artist in Paris and going for a ride with another artist in Ostend.[297] Peripheral as these events may be, they are significant for the way art history is told.

In general, there is a need for further research on exotic dance in Paris, in itself, but also for its influence on avant-garde art expressions. An important evolution for such, often transcultural research is the digitization and transcription of archives all around the world. This allows researchers such as me to reconstitute the travelling existences of these performers. Such research would be framed by the growing art historic interest in a heterogenous modernism as I have defended it. In general, current research on vanguard "primitivism" hasn't yet been concerned with these broader mass entertainment factors of influence either. For example, a question I had while researching this thesis, was: What is the influence of scout culture and Indianism on the way Surrealism appropriated Native-American myth and form? Certainly, in the case of Max Ernst (1891-1976), for example, there is a clear intersection between the "high culture" of scientific ethnography and the "popular culture" of

---

[296] Maniben Patel, *Inside Story of Sardar Patel: The Diary of Maniben Patel.*

[297] Molly Spotted Elk nicknames the portraitist San and the portrait was made in pastels. The artist in question was an Indianist, but as *Wakanda* counted many artists, for example illustrator Jean Droit and Paul Coze were among the founder of the *cercle*, it's impossible to tell who San is. *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries 1929-1933,* October 28, 1931.
The artist she went riding with in Ostend was painting her friend "Celia" at the time. *Molly Spotted Elk's Diaries 1929-1933,* August 3, 1933.

childhood "Indianist" nostalgia. Explorations of his totemic image "the bird Loplop" neglect paying attention to this broader context of "Indianism" in Paris and Germany.[298] There is a tendency in current research surrounding Surrealism to defend Surrealist antics as well-thought out intellectual experiments.[299] However, I think there is just as much worth in accepting the antics as part of broader cultural phenomena that are embedded in their time period. This, in my opinion, does not negate Surrealism's real and continued impact on the history of modern and contemporary art, but makes the picture surrounding this impact more complex.

Finally, I've defended a methodology of art historic research that doesn't distinguish between centre and periphery, and that critically investigates claims of "derivativity" or "complacency" when applied to non-Western modernists. I think the work on deconstructing avant-garde "primitivism" from this perspective is also not finished yet. As mentioned, a lot of fascinating work is already being done, from such referenced authors as Greet, Lemke, Leininger-Miller, Phillips and Mitter. For example, while doing this research I was intrigued to learn more about Ojibwa artist George Morrison (1919-2000) who went to Paris in the 1950s. Morrison was interested in incorporating Surrealist methodology and form in his art, and through this negotiated his own identity.[300] There are many more stories like this to be told of renegotiation and reappropriation by Native-American artists, both modern and contemporary. In the finalizing of my bachelor's degree, I wrote on contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw artist Beau Dick's (1955-2017) renegotiation of the Surrealist appropriation of the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch ceremony. I argued that contemporary Indigenous artists face an art market which produces value based on an inherently Western view on what constitutes modern/contemporary, and therefore

---

[298] Cowling discusses the fact that Loplop is a testament to Ernst's ethnographic interest in North-West Coast totemic cultures. Yet, none of the articles and book that take on Ernst's bird persona after her integrate this knowledge. Werner Spies for example refers to the fact the bird originated at the same time as the Surrealists were ferociously collecting, but doesn't develop that argument. While Cowling does a good job tracing the motif's origins to his ethnographic interest, she misses out on investigating the broader cultural context of Indianist nostalgia in Germany and France. "Indianism. On Lolop, See: Elizabeth Cowling, "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists," 494–96; Werner Spies, *Max Ernst - Loplop: The Artist's Other Self.* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983), 10, 38; Charlotte Stokes, "Surrealist Persona: Max Ernst's 'Loplop, Superior of Birds,'" *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 13, no. 3/4 (1983): 228, https://doi.org/10.2307/3780542; Samantha Kavky, "Authorship and Identity in Max Ernst's Loplop," *Art History* 28, no. 3 (2005): 357–85, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0141-6790.2005.00468.x.

[299] This tendency is exemplified by the writing of Hal Foster and the tradition of art criticism of Rosalind E. Krauss he belongs to. Surrealism is almost like art history's passport into critical theory. By which I mean it serves as a certificate of legitimate entry into the critical discourses of for example the Frankfurter School, which then in turn become the basis of art critique. I believe this is why it is currently so vehemently defended as viable. See: Foster, *Compulsive Beauty,* xii.

[300] W. Jackson Rushing, "TEN Being Modern, Becoming Native: George Morrison's Surrealist Journey Home," in *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 261-263, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822372615-014.

valuable, art.[301] These and more critical questions on value and modernity narratives should be asked. For example, a global survey on North-American Indigenous artists' negotiation of the cultural sphere of "primitivism" is long overdue. In general, art history and the art market can only benefit from more research into what I have called "simultaneous modernisms": artists who do not belong to the classic picture, creating frameworks of value that move beyond that of dominant, Eurocentric art historical "modernism".

[301] Charlotte V. Greenaway, ""Everything gets devoured": sporen van de Frans Surrealistische visie op potlatch in het werk van Beau Dick", (Bachelor's thesis, KU Leuven, 2022), 23.

List of images

Illustration 1:	Pablo Picasso, *Buffalo Bill*, 1911-1912. Oil on canvas, 46 x 33 cm. Private collection. Artnet, last accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.artnet.com/artists/pablo-picasso/buffalo-bill-9AJNyXFb-_dukyQp-61j7A2.
Illustration 2:	Unknown, *Stade-Capitaine Buffalo Bill* (Stage-Captain Buffalo Bill), April 3, 1928. Printed illustration in colour, 24 x 13 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ark:/12148/bpt6k69643573. Gallica, last accessed May 5, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k69643573.r=Bufallo%20Bill?rk=257512;0#.
Illustration 3:	Paul Eluard (?), *Le monde au temps des surréalistes* (the World at the time of the Surrealists), June 1929. Printed illustration, 42 x 30 cm. Tate Modern. Tate Modern, (originally published in: Paul Eluard, "L'Art Sauvage" in *Varietés*, numéro hors series (1929)) last accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/Surrealism-beyond-borders/Surrealism-beyond-borders-symposium.
Illustration 4:	Tarsila Do Amaral, *Morro Da Favela* (Shantytown Hill), 1924. Oil on canvas, 64 x 74 cm. Rio de Janeiro, Hecilda e Sérgio Fadel collection. Wikiart, last accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.wikiart.org/en/tarsila-do-amaral/morro-da-favela-1924.
Illustration 5:	Tarsila do Amaral. *A Negra* (The Negress), 1923. Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm. São Paulo, Museo de Arte Contemporânea de Universidade de São Paulo (MASP). Wikiart, last accessed May 5, 2023, https://uploads1.wikiart.org/images/tarsila-do-amaral/a-negra-1923.jpg.

Illustration 6:	Tarsila do Amaral, *Autorretrato or Le manteau rouge* (Selfportrait or The Red Coat), 1923. Oil on canvas, 73 x 60.5 cm. Rio de Janeiro, Museu Nacional de Belas Artes (MNBA). Google Arts and Culture, last accessed May 25, 2023: https://artsandculture.google.com/story/JgXRklpJLPeIhA.
Illustration 7:	Photographer unknown, *Paul Coze as a Sioux Chief*, 1929. Photograph printed on baryte paper, 23 x 17 cm. Paris, Musée du Quai Branly. Inv. 70.2015.43.1. In: Daniel Dubois, *Paul Coze, Wakanda: archives, collection Daniel Dubois : vente, Paris, Drouot-Richelieu*, vendredi 10 avril 2015 (Paris: Tessier-Sarrou, Hôtel Drouot, 2015), 69. Auction Catalogue.
Illustration 8:	Photographer unknown, *Jean Etienne Archambaud dressed in Native-American costume*, 1930s. Digitized photograph, true size unknown. Maine, Molly Spotted Elk Collection (MF079). In: Bunny McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 206.
Illustration 9:	Photographer unknown, *Press photo for the movie "The Silent Enemy" with a dédicasse to Paul Coze,* 1930. Photograph, 25 x 20 cm. Paris, Musée du Quai Branly. In: Daniel Dubois, "Paul Coze, Wakanda: archives, collection Daniel Dubois : vente, Paris, Drouot-Richelieu, vendredi 10 avril 2015," (Paris: Tessier-Sarrou, Hôtel Drouot, 2015), 69. Auction catalogue.
Illustration 10:	Paul Coze, *collage of pictures of "Princess Dao*", 1929?. Photographs printed on black paper, 21 x 27 cm. Paris, Musée du Quai Branly. Inv. PA000514.50. Musée du Quai Branly, last accessed May 23, 2023 : https://collections.quaibranly.fr/?pk_vid=9eca55ef887a581e1684832382f2a12a#d62168aa-bff1-4678-bf5e-f88171681cff.

Illustration 11:	Paul Coze, *Portrait of Kateri Tekakwitha for which Molly Spotted Elk modelled*, 1933. Book illustration, originally pastel on paper, size unknown. Produced in: R. Rumilly, *Kateri Tekakwitha. Le Lys de la Mohawk. La Fleur du Saint-Laurent* (1934). In: Daniel Dubois, *Paul Coze, Wakanda: archives, collection Daniel Dubois : vente, Paris, Drouot-Richelieu, vendredi 10 avril 2015*, (Paris: Tessier-Sarrou, Hôtel Drouot, 2015), 80. Auction catalogue.
Illustration 12:	Photographer unknown, *Molly Spotted Elk in East Indian costume*, 1933. Digitized photograph, size unknown. Maine, Molly Spotted Elk Collection (MF079). In: Bunny McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 187.
Illustration 13:	Le journal de l'Exposition Coloniale, *The American pavilion at the 1931 Exposition Coloniale Internationale*, 1931. News article photograph, 5 x 10 cm. Paris, NumBA, la bibliothèque numérique du Cirad. In: Artus Robert, "Le Pavillon Américain," *Le Journal de l'Exposition Coloniale,* June 1, 1931, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9361418.
Illustration 14:	Photographer unknown. *Postcard for Exposition Coloniale United States section showing the United States Indian Band*, 1931. Postcard, dimensions unknown. Louisiana, private collection of John Troutman. In: John W. Troutman, "Joe Shunatona and the United States Indian Reservation Orchestra," in *Indigenous Pop: Native-American Music from Jazz to Hip Hop*, ed. Jeff Berglund (University of Arizona Press, 2016), 26.
Illustration 15:	Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, *Congolais*, 1931. Cherry wood, 43 × 20 × 24 cm. New York, Whitney Museum of American Art. Inv. 32.83. Whitney Museum of American Art, last accessed May 26, 2023, https://whitney.org/collection/works/17.

Illustration 16:	Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution, *Fétiches Européens* (European fetiches), 1931. Printed photograph, 23 x 17 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute. Inv. 2003.R.20. Getty Images, last accessed May 27, 2023, https://rosettaapp.getty.edu/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE1074201.
Illustration 17:	Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution, *ethnographic objects at expo « la Vérité sur les colonies »*, 1931. Printed photograph, 23 x 17 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute. Inv. 2003.R.20. Getty Images, last accessed May 27, 2023, https://rosettaapp.getty.edu/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE1074201.
Illustration 18:	Michel Leiris (?), Map of the route taken by the Dakar-Djibouti expedition, 1933. Printed illustration, 23 x 15 cm. Produced in: Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique Fantôme* (1968). In: Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme: De Dakar à Djibouti, 1931-1933*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1968, originally published in 1934), 16.

Illustrations

Ill. 1. Pablo Picasso, *Buffalo Bill*, 1911-1912.
Oil on canvas, 46 x 33 cm.
Private collection.

Ill. 2. Unknown, *Stade-Capitaine Buffalo Bill* (Stage-Captain Buffalo Bill), April 3, 1928.
Printed illustration in colour, 24 x 13 cm.
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Ill. 3. Paul Eluard (?), *Le monde au temps des surréalistes* (The World at the time of the surrealists), June 1929.
Printed illustration, 42 x 30 cm.
London, Tate Modern.

Ill. 4. Tarsila Do Amaral, *Morro Da Favela* (Shantytown Hill), 1924.
Oil on canvas, 64 x 74 cm.
Rio de Janeiro, Hecilda e Sérgio Fadel collection.

Ill. 5. Tarsila do Amaral, *A Negra* (The Negress), 1923.
Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm.
São Paulo, Museo de Arte Contemporânea de Universidade de São Paulo (MASP).

Ill. 6. Tarsila Do Amaral, *Autorretrato or Le manteau rouge* (Selfportrait or The Red Coat), 1923.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 60.5 cm.
Rio de Janeiro, Museu Nacional de Belas Artes (MNBA).

Ill. 7. Photographer Unknown, *Paul Coze as a Sioux Chief*, 1929.
Photograph on baryte paper, 23 x 17 cm.
Paris, Musée du Quai Branly.

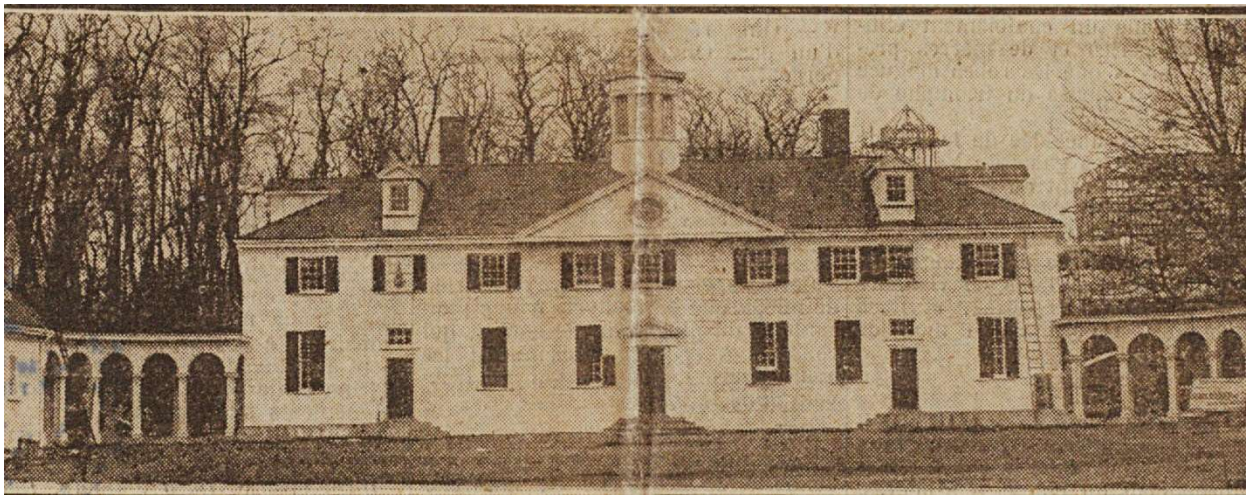
Ill. 8. Photographer unknown, *Jean Etienne Archambaud dressed in a Native-American costume*, 1930s.
Digitized photograph, size unknown.
Maine, Molly Spotted Elk Collection (MF079).

Ill. 9. Photographer unknown, *Press photo for the movie "The Silent Enemy" with a dédicasse to Paul Coze,* 1930.
Photograph, 25 x 20 cm.
Paris, Musée du Quai Branly.

Ill. 10. Paul Coze, *collage of pictures of "Princess Dao*", 1929?.
Photographs printed on black paper, 21 x 27 cm.
Paris, Musée du Quai Branly.

Ill. 11. Paul Coze, *Portrait of Kateri Tekakwitha for which Molly Spotted Elk modelled,* 1933.
Book illustration, originally pastel on paper, size unknown.
Produced in: R. Rumilly, *Kateri Tekakwitha. Le Lys de la Mohawk. La Fleur du Saint-Laurent* (1934).

Ill. 12. Photographer unknown, *Molly Spotted Elk in East Indian costume*, 1933.
Digitized photograph, size unknown.
Maine, Molly Spotted Elk Collection (MF079).



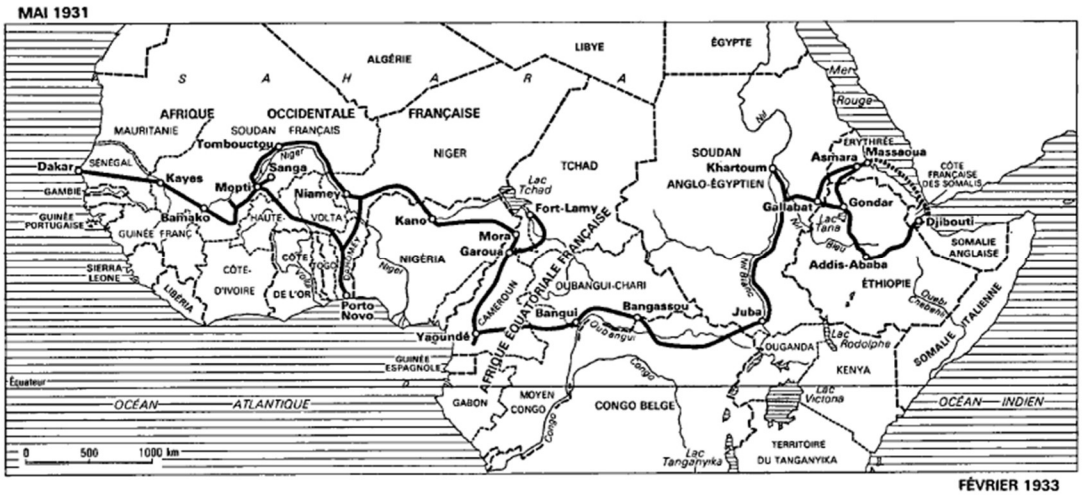
Ill. 13. Le journal de l'Exposition Coloniale, *The American pavilion at the 1931 Exposition Coloniale Internationale*, 1931.
News article photograph, 5 x 10 cm.
Paris, NumBA, la bibliothèque numérique du Cirad.

Ill. 14. Photographer unknown. *Postcard for Exposition Coloniale United States section showing the United States Indian Band*, 1931.
Postcard, dimensions unknown.
Louisiana, private collection of John Troutman.

Ill. 15. Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, *Congolais*, 1931.
Cherry wood, 43 × 20 × 24 cm.
New York, Whitney Museum of American Art.

Ill. 16. Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution, *Fétiches Européens*, 1931.
Printed photograph, 23 x 17 cm.
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

Ill. 17. Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution, *ethnographic objects at expo « la Vérité sur les colonies »*, 1931.
Printed photograph, 23 x 17 cm.
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.



Ill. 18. Michel Leiris (?), *Map of the route taken by the Dakar-Djibouti expedition*, 1933.
Printed illustration, 23 x 15 cm.
Produced in: Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique Fantôme* (1968).

Annex 1: timeline of relevant moments in Molly Spotted Elk's biography

Nov. 17, 1903	Molly Spotted Elk is born in Old Town, Indian Island, Maine
1919	Molly Spotted Elk starts performing for the first time
1921	Molly Spotted Elk joins Milton Goodhue's troupe and starts touring the United States
1924	Molly Spotted Elk starts going to University of Pennsylvania with help from Frank E. Speck
	The First Surrealist manifesto is published
1927	Molly Spotted Elk starts performing in New York
1928	*Paul Rivet is appointed as the director of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro and starts renovating the museum*
1930	"The Silent Enemy" premiers
1931	
May 1	*Publication of "Ne visitez pas l'Exposition Coloniale"*
May 2	**Molly Spotted Elk arrives in Paris**
May 6	Inaugural opening of the Colonial Exposition
May 12	Molly Spotted Elk performs at restaurant Les Ambassadeurs
May 23	Molly Spotted Elk performs together with Charlie Oskomon for the opening of Paul Coze's "Peaux-Rouges d'hier et aujourd'hui" expo at the Trocadéro
June 9	The Indian Jazz Band leaves, Molly Spotted Elk decides to stay
July 3	*Publication of "Le Premier Bilan"*

July 4	Molly Spotted Elk performs with Charlie Oskomon at the Fontainebleau American Conservatory for Music
July 5-28	Molly Spotted Elk goes hiking in the Pyrenees mountains
Sept. 23	Molly Spotted Elk dances solo at Exposition theatre
Oct. 6	Molly Spotted Elk and Jean Archambaud lecture at Marcel Mauss' Institut d'Etnologie
Oct. 14	Molly Spotted Elk tries out for Folies-Bergères
Oct. 29 - Nov. 17	Molly Spotted Elk performing in Italy
Dec. 17 – Jan. 7	Molly Spotted Elk performing in Madrid, Spain, amongst other locations at nightclub Lido
1932	
Feb. 2	Arrangements made for Molly Spotted Elk to dance at French Theosophical Society
March 2	Molly Spotted Elk lectures at Marcel Mauss' Institut d'Ethnologie about her experiences growing up, the lecture is titled "Indian Woman"
July 29	Molly Spotted Elk starts dancing at nightclub l'Aeroport
Aug. 13	Molly Spotted Elk plays an extra in "Gitane" (1932) directed by Jacques de Baroncelli (1881-1951)
Sept. 3 – Sept 27	Hiking to Biarritz and performing at the Casino
Oct. 12	Molly Spotted Elk first starts thinking of publishing a semi-autobiographical novel under the auspices of William Bradley
Nov. 5	Meets Tsuguharu Foujita at Le Dôme

Dec. 9	Poses for Paul Coze's *Katarina Tekakwitha*
Dec. 10	Performs "Life Perpetual" at Vieux Colombier with Yeichi Nimura and Lisan Kay
1933	
Apr. 15	Public falling out with Yakima performer Charlie Oskomon
May 27	Molly Spotted Elk starts working on the Dakar-Djibouti exhibition
July 28 – Aug. 4	Molly Spotted Elk in Oostende, Belgium, performing at holiday complex "Ranch de Ostende"
Nov. 12	Dances Eagle Dance at Ethnographic Museum of Trocadero Palace
Nov. 20 - Nov 24	Revue in London
1934	
Jan. 11	Molly Spotted Elk dances before the prestigious Salons du Cercle Internationale des Arts
March 21	Offer to dance for Académie des Beaux-Arts
March 25	Second time invited to dance at Cercle Internationale des Arts and initiated as a member there
April 24	**Molly Spotted Elk leaves Paris**
May 31	Jean Archambaud Moore (1934-2011), Molly Spotted Elk's first and only daughter, is born
June 6, 1938	**Molly Spotted Elk secures passports to return to Paris with her daughter Jean**

1938	Molly Spotted Elk and her husband Jean Archambaud start seriously working on her collection of short stories and myths
Spring 1939	Molly Spotted Elk delivers a second child, but the child passes away two weeks later
June 15, 1939	Parisian publishing house Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner agrees to publish *Katahdin: Wigwam's Tales of the Abnaki Tribe*
Sept. 3, 1939	*Britain declares war on Germany after Nazi-troops invade Poland*
Nov. 3, 1939	The American Committee for civil assistance writes to Molly Spotted Elk to congratulate her on her recent marriage with Jean Archambaud and see what they can do to evacuate
June 14, 1940	*The German troops march into Paris*
July, 1940	Molly Spotted Elk evacuates to the U.S. by crossing the Pyrenees mountains into Spain
Oct. 24, 1941	Molly Spotted Elk's husband Jean Etienne Archambaud passes away
February 21, 1977	Molly Spotted Elk passes away in Old Town, Maine
2003	Molly Spotted Elk *Katahdin: Wigwam's Tales of the Abnaki Tribe* is posthumously published