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## Fractured Feminine Selves, Autospecular Affect, and Global Modernity: Meena Alexander and the Postcolonial Artist as a Woman

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**Abstract:** This essay takes up the modernist tradition of representing fractured feminine selves in the work of contemporary Asian-American author Meena Alexander (1951–2018), examining her representation of the postcolonial artist through a critical exploration of autospecular affect. Drawing on modernist impulses—the breakdown of human communication, the inefficacy of language, as well as experiences of alienation—Alexander depicts the creative act for the postcolonial artist as suffused with an autospecular desire to connect fragmented, displaced psyches through a reassessment of subjectivities. She delineates possibilities of moving past Eurocentric modernism through her articulation of the struggles of the postcolonial artist dealing with global modernity. Drawing from theories of specularit y within affective paradigms, I trace the phenomenological process of self-other engagement in Alexander’s references to the autospecular subject looking in the mirror to understand herself and others around her. I also highlight how modernist writers such as Joyce, Eliot, and Woolf offer Alexander a metaphorical mirror wherein she sees the anxieties of the postcolonial artist and reflects them through renderings of their creative challenges. The essay concludes with a theoretical interpretation of Alexander’s autoscopic experiences in terms of Jacques Lacan’s “mirror stage theory” to understand subject formation in her work.

**Keywords:** Meena Alexander, affect theory, postcolonial artists, global modernism, feminism, Asian-American

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What would it mean for one such as I to pick up a mirror and try to see her face in it...? What might it mean to look at myself straight, see myself? How many different gazes would that need?

—Meena Alexander, *Fault Lines*

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy.

—Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias”

The act of narrating the fractured feminine self, in the works of many women writers, is laced with a desire to be seen within an ocular framework that allows autospecular reflections about divergent selves. The image of a woman looking at her own self in the mirror is a recurrent trope that brings together multiple phenomenological perspectives on female selfhood, giving evidence of muted experiences of suffering that need a voice for assertion. In narrating the feminine self, women writers from Charlotte Perkins Gilman to Virginia Woolf to Sylvia Plath recreate a cracked mirror, so to speak, of mental images that float amidst ethereal allusions to vacuous surfaces recalling symbolic violence in different contexts. In this essay, I take up the modernist tradition of representing fractured feminine selves in the work of a postcolonial author, to track the long history of aesthetic influence and affective intervention that attended the break-up of the colonial world and the emergence of the postcolonial subject, from 1945 to the present.

To trace the relation between the postcolonial subject and specular aesthetics, I follow the divergent path of global modernism through an exploration of autospecular affect in the contemporary writer Meena Alexander (1951–2018). In her work, drawing on modernist impulses—the breakdown of human communication, the inefficacy of language, as well as experiences of psychological isolation and spatial temporality—the creative act becomes suffused with a desire to connect fragmented, displaced psyches through a reassessment of subjectivities. Such an aesthetic necessity, although mostly identified with twentieth-century modernist writers such as Joyce, Lawrence, Pound, Eliot, and others, also opens the way to critical developments of modernism implied and anticipated in non-Western literary traditions. The exceptionalism of modernist prerogatives in Anglo-American and Eurocentric literary traditions reflects a theoretical privilege that sets non-European traditions and experiences apart through rigidly defined global perspectives. A critical “deterritorialization,” in Arjun Appadurai’s terms, demands that connections be made between the global and the local, acknowledging the dialectical relationship between art and the makers of art, in specific worldly settings. In the case of diasporic writers dealing with issues of homelessness, linguistic opacity, alienation, and psychosomatic chaos in different ways, a fundamental “modernism” highlights postcolonial sensibilities and displacement within otherness-based aesthetics. Autospecularity is a privileged response to subjective and worldly pressures on the postcolonial subject.

What I term specularity—looking at one’s own image in a reflection—may induce a sense of mimetic connection with one’s self or even engender an antimimetic detachment from a self, ultimately leading to a cognitive acknowledgement of its otherness. The visual turn to the autospecular self also reveals the self’s imagination at play with other projected selves to bring forth a dialectical framework that simulates a cognitive mirror of acknowledged otherness. Drawing from diverse theoretical formulations of the act of specularity within affective paradigms, my essay traces the

phenomenological process of self-other engagement in the looking-glass scenario.<sup>1</sup> From John Berger's idea of the female surveyor looking at herself in the mirror and becoming objectified by a constructed male gaze in *Ways of Seeing*, to Michel Foucault's metaphor of the mirror as a virtual space of utopia/heterotopia, the act of looking at a mirror or other ocular surfaces reveals multivalent layers of cognition and/or estrangement that allows a self to see itself as either a subject or object. The specularity described by my two epigraphs evokes modernist perceptions of self-reflection as well as identity formation. The self-referentiality elaborates the reflected identity in terms of multiple cultural, psychological, and social identities. Self-mirroring thus leads a seemingly cohesive self to undergo a fragmentary experience, an acknowledgement of self's fractured multiplicities. Looking in the mirror becomes a personal as well as a political act. It also entails a transformation from a deeply individualistic and intimate rhetoric to a collective ethos of acknowledgement.

The works of Meena Alexander reveal a fascinating combination of modernist aesthetics and postcolonial selfhood. Such an aesthetic, emerging in postcolonial context from histories of colonialist violence and migration encoded in terms of constraints and inabilities, portrays the im/possibility of a subjective experience that struggles to register and eventually to subvert those histories. As Neil Lazarus explains: "In 'postcolonial' literature we very often find an insistent and studied emphasis on the inability of ideas or words or memories or narratives to assume consequence—or, still less, to change things" (55-56). As a result, we find in Alexander's works what Jefferson Holderidge has termed the "postcolonial sublime," built upon the tradition of Kant and Franz Fanon, that reveals a "balance between subject and object, through aesthetic violence upon the internal sense, to transcendent compensation" (189).<sup>2</sup> This postcolonial sublime is distinctly proclaimed through Alexander's references to or depictions of a range of postcolonial artistic characters, asserting the reinscription of otherness on the nonwhite, artist's body, through historical references and narratives of persecution, oppression, and prejudice.

The mirror and other ocular surfaces, like water and glass along with dreams, become a crucial modernist apparatus in Alexander's writings to link visibility with the idea of an autospecular subject looking, peering to understand herself and others around her. The world inhabited by Alexander's characters reveal a world of new ethnicities, engaging in what Stuart Hall describes as "the aesthetics of the crossover, the aesthetics of diaspora, the aesthetics of creolization" (38-39). Her fictional characters take part in what Arif Dirlik defines as a "global modernity" that, overcoming Eurocentric privilege, enacts other transnational cultural legacies.<sup>3</sup> Dirlik also suggests that postcolonial criticism helps critiquing the politics of identity that merely feeds into culturalism: "Global modernity bears upon it the mark of European origins in its formulation. . . . Most importantly, global modernity as a contemporary condition is marked not by the disintegration of modernity, but its reconfiguration around a global center albeit of necessity an absent center" (289). This re-configuration is discernible in Alexander's representation of an internalized "alternative modernity" that is recognized as an act of imagination, via the experience of autospecular affect, to enact a postcolonial modern subjectivity.

Tracing such global modernity in Alexander's works, as she represents women becoming empowered in creating their own experience of modernity, I am also cognizant of Arjun Appadurai's caution against parochialism assumed in the Western academy to divorce literary discourse from other forms of study. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Appadurai traces

the relationship between media, migration, and globalization and affirms the role of imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity. While fantasy might suggest a private, individualistic association, imagination has a projective sense with pregnant possibilities. “It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule” (7). Global modernity is an act of the imagination, in other words. Appadurai also insists that the term “global” should not be confused with space in the ways as the term “modern” is understood in terms of time and the present moment in Western thinking. “For many societies, modernity is an elsewhere, just as the global is a temporal wave that must be encountered in *their* present” (Appadurai 9). Thus, for diasporic people, the experience of modernity—from repressive, violent regimes to democratic societies and peaceful movements—disrupts the monopoly of autonomous nation-statehood. “The diasporic public spheres that such encounters create are no longer small, marginal, or exceptional” (10). Appadurai also points to the politics of culturalism that tends towards a tactical self-consciousness about identity, culture, and heritage leading to a vocabulary of culturalism, including deliberate, strategic, and populist mobilization of culture.

As exemplifying the contemporary disintegration of modernity, most characters in Alexander’s work, as we will see, learn to reconfigure their dilemmas amidst personal rootlessness, displacement, traumas linked with violence, and the memories and suffering experienced by fragmented, female subjectivities. At the same time, they disseminate such experiences into a public act of affirmative translation and transcendental reflection. The female postcolonial artist’s subjectivity thus reframes its autospecular project of modernity through affective paradigms. Affect theory, in simple terms, is a discourse about emotions and power and their performative dynamics. It implies a performance—an engagement with the power of senses and with senses of power. Bypassing the linguistic turn, affect methodology highlights a sense of self and explores its deep intricacies to reveal the complex nuances of feelings and emotions. Affect is a multidisciplinary concept that brings diverse approaches to its objects of understanding.<sup>4</sup> For some writers and critics, affect is political, for others it is deeply personal. But in all cases, the affective paradigm incorporates the body as well as mind as a continuation and exploration of the sense of self. As Brian Massumi explains, while emotion reflects exterior contexts, affect implies a continuity:

Emotion is contextual. Affect is situational: eventfully ingressive to context. . . . Self-continuity across the gaps. Impersonal affect is the connecting thread of experience. It is the invisible glue that holds the world together. In event. The world-glue of event of an autonomy of event-connection continuing across its own serialized capture in context. (217)

My engagement of affect theory here investigates how it establishes a theoretical detour or alternative for the understanding of postcolonial modernity, without framing it within the margins of a subaltern or regressive politics of identity. The concept of autospecular affect offers an understanding of affect as a psychosomatic reflection of bodily displacement, sensory dissonance, and self-estrangement through what Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg refer to as “forces of encounter” (2). Affect’s inclusive paradigms and accumulative capacity engenders “a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between ‘bodies’” (2). Affect not only notes the belonging

to a world of encounter but also its unbelonging. Autospecular affect, therefore, leads to self-interpretations through an affirmative detour to otherness, implying a virtual embracing of agency. In tracing Alexander's modernist affinities with the Eurocentric tradition through an exploration of autospecular affect, this essay underscores the juxtaposition of her conflict between instinctual desires and linguistic/semantic doubts.

Throughout her work, Alexander creates or describes a range of artistic characters, as she reflects on her own work and selfhood as an artist. Her characters, each enmeshed in art amidst suffering and violence in distinct ways, reflect modernist perspectives that recall the anxieties and exactions shared by the characters of authors from the Western literary canon. At the same time, evoking an ontological urgency to locate feminine subjectivity amidst multiple dilemmas of being, nothingness, identity formation, and resistance to marginalization, Alexander's characters are representative of diasporic, multilingual, multinational, plural subjectivities that link creativity with the suffering of postcolonial subjects. Like her characters, Alexander underwent multiple displacements: born in Allahabad, India, to Syrian Christian parents, she lived in Sudan, Britain, and America, and grew up amidst multiple languages—English, Malayalam, Hindi, Arabic, and French. As an academician, she earned a doctorate in English romantic literature and taught as a professor of creative writing and literature. Her works display a characteristic literary quality that combines a poetic aestheticism with philosophical reflection and inquiry, incorporating influences from a wide range of genres and traditions. A feminine aesthetic of self-empowerment through a collective consciousness assumes a modernist trajectory in her autobiographical writings, in fiction as well as poetry.

Recalling the philosophical modernism of Woolf, Eliot, and Joyce, among others, Alexander adeptly portrays complexities of form, inward states of consciousness, a sense of nihilistic disorder behind the ordered surface of life and reality, and the freeing of narrative from a rigidly determined plot. Her representations of the female postcolonial artist, continuing the lineage of modernism, emerges in her works of nonfiction such as *The Shock of Arrival* (1993), *Fault Lines* (1993; rev. 2003), in her interviews, and in her novel *Manhattan Music* (1997). Alexander's female characters, including her autobiographical self, attain creativity after acknowledging their autospecular moments of being in relation to violence and its aftermath, unlike her male artist characters, who remain transfixed by a restrictive and violent experience. Her depiction of astutely modernist, feminist, poetic, and philosophical characters engrossed with suffering, anguish, and pain, give voice to the female body. Metaphors of fragmented or deprived bodies are employed well as Alexander's characters think, and even remember, through their damaged bodies.<sup>5</sup> This is especially pronounced in her novel *Manhattan Music*, which is centered around displaying the confluence of experiences that are postcolonial and modernist. The novel creates a Woolfian world of alienated characters attaining an understanding of their fragmentary, immigrant identities through intensely reflective and performative moments of autospecular affect.

Like her contemporaries, Jamaica Kincaid, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, and others, Alexander addresses the critical and creative problems that a woman writer must deal with while seeking answers to the ever-puzzling questions about female existence. Her Joycean portrayal of the artist as a woman, struggling amidst barriers of language, gender, and postcolonial histories, and her treatment of embodied memories establishes a psychoanalytic rendition of the fragment as a body and the body

as a fragment. The recurrent idea of fragmentary selves finally finding meaning through collective consciousness posits the postcolonial artist learning to understand the true function and validity of art in the postmodern world. The postcolonial artist experiences fragmentation and learns to rearticulate through acts of collective remembering and understanding of human suffering. Alexander's writings not only deal with the worldly situation of minority victims and displaced souls searching for home, but also reflect the creative dilemmas, linguistic barriers, and ideological challenges faced by her characters as artists. As a postcolonial writer who was deeply influenced by modernism, Alexander offers to her readers a world of postcolonial modernists who must resolve their dilemmas and histories of multiple migrations, memory, and violence without getting framed by it.

### **Autospecular Affect and Alexander's Literary Tradition and Individual Talent**

Alexander's complex linkages between postcolonial identities and modernist impulses are reflected in the dilemmas of the postcolonial artist figure attempting to understand and eventually acquire an activist persona through the autospecular lens of a mimetic gaze. In realizing postcolonial subjectivity, she also points to an encoded politics of identity entailed in Eurocentric discourse. In her references to the making of the work of art, she delineates possibilities of moving past Eurocentric modernism through the struggles of the postcolonial artist dealing with global modernity. She offers alternative narratives that highlight the predicament of postcoloniality in the changing global world, and that offer intellectual and poetic insights into the signifying process of historically situated subjectivity. Her representations of a global modernity echo Arif Dirlik's call to achieve a globality beyond the colonial, overcoming Eurocentrism and bringing the voices, experiences, and cultural legacies of others into play and demanding acknowledgement of their cultural subjectivities. Modernity may be no longer understood as intrinsic to Europe or Euro-America but rather as a project of global discourse in which many different formulations of modernity are produced and come into contact. As Rasheed Araeen affirms, "The historical responsibility of the postcolonial artist, both white and black, European and non-European, is to understand that the world is no longer the West's colony" (531). Alexander demonstrates this responsibility well in her works.

Postcolonial art arises, at the same time, as Cameron McCarthy and Greg Dimitriadis explain, "in the tracks of the more hegemonic art discourses of the West, a harlequin archetype patched together at the beginning from borrowed robes, a figure colliding with domination's undertow and wrestling anxiously to the surface for air" (232-233). Toiling with shifting frameworks of language, culture, and nationality, the postcolonial artist generates a collective, pluralist subjectivity in response to identity crisis. "The postcolonial artist may therefore quote or combine the vernacular and the classical, the traditional and the modern, the cultural reservoir of images of the East and the West, the first world and the third, the colonial master and the slave" (241). The postcolonial artist negotiates a narrative that attacks the centrality of any seemingly original subjectivity and thus highlights the margins of identity amidst ambiguous, multivalent frameworks. "The text of the underside of modernity and modernization is a quilt, a patchwork of associations, repressed in the philosophies of reason associated



with enlightenment discourses and best exposed through strategies of ambiguity and triple play” (245-246). As a product but also an inheritor of Western imperialism, the postcolonial artist finds herself at a crossroads of borrowed language and cultural migration. As one critic describes the situation: “The postcolonial artist is forever the atelier ingénue—belated, derivative, second hand. Unable to handle the mastery of conceptual or abstract forms, the identity of the postcolonial artist must be sought in attenuated ‘oriental’ imagery, an exotic colour tone, a reposeful spiritual calm, an archaic detail” (Edwards 270). The artist’s precarity within shifting linguistic imperatives demands a coterminous sense of urgency. The experiential translation of original, native memory becomes an exercise in vulnerable interpretation in nonnative aspects of identities. The process of attaining identity then becomes a strategic exercise premised on a binarism between self and nonself.

Women writers, especially Indian women writers, trapped by dual forces of patriarchy and colonialism must work their creativity through what Alexander calls as a “double peril that incites the woman’s imagination to realms of almost inconceivable freedom” (*Shock of Arrival* 169). Her novel *Manhattan Music*, written in stream-of-consciousness technique, develops female fictional characters who learn to redefine their earlier identities trapped within colonial/postcolonial histories, racism, and violence while making sense of their fragmentary lives as immigrants in America. Sandhya Rosenblum, the protagonist, struggles with being a dark, female, ethnic woman in America. Her experience of self-fragmentation and isolation in her unrequited love for Gautam in India, followed by her marriage to Stephen Rosenblum and coming to America, sets the stage for exploring her existential dilemmas caused by her dark ethnicity and a recurring sense of displacement. Seeking unfound solace in her extramarital affair with Rashid, an Egyptian scholar and academic, she is gridlocked; she then learns to reroute her journey when she understands herself through a cognitive relation with other feminine subjectivities as represented through Draupadi and Sakhi. Draupadi, a second-generation Indian immigrant from the West Indies, is a performance artist who befriends Sandhya, while Sakhi, Sandhya’s cousin, is a feminist social worker. Through these characters, the relation between life and its representation through art becomes a key thematic concern of the novel. Art—be it photography practiced by Jay, Sandhya’s cousin, or his poetry that concludes the novel; sculptured pieces made by Draupadi—functions as a mirror reflecting multiple identities of the postcolonial artist. The versatility of art reflects the dynamic and even fluid quality of the immigrants’ lives in America. Her characters are astutely perceptive about others around them, even while they all seem lost in their world while attempting to translate its complexity in their art.

As the novel begins, Sandhya Rosenblum reminisces about her life, sitting in Central Park, realizing that “something in her needed to slip” (9). Haunted by painful memories and dreams about Gautam (who we later learn has died because of torture in police custody), but seeking solace in her marriage to Stephen Rosenblum, her anxieties culminate in utter helplessness. Stephen also shares an artist’s sensibility, having “the soul of a poet” (33), equally affected by Sandhya’s anguish: “Her sense of lostness had seeped into his own soul” (37). As artists, they both suffer, together yet alone. Sandhya’s affair with Rashid, followed by Rashid’s rejection, leads to her nervous breakdown as she suffers silently, unable to articulate her feelings, almost like an artist unable to express: “The sounds played within her in a ceaseless cacophony, struggling to become speech...” (193). Unable to cope with conflicting voices that overwhelm her, Sandhya shares her anguish with Draupadi, who seems

to understand. Sandhya's suicide attempt brings her closer to Draupadi, who rescues her and along with Sakhi, Sandhya's cousin, "help[s] her pick her way back into a shared life" (208) and chart "a different map" (211). With emphasis on music, another art form, Alexander shows how Sandhya, despite the trauma of her past, must seek her own way. She finally learns to acknowledge her name: Sandhya means threshold hours, "fragile zones of change before the clashing absolutes of light and dark took hold" (227). Her consequential grasp of an artist's vision is visualized through an epiphany when Sandhya looks at her image in a glass window as a "dark, marginal being basted to the reflection of moving flesh. . . . Strains of saxophone music wafted up. . . . She was tempted. She would turn back, go down into the darkness, never come back" (214). With Sakhi besides her, Sandhya checks herself and reviews her image: "The strains of music rising again. . . . There she was, intact and whole, no doubleness seizing her from behind" (215). Eventually her sensory guilt is transformed to seeking harmony as the cacophony of existence is restored by a euphony of multiple voices.

Draupadi, a performance artist, upholding the Emersonian ideal of cutting off the past, seems able to negotiate her multiracial, multinational past and history. Her immersion into art while studying at the School of Visual Arts offers her more opportunities to create art, yet she is also aware of the challenges that creating art presents; she scribbles "a species of automatic writing she neither questioned nor fully understood" (52).<sup>6</sup> Unable to connect with her mixed heritage and her relation to her namesake, the mythical Hindu figure, Draupadi feels compelled to ask herself, "[all] she had were whispers, shards of songs, torn phrases, and could they add up to a heritage?" (52). As an artist dealing with "fragments of her past, real and imagined, swarming into her art" she finds affinity with Billie Holiday as "her truest bond with American culture" (53). Draupadi represents a different sensibility than Sandhya, but even she needs to overcome her anxieties. When she tries to convince Sandhya to adopt her ideal of cutting off the past and live in the present, "her voice sounded disembodied, unreal, a poor performance" (62). Like Sandhya, she also must come to terms with her failed love relationships—with Rashid and Rinaldo—attempting to understand her life through performing art pieces that reflect her experiences, past, and history.

Jay, likewise, is also afflicted by painful memories from the violent history of his past, which is rearticulated through his photography. As a visual artist, he understands the limitations of photography in capturing the truth of experience. He has experienced important personal losses, such as his friend Ahmed's murder by stabbing and Gautam's torture in police custody eventually leading to his death, as well as collective losses implied by references to the anti-Sikh killings of 1984, Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, and the Hindu-Muslim violence following the demolition of the Babri Masjid, as well as other incidents of ethnic cleansing in the world. As a result, Jay exhibits an acute perceptivity to suffering and tries to capture it through his art. From photography, he turns to poetry: "Why not let his poems be the fat, packed, resinous occasions of living, all their lives lived here?" (220). Each character learns to deal with their fragmentary selves through art to capture what is essential: "the flow of imagination: photos, poems, paintings" (162).

Through the differing stories of Sandhya, Draupadi, Sakhi, Stephen, Jay, and Rashid, with their divergent understandings of the immigrant sensibility, Alexander offers the readers a chance to experience multifarious, complex ways of creating an alternative modernity that is at once multilingual, multinational, and multiracial. Most of the characters struggle with their diasporic



identities at the backdrop of violent incidents in the past or their potential occurrence in near future, be it Sandhya's dreams about her lover, Gautam's decapitated torso, Draupadi's articulation of her mixed heritage—including the rape of her grandmother linked with Draupadi's choice to abort her fetus—or Sakhi's encounter with racial discrimination as explained in the stoning metaphor. The male characters, Rashid, Jay, and Stephen, must also address their dilemmas of displacement within the context of their Arabic, Indian, and Jewish identities.

Alexander's Bakhtinian display of the dialogic interconnections of diasporic voices does not amount to a generic condition that works for all who are removed from their native lands or cultures. The psychic fragmentation of the subjects in Alexander's writings includes a marked difference in representing the male and female reactions towards it. While the female characters resolve and reconstruct their fragmented subjectivities through an autospecular sense of collective consciousness, the male characters, often, are unable to resolve the implications of violent fragmentations and existential angst. While her male characters are portrayed as experiencing or interacting with destruction caused by the violence entailed in a diasporic condition; the female characters, although seemingly affected by similar experiences, must adopt a language of creation rather than destruction. Thus, the Frankensteinian metaphor of a fragmented immigrant self, which is strongly endorsed by Rashid and Jay, is countered by a feminist articulation of regenerated rather than lost or rejected identities. This becomes clear in the end when Sakhi helps Sandhya to recuperate after her suicide attempt and invites her to attend a women's meeting at Columbia University to show her "a different map" (211). Sandhya recalls to Sakhi an autospecular moment from their childhood of staring into a well and remembering a young pregnant girl who had jumped into well in shame; in response, Sakhi consoles her with courage to live life. At the meeting, listening to the testimonies of other immigrant women who are learning to remake their lives, Sandhya becomes aware of the need to reaffirm her subjectivity. Sakhi believes that Sandhya needs to be exposed to other lives, including men who struggle too. Ultimately, Sandhya's moment of epiphany is an autospecular acknowledgement she experiences at Central Park: "She had to trust herself if she wanted to go on" (226). Gazing into the water at the park, she feels affirmed by her "two eyes staring back at her" (227) and believes that "there is a place for her here" (228).

In depicting the need to express art which captures a collective, multitudinous modernity through diverse experiences of displacements, Alexander is also adopting an autospecular affect in her writings by way of "looking" at modernist theorizations of artistic subjectivity. For example, her acknowledgement of suppressed voices and enabling them to be heard in their multiplicities that she endorses in an interview is a distinctly modernist strategy:

These are the buried voices that we have to give voice to through our art, the voices that were buried and mutilated and hidden. What is unitary we have done with—we don't need that anymore in terms of looking at life. We want the multiple, the polyvocal, because in this century, certainly, the hegemony of the one has always been frightening and destructive. (Ali and Rasiah 89)

Likewise, the revelatory aspects of experiences offer an interesting glimpse to a hidden world of artists:

In its rhythms the poem, the artwork, can incorporate scansion of the actual, the broken steps, the pauses, the blunt silences, the brutal explosions. So that what is pieced together is a work that exists as an object in the world but also, in its fearful consonance, its shimmering stretch, allows the world entry. I think of it as a recasting that permits our lives to be given back to us, fragile, precarious. (Basu 34)

Alexander's appreciation of art is abundantly evoked in her works through multiple references to visionaries, poets, painters and visual artists, musicians, and writers. In *Manhattan Music*, for instance, in chapters attributed to Draupadi's first-person narratives, Alexander begins the chapters with epigraphs invoking a wide range of writers including Kalidasa, Ellison, Shakespeare, Genet, Blake, and Kafka. Draupadi also endorses affinity with Emerson, Melville, Thoreau, Billie Holiday, and Harriet Jacobs, recalling T.S. Eliot's prolific style of literary allusions. The novel's coda of four poems written by Arjun Sankaramangalam (Jay, Sandhya's cousin) offers artistic reflections on hyphenated identities: "We make up an art of pariahs" (231). Through Jay's poetry, Alexander revises Eliot's Eurocentric idea of the historical sense by referring to the ancient Greek poet Homer along with the ancient Indian sage Vyasa, who composed the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, transcending the European/non-European binary. Translating Jay's creative struggles as a photographer, and concluding her novel with his poetry in a woman's voice, enables Alexander to create a global, rather than a European, sense of modernism. Yet the influence of the modernist writers is obviously crucial in the making of art that enables autospecular postcolonial subjectivity. Modernist writers offer Alexander a metaphorical mirror wherein she sees the anxieties of the postcolonial artist and reflects them through autospecular ruminations and artistic renderings of the creative process.

One writer whose influence is traceable and acknowledged in Alexander's works is Virginia Woolf. In her essay, "Modern Fiction," Woolf writes about the need to situate fiction within the flow of human consciousness rather than in linear form, even as she acknowledges the role of the past in writing:

The mind receives myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent or engraved with sharpness of steel...so that if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, *if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention*, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style. (287; my emphasis)

Often, we see Alexander's characters in *Manhattan Music* undergoing deep self-reflections during mundane moments of any given day without being inscribed within a plot. In "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf describes the moments of being when an individual receives shocks that are not a random manifestation but "token of some real thing behind appearances" that she makes real by putting into words (72). Alexander also attempts to grasp a similar aesthetic practice in her works. While writing Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf observed "how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment" (*A Writer's Diary* 59). This technique of projecting characters by

drawing on the workings of their memories helped Woolf bring transitions from one thought process to another and depict change from present time to past time and vice versa: “It took me a year’s groping to discover what I call my tunneling process, by which I tell the past by installments, as I have need of it” (60). Alexander adopts a similar strategy in *Manhattan Music*, as most of her characters remember their past in installments until they have arrived at some spiritually transcendent truth or personal or cosmic dimension. The reference to cave imagery and the tunneling process also recalls Walter Benjamin’s notion of memory as excavation.<sup>7</sup> Woolf also believed in a synthesis of individual consciousness with the group consciousness. In an early draft of *The Waves*, she revealed: “I am not concerned with the single life but with lives together. I am trying to find in the folds of the past such fragments as time preserves” (42).

Alexander also endorses a similar aesthetic, entailing not one but multiple subject positions. For instance, a Woolfian artistic moment occurs in *Manhattan Music* at the dinner party hosted by Sandhya wherein most of the characters—Draupadi, Sandhya, Jay, Rashid, and even Stephen—are all thinking alone yet together. They all deal with the inarticulation of words, emotions, and feelings about others and themselves, and each comes to a revelation that propels them all forward. Like Woolf, Alexander too acknowledges complexity in writing within the flow of human consciousness. Perception, reality, and meaning are all questioned as language, in a volatile and indeterminate system of mirroring suggestions, where reality is potentially unknowable. Alexander’s acknowledgement of Woolf’s influence is discernible in her discussion of autospecular encounters:

This very dissolution of the bodily hold on things that allowed for the textured layering of spaces, sharp and disjunctive sensations, that wrapping themselves, one over the other, could free the woman writer from an imprisoning social world. . . . The sharp disjunctions of space, the shock of motion, the edginess of sensation, even a violence to it so that the self can scarcely discover an underlying continuity in the flow of consciousness, all this sparked a quick recognition in me. . . . *How her fear of even stepping over a puddle, or of what the looking glass might reveal, reverberates in me.* And always on the other side is the civilized world, others who are ‘immaculate,’ watching, staring. (“Shock of Sensation” 63-64; my emphasis)

While reading Woolf’s *The Waves*, Alexander discovered a critical sense of recognition from Woolf’s notion of scattered bits and pieces, “sensorial beckonings, of a ‘shattered mind which is pieced together by some sudden perception’” (“Shock of Sensation” 61). In Woolf, she “recognized in a deep, if unspoken awareness, a kindred spirit, one who took for granted the walls of old houses, ancestral gardens, the migrancy that time enforces” (61). Alexander captures a similar kindred spirit among her female characters, sharing many Woolfian concerns, predominantly memory and its chokehold on sensory reflections. Her own memoir, *Fault Lines*, is a Woolfian threshold where she tries “to write out a palimpsest of memory without which the present could not exist. In this way, each moment of reflection becomes a threshold” (64). Even though Alexander admits that her initial distance from Woolf’s white privilege, as representative of the colonial enterprise, kept her at a distance with her own racialized identity, Woolf’s characters convey similar senses of sensorial precarity that Alexander’s characters too must survive or risk self-abjection. “My earlier awareness of Woolf’s power, and my

love of her writing, was cut by another emotion in me, a distinct refusal, a rage at the white, colonial world in which she lived, moved, and had her being” (65). Alexander realizes the differences, “the layered, sedimented worlds, the opposite histories... the density of the whiteness” that separated her from Woolf (66). Her “affiliation with a foremother was cut by the disenfranchisement, the awareness of a racialized world which would force my own body into the shadows, into the bushes, away from the ‘immaculate others’” (66). At the same time, she acknowledges her indebtedness to Woolf, “to the ways in which she etches in the strangeness that lies just under the surface of our skin” (66). Woolf’s writings not only guide Alexander in her modernist enterprise but also offer a “glistening palimpsest of bodily knowledge, a body of work immensely useful to a postcolonial imagination in search of dissolving structures” (65). Interestingly, Woolf’s novel *The Waves* deals with the soliloquies of six men and women who display, through their artistic interludes, interior dilemmas from childhood to old age. For Alexander, *The Waves* as a work of art and a work about artists produces a mirror surface for her to reflect the autospecular subjectivities in *Manhattan Music*.<sup>8</sup>

Alexander’s characters, like Woolf’s, struggle with the meanings of their perceptions and experience a breakdown of communication with others. Specifically channeling Woolf, Sandhya is a repository of homeless voices, as Alexander recounts: “Voices pour through her. The body is pitched against its own need to simply have and hold onto the ordinary world and can barely shelter those homeless voices.... In my need to braid in these voices, I have taken what I could from Virginia Woolf” (“Shock of Sensation” 67). Less concerned with telling a story sequentially and chronologically, Alexander fragments the narrative and chops up experience into small blocks of time, connected through repeated images in the modernist tradition. Her Woolfian skill in presenting a stream of consciousness technique with minute psychological details is evident in the portrayal of Sandhya, Draupadi, Sakhi, Jay, and others, who all attempt to articulate their uncertainties as postcolonial artists in a world of memories, displacements, and violence.

Self-narration becomes a deliberate discursive strategy, a performance of a continual process of self-creation, yet it is not an easy task as it registers the existential pain and dilemmas of embodied suffering. As Alexander explains her haunting question in *The Shock of Arrival*: “How can I make a durable past in art, a past that is not merely nostalgic, but stands in vibrant relation to the present?... It forces me back into a present forged through multiple anchorages” (127). Aware of her hyphenated markers of identity, living in America, writing in English, Alexander attempts to capture the pain of marked displacements in a violent world: “O confusions of the heart, thicknesses of the soul, the borders we cross tattooing us all over!” (127). Such modernist impulses of the postcolonial artist, linked with fragmented subjectivities, become more resonant in autospecular moments that emerge in Alexander’s writings, bringing her closer to James Joyce’s aesthetic concerns of an artist searching for his art and identity. In *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce describes the artist’s autospecular engagement with aesthetic forms and how art divides itself in three forms that progress one to the other: lyrical, epical, and dramatic. In the lyrical form, “the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself”; in the epical form, “he presents his image in mediate relation to himself and to others”; and in the dramatic form, “he presents his image in immediate relation to others” (232). Summarizing the latter:

*The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak. The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination.* (252; emphasis added)

Like Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's novel, Sandhya is a person with a keen artistic sensibility who portrays "the phenomenon of artistic conception, artistic gestation and artistic reproduction" (227). Sandhya is not a professional, yet Alexander represents through her story the evolution of a Joycean postcolonial artist. Even more interesting is how Alexander incorporates the voices of others in her portrayal of Sandhya, further enabling her to make sense of her being an artist who is not one, as the significant others who populate her self-understanding all undergo artistic struggles.

Alexander's novel also resembles an opera, with music as a background presence, and acquires a dramatic form in which characters perform their artistic roles in terms of an autospecular display of emotions, spectacle, history, mythology, and memories amidst the cacophony as well as euphony. As an opera combining soliloquy, monologues with dialogues, and action to produce a collective performance of the postcolonial artist, the novel incorporates a series of relationships between lyric, epic, and dramatic subjectivity as established in Joycean terms. Thus, Jay represents, if more conventionally, the modernist concerns of the postwar postcolonial artist who comes to self-understanding after transcendental reflection. Mired by the burden of violent memories from the past, he struggles to sustain them through his photography. Yet his recognition of autospectrality comes in his eventual transition from photography to poetry. After Gautam's death, Jay had been carrying a broken piece of glass from Gautam's spectacles to give to Sandhya (to honor Gautam's last wish). Throughout Jay's travels to Delhi, Berlin, and New York, the glass had been "burning a hole in his pocket" (Alexander, *Manhattan Music* 63). At the dinner party at Sandhya's house, Jay ponders whether to give Sandhya the glass piece or not. In it, Jay "saw a shape there, dark, amorphous, a shadow of the past cast by the visible present." Another specular moment for Jay recalls a photographic image of an old man who held the broken glass with a recycled frame. "He had caught a shining instant, Jay thought to himself...scrutinizing the image. And a moment caught like a live dragonfly clasped in a child's palm, wings still sieving sunlight from a stream, lets us live" (66). His noncommittal approach to life, sensitivity to violence all around the world, and unvented frustrations of an artist are finally processed through his autospecular turn to poetry:

The mental frame needed to balance his images no longer held together. Something had fallen apart. There was a sharp gap between what the eye saw and what the heart might hold. Composition seemed too contrived, its balancing act too finicky to contemplate. Making sense meant letting images hang together in a previously inexistent luminosity. (155-156)

Although Jay echoes some of Alexander's sentiments about immigrant sensibilities in her memoir, *Fault Lines*, he epitomizes a conventional, male modernist perspective in the novel. Alexander's

concluding the novel with his poetry endorses his modernity as an artist, however it is ultimately the triad of Draupadi, Sandhya, and Sakhi that reflects a Joycean progression of understanding through artistic form that is never self-sufficient or complete. Draupadi's vision of art is expressed in immediate relation to herself; hence she emulates the lyrical form of art. She thinks about others not because of their own selves but rather because they are connected to her. Likewise, Sandhya's portrayal resembles the epical form, as we see her prolonging and brooding upon her miseries as the central concern for herself and others. Her personality seems to pass into the narration itself as most characters wonder about her. Lastly, Sakhi's views resemble the Joycean dramatic form, wherein we see her in relation to others as she guides Sandhya at the end of the novel toward other lives who suffer similarly. Together, the triad of Sandhya, Draupadi, and Sakhi represent a feminist and modernist consciousness of plurality.<sup>9</sup>

In *Manhattan Music*, as throughout Alexander's writing, remembering and connecting to other subjectivities becomes an intrinsic part of the ethnic self in order to pave the way for hybrid, syncretic, fluctuating identities that create autospecular affect. Her focus on memory has dual functions: through memory she not only remembers the personal histories of the selves represented but also connects these histories to their present, current selves. She also suggests that the gaps and fissures in memory, both conscious and unconscious attempts to forget past incidents, emerge in order to protect or assert the current self. Memory's function then is also political: a subject narrates the past and eventually gains a sense of agency and power over the world inhabited by her.

### Dark Mirrors, the Iconic Feminine, and Lacanian Identification

The trappings of fragmented subjects within oppression and repression, along with transgressive desires for articulating a feminist writer/self, ultimately are attempts at "fracturing the iconic feminine" (Alexander, *Shock of Arrival* 169) to challenge us to think about a feminist modernity seeking a voice amidst repressive silences. A self marked by fragmentation and a false sense of identity yearns for an otherness while abandoning the self until it realizes that the meaning of its self-assertion lies in an identification with others; through the experience of otherness, the self finally understands. Such an autoscopic experience, attempting to grasp the meaning of one's self, can be understood via the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan of identification and subject formation.

In his critical reinterpretation of Freud's works, Lacan proposes the mirror stage: when a child looks at a mirror, she sees her image or that of the mother as a whole and at the same time imagines her body as fragmented. In the mirror stage of identification, thus, the reflection becomes a whole/synthesis, an Ideal-I, whereas the body becomes a fragmented perception. The specular image situates the ego in a fictional orientation before its social determination and the linguistic restoration of its function as a subject. In this ambiguous relation with the specular image, "the mirror-image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world [and] presents in hallucinations or dreams [if] we observe the role of the mirror apparatus in the appearances of the double, in which psychological realities, however heterogeneous, are manifested" (3). The ego formed by this identification constantly reminds the



subject of its fragmentation and hence causes anxiety as she remembers images of “castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and the bursting open of the body” (11). As the ego develops, the imagination is haunted by corporeal fragmentation. The self becomes aware of the difference between the ideal image and the fragmented bodily image constituting lack. Even before a subject enters consciously into social reality, it is made aware of its incompleteness. Trapped by this pervasive tension, it thus becomes dependent on the other, desires the other. Facing internal alienation, the subject seeks identification with the other, as any self-knowledge is mere illusion. The wholeness of the reflection represents to the subject a stable form, *Gestalt* in German, and becomes an object of desire. The mirror stage thus becomes an important moment in the movement of the self from the subject to the intersubjective formation of identity. The ego is thus paradoxically intersubjective and split, internally divided between self and other. Autonomous self-knowledge is no longer possible. The ego remains trapped between the Real which can only be known in its effects and the Imaginary which is imbricated in the Real but does not perform the identification of the Real and remains contrastive to it.

From this psychoanalytic perspective, Alexander’s writings reveal a similar organization of subjectivity. The female subject is never a unified subject. A recurrent depiction in her writing is a body that suffers mutilation, decapitation, and even self-destruction. The aestheticized, fragmented bodies in Alexander’s writings are reminiscent of bodily catastrophes that Lacan describes as images of “castration, emasculation, mutilation,” as above (11). Alexander’s representation of female subjectivity recalls Lacan’s mirror stage theory whereby an individual’s awareness as a subject is realized through a gradual recognition of doubling when she sees herself in a mirror, after experiencing anxiety evoked by fragmentation and finally learning to acknowledge others through specular identification. As she writes about her autoscopic attempts in the beginning of her memoir, *Fault Lines*:

What would it mean for one such as I to pick up a mirror and try to see her face in it. . . . What might it mean to look at myself straight, see myself? How many different gazes would that need? And what to do with the crookedness of flesh, thrown back at eyes. . . . My voice splintered in my ears into a cacophony: whispering cadences, shouts, moans, the quick delight of bodily pleasure, all rising up as if the condition of being fractured had freed the selves jammed into my skin, multiple beings locked into the journeys of one body. (2)

The act of reflection, of picking up a mirror and seeing one’s body, is akin to Lacan’s mirror stage when the subject looks at her reflection and subsequently undergoes the tripartite confluence of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real in the self. In Lacanian thought, the Real remains elusive, unrepresentable, and impossible and is driven by needs; the Imaginary is driven by demands for recognition and wholeness and operates through fantasy image of oneself in a narcissistic relationship with others; and the Symbolic is driven by desire and operates through language and narrative. Alexander’s representation of self-affirmation can be translated in Lacanian terms as a journey of self that sees her reflection in the mirror stage, moves out of the Real after seeing its fragmented body as a specular object, aspires towards the Imaginary and recognizes the other, and learns to understand subjectivity in the Symbolic through language and her place in the social order. Through fragmentation and alienation,

Alexander's characters encounter otherness and intersubjectivity and eventually construct a social self.

Such a confluence of the real and virtual is also central to Michel Foucault's discussion of the mirror (quoted in the epigraph) as a site of displacement, whereby he asserts that a mirror could be a utopia as a placeless space but also goes beyond it to become a heterotopia that exerts a counteracting gaze to enable self-affirmation. The self's reflection in the mirror opens a virtual space behind the ocular surface as the self sees its invisibility/absence and then gradually recognizes a heterotopia comprised of other selves, leading to identify with an intersubjective palimpsest. The gaze evoked from the virtual space turns back on the self and enables its reconstitution. The mirror becomes, to paraphrase Félix Guattari, a strange contraption of modernity: "These machines of virtuality, these blocks of mutant percepts and affects, half-object, half-subject" (92). In Alexander's writings, then, mirrors and other glass surfaces are not simply solipsistic devices, but rather instruments of subject formation for the self that initially struggles against its modernity.

A similar reconstitution of self is evident in *The Shock of Arrival*, as Alexander's autobiographical subject accepts her body within an autospecular framework while also acknowledging her femininity:

I see myself, to some extent, as I am seen, as bodily being. Struggling against the way I am seen, I remake myself, rework the images that encode the symbolic valencies of self... truth comes to me through the sensorium of a gendered body. (155)

Alexander's use of the body is not a narcissistic employment; it rather offers an assertion of intersubjective identities through a gradual process of recognition. As Elizabeth Grosz explains in her analysis of the Lacanian mirror stage, the child's capacity for specular perception is mastered gradually through the doubling effect of the mirror "when it perceives others than in its self-perceptions" (36). In the process, the body "becomes the organizing site of perspective, and... an object available to others from their perspectives—in other words, both a subject and an object" (38). The Lacanian mirror stage where the subject becomes aware of her fragmented self is recurrently discernible in Alexander's works. The subject represented in her autobiographical and fictional women characters reveals an acute sense of alienation and isolation initially. However, the female subject is not limited to narcissistic pursuits of self—to mere mirroring. Despite her self-alienation at the outset of the autospecular encounter, the subject in Alexander's writing can look beyond the metaphorical mirror and aim not at a single, unified self but rather an interconnected subjectivity. In Lacan's theory, the child looks at the mirror and feels alienated yet subsequently initiates the process of differentiation. Alexander begins her writings with an acknowledgment of fragmented subjectivities but then concludes with self-affirming epiphanies and mimetic renditions of intersubjectivity that allow the identification not just to remain within the self but also to extend to others finally.

In *Fault Lines*, Alexander remembers her mother and her role in shaping her sense of subjectivity. "Without her, I would not be, not even in someone's memory.... Lacking her I cannot picture what I might be. It mists over, a mirror with no back where everything streams in" (7). Her writing the memoir in 1993 and revising it a decade later (when she also finds out the horrifying secret of her sexual abuse) becomes an act of putting her both hands through: "My right hand reaches through the mirror with no back, into a ghostly past, a ceaseless atmosphere that shimmers in me even as I live and

move. . . . But my left hand stretches into the present. With it I feel out a space for my living body” (7). It is also notable that she not only refers to the visual perception but also the auditory quality via the sounds, the silences, and the maquillage of words employed to describe the fragmented subjectivities. As a child, Alexander learned from her mother “a shyness in the face of the world, a fear of looking straight at the lives of others” (67). With reticence and art of withdrawal that Alexander obtained, she understands “the impossibility of leaping out of [her] own skin in the direction of desire” (72-73). Her reference to the well-jumping women, the stone-eating girl, and many other stories of marginalized women struggling to articulate amidst resistance, patriarchy, and subordination becomes a mirror of text whereby Alexander sees her own subjectivity reflected in these mimic models in Lacanian and Foucauldian terms. Her fragmentation is reflected and echoed in the fragmentation represented by these women who serve as alter egos, performing the similar “theater of cruelty that is our lives. . . together” (80), thereby becoming female icons, “perfector[s] of an art” (85).

Likewise, in *Manhattan Music*, Sandhya, having survived a suicide attempt that came after her breakdown and loneliness, is able to look constructively at the other fragmented subjectivities when she attends the meeting at Columbia University, hearing the testimonies of other immigrant women who learned to remake their lives in America. Later, looking at a glass window she sees her image “fractured, unrepentant” and a dark shadow, “[a] marginal being basted to the reflection of moving flesh” (214). With music in the background, she momentarily feels tempted to lose herself in the darkness and never come back. She stares again at the bright mirror: “There she was, intact and whole, no doubleness seizing her from behind. . . . Perhaps it would all splinter again[, but] for now, she would be, she would let herself be” (215). It seems that music helps Sandhya review her life to the moment that she attempted suicide, as she races “into America from the dark vessel of her past. . . ready to break free, the load of her womanhood, of accumulated life” (219). Sandhya is no longer fearful of shadows, finding her way back in and attempting to know her real self even when it seems futile; she learns self-affirmation amidst the multiply dispersed, feminine subjectivities.

Alexander’s depiction of the fractured feminine icons becomes an art of shadow work. As she describes in *Fault Lines*: “In shadow work, the embroidery is done with great care on the underside of the fabric. The missing parts are hidden under the skin of cotton or silk. All that is missing casts a shadow. *And sometimes the shadow is considered lovelier than the thing itself*” (emphasis added; 270). Her silent stitching, so to speak, brings out her past life as shadow work, “the real stuff of consciousness hidden under a transparent surface” (272). Ultimately Alexander evokes, through her art, an autospecular epiphany, a shadow work whereby the postcolonial female subject looking at the mirror of her life sees multiple, fragmented images of silence and otherness and creates an art of pariahs that enables them with a voice to be heard, a sight to be seen, a bond to be connected therewith.

## Notes

1. The looking glass self-concept, coined by sociologist Charles Cooley, draws from the work of George Herbert Mead to articulate the idea of self-formation through mediated reflections and their impact on the self-other relationship. Accordingly, three scenarios are created when a self engages in a social interaction—the self is perceived as imagined by the other, the self is assumed by the judgments that another person makes, and the self imagines the judgments of the self and experiences affective responses to these evaluations.

2. Holderidge explains: "The first uplifting stage of the postcolonial sublime is when the reified subject becomes aware of the possibility of freedom and of how its humanity was denied by the colonizer. . . . The second, negative stage is when one becomes aware of the impossibility of recovering the precolonial wholeness, the culture before the colonial rupture, and the complicity the society and family have had in their own subjection; one also becomes aware of the violence necessary to free oneself, of violence that necessarily wounds both sides of the struggle. . . . The third positive stage of the postcolonial sublime is multifaceted. It can occur during the retrieval of morality and freedom, during that time when the violent struggle finds its reflection in the self's romances, in the forgiveness between opposites . . . that is necessary for the inevitable hybridity of future life" (189-190).
3. As Dirlik writes: "The former colonial 'subjects' of Euro/American projects of modernity are empowered in a postcolonial world to assert their own projects of modernity. Those who are the most successful in doing so are those who . . . demand recognition of their cultural subjectivities, in vented or not, in the making of a global modernity" (284).
4. Affect can be understood in terms of becomings (Deleuze and Guattari), as points of mutual contagion, contact zones (Pratt), self-continuation (Massumi).
5. In an earlier article, I illustrate how Alexander represents, especially in *Manhattan Music*, fragmented selves that learn to re-member their fragmentation and recover through memory; Parvinder Mehta, "When the Fragmented Self Remembers and Recovers."
6. Alexander's reference to the mythical heroine, Draupadi, from *Mahabharata* enables her to compare as well as redefine her fictional character in terms of her approach to memory, identity, and notions of nostalgia and exile. For a comparison between the fictional Draupadi and the mythical Draupadi, see Parvinder Mehta, "When the Fragmented Self Remembers and Recovers."
7. Alexander makes several references to Walter Benjamin's theories, especially in her memoir, *Fault Lines*.
8. Thanks to Barrett Watten for suggesting how modernism operates as a mirror surface for Alexander to reflect the multiple and dispersed subjectivity within the postcolonial feminist condition.
9. For comparison of Alexander's feminist subjectivity to Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of mestiza consciousness, see my article in *Passage to Manhattan*.

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