

TAMA JANOWITZ'S SLAVES OF NEW YORK, OR SLAVES OF POSTMODERNISM?

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ABSTRACT

Tama Janowitz's *Slaves of New York* (1986) is a collection of short stories that takes issue with recent debates about postmodern art and its links with capitalism. On the one hand, Clement Greenberg's idea of postmodern art as commercial bad taste is retaken by Janowitz and parodied in the depiction of characters belonging to the world of the arts in New York. These artists' works of art have much to do with Fredric Jameson's ideas of pastiche and postmodern consumer culture. To deal with New York artists and their exhausted art, Janowitz chooses the short story, a form that best reflects the fragmentation present in the postmodern condition. In spite of this pessimistic subject matter, the result is a very amusing collection of short stories that still allows for the possibility of community, maybe the answer to all postmodern maladies and excesses.

The aim of this paper is to probe into the nature of Tama Janowitz's 1986 short story collection *Slaves of New York* as a self-conscious postmodern product. This can be seen both in the book's subject matter and in the genre used: the short story. As will be argued, the short story is the genre that best reflects the idea of fragmentation present in our postmodern condition, a condition that the book exaggerates and satirises. The book laughs at the world of the arts in a postmodern consumer society. Originality has become exhausted and pastiche has taken its place. At the same time Janowitz criticises theories, such as feminism, that underwent important changes in the course of the 80s. The result is a very amusing book that, through exaggeration, reflects some of the postmodern excesses of the 80s in North America, especially in the world of the arts.

The word postmodernism is difficult to define since it does not refer to a single idea. It may be applied to the postindustrial society, a society that for critics such as Fredric Jameson (1991), is characteristic of late capitalism and has fallen prey of consumerism. This is a conformist society that has lost the 'subversive' power of modernism. Matei Calinescu also agrees with this portrait of society and adds that postmodernism has brought about a 'relaxation' both of artistic standards and of the implicitly political standards of aesthetic criticism (1996:295-6). In the realm of the arts the theories run through a similar line. Critics argue that during the modernist period there was a clear difference between high art and mass culture. High art was accessible only to a few people that could appreciate its beauty and values, while mass culture was meant to be enjoyed by the lower class that had practically no access to the arts, which were too removed from everyday reality. Postmodernism has closed this wide gap in a two-side movement: artists have drawn from mass cultural forms, at the same time as some sections of mass culture have increasingly adopted strategies from high art. This 'closing the gap' is for Andreas Huyssen the postmodern condition in literature and the arts (1986:ix).

This process took place in the arts throughout the 60s, a time when Pop Art developed and became increasingly popular. For Douglas Tallack the flourishing of Pop Art has to be understood in the context of the general feelings of the 60s' liberation from high culture and political authority (1991:108). For other critics pop culture extended its meaning to stand for 'any manifestation of "subculture" and "underground"' (Huyssen, 1986:141). In a time when high art was the art of the ruling classes, creating a new art nearer to the common people was another form of social revolt. Pop artists saw works of art in everyday objects. Commodities, serial production objects, pictures of film stars or comic strips were exhibited as works of art. Common people responded in a very positive way to this new form of art, but the critical reaction was not so open-minded. One of the most critical voices has been Clement Greenberg's. Greenberg considers modernism as the time of heroic struggle against bad taste or kitsch in art. The postmodern manifestations of art are for him commercial bad taste that even challenges the integrity of art (Greenberg, 1980). In this sense, his attitude towards postmodern art is similar to Jameson's attitude towards postmodernist society, a society that has lost its subversiveness and has surrendered to capitalism. Capitalism seems to have exploited the needs exhibited by Pop Art. A new market was born that produced and sold art, records, posters, films, clothes... The romanticism of Pop Art and its struggle against high art has been transformed in the 80s. Pop Art has turned commodities into works of art and, as a consequence, capitalism has turned the work of art into a commodity to be bought and sold in the market place. Of course not all critics think of this democratisation of art in negative terms. For Paul Oliver (1993) or Leslie A. Fiedler (1993), Pop Art is subversive since it is a threat to all hierarchies, it is hostile to this order

in its own realm. The critic can now make judgements about the 'goodness' and 'badness' of art that are quite different from distinctions between 'high' and 'low' and from their concealed class bias.

We need to take this discussion over high art and low art into account when reading *Slaves of New York*, since most of its short stories focus on New York pop-artists. Tama Janowitz takes issue with Greenberg and Jameson's discussion about postmodern art and its links with capitalism. She shows a society of artists that represent all that Greenberg and Jameson fear. The main characters are painters, musicians, writers... and through different stories we get to know them and their art. Some of the stories stand separately, others are continued throughout the book but always mixed with other different stories. Eleanor's story is developed through eight short stories that are intersected with other stories from other people in New York. Since her story is never developed in a continuous way, we only get fragments of her experiences. At the beginning she lives with Stash, a successful artist. However, Eleanor, an artist herself, is not as successful as her boyfriend and has no economic independence. She has become a slave since she cannot afford to rent an apartment on her own. Eleanor is considered an artist in postmodern standards but she would not have been on in modernist times. She designs jewellery but she does not work with precious stones, she works 'in rubber, shellacked sea horses, plastic James Bond-doll earrings (...)' (1986:7). As her stories progress, she decides to make pins and earrings out of reproductions of food. This is a capitalist society so a plastic company will sell her plastic reproductions of pastries that she will stud in necklaces and earring wires. This might have been an original idea in the 60s but for the 80s it is already done. Stash, her boyfriend, has already seen earrings in the shape of 'sushi and sashimi, with realistic rice, seaweed, and raw fish' (1986:90). Janowitz reflects a late twentieth century that seems to be witnessing a lack of new ideas and originality. Once common objects have been ransacked, it becomes more difficult to be original. At the end she does achieve some success by making hats that look like 'pancakes, others looked like pizzas, some like cheese soufflés - made of the kind of brocade used on chairs' (1986:230). The final irony comes from the fact that she found the fabric for the hats in a garbage dumpsite in Soho. As a result, the hats are full of moths. As Greenberg fears, art seems to have come so close to the everyday that it has fallen beyond. The exhaustion of originality has made it harder to come up with new ideas and this is something that plagues other artists in the book.

Marley is another main character in the book whose life develops in five different short stories. He is an artist fond on relating mythological figures to present situations. This return to the past for inspiration has been stated by different critics. Among them is Umberto Eco, who claims that avant-garde destroyed the past, arriving:

(...) at the abstract, the informal, the white canvas, the slashed canvas, the charred canvas (...) the postmodern reply consists of recognizing the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently (quot. in Calinescu, 1996:276-7).

However, postmodernism has come so far that returning to the past is not original any more. Marley has painted a Ulysses that represents an unsuccessful artist returning home after twenty years to ask for some money. For Sherman, a friend artist of Marley in the book, the idea is already old-fashioned. He says:

“You are not exactly in sync with the times, Marley”, he said. “Maybe you know something I don’t, but your work seems like a lot of stuff that was done in the late seventies” (1986:153).

This exhaustion leads to new combinations that may produce ridiculous effects. Some Pop artists used to paint cartoon figures, and Stash does something similar, but with a difference: although he tries to be original, he only manages to be grotesque. He gets inspired by watching the ‘Jeer Lewis Telethon’ on television and the resulting picture is “Mighty Mouse” ‘rescuing a bald, baby bird from the hands of a giant Japanese robot in a business suit’ (1986:87). Eleanor does not understand the meaning of the drawing but that does not really matter, since Stash is very successful at his work. For critics such as Fredric Jameson, the exhaustion of originality has lead postmodernism towards pastiche. Pastiche is for Jameson a ‘blank parody’ or ‘empty copy’ that has lost the sense of being a convention from which it diverges. As he explains:

In this situation parody finds itself without a vocation; it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place. Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody (...) (1991:17).

Jameson sees pastiche as an inward-looking, second-hand aesthetics. When Marley uses mythological figures in his paintings or when Stash paints a Micky Mouse, they are doing an ‘empty copy’ of previous styles in the arts. They reflect the exhaustion of originality in postmodern times.

Capitalism uses everything to control popular culture, since popular culture becomes a means to control people. In one of the stories we meet Wilfredo, who is a very successful clothes designer. The key to his success is the following:

Wilfredo based his designs on all kinds of things: clothing he found in thrift stores, costumes borrowed from a theatrical clothing warehouse - pirate outfits and gorilla costumes

and old Victorian numbers. Then he combined the various elements, had them remade in beautiful fabrics such as silk and cashmere, and faille and when the entire ensemble was together (such as a sequined vest with a cotton T-shirt and a brocade jacket and tiny wrinkled pants) the whole thing looked gorgeous and sold for a thousand dollars (1986:228).

The passage should be read in ironic terms. This is again a criticism of the excesses of capitalism and postmodern ideology. Everything goes as long as it sells, which results in horrible pastiche combinations successful at a time when originality is simply not possible. The answer to this lack of new ideas is to go for baroque design, a kind of design that the 80s' society of excess most favoured. This baroque abuse of combination seems to have exhausted itself and the 90s' answer to the general lack of imagination has been to return to minimalist designed. However, this topic exceeds the scope of this paper. What is clear is that by the late 80s authors like Tama Janowitz were already conscious of these excesses and used parody⁽¹⁾ to criticise a society too keen on combinations and marketplace ideology.

The book not only laughs at the lack of originality and at the absurdity of an art that has come too close to every-day commodities: in the short stories art has become a commodity itself. It is a business, a way to make money, something to consume. The obsession with consumerism is reflected in 'Spells,' where Eleanor and Stash attend Daria's birthday. This is the list of presents that Daria receives:

(...) a Godzilla lighter (flames shoot out of Godzilla's mouth); a record of Maria Callas singing *Norma*; a silk survival map of the Arctic Circle; a glue gun; a cassette tape of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks; a large plastic object with a pink pyramid-shaped cover (possibly made by the Memphis Design Collection) which might be a breadbox or an ice bucket; a ten-pound bag of Eukanuba health food for dogs; a book about wrestling; and a Statue of Liberty hat - a spiky helmet of flexible foam. Daria puts it on (1986:154).

The presents are completely useless. Eleanor cannot even make out what one of them is and the other presents have nothing to do with Doria. Fashion is what really counts, not usefulness. Some of the presents could be considered art following the book's standards. The Statue of Liberty hat could have been one of Eleanor's successful designs and the 'large plastic object with a pink pyramid-shaped cover' is after all made 'by the Memphis Design Collection.' The narration itself is aware of the excess, something we can appreciate in Eleanor's comments about the presents:

(1) Parody is understood here in Linda Hutcheon's sense of repetition with a difference in order to achieve new effects (Hutcheon, 1991).

I know that this assortment of gifts means something specific and symbolic about people my age who live in New York and are involved in the arts (...) But what the gifts actually represent, I have no idea (1986:154).

The meaning is obvious: art as consumerism and consumerism for consumerism's sake.

The artists in the stories also understand their art as a business. This prevailing attitude is best seen when Marley receives his mother's visit. Marley is not being very successful but her mother will not give him any money. This is her reaction:

“At one time I thought you'd make these paintings, which seem to be all you're capable of, and make some money, and in this way things would work out for you (...) But let's face it, other, younger artists have come along who are by now big success. Your shows don't even get reviewed. I wish you'd get out of this business, which is making you neither rich nor happy. It's not too late, you could still change. There are schools to learn the computer –” (1986:47).

Artists do not aim at immortality any more. They are rather more worried about the immediate effects of their art. This is what art has become, a way to get money. For critics such as Douglas Tallack postmodernism has erased the difference between the work of art and the commodity (1991:105). Norman K. Denzin goes even further by saying that the 'both-and' logic of late capitalism has turned everything, including life experience, into a commodity to be bought and sold in the market place (1991:151). This is also reflected in the book, since the artists portrayed do not only have to worry about being original at a time when that has become a very hard task, but also have to stand the criticism that art dealers and gallery directors launch at their art. Marley's art dealer, Ginger, is the one to select his paintings. On the one hand, she likes a picture Marley gave to her mother because he did not like it; on the other hand, the picture Marley likes best is for Ginger the weakest. Ginger is the one to decide so there is not much to discuss about. In 'Turkey Talk' Marley visits a very rich art collector who wants to buy one of his paintings. Marley makes a commodity of his own life and, to please the collector, he is compelled to eat an insane amount of food for breakfast and stand a silly conversation leading nowhere. He sells only one of his pictures, a small one, not especially good for him. This is what the world of art has become, or at least this is the way Janowitz portrays it. Janowitz may have chosen the trendy world of art in New York but the criticism she makes may be applied to any sphere of society in the 80s. For her, the result of the postmodern condition, a superficial fragmented society obsessed with consumerism and embedded in the marketplace.

The critique is especially sharp because Janowitz has chosen the genre that best reflects this postmodern condition: the short story. For centuries the genre

has been rejected by critics for its popular appeal. This was so at a time, as has been already explained, when the difference between high art and low art was a clear-cut one. For Clare Hanson the success of the 'woman's short story' in the weekly magazines has also helped to fix the form as popular and/or inferior to many literary critics (1989:2). Postmodernism, in its attempt to bring high art and low art together has allowed the fluctuation of both short stories and literary criticism about the genre. Ferguson explains how the 1934 volume *The Best American Short Stories* contained one-and-a-half pages listing publications, while in the 1984 volume there were over six pages, most of them coming from small presses and academic journals (1989:199). Ironically enough, the postmodern blurring of high art and low art may account for the success but we also have to take into account how much the short story's success is indebted to the capitalist system. The number of small presses has increased, which makes it easier for a young writer to get published. Publishing a short story is easier than publishing a novel and the genre is popular enough to be a 'business.' In spite of this we cannot forget the subversive power of the form. Precisely because it is easier to write a short story than a novel, marginal people have been able to use the form to express their alienated, fragmented visions of society (Hanson, 1989:2).

In formal terms it is the brevity of the short story that permits this representation of a necessarily fragmentary, subjective and partial material (Hanson, 1989:23). Contemporary society is not only fragmentary, subjective and partial, for critics such as Gerald Kennedy it is also multiple and the short story sequence assumes a form reflective of that multiplicity. Different situations are projected from different perspectives through separate narratives (1995:xi). Many postmodern critics have dealt with these ideas of fragmentation and multiplicity. Among the best-known is Jean-François Lyotard, who considers the postmodern condition a general condition of contemporary Western civilisation. For him 'grand narratives of legitimation' are no longer credible. Grand narratives are totalizing metadiscourses that legitimised knowledge in the past. They are universalist conceptions that have been generally assumed to have the right pragmatics and are able to perform the right practices. These are Christianity, the Enlightenment, Hegelian philosophy and Marxism among others. The modern project still believed in this metanarratives, however, postmodernism does not believe in the availability of a privileged metadiscourse capable of encompassing all the truth of life in one single unified vision. Legitimation is achieved through plurality and locality, through a multitude of heterogeneous and local 'petit histoires.' As a result we find fragmented visions that, although fragmented, are true in their individuality, the consequence of descending to the level of practice (Lyotard, 1984). These views are similar to those held by the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo. Vattimo makes the difference between 'weak thought' and 'strong thought.' 'Weak thought' is the typical postmodern mode of reflection in opposition to 'strong thought,' which stands for a kind of metaphysics that is

domineering, imposing, universalistic, atemporal, aggressively self-centred and intolerant in regard to whatever appears to contradict it (Calinescu, 1996:272). Vattimo's idea of 'strong thought' is clearly related to Lyotard's conception of 'grand narratives of legitimation.' Through the short story the effect of the 'petit histoires' is fully achieved.

When dealing with the short story many critics have compared it with the novel. One of the most repeated differences is that the novel has as representative qualities its 'breath', scope and universality (Hanson, 1989:23). The universality of the novel makes of it a very good medium to express the ideology of the master narratives, though not all novels express this ideology. Postmodern writers, for example, do not use the novel as it was used in the nineteenth century. They use it in a very self-conscious and innovative manner, always trying to obtain new effects out of old forms. On the other hand, the short story readily allows the expression of a fragmented reality, the same as Lyotard's idea of 'petit histoires' of legitimation, of narration in this case, descends to the level of practice, in the sense that the reality portrayed is plural and local at the same time.

Slaves of New York is divided into twenty-two short stories. Nine of them work in an autonomous manner and have no connection among themselves. These stories are like pictures in a museum, different pieces of experience. Some of the titles are even numbered as they would be in an art collection: 'Modern saint # 271,' 'Case History #4: Fred,' 'Case History #15: Melinda.' The rest of the stories deal either with Eleanor and her experiences or with Marley. There is one story where Eleanor and Marley meet, which takes place in 'Who's on first?,' where they play a baseball match with common friends, all of them related to the world of the arts. In this way, a postmodern conception of sociality and social identity is depicted. Lyotard calls relationships of this sort 'social bond.' For Lyotard the social bond is a weave of crisscrossing threads of discursive practices, no single one of which runs continuously throughout the whole (in Fraser, 1990:24). These discursive practices intersect in the individuals, who intersect with others forming a long chain that constitutes society. In this sense, society is not understood in generalising terms but as a group of separate interactions. In *Slaves of New York* we learn that Eleanor and Marley went out once, and that is the social bond that joins them and that joins many of the stories. In this way, social identities become something complex and heterogeneous —that is why Lyotard rules out the idea of a totalizing social theory— which may include general categories like gender, race and class.

If we take the rejection of master narratives to its extreme, even the distinction male/female would not hold any more. If critics have turned to the practice of single cases instead of generalisations, this puts into question feminist approaches to the question of gender that seem to have been looking for basic kinds of male behaviour, supposedly found in all cultures, and capable of explaining

female marginality and male power in a crosscultural way⁽²⁾. The incapability of some kinds of feminism to understand that all women are not necessarily the same simply because they share the same gender is reflected and parodied in *Slaves of New York*. In the story called 'Engagements' Cora is a student of feminist criticism at Yale. After one of her classes, she goes over her notes and discovers that she cannot make out what they mean. They sound to her as if they were written in another language:

Status of empirical discourse.

Post-structuralist account of dissolving subjects precludes formation of female identity.

The notion of the subject in progress.

It was assumed she was calling for a return to fixed identity.

Post-gendered subjectivities.

If gender is constructed - a gendered identity 99% of the time is built onto a person who has a sex (1986:23).

This is an empty language that does not help women in their everyday affairs. Can this speech help the prostitute in 'Modern Saint,' Eleanor (a jewellery designer), Cora (a student of feminism), Melinda (a lonely dancer-to-be) or Natasha (a hairdresser) in the same way? In her book, Tama Janowitz seems to imply that this is not possible and she does so through the fragmented stories where we see isolated people rather than oppressed females. The slave system of New York, where not having enough money to afford your own apartment means being the slave of the person who does own one, affects both sexes. In this sense, *Slaves of New York* does not aim at portraying fragmented pictures of women but fragmented portraits of people, whatever their sex.

This idea of fragmentation was already present in Lacan. In his account of the 'mirror stage' Lacan explains how the child, when seeing his reflection in the mirror, misrecognises himself: the image is a pleasing unity that he does not experience in his own body. When the child grows he continues to make such imaginary identifications with objects so as to build his own ego. His unconscious desire to join and identify with other objects comes from the stage when the father divided the child from the mother's body. The subject that emerges from this process is a 'split' one: divided between the conscious life of the ego and the unconscious or repressed desire that he has developed. In this fashion, in

(2) The book *Feminism/Postmodernism* (Nicholson, 1990) analyses the implications of postmodern theory in feminist criticism. Though it is a collection of essays and there are different approaches to the question, the general conclusion seems to propose a return to practice and to the analysis of more specific cases instead of keeping on looking for general patterns to be applied to any culture.

order to have a self we become fragmented, since we long to join the other, to return to the original contact with the mother⁽³⁾.

Liotard would probably consider psychoanalysis one example of master narrative, since it is a universalising concept that is supposed to ‘work’ with anybody. Ironically enough, Lacan’s concept of fragmentation and the split subject is not so different from Lyotard’s idea of ‘petit histoires’ or of the ‘social bond.’ For Lacan, the imaginary stage when child and mother are joined as a complete entity is a delusion: the grown adult will never attain such a union again, though this will be his/her inner wish. In the same way, theorists and social critics will have to go for concrete separate examples, trying to avoid the strong allure of master narratives that seem to capture the truth of every discourse conclusively. The ideological result of these theories is of course fragmentation.

Susan Bordo retakes these ideas of fragmentation and applies them to the postmodern idea of the body. For Cartesian epistemology, the body required transcendence if one was to achieve the view from nowhere, an objective view to see how things really are without the distortion of human experience. For the postmodern critic Susan Suleiman (in Bordo, 1990:143-4), the body is reconceived and seen as the vehicle of the human remaking of the world, shifting location and revealing new ‘points of view.’ Though it denies the unity and stability of identity, this is a moving but still unified body. A further step would be for Bordo the body ‘whose own unity has been shattered by the choreography of multiplicity’ (1990:144). This is the case of the cyborg who takes pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and the fragmentation of the self. This last example of body is for Bordo no body at all, so she defends the idea of body defined by Susan Suleiman. This is the kind of fragmented body that we find in *Slaves of New York* through the use of a collection of short stories. Each story represents and deals with a single experience, be it Eleanor’s, Marley’s, Doria’s, or Perso’s. The multiplicity of characters is rendered through all these different stories, in which we see different experiences of people in the world of the arts. The world of the arts becomes a ‘petit histoire’ in the sense that it reduces the wider scope of society. The experiences are further condensed in multiple personal experiences of that same reality. The multiplicity of voices is created through different stories with different characters. As has already been explained, Eleanor and Marley take the chief role in several stories. By this means the idea of the fragmented body appears. Eleanor’s personality is not developed in a single story. Each story shows a new trait in her character that we did not know before, her personality is then fragmented through the stories where she is present. The reader can appreciate how in the first stories she is portrayed as insecure and very dependent on Stash, just a shadow

(3) For a good summary of Lacan’s concept of the ‘mirror stage’ see Terry Eagleton, 1983:164-174.

incapable of succeeding in her own art. However, in 'Patterns' or 'Matches' the reader meets a much more self-assured Eleanor, who has broken up with Stash, has other relationships and gives her own parties.

Janowitz's pessimist attitudes towards postmodern art and society, channelled through the use of the short story form, are not completely hopeless. In postmodern times fragmentation has a side effect, and that is the longing for community and the search for lost ideas of community. In cinema this is especially clear in the release, during the 70s and 80s, of a succession of 'retro' films that looked back to lost communities of the 'idealised' 50s (Tallack, 1991:321). This is an idea that can be extended to literature and to society itself. The nostalgia for the past is present in every postmodern manifestation. We have already seen how in *Slaves of New York* characters are constantly revisiting the past, and trying to, somehow unsuccessfully, make it new. In social terms, the past is seen as the time of community, while the present is the time of fragmentation. Andreas Huyssen goes as far as to state that 'the search for tradition combined with an attempt at recuperation seems more basic to postmodernism than innovation and breakthrough' (1986:169). The nostalgia for the community is a logical consequence if we take the urban lifestyle and society into account. Collier sees the 80s, the time in which *Slaves of New York* is set, as a time when people had become loners. Young people rejected marriage, divorced easily, abandoned their children, had fewer friends and saw them less. Their economic prosperity allowed them to buy 'expensive pieces of equipment that provide substitutes for human contact' (1991:260). All this results in the increasing fragmentation of American people. Husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and relatives see each other only in passing. In an urban society community has become an abstraction: millions of people who are mere ciphers, a large group of fragmented selves. The postmodern moment has made people aware of our fragmented societies and has given way to a sense of longing for community.

Slaves of New York represents the postmodern excesses of urban fragmentation and at the same time includes the nostalgic idea of community. There are mainly two short stories in the book where the idea of community is present. These two are the only ones where characters appearing in different stories meet; however, the two stories differ in the treatment given to the idea of community. In the short story 'Who's on first?' Eleanor and Stash join other artists to play a baseball game. Stash knows them but Eleanor only knows Marley and prefers not to talk to him since they went out once and Stash might be jealous. Her first reaction when arriving at the field is not very positive:

Across the field grimy, fierce men —I don't recognize any of them— sock-sock the ball back and forth, faces stony as Aztecs. I feel like some actress who's walked onto the movie set without her script. Obviously I don't belong. Yet I'm not certain I feel any different when I'm at home, pretending that Stash and I are an old married couple (1986:89).

By the end of the story her attitude has not changed much:

The game has gone on for hours, it must be getting close to midnight. I wonder if the 'Jerry Lewis Telethon' has finally ended. It seems as if everyone is a mile apart from each other. Plus, I have to go to the bathroom (1996:100).

This is not Eleanor's idea of community because she does not know the people there and, since she lives with Stash, she cannot normally relate to Marley. The other story where the idea of community is present is 'Matches,' which takes place once Eleanor and Stash have already broken up and Eleanor has her own apartment. She decides to give a party and invites the people *she* knows. The party is not entirely a success since Eleanor still feels insecure without a boyfriend; however, she does nothing wrong, disproving Stash's notion of Eleanor as a very clumsy person. In this short story the idea of community is retaken: out of the net of fragmented social relationships, of fragmented stories, a certain nostalgia prevails and the idea of community stands out from the fragments and successful lifestyles.

Both in its subject matter and in its form, *Slaves of New York* is a book that openly deals with postmodernism. Its subject matter is a social critique of the distance art has travelled to become mass culture consumption. The book is a reflection on art's lack of originality and on its turn to pastiche and ridiculous combinations. Art has also fallen prey to the capitalist market place, becoming a business rather than a form of artistic representation. To deal with New York artists and their exhausted art, clearly a consequence of the postmodern society and its characteristics, Tama Janowitz chooses the short story form. This form has the capacity to express the fragmentation and multiplicity of postmodern society through its own shape. Janowitz criticises this fragmented urban postmodern society but in its very fragmentation she still allows for the possibility of the construction of community. Maybe this is the answer to all postmodern maladies and excesses.

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