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Inhabiting *Relingos*: Horizontal Harlem, Told Vertically

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## **Inhabiting *Relingos*: Horizontal Harlem, Told Vertically**

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**Hannah Huxley**

According to Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, the business of defining Harlem in cultural and topographical terms has ‘already been perfected’.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, definitions of Harlem are rarely without reference to the era of the Harlem Renaissance. Between 1920 and 1929, the community was at the forefront of a period of artistic rejuvenation, underpinned by the post-war economic prosperity and a surge in African American migration from the South to Northern cities. Harlem Renaissance writer James Weldon Johnson attempted to outline Harlem within a roughly drawn boundary of ‘less than two square miles’.<sup>2</sup> His anthropological study, *Black Manhattan*, discussed Harlem within the terms of racial sectionalisation, declaring ‘Negro’ Harlem (in its proximity to Central Park) to be at the very heart of New York City. Harlem, he observed, was neither a ‘fringe’ nor a ‘slum’.<sup>3</sup> Connected to Manhattan by three main highways, he wrote, ‘Harlem is not a section that one “goes out to”, but a section that one goes through’.<sup>4</sup> While Johnson’s initial definition proves to be considerably more flexible than the static borderlines drawn on various maps of Manhattan, it indicates migratory border crossings of the neighbourhood, affirming Harlem’s status as a transitory place.

Several decades after Johnson’s mapping of this space, Rhodes-Pitts describes her attempts to locate corresponding geographical descriptions of Harlem, after taking up residence there in 2002. She highlights several differing descriptions and coordinates found in reference books, guides, and directed walking tours frequented by the inquisitive tourist. The first description outlines Harlem in cartographical terms as merely a set of plotted coordinates; ‘[a] residential and business district of [the] N Manhattan borough of New York City, SE N.Y., bounded approximately by Central Park and 110<sup>th</sup> St. (S), East R.

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<sup>1</sup> Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, *Harlem is Nowhere: A Journey to the Mecca of Black America* (London: Back Bay Books, 2011), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1968), p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, p. 146.

(E), Harlem R. (NE), 168<sup>th</sup> St. (W).<sup>5</sup> The most remarkable of the definitions identified by Rhodes-Pitts is found in the Works Progress Administration (WPA) *Guide to New York City* (1939), that stated: ‘Harlem is blocked in by the high ridges of Morningside Heights and St. Nicholas Terrace, by the East and Harlem rivers, and by Central Park’.<sup>6</sup> For Rhodes-Pitts, more important than the geographical boundaries was ‘the action of those physical frontiers: *Harlem is blocked in*’.<sup>7</sup> This description framed Harlem as a neighbourhood geographically situated on lower terrain than that of neighbouring communities, and separated from white Manhattan by the expanse of Central Park.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak considers the fluid cultural interconnections in Harlem, and points out that it is increasingly difficult to inhabit and define an urban space that is continually in flux. She raises the pertinent question: ‘New Yorker is a collective term. How many are we? We are residents of Morningside Heights. How much of *us* is Harlem?’<sup>8</sup> Moreover, she refers to the principal entry found in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which — in contrast to the definition initially outlined by Rhodes-Pitts — describes Harlem as a neighbourhood of ‘no fixed boundaries’.<sup>9</sup> This definition, Spivak observes, is used in the ‘narrow sense’ and refers to Harlem’s geographical location within New York. The very notion of a ‘fixed’ border is, arguably, a historically produced political construct, designed, according to Caroline Levander and Robert Levine, to ‘include certain groups and exclude others’.<sup>10</sup> If considered in a cultural and aesthetic context, the definition of Harlem as a place of no fixed boundaries encourages a transnational perspective of Harlem and the continued resonance of its renaissance era, reflecting creatively upon Harlem’s expansive ‘outward, upward momentum’ in cultural history.<sup>11</sup> The WPA description of Harlem as a bordered space is also in direct contradiction to Ralph Ellison’s 1948 observation that Harlem was metaphorically ‘nowhere’.<sup>12</sup> By ‘nowhere’, Ellison implied that Harlem was indefinable in the geographical

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<sup>5</sup> Rhodes-Pitts, pp. 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> Rhodes-Pitts, pp. 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Rhodes-Pitts, pp. 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Harlem’, *Social Text*, 22.4 (2004), 113-139 (p. 117) (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> ‘Harlem’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, cited in Spivak, p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, ‘Introduction’, in *Hemispheric American Studies*, ed. by Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine (London: Rutgers University Press, 2008), pp. 1-17 (p. 5).

<sup>11</sup> Rhodes-Pitts, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph Ellison, ‘Harlem is Nowhere’, *Harper’s Magazine*, August 1964 <<http://harpers.org/archive/1964/08/harlem-is-nowhere/>> [accessed 4 June 2014], pp. 53-57.

sense, but also suggested that it was lacking in the cultural vibrancy and creativity that had defined Harlem in the 1920s.

Latin-American author Valeria Luiselli presents an alternative re-imagining of Harlem in this context. Her first novel, *Faces in the Crowd* (2011) might be read (in Luiselli's own words) as a 'horizontal novel, told vertically' or a 'vertical novel told horizontally'.<sup>13</sup> This is unbounded Harlem: told from the inside out and the outside in, and at several points 'seen from below, like Manhattan from the subway'.<sup>14</sup> In a recent review of the novel, Hector Tobar labels Luiselli's text 'a time-bending ménage-a-multitudes', involving figures both 'real and imagined, from the past and present'.<sup>15</sup> Told in four different time zones, by two different narrators, Luiselli's narrative shifts between 1920s Harlem and modern-day Mexico City, and supersedes restrictive chronological, spatial and aesthetic boundaries. Luiselli signals a transatlantic and temporal shift in the opening of the novel itself: '[i]t all began in another city and another life. That's why I can't write this story the way I would like to — as if I were still there'.<sup>16</sup> Luiselli succeeds in re-mapping Harlem as a space of 'no fixed boundaries', far beyond the literal or geographical.<sup>17</sup> Her personal musings provide a nostalgic narrative of the urban nomad. Luiselli's primary narrator is a woman in her early forties, married, and a mother to two young children. From her home in Mexico City, she reflects upon her time as a young woman living a somewhat unanchored life in Harlem. Whilst working for a small publishing house specializing in literary translation, she discovers the work of an obscure Mexican poet of the Harlem Renaissance, Gilberto Owen, and traces the details of his life in 1920s New York.<sup>18</sup> A second, parallel narration emerges from the perspective of Owen himself, recounting his time spent living in Harlem as a young poet. As the novel draws to a close, the two narratives merge, collapsing the boundaries between time, space, and identity. Even the physical state of Luiselli's male narrator appears obscured and distorted. He states, '[m]y face is no longer enclosed by a contour; it extends towards the

<sup>13</sup> Valeria Luiselli, *Faces in The Crowd*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Granta Publications, 2011), p. 61, p. 123.

<sup>14</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in The Crowd*, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> Hector Tobar, 'Review: Valeria Luiselli's "Faces in The Crowd" Seeks Poets in a City', *LA Times*, 15 May 2014 <<https://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-ca-jc-valeria-luiselli-20140518-story.html>> [accessed 16 July 2014] (para. 4 of 16).

<sup>16</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in The Crowd*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Spivak, p. 117.

<sup>18</sup> Gilberto Owen was a Mexican poet who lived and wrote in the late 1920s, during the height of the Harlem Renaissance.

edge of something that can no longer contain me, like a glass on the point of overflowing'.<sup>19</sup> As Mark Reynolds remarks in an interview with Luiselli, the novel 'takes on the quality of one of those vivid dreams that offers tantalisingly profound insights only to crumble to dust on the instant of waking'.<sup>20</sup> Within the same interview, Luiselli accordingly revealed that she is quite simply 'not interested in everything being geometrically tied to an origin'.<sup>21</sup>

This lack of linearity allows for an inter-textual exploration of the narrative. The title of novel itself is taken from Ezra Pound's imagist poem *In a Station of the Metro* (1913): '[t]he apparition of these faces in the crowd/Petals on a wet, black bough', eludes to phantom-like encounters across the temporal divide between the novel's two narrators.<sup>22</sup> Luiselli also offers a surreal, phantom-like characterisation of Harlem Renaissance writer Nella Larsen, in recognition of her distinctive cultural hybridity and the themes of racial passing that pervaded her novels. In his narration, Gilberto Owen refers to Larsen's dual heritage, and describes her as '[...] a walking, wiggling paradox who united the two characteristics [...] the Swede and the African, the world of the whites and the world of the blacks'.<sup>23</sup> Like several of the phantom literary figures who frequent the novel, Luiselli's characterisation of Larsen vanishes just as swiftly as she appears. Yet subsequent glimpses of Larsen are intricately woven throughout the narrative. Luiselli's narrator later observes, 'I glance towards the mirror to locate myself within this nightmarish scene. But I'm not there. Instead of my face, I see a flicker of Nella Larsen's'.<sup>24</sup> This fictional interweaving of Larsen underlines Luiselli's approach to writing without aesthetic limitations. Luiselli's narrative depicts the transnational interests and artistic exchanges of 1920s Harlem writers, poets, and artists of both African and Mexican descent. Notably, her female narrator does not specify her own cultural identity but does describe her life and residence in Mexico City, and consequently leads readers to assume that she has a connection to Mexico as a place of cultural origin. Luiselli's male narrator also indicates Mexican cultural

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<sup>19</sup> Spivak, p. 141.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Reynolds, 'Valeria Luiselli Interview', *Untitled Books*, 50 (2012) <<http://untitledbooks.com/blog/2012/07/valeria-luiselli.html>> [accessed 16 July 2014], [n.p.].

<sup>21</sup> Reynolds, [n.p.].

<sup>22</sup> Ezra Pound, 'In a Station of the Metro', in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol. 2, ed. by Nina Baym, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 1236.

<sup>23</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in the Crowd*, p. 124.

<sup>24</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in the Crowd*, p. 140.

origin when he describes himself as ‘a young Irish-Mexican, neither red haired nor good looking, more bastard than poet’.<sup>25</sup> At various moments throughout *Faces in the Crowd*, both Mexican and American individuals seem to come together at *tertulias* — social gatherings of primarily literary and artistic figures — the ‘regulars’ of which include Mexican artist Emilio Amero and the poet Federico García Lorca, who, notably, ‘almost always brought Nella Larsen’.<sup>26</sup>

For Luiselli, the aesthetical overlap between her own fiction and the fictions of American and British modernists who had graced the streets of Harlem before her made her ‘everyday Harlem more liveable’.<sup>27</sup> In an interview, she declared that this section of New York was ‘a more barren, simultaneously backward-looking and future-speculative, gentrified Harlem’ than the one occupied some eighty years before by figures such as Larsen and Owen.<sup>28</sup> For Luiselli, the act of writing *Faces in The Crowd* was an attempt to negotiate Harlem as a transcultural space. According to the author,

[i]t was a novel about fiction. It was also a novel with personal and political concerns — how does a Latin American Catholic-raised *criollo* deal with WASPland, how can a Mexican in Harlem appropriate or relate to ‘black is beautiful’, how does a Spanish-speaking writer swim around American insularity? [...] I was constantly trying to work out how the modernist reinvention of cities, for example, was still today a paradigm that was difficult to overcome in our experience of time and space. That problem obsessed me.<sup>29</sup>

Upon her arrival in New York, Luiselli’s female narrator shows little willingness to venture beyond her own self-imposed boundaries. She describes walking a repetitive route from ‘apartment to the office, from the office to some library [...] to the cemetery’.<sup>30</sup> For Michel de Certeau, this pedestrian process within an urban space is often linked to a lack of place or destination. Readers are reminded of Harlem’s ‘nowhere’ status; the wanderings of the passer-by indicate the ‘indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper’.<sup>31</sup> Certeau posits that pedestrian navigation of the city produces, ‘a network of residences

<sup>25</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in the Crowd*, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in the Crowd*, p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> Valeria Luiselli, ‘Cultivating Fact and Fiction’, *Untitled Books*, 50 (2012) <<http://www.untitledbooks.com/features/features/by-valeria-luiselli/>> [accessed 16 July 2014], [n.p.].

<sup>28</sup> Luiselli, ‘Cultivating Fact and Fiction’, [n.p.].

<sup>29</sup> Luiselli, ‘Cultivating Fact and Fiction’, [n.p.].

<sup>30</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in The Crowd*, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 103.

temporarily appropriated by pedestrian traffic, a shuffling among pretenses of the proper, a universe of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed-places'.<sup>32</sup> Here, Certeau adopts the 'proper' as a sense of permanence, visible in the physical and social structures of a community. The 'pretense' of the proper occurs when these structures conceal the realities of an impermanence or transitory existence. Certeau refers to New York as a 'wave of verticals', a reference echoed in Luiselli's reference to the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' formal structures featured within *Faces in the Crowd*.<sup>33</sup> Certeau's reference also infers an element of pretence, or duality. It is a direct reference to the skyscrapers that shape the skyline of Manhattan, but the term 'wave' simultaneously suggests a sense of fluid movement that is also reflective of the changing physical structures within the city.

Luiselli formally engages with these vertical and horizontal structures. If Harlem is considered the 'nowhere' that Ellison once pronounced, then the movements undertaken by Luiselli's narrators in crossing disparate time zones, realities, and spaces emphasises the inability to define or locate Harlem within restrictive temporal or spatial boundaries. The New York subway, with its 'multiple stops, its breakdowns, its sudden accelerations, its dark zones' provides the 'space-time scheme' for the novel, and moves 'beyond the island, beyond this story'.<sup>34</sup> The point at which two trains cross each other allows for Luiselli's characters to 'see' through the temporal gap that initially divides them. Her narrator describes this fleeting glimpse through the time-space divide:

[t]he subway used to bring me close to dead things; to the death of things. One day, when I was travelling home on the I line, I saw Owen again [...] I was looking out of the window — nothing except the heavy darkness of the tunnels — when another train approached from behind and for a few moments traveled at the same speed as the one I was on. I saw him sitting in the same position as me, his head resting against the carriage window. And then nothing. His train speeded up and many other bodies, smudged and ghostly, passed before my eyes'.<sup>35</sup>

Spaces and gaps in the urban landscape are frequently found throughout *Faces in The Crowd*, and become all the more noticeable as Luiselli's characters engage with a process of constructing (and deconstructing) an architectural space around them as they write. In *Sidewalks*, a collection of essays

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<sup>32</sup> Certeau, p. 103.

<sup>33</sup> Certeau, p. 91; Luiselli, *Faces in the Crowd*, p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in the Crowd*, p. 60, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in the Crowd*, p. 61 (emphasis in original).

mapping Harlem and Mexico City, Luiselli observed that ‘cities, like our bodies, like language, are destruction under construction’.<sup>36</sup> In an interview with Jennifer Kabat, the author further remarked that she was ‘surprised by certain similarities’ in the way that Rhodes-Pitts’s *Harlem is Nowhere* began, and that *Sidewalk* was also influenced by the narrative approach to mapping Mexico City through the gaps in urban spaces, which were crucial to the formal narrative. Without them, Luiselli states, ‘there’s no room for imagining anything’.<sup>37</sup>

There is a sparseness within Luiselli’s narrative that originates from the places that her narrator inhabits: the sparingly furnished apartment in New York, and later her family home in Mexico City — places filled with ‘temporary’ and ‘tiny’ objects which ‘take up all the space’, and yet leave the resounding sense of something missing.<sup>38</sup> There is an emerging pattern in this sense of emptiness that is visible within the alternating urban surroundings of Luiselli’s narrators. The author defines these irregular spaces, or ‘urban absences’, as *relingos*: an ‘ambiguous space, a piece of waste ground *without defined borders or limiting fences*, a species of plot on the margins of metropolitan life, even if it is physically to be found in the very centre of a city, at the junction of two main avenues, or under a newly built bridge’.<sup>39</sup> She connects *relingos* to a similar concept, *terrains vagues*, which was developed by Catalan architect Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió. In his essay on the subject, Rubió emphasizes the indeterminacy of these urban spaces, and considers both their spatial and social implications. He outlines the *terrain vague* as a space which ‘assumes the status of fascination, [as] the most solvent sign with which to indicate what cities are and what our experience of them is’.<sup>40</sup>

The term itself carries a multitude of meanings, and has been translated in various ways. Rubió suggests that the French term ‘terrain’ connotes a far more ‘urban quality’ than the English definition, which most frequently associates the phrase with geological or agricultural land. He posits that the French delineation points towards a notion of expansion, and refers to ‘greater and perhaps

<sup>36</sup> Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> Jennifer Kabat, ‘Valeria Luiselli’ (Interview), *BOMB*, 129 (2014), 102-107 (p. 103).

<sup>38</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in the Crowd*, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, p. 71, p. 72.

<sup>40</sup> Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió, ‘Terrain Vague’, in *Anyplace*, ed. by Cynthia C. Davidson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 118-123 (p. 119).



less precisely defined territories'.<sup>41</sup> These are traits which also seem appropriate when considering the physical movements undertaken by Luiselli's characters as they navigate the outer limits of their spatial surroundings. She stresses that these urban absences are essential to reading and mapping a city space. Beyond the construction and deconstruction that continuously dominates and changes the landscape of a metropolitan space, *relingos* have an enduring presence, and in their emptiness, gesture towards a history that is often overlooked, and simultaneously provide a space for that which is yet to come. 'A *relingo*', she writes, is

an emptiness, an absence — is a sort of depository for possibilities, a place that can be seized by the imagination and inhabited by our phantom-follies. Cities need those vacant lots, those silent gaps where the mind can wander freely.<sup>42</sup>

For Luiselli's narrators, in particular, Harlem provides the space for 'phantom-follies' through the spectral figures that pervade this city space.<sup>43</sup> Both narrators inhabit fixed spatial contexts, and yet Luiselli explores the effects of their temporal displacement. This space allows for the fluctuating temporality throughout the novel. If *relingos* are spaces of topographical absences, then they provide an aesthetic niche for narratives free from temporal or spatial boundaries. These spaces also metaphorically suggest that there is a spatial exploration within the process of writing or reading a novel that acts as an 'inverse process of restoration' in which the writer 'starts from the fissures and the holes'.<sup>44</sup> 'A writer', Luiselli declares, is 'a person who distributes silences and empty spaces'.<sup>45</sup> When comparing both Larsen and Luiselli's work, it is certainly possible to consider Harlem through the connotations inherent in the term *relingo*; as a marginalised area of Manhattan full of spaces and empty lots, open to numerous re-imaginings.

Rhodes-Pitts recognises the spaces and gaps present within Harlem, and points out that more can be gained from reading or mapping the empty lots of this urban area than by the spaces occupied by buildings. Much like Luiselli's observations, she later describes her own fascination with the 'blank disavowed spaces' (*relingos*) in modern Harlem which, she notes, 'provided something beyond veracity'.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Solà-Morales Rubió, p. 119.

<sup>42</sup> Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, p. 74.

<sup>43</sup> The original Spanish title for the novel, *Los Ingrávidos*, literally translates as *The Weightless Ones*.

<sup>44</sup> Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, p.78.

<sup>45</sup> Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, p.78.

<sup>46</sup> Rhodes-Pitts, p. 11.

According to Rhodes Pitts, ‘here was solace from the crowded landscape, both the physical crowdedness of buildings and people and the crowd of stories and histories [...] in the empty lots, my mind escaped history’.<sup>47</sup> Recognising the blank spaces is an intrinsic part of this process of reading a city space via a map, or a novel. The blank areas signal something beyond the limits of what the individual can physically see, or read.

Luiselli compares the construction of the novel to that of a map, and suggests that it provides a ‘spatial abstraction; the imposition of a temporal dimension’.<sup>48</sup> She argues that in their fixed nature, maps ‘don’t impose any limitations on the imagination of the person studying them. Only on a static, timeless surface, can the mind roam freely’.<sup>49</sup> She likens the role of the cartographer to that of an anatomist, and observes striking similarities between these roles, within which these individuals each attempt to trace ‘vaguely arbitrary frontiers on a body whose nature it is to resist determined borders, definitions and precise limits’.<sup>50</sup> Maps are constructed in much the same way as a novel: things are left out, accentuated, shaped, and envisioned through the perspective of the writer or cartographer. As Peter Turchi asserts, ‘even after we mark the page, there are blanks beyond the borders of what we create, and blanks within what we create. Maps are defined by what they include but are often more revealing in what they exclude’.<sup>51</sup> According to Certeau’s definition, ‘[w]hat the map cuts up, stories cut across [...]’. Boundaries are transportable limits and transportations of limits’.<sup>52</sup> The transnational narrative explored throughout *Faces in The Crowd* does indeed ‘cut across’ previous interpretations of the Harlem Renaissance. Moreover, Luiselli’s narrative highlights an intrinsic part of Harlem’s history, and demonstrates a dialogic connection between Harlem in its renaissance and post-renaissance eras.

Luiselli draws upon alternative cityscapes, resulting in an interchangeable, over-lapping transcultural discourse that echoes representations of Harlem in the 1920s. For David Luis-Brown, the Harlem Renaissance can be recognised as a movement of ‘postcolonial sensibility’ that embraced

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<sup>47</sup> Rhodes-Pitts, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, p. 19.

<sup>49</sup> Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2004), p. 29.

<sup>52</sup> Certeau, p. 129.

an alternative discourse of ‘hemispheric citizenship’.<sup>53</sup> He draws an intriguing connection between the Harlem Renaissance and the Mexican *indigenismo* movement.<sup>54</sup> Despite having been traditionally considered as distinctly separate movements amongst academic circles (in accordance with cultural, ethnic and nationalist categories), Luis-Brown argues that such restrictions fail to account for the multiple collaborations between writers and artists from New York and Mexico during the 1920s, which displayed converging interests that ‘cut across national lines’.<sup>55</sup> Luis-Brown, rather, considers Harlem’s transnational influence through a theoretical framework that re-appropriates the term ‘primitivism’, and extends it beyond common critical and ‘ahistorical’ limitations, and instead presents ‘the analysis of cross-national cultural flows under the shadow of empire, rather than as a term that solely denotes the limited horizons of stereotypes’.<sup>56</sup> An example of one such transcultural collaboration is apparent in the life and work of German-born artist, Winold Reiss, who travelled extensively between Mexico and New York, and was noted for his involvement in visualising the Harlem Renaissance. He was particularly interested in Harlem’s cityscape, and, in a wider context, the ‘function of art in metropolitan cities’.<sup>57</sup> His 1925 illustration, ‘Harlem Rooftops’, depicts a strikingly similar view to that later described by Luiselli’s female narrator: a vertical view of Harlem from the ‘roof terraces’ of buildings.<sup>58</sup> The illustration is a visual narrative told through a vertical perspective that effectively captures the spatial abstraction and disorientation to which Luiselli refers.

In alignment with Spivak’s initial reference to Harlem as a space of ‘no fixed borders’, it is clear that Harlem is a space that ultimately resists definition. Under the mark of modern gentrification, new empty (rented) spaces in Harlem take the form of modern *relingos*. Like the intersections that pervade Luiselli’s narratives, the Harlem Renaissance occupies a unique space in both cultural and literary terms. *Relingos* provide necessary spaces for the temporal displacement within *Faces in The Crowd* to develop.

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<sup>53</sup> David Luis-Brown, *Waves of Decolonization: Discourses of Race and Hemispheric Citizenship in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States* (London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 179, p. 177.

<sup>54</sup> *Indigenismo* is a term that is associated with the political ideology of Latin American countries and affirms the relation between indigenous minorities and the nation state.

<sup>55</sup> Luis-Brown, p. 148.

<sup>56</sup> Luis-Brown, p. 148.

<sup>57</sup> Frank Mehring, ‘The Visual Harlem Renaissance; or, Winold Reiss in Mexico’, *American Studies*, 55.4 (2010), 629-640 (p. 630).

<sup>58</sup> Luiselli, *Faces in the Crowd*, p. 10.

At the same time, Luiselli's recognition of empty spaces within Harlem offers a formal textual framework. While our spatial understanding of Harlem may be drawn from cartographical definitions, the temporal displacement of 1920s Harlem in Luiselli's contemporary texts reinforces the fact that there is still much to be drawn from Harlem's renaissance in contemporary discussion. In both aesthetic and cultural terms, Harlem remains an intersection.

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