

**Baroness Elsa and Her Anti-chic Dada:  
Locating Anarchist Fashion in Modernist Aesthetics**

Abstract for

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Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (1874 –1927), born Else Plötz in Germany who settled in Greenwich Village in 1913, is considered to be the mother of Dada and the first female proto-Dadaist to set foot on American territory (Gammel). Using fashion within modernist aesthetics as the focal point, this paper delves into how the Baroness recasts a sexual politics of radical style, which is situated in opposition to urban chic as a by-product of the capitalist and bourgeoisie metropolis. The Baroness's ten-year New York dwelling is distinguished by her experimental and outrageous literary and visual performance under the rubric of modernist avant-garde. Through her astounding artistic practices in everyday life — shaved head, black lipstick, tomato can bra, teaspoon earrings, and other unconventional adornments — for the Baroness, fashion became a conscious and necessary choice; a conscious act of self-fashioning or a manifestation of artistic expression of self. Her ambiguity as living work of art and performing irrationality (Jones; Wilson) formulates an anarchist subject who uses and subverts her corporal body as a spectacular revolt. She eventually delivers a cultural battle to fight against dominant elitist and masculinist urban aesthetics in the context of New York Dada in the early twentieth century. Using theories of fashion and the avant-garde, this paper argues that the Baroness's performative self-fashioning enables her body to become a gendered physical configuration that is both astonishing performance and politicized embodiment. Ultimately, her anti-chic maneuvers destabilize the mainstream bourgeois aesthetics of urban modernism.