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“A Modernist Home for Holly Golightly: From Fabricated Glamour to Functional Minimalism”

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Blake Edwards' 1961 film, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, which is based on Truman Capote's novella, tells the story of Holly Golightly, a girl trying to establish a glamorous identity in order to endure in the treacherous setting of New York City. Holly's original backwoods identity of Lula Mae haunts her as it comes with memories of her and her brother not having an authentic home in their youth. Holly's past and uncertain present cause her discomfort, and the persona she assumes—one of fabricated glamour—is representative of her desire for security. However, at times, her glamour is replaced with minimalist wardrobe choices and life decisions which allow her to be more comfortable and honest with herself. In these moments, she allows herself to understand her emotions and develop a relationship with Paul Varjack, someone who sincerely cares about her and her happiness. Consequently, Holly's actions and character traits align with certain aspects of modernism. In *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman describes modernists as individuals who are able to make a home for themselves in modernist turmoil (5). Holly Golightly looks to make a home, or discover where she belongs, in her own chaotic modernist world; she uses fabricated glamour to protectively mask herself because it allows her to redesign her identity and battle with her uncertainty. However, when she strives for a more minimalist image and mindset, she becomes her most functional and autonomous and finally achieves a more authentic sense of home and of identity.

The modernist movement became particularly prevalent in the years after WWI, but one can argue that modernism never truly ended as its literary themes of disillusionment, uncertainty,

and the struggle for individuality and identity continue to echo. Three modernist theorists, George Simmel, Judith Brown and Marshall Berman, can help one understand Holly's character composition and ultimate transformation. In "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Georg Simmel argues that occupants of modern cities are forced to think with logic instead of emotion in order to protect themselves because city life is incredibly impersonal and calculated by money and time. In *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form*, Judith Brown defines glamour, an essential trait of modernism, as a constructed fantasy that strategically shapes perceptions in order to make people and objects seem more enticing. Marshall Berman, in *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, explains that modernists, to create some form of autonomy and comfort, must endeavor to understand their settings and make a home for themselves in some way. He proclaims that modernists are brave enough to acknowledge that the modern world is one of both remarkable promise and risk. Holly ran away from her original home in Texas because she had no control over her situation there, and she has trouble making a home in the impersonal setting of New York City. The only piece she carries of her past is the hope for reuniting with her brother, who is in the Army. She even renames Paul, "Fred" because he reminds her of him, suggesting that Paul offers her the comfort of one of the only positive aspects of her former home. However, in her struggle to create a new home authentic to herself, she protectively masks and re-makes her fragmented identity with something quite different from her old self—glamour and the pursuit of money.

Minimalism, a movement or practice that finds functionality in the fragmentation of modernism, profoundly shaped modernist architecture as architects rejected complications and sought to find ways to deconstruct structures while also making them as functional as possible. One can relate Holly's attire and character traits to the sentiments of modernist architecture.

Hubert de Givenchy, the legendary designer who created Audrey Hepburn's wardrobe for the film, was known for his elegant architectural fashion designs. Take the iconic little black dress Holly wears the majority of the film—it is minimalist in its simple structure, but it symbolically stops Holly from being functional, or true to her identity, because she accessorizes it with fabricated glamour. She could be true to herself, even in her glamorous outfits; however, because her identity is already confused, the constructed glamour hinders her. Audrey Hepburn said that Holly's charm was “a jazzy façade she creates because basically she's a small town girl out of her depth” (qtd. in De La Hoz, 112). She uses glamour as protection against the modern city. Minimalism reflects the fatigue caused by the struggle for autonomy and refuge in the modern world. It allows for individuals to observe simplicity, and in return, perceive what is essential to humanity in the complicated world around them. While minimalism can be radical in its focus on the bare essentials, its message is redemptive in Holly's life of uncertainty, impersonality, and fabrication because it strips what is unneeded from the equation, glamour, and presents only what is essentially needed to function. While Holly's modernist complications reshape her identity and motivate her actions, minimalism will guide her to understanding of her identity, autonomy, and desire for true happiness and a home.

In the beginning of the film, Holly displays a jaded city-life attitude and tries to shield her disposition through the mask of glamour, tailor-made to provide her with false security in the unpleasantness of her true circumstances. When Paul meets his neighbor for the first time, Holly answers the door wearing a literal mask, a very glamorous sleeping mask with eyelashes stitched on it. Later in the scene, she explains why she has no furniture and a nameless cat: “I don't want to own anything until I can find a place where me and things go together” (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*). Her statement and apartment are examples of minimalism. However, one could

claim that Holly is actually just uncomfortable in her setting, and is struggling to create a home for herself. Her situation is not necessarily an example of functional minimalism because she refuses to own anything at all. Additionally, she says she goes to Tiffany's when she is afraid, but unsure of what, and describes this feeling as having "the mean reds" (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*). One can infer that she has some anxiety related to uncertainty of self and setting. Thus, she displays a disassociation with her own possessions yet aspires to observe glamorous material objects. Paul is confused about her fascination with the jewelry store, and she responds "nothing bad can happen to you at a place like that" (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*). She associates the store with safety. She feels unsafe in her identity, so she clings to something constructed and fantasy-like to redesign herself. Tiffany & Co. is arguably one of the most glamorous destinations in New York City and a perfect place for her to shield herself and find fleeting comfort.

Holly uses glamour to defend herself against her uncertainty about herself and her environment. Glamour is her tool to protect herself as it is the opposite of her past as Lula Mae, the version of herself which caused her to run away to New York City. Holly's behavior recalls Simmel's description of modern city life: "[...] The metropolitan type of man [...] develops an organ protecting him against the threatening current and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart" (Simmel 410). Simmel believes that in the cities of the modern world, people are forced to shield themselves by using their brain instead of their heart because they feel as if they are in a wasteland of blurred identities and strict impersonality. Holly, as a metropolitan woman, turns to glamour to protect herself from her past and confusing present. She latches on to the fantasy of glamour because it is the opposite of who she is and how she feels. It logically safeguards and masks her identity.

Furthermore, after this brief moment of letting Paul into her apartment and psyche, she continues her quest for protective glamour by putting on a more figurative mask: makeup and the perfect outfit which will portray her in the way she wishes to be seen in the midst of the uncomfortable, calculative modern city. While getting ready, she looks in the bathroom mirror and says, “I got to do something about the way I look.” In other words, she has got to put on her glamorous mask. She then moves to her vanity mirror, trying on her most showy pair of earrings. She explains that she can always tell what a man perceives about her by the kind of earrings he gives her. Then, she states, “The mind reels” (*Breakfast at Tiffany’s*). Her statement showcases her surprise that people can believe in the fantasy of the invented image of glamour and suggests that she herself does not buy into her own manufactured image. She then tells Paul that she is going to visit Sally Tomato, rumored mafia leader, in prison because she provides his lawyer with a “weather report” message (a coded message for Tomato’s drug ring) for 100 dollars a week. She also discusses other ways she makes money—by taking “50 dollars for the powder room” when dating men (*Breakfast at Tiffany’s*). Her ways of making money are not glamorous, yet her fabricated image keeps her glamorous and safe against her past self and the dangerous calculation of her modern world. She puts her makeup on (a mask), her sleekest black dress (the ultimate fabrication of her identity), her biggest hat (a shield), and sunglasses (another version of a mask). She quickly leaves to go out the door after preparing herself. She must continually run towards glamour to make it in the modern city that is full of hurt and promise, yet she has not found the promise it holds for her. Thus, she protects her identity from the city and its people with a glamorous mask. After she visits Tomato, in strong juxtaposition with her protective glamour, she allows herself to be vulnerable with Paul after using the fire escape to flee to his apartment to avoid her drunken date. Wearing only a minimal white robe, she bonds

with Paul over their similar ways of making money and their individual uncertainties—she misses her brother and he isn't sure if he is actually a writer. Holly actually says that they are friends. After this, she falls asleep with Paul but has a nightmare about her brother and abruptly leaves because she does not want to be any more vulnerable with Paul. While separated from her glamour, she allows herself to be comfortable with Paul and even assess her own emotions. However, she realizes that without the glamour, she is not protected from her own emotions.

Holly puts on her glamorous mask yet again when showcasing her party girl identity and mingling with the privileged city people, strangers who will never really know who she is, who will only see the intangible glamour she presents to them. She greets her party guests while painting her nails and wearing what seems to be a very fashionable towel, allowing her glamour to seem effortless. However, when she leaves the room, her “manager” tells Paul that Holly is a “real phony.” She eventually comes back to the party wearing her black dress accompanied with different accessories: an extravagant beaded necklace and an old-fashioned cigarette. Smoking carelessly, she mingles with the people she barely knows and abandons Paul, her only real friend at the party, to dance with a very rich man. Holly's fabricated glamour parallels Judith Brown's description of glamour. “Glamour is cold, indifferent, and deathly; it relies on abstraction, on the thing translated into idea and therefore the loss of the thing itself, curling away from early concerns as if a whiff of smoke” (Brown 5). Brown says that glamour is unconcerned with the thing it glamourizes and that it can only fashion superficial changes. The glamorous image Holly creates causes her to lose her true self. Her glamour, in return, does not validate her because it only reshapes her. Because of her uncertainty of self, she fabricates instead of accepting herself. Thus, she displays a need to flee from real human interaction with Paul because the vulnerability it would promote would threaten the image she has constructed.

Holly wants people to perceive her in a certain way in order to protect herself; however, right after the party sequence, the film's audience learns just how false Holly's glamour is. When Paul and Holly visit Sally Tomato, he reads from Holly's expenses ledger because he is trying to help her with her finances. He says that someone could write a heartbreaking book about her life and reads the contents of her ledger aloud: "Mr. Fitsimmons, powder room: 50 dollars, less eight dollars: repair one satin black dress, cat food: twenty-seven cents" (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*). Wearing her giant hat (her shield in the modern world) she tells him that he is making her blush, showcasing her uncertainty about her identity and way of life. The girl who allows complete strangers into her barren apartment for a huge party is the same girl who repairs her one black dress, the dress that represents her fabricated glamour. This illustrates that Holly lives a fairly simple and even sorrowful life, but relies on glamour to distort her life into something more intriguing. To further connect Holly to the concept of modernist glamour, one can examine Brown's theories of glamour's properties: "Glamour is both wispy and capacious: it is difficult to catch hold of, yet its effects pervade modern culture... Glamour is *both* elusive and generative form with the magical ability to shape and reshape objects before us, to make them better, more tantalizing, by pressing them into an inhuman dimension" (Brown 9). According to Brown, glamour has the ability to completely change the value and image of something; thus it is almost impossible to actually pinpoint where the glamour ends and the truth begins. Holly Golightly is much like the glamorous object Brown describes. All of these strangers at the party want to be her friend—or use her—because she presents a glamorous image that makes her inhuman and tantalizing. However, the image does not offer her a sense of belonging in the modern world. She is closest to functionality, or a feeling of belongingness, when she rejects glamour and strives for another aspect of modernism, minimalism.

Paul gets closest to Holly's true identity when she is her most minimalist and almost autonomous; she removes the glamour at times and displays a simple sense of style and a personality which allows her to reflect on her emotions. A prime example of this is the scene in which Holly sings and plays acoustic guitar on her fire escape—a symbol of escape from her uncertainty—while wearing a simple towel around her hair and a sweatshirt. She has only the essentials and is able to evoke her strongest emotions yet. Paul looks at her from a distance, only catching a glimpse of Holly's identity. She sings "Moon River," the film's theme song. Reflectively, she croons, "Moon river, wider than a mile / I'm crossing you in style someday / Oh, dream maker / You heartbreaker / Wherever you're going I'm going your way / Two drifters off to see the world / There's such a lot of world to see / We're after the same rainbow's end / Waiting round the bend / My huckleberry friend / Moon river and me" (Mancini and Mercer). Holly is able to understand her hindrance, hurt, and hope by simply singing to herself. She seemingly ponders her past home and current lack of a home. While the "two drifters" in the song may represent both Holly and Paul, they are also reminiscent of Holly's two identities: Lula Mae and Holly. She is on a quest to autonomously recover her identity and she gets closest at her most minimalist moments—moments when she is not wearing her glamorous mask.

In minimalist attire and song, she becomes more hopeful and understanding of her own needs and emotions. Berman's theories of the modernist movement can aid in analysis of Holly's behavior. He states, "At [glorious yet ominous modern] times like these, 'the individual dares to individuate himself.' On the other hand the individual desperately 'needs a set of laws of his own, needs his own skills and wiles for self-preservation, self-heightening, self-awakening, self-liberation'" (Fredrich Neitzsche qtd. in Berman 22). Berman says that modernists can reach autonomy by individualizing themselves and establishing their own set of rules for living in a



modernist world that is full of wondrous possibility and harrowing uncertainty. Holly, at times, does try to find the core of her identity through minimalism, casting aside the rules of glamour in order to understand her true self—the girl under the fabricated image of “Holly Golightly.” Her action of dressing down and singing is a way for her to be alone with her own emotions, and it is minimalist for her; it seems essential to her understanding of her own needs and allows her to therapeutically understand her discomfort. In return, her song seems to allow her comfort and peace.

However, one of the most glamorous things, money, gets in the way of Holly accepting a more peaceful minimalist life and allowing Paul, and herself, to see who she really is and what she needs to feel truly at home. Perhaps her quest for money is motivated by wanting to save money to reunite with her brother, but it seems more like self-sabotage because of her desire to remake her identity. Towards the middle of the film, Holly tells Paul about her ruined plans to marry the ninth richest man in America. Holly tells Paul, “I’d marry you for your money in a minute. Would you marry me for my money?” He replies, “In a minute” (*Breakfast at Tiffany’s*). In this scene, there is a stark contrast between Holly’s glamour-charged statement of wanting to marry Paul if he had money and her minimalist house-robe attire. She looks lovingly at Paul and even kisses him, suggesting that she actually loves him, but rejects him because of his lack of wealth and status. After their conversation, they spend the day roaming New York City and Holly displays authentic happiness with Paul. She even takes Paul to Tiffany’s. Their experience at the store contrasts with the opening scene of the film in which Holly glamorously looks through the Tiffany’s window alone and adorned in her sleek black dress, jewels, and sunglasses. The difference is that Holly seems comfortable with Paul. Paul provides her with happiness and security, not Tiffany’s. Later in the day, the two wind up stealing two costume masks from a

store and run down the street wearing the masks. Their carefree interaction is symbolic of them shielding their identities from everyone else in New York City and just being together, and it is minimalist in a way because they transform into what each other needs. Neither one is defined by anything—they are faceless but can still see each other. It isn't Holly's typical glamorous mask—it's honest and essential to her happiness. At the end of the day, they finally remove their masks and kiss. In their masking and unmasking, the two are able to block out the modern world around them and accept each other as a home in the chaos around them.

However, Holly continues to flee from her chance at a home and happiness with Paul in her pursuit of glamour and money because of the security she thinks they offer her. The morning after their day in New York, Paul finds Holly wearing the opposite of the costume mask, her glamorous sunglasses, while she is reading at the library about South America because she plans to marry the future president of Brazil. Paul tells her that he loves her and she disregards his feelings because she is still in the pursuit of glamour. Paul gives her a check for 50 dollars and says that it's "for the powder room." Symbolically, he suggests that he is no different than any other man to Holly even though he is and truly cares about her. She buys into the definiteness of money instead of allowing herself to have what she wants—a home with Paul in the uncertainty of modernity. Holly rejects Paul because her identity—or lack of identity—is molded by glamour, which is defined by her image and the value of money. She has to be calculative and cannot give into her own desire to be with Paul because the modern world makes her believe that she can only be validated through money. Simmel's theories on the restrictive design of modernism can be used to analyze Holly's fixation. He states, "Through the calculative nature of money a new precision, a certainty in the definition of identities and differences, and unambiguous in agreements and arrangements has been brought about in the relations of life-

elements—just as externally this precision has been effected by the universal diffusion of pocket watches” (Simmel 412). Simmel is explaining that in modernism, money runs almost everything; it defines everything—even the undefinable. In Holly’s case, money outlines her life and the version of glamour she is reaching to achieve. Thus, she refuses to truly embrace her desire to be with Paul, and seeks to marry a man she thinks she needs in order to continue to pursue glamour and be safe or comfortable in a modern world. In reality, her comfort starts with her acknowledgment of her true need to create an authentic home with simple happiness.

At the climax of the film, Holly is still pursuing her glamorous identity even though she knows she needs to eventually move towards minimalism in order to be finally comfortable in her life. Holly received word of her brother’s death and went away with her politician fiancé to recover. When she returns to New York City alone, she visits with Paul and winds up being arrested for her role as a messenger in Sally Tomato’s scheme. Adorned in her sunglasses, she is bailed out of jail by Paul. She immediately changes into her little black dress in the back of the taxi. Paul has collected all of her belongings and tells her that she needs to stay out of the public eye for a while. At this point, she has the bare minimum to survive because her glamorous identity has been completely thwarted. Instead of listening to Paul, she is ready to leave for Brazil. However, her fiancé has heard of her arrest, which has destroyed her social image, and has decided to call off the engagement by sending her a note. Before Paul reads the note, Holly reaches for her purse. She says, “A girl can’t read that sort of thing without her lipstick” (*Breakfast at Tiffany’s*). The lipstick is another symbol of the mask she wears to protect her true identity, which starts to show through when she becomes upset, and there is a struggle between the glamorous image she wants to maintain and the minimalist image she needs to maintain. She covers her black dress with a minimalist overcoat, making the dress the most minimal it has

ever been. A black dress is perhaps one of the major symbols of minimalism in fashion, but up until now, it has not been minimal for Holly. Holly always accessorizes it, putting it over the top. In this moment, the audience thinks she will perhaps remove herself from her fabricated glamour.

However, she quickly tries to recover her glamour, and she tells the taxi driver to go to airport because she plans to find another rich man in Brazil. She continues to reapply her lipstick, continuing to mask her identity. Paul says he will not let her leave and that he loves her. She eventually responds: “People don’t belong to people. I’m not gonna let anyone put me in a cage.” He says he just wants to love her and calls her by her name. She says, “I’m not Holly. I’m not Lula Mae either. I don’t know who I am. I am like Cat here. We’re a couple of no-name slobs. We belong to nobody and nobody belongs to us. We don’t even belong to each other.” She then abandons Cat on the side of the road. Paul gets out of the taxi and says, “People do belong to each other” because he believes relationships are one of the only chances for happiness in life. He proclaims that she is sticking herself in “a cage” because of her own fear, and that “no matter where [she] runs [she] just [ends] up running into [herself].” (*Breakfast at Tiffany’s*). Paul understands Holly’s glamour is fabricated and protective because he has seen her at her more vulnerable and minimalist moments. He knows she would feel safer in her own life if she could settle into her uncertainty and make herself at home by allowing herself what she truly wants: simple happiness with Paul instead of always running away towards glamour.

One can connect Paul’s understanding of Holly to Berman’s discussion of Michael Foucault’s “variations on the Weberian themes of the iron cage and human nullities whose souls are shaped to fit the bars.” Foucault argues that lack of freedom drives humanity to be placed in institutions—quite literally ending up caged. However, Berman explains that Foucault’s idea

“swallow[s] up any idea of modern life” because Foucault focuses too much on the psychological aspect of humans being mentally tormented by modernism. Berman further explains that modernists can accept the futility of life and still achieve comfort and avoid insanity (Berman 34). Holly’s glamorous image has reshaped her identity and her psychological view of herself, and in return, placed her in her own iron cage. She believes glamour and the pursuit of money serve her, but they do not. She is her own modern world, obstructing her own freedom. While she is not driving herself to insanity like Foucault expresses, she has lost touch with her true self. However, Holly Golightly eventually becomes more aligned with Berman’s hopeful ideal of modernists making a home even in the midst of uncertainty because she eventually rejects the glamorous image and pursues a form of modernist minimalism by running away from the hurt of the modern world and towards the promise of the modern world which offers her what she essentially needs.

The promise is shown through her finally acknowledging herself and her skewed identity, striving for a minimalism that allows her to live functionally even in the chaos of uncertainty. Earlier in the film, Holly and Paul have a ring engraved at Tiffany’s for ten dollars. When Holly is alone in the cab, she finally puts on the ring. The ring is from a crackerjack box that Holly’s ex-husband brought to New York City. The ring symbolizes Holly’s acceptance of her two identities. It represents her old identity because it came from her ex-husband, who is an emblem of her old “Lula Mae” self which she has tried so hard to erase. It also represents her “Holly” self because it was engraved at the glamorous Tiffany’s and it is a present from Paul from the day they spent in the city together. Upon her first meeting with Paul, she tells him “If I could find a real life place that made me feel like Tiffany’s then I’d buy some furniture and give the cat a name” (*Breakfast at Tiffany’s*). Her putting on the ring is symbolic for her ultimate realization

that she has found someone that makes her feel safe—Paul, who is symbolic of the minimalism she needs because her acceptance of him would allow her to take off her glamorous mask. She realizes that this will take away the glamorous shelter she has placed herself in, but she accepts it in an effort to make herself at home in modernism. Berman states, “To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are” (15). He believes modernists are anti-modernists as well. The bleak uncertainty of modernism threatens humankind, and humankind is aware. However, this same awareness should not hinder one from pursuing the promise of the modern world. Holly realizes her life is an utter mess in this scene and she accepts her two identities and begins to run towards her freedom.

Her freedom lies in making her own autonomous, minimalist home and accepting Paul. In her very minimalist overcoat, Holly runs out into the rain, flicking her cigarette (another image of glamour that she discards) on the pavement. Symbolically, the rain washes away her mask of glamour. Aiming for a more minimalist and functional version of modernism, she runs towards Paul, who is also wearing a minimalist overcoat, and asks where the cat is. She finds the cat and she hugs it tightly, accepting it as her own and as something that somewhat belongs to her now. She has found a sense of identity. She then kisses Paul, the two accepting each other as home in the midst of their turmoil. “Moon River” plays again over this scene, echoing those same hopeful lyrics of “Wherever you’re going I’m going someday / Two Drifters off to see the world” (Mancini and Mercer). They have found an identity in uncertainty and in each other and have made themselves comfortable. There is no final resolution in this scene, but there is a movement towards the notion of the more positive aspects of modernism. Berman states, “[...] I

define modernism as any attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernization, to get a grip of the modern world and make themselves at home in it” (Berman 5). He explains that in order to live in modernism, one must accept it and make oneself comfortable in it in some way.

Holly has been trying to achieve comfort; she just bought into the wrong image of modernism. She tried to make herself at home by constructing an obscure glamorous image she does not actually want, but thought she needed because it offered protection. What she truly wants—and needs—is a simpler place she can call home in the bleak uncertainty that modernism has dealt her. Maybe now that she has forsaken the false glamorous version of herself and embraced a more minimalist version of herself, she can functionally “buy some furniture and give the cat a name” because now she has a better grasp of her own names and identities, both Lula Mae and Holly, and what it means to make oneself at home, even in the discomfort of the modern world, which is full of hurt, uncertainty, impersonality, fabrication, and calculation. However, more importantly, it can be full of hope.

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