

Intermedial Modernism: Music, Dance, and Sound

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Abstract

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Intermedial Modernism: Music, Dance, and Sound examines how twentieth-century combinations of literature with sound-based arts like music, dance, and radio emerged from aesthetic negotiations with new media technologies. Such technologies—specifically phonography, electric amplification, modern stagecraft, and radiophonic broadcast—practically and conceptually integrated multiple artistic mediums and their meaning-making potentialities. I use the framework of intermediality, especially as utilized in word and music studies, to describe such integrations. Intermediality is a centuries-old practice of “making it new,” but what sets its twentieth-century iterations apart from those of Aeschylus or Monteverdi, I argue, is that they interpolate the acoustic effects, cultural practices, and expanded perceptual vocabularies affiliated with new media. By fully contextualizing case studies of opera, musicalized literature, expressive dance, and radio programs within a broader media ecology and by understanding the

role of stipulated sense modalities and listening practices, we can develop a new set of interpretive approaches that account for meaning-events occurring between and across semiotic operations and sensory registers. Drawing from recent work in sound studies and media studies, the dissertation situates various musico-poetic texts within the “first media age.”

The dissertation’s four chapters each present representative texts belonging to different intermedial configurations, ranging from 1891 to 1991, to illustrate the interdisciplinary combinations both technically and imaginatively enabled by new media. These texts include collaborations between William Walton and Edith Sitwell as well as Nicolas Nabokov and Stephen Spender, John Cage’s final opera, volumes by Jean Toomer and Langston Hughes, choreographic arts from Loïe Fuller and Florine Stettheimer, and radio works by Orson Welles and Dylan Thomas. In selecting texts and performances that center modernity’s ubiquitous mechanisms and materials, I have also selected ones by writers, composers, and artists typically considered marginal. Reorienting modernist studies according to things as mundane as the radio or cellophane has the energizing result of pressing against the canonical and historical boundaries of the period.

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Introduction

Co-Operations and Co-Evolutions

Intermediality is the phenomenon by which one medium takes on or is integrated with the qualities of another, thus situating the text between sense modalities and semiotic operations. Such an integration can take the shape of one art striving toward the conditions of another—recalling Walter Pater’s famous dictum that all arts aspire toward the condition of music (140)—or multiple arts deployed in a shared phenomenal space—as in opera, film, or graphic narrative—or a combination of these two. However, such aspirations or combinations do not by their very nature indicate the presence of an intermedial relationship between the arts. Meaning is an event of comprehension, and intermediality occurs when the artwork as a meaning-event draws from the representational and expressive capabilities of multiple mediums. It is in this sense a complex of compositional strategies and communicative registers—something a text *does* rather than something a text *is* or *has*. The question at the center of this dissertation is how can the intermedial configurations found in Anglo-American modernism—especially as related to sound-based performances like opera, jazz, expressive dance, and radio broadcast—help us to understand the relationships between interdisciplinary modernism and the social and technological features of modernity.

With the proliferation of new media like sound reproduction and amplification, electrical and synthetic stage technologies, and the radio came new considerations of how sound-based art and performance intersect with other means of representation. The phonograph record transformed an inscribed “writing” system into an audible phenomena; amplification and

electrification expanded and enforced the boundaries of spaces delineated by sound; electric lighting and synthetic materials extended the body's semantic worth in dance performance; and wireless radio transmission turned electromagnetism into a soundscape of intermixed speech, music, effects, interference, and silence. At the same time as these changes in the media ecology, intermediality proliferated in the lexical experiments of modernist opera libretti, the musicalization of Jazz Age literature, the choreography and stagecraft of expressive dance, and the emergent genre of the radio feature. New media are not wholly autonomous, fully formed mechanisms, but rather sites of entanglement between technological novelty, developing cultural practices, and protean popular ontologies. Such alterations to the perceptual vocabulary that new media helped precipitate became mutually imbricated in the aesthetic experimentation that recruited and interpolated the effects and operations of such technology. *Intermedial Modernism* argues that a significant number of twentieth-century combinations of literature with music, dance, and broadcast emerged from negotiations with technologies that themselves integrated multiple mediums and their meaning-making operations. By focusing on four sites—opera, jazz, dance, and radio—through multiple representative case studies, I model interpretive approaches suited for interdisciplinary texts and illustrate the extent to which new media technology is bound up with intermedial combinations between literary modernism and music, dance, and sound.

1. Defining Intermediality

The first recorded usage of the word “intermedia” was by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1812 “to define works which fall conceptually *between media* that are already known” and to describe allegory as an “intermedium” between person and personification (qtd. in Petermann

16). While his application of the term feels idiosyncratic or even misplaced, the fundamental principle of works between known media—suggesting the intermedial text as somehow previously unknown—approximates intermediality’s larger applicability, especially in modernist studies. Much later, Dick Higgins used the term *intermedia* to describe the work created by the American Fluxus artists of the 1960s and 70s,¹ but it was not until the 1990s that intermediality studies first began to trace the outlines of the discipline that informs this dissertation.

Emerging predominantly from German-speaking countries thanks to the work of Irina O. Rajewsky, Ulrich Weisstein, Ingeborg Hoestry, and Claus Clüver,² intermediality studies inspired several scholarly conversations across Europe but has been largely invisible in North American contexts. Rajewsky, in a 2005 article that takes stock of the first decade of intermediality studies, both its successes and shortcomings, writes:

From its beginning, “intermediality” has served as an umbrella-term. A variety of critical approaches make use of the concept, the specific object of these approaches is each time defined differently, and each time intermediality is associated with different attributes and delimitations. The specific objectives pursued by different disciplines (e.g., media studies, literary studies, sociology, film studies, art history) in conducting intermedial research vary consistently. (“Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation” 44)

A plurality of definitions and approaches yields a broad range of intersecting and occasionally contradicting versions of what is in name a single discipline. This is especially evident in the

¹ According to Higgins, *intermedia* includes mediums that are “fused conceptually” with one another, as in the case of sound poetry, abstract calligraphy, and concrete poetry (25). *Intermedia* as a genre includes works of art that make distinctions between the mediums comprising the work impossible to outline. Sound poetry fuses non-referential sound and language to the extent that there is no discernible difference, no point at which one medium ends and another begins. Opera, he contends, is not an example of *intermedia* because the audience maintains an ongoing awareness of the overall mixed media performance as comprised of discrete components: music, text, drama, and *mise en scène*.

² See Rajewsky’s *Intermedialität* (2002), Clüver’s “Inter textus/Inter artes/Inter media” (2001), and Hoestry and Weisstein’s edited collection of essays *Intertextuality: German Literature and Visual Art from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century* (1993). Intermediality as discussed in these texts is applicable to literary studies, art history, and musicology, among other fields.

most recent work by Lars Elleström, which attempts a broad-reaching systematization of intermediality studies. *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics Among Media* (2014) begins with the assertion that “all media are multimodal and intermedial in the sense that they are composed of multiple basic features and are understood only in relation to other types of media” (2) and goes on to theorize how those relations and understandings can be discussed. His article “Material and Mental Representation: Peirce Adapted to the Study of Media and Arts” (2014) furthers this ambition by describing an adaptable system to the operations of intermedial semiotics. The result of these ambitions is a sprawling taxonomy of signs and their interrelationships that is limited in its practical application toward a reading practice. I avoid navigating the early work of German intermediality theorists and the more expansive theories of Elleström and instead draw predominantly from the definition and application of intermediality within word and music studies in order to develop a more precise methodology and vocabulary.

The discipline-specific interpretation of intermedial relations and combinations for word and music studies is derived largely from Werner Wolf’s *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (1999). His book draws from the principle of intermediality in order to describe relationships between the musical and the linguistic, and therefore offers a valuable means of interrogating the connections between the sonic and the literary. Though explicitly concerned with fiction modeled after music’s forms and expressive features, thus taking its name from Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* (1928), Wolf’s survey describes intermediality in the general sense as “the participation of more than one medium of expression in the signification of a human artefact” (1). What I find most valuable in this definition is the emphasis on participation and the active role of multiple mediums—again the

principle of intermediality, like the meaning-event itself, as a complex of verbs, not nouns—as well as the stress placed on signification. While “signification” might unproductively limit the semiotic activity available to different mediums, the fact that the participation described is that of communicating meaning is worth paying attention to. Intermediality is more than co-presence; it is semiotic co-operation.

Intermediality has been fundamental to the discipline of word and music studies Wolf helped to define, having been taken up and repurposed by the other major founders of the discipline—Peter Dayan, Walter Bernhart, Lawrence Kramer, and Steven Paul Scher—as well as the younger generation, including Axel Englund, Yayoi Uno Everett, and Emily Petermann.³ As pivotal as Wolf’s work and word and music studies more broadly has been in theorizing intermedial relations between arts, intermediality remains a promiscuous term even within the discipline. Wolf’s focus on musicalized fiction, Bernhart’s on narrativized music, and Scher’s on music and text together all utilize intermediality as a framework to theorize how such texts are to be interpreted. The result is a term that seems both overly vague in its application across numerous contexts and overly specialized in its deployment by a small group of scholars working in an idiosyncratic discipline. While intermediality as developed within word and music studies is a useful interpretive tool, its usefulness is limited without a more precise vocabulary for the different intermedial configurations we encounter. Therefore, I propose four intermedial

³ See Scher’s *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries* (1992), Kramer’s *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (2002) and *Expression and Truth: On the Music of Knowledge* (2012), Bernhart’s “Narrative Framing Schumann’s Piano Pieces” (2006), and Dayan’s *Music Writing Literature: From Sand via Debussy to Derrida* (2006) and *Art as Music, Music as Poetry, Poetry as Art: From Whistler to Stravinsky and Beyond* (2011), Petermann’s *The Musical Novel: Imitation of Musical Structure, Performance, and Reception in Contemporary Fiction* (2014), Everett’s *Reconfiguring Myth and Narrative in Contemporary Opera: Osvaldo Golijov, Kaija Saariaho, John Adams, and Tan Dun* (2015), and Englund’s “Intimate Practices: Music, Sex, and the Body in J.M. Coetzee’s *Summertime*” (2017).

configurations in which mediums of expression can participate and around which the chapters to follow will be organized.

The first axis along which my proposed four configurations are organized is the nature of the relationship between mediums. The point of contact shared by the arts can be described as either interartistic or intersemiotic in nature. Describing the difference between these two forms of interrelatedness can clarify the various forms intermediality can take as well as the different ambitions that often underlie moves toward combining the arts. I take the name for the interartistic configurations from Dayan's study on interart relations: *Art as Music, Music as Poetry, Poetry as Art: From Whistler to Stravinsky and Beyond* (2011). Dayan contends that interartistic relations are predicated on a fundamental incommensurability between the arts; art can never operate and communicate as music does, nor can music as poetry, nor poetry as art. However, by transposing the features of one medium to another, the artist accesses a means of invention that remains legible to the audience. As Dayan describes it, this process of transposition "allows the artist to maintain the existence of a 'truth' in art, by presenting that second medium as possessing precisely those qualities of measurability, of scientific repeatability, which the work of art in its primary medium refused" (45). What is most important to the interartistic configuration as an available intermedial practice is its legibility. One example of this configuration is Thomas De Quincey's "Dream-Fugue" from *The English Mail Coach* (1849) which uses the fugue structure to organize an essay into a sequence of subjects, answers, and free counterpoint. The essay extends nineteenth-century prose forms, but its Baroque musical form offers inventiveness through a coherent structure, thus maintaining intelligibility.

The interartistic configuration utilizes a relationship between arts to create understanding—using a foreign medium to make it new while still making it knowable—but the

intersemiotic configuration stems from a pursuit of the unknown qualities shared between arts, the commonalities beyond intelligible semiotic similarities and known sense modalities. I use the term intersemiotic with reference to Roman Jakobson's definition of intersemiotic translation: "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems" (233). In this process of translation, meaning exceeds the borders of the two sign systems and spans mediums in order to occur across, between, and within them both. The interartistic sees one medium as offering a sign system and set of expressive conventions to another, but the intersemiotic figures the relationship between mediums as indicating an emergent property that exceeds both. It operates by evocation, allusion, and suggestion that deepens and defamiliarizes the mechanisms by which understanding is achieved. If De Quincey seeks the compositional principle of musical counterpoint to organize his dream-filled prose, an intersemiotic approach would seek the point between arts at which organization and intelligibility begin to dissolve. The musical form of De Quincey's fugal modernizes but systematizes his essay, but the fugal structure at work in something like Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) suggests an imaginative resonance between narrative and musical composition—a resonance expressed through perceptible shared qualities, not legible shared forms. There are no fugal subjects and answers in Woolf's novel, but there is a sustained treatment of intersubjectivity as a kind of counterpoint and interweaving of audible themes. Her ambition is not to reformulate the novel as a musical composition, but rather to use the shared qualities of music and prose to examine the inarticulate features of communication, consciousness, and interpersonal experience. Understanding which of these configurations is at play in a given text is more than an academic exercise; it is the first step in developing a grounded and appropriate interpretive approach to a given text. Much ink has been spilled arguing over whether the "Sirens" episode of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) follows a fugal structure

throughout the chapter or if the *fuga per canonem* technic of the episode is merely a musical suggestion.⁴ Determining which intermedial configuration is being deployed—a determination beyond the purview of this introduction—would potentially resolve many of these debates.

The distinction between the interartistic and intersemiotic configurations corresponds to other distinctions that have been drawn in describing artistic interrelations, including Brad Bucknell's evaluation of the two operations of musical aesthetics in literary modernism. In *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics: Pater, Pound, Joyce, and Stein* (2001), he describes the first approach as based on the operas of Richard Wagner, in which music supplies text with “a formal ideal, a sense of art's potential integrity which suggests that the aesthetic object can mark out a space beyond the quotidian” (24). The other approach, based on the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé, “joins music and literature not so much at the level of their transcendence, but at the level of their obscurity, in precisely the place where they do not speak” (32), in the shared semiotic activities that resist our attempts at systematizing them through meta-discourse. David Roberts draws a similar distinction between Wagner and Mallarmé in *The Total Work of Art in Literary Modernism* (2011). He writes of how, for Wagner, combinations of music, dance, and poetry “accomplish the transposition into the living presence of performance. With Mallarmé, by contrast, the transposition accomplished by dance, music, and poetry consists of dematerialization, abstraction and generalization, understood as the purification of the world

⁴ David Cole in “Fugal Structure in the ‘Sirens’ Episode of *Ulysses*” (1973) argues for the presence of a perpetually repeated though entirely atonal fugue, and Nadya Zimmerman in “Musical Form as Narrator: The Fugue of the Sirens in James Joyce's *Ulysses*” (2002) systematically traces each fugal episode of the chapter. Sebastian Knowles in *The Dublin Helix: The Life of Language in Joyce's Ulysses* (2001), however, simply dismisses the fugal structure of the chapter as a “bogus statement” (167) while Zach Bowen in *Bloom's Old Sweet Song: Essays on Joyce and Music* (1995) describes the opening passage of the episode as an overture. Because fugues do not have overtures, he argues, the chapter simply cannot be considered a fugue. A list of studies on either side of this debate could be increased nearly ad infinitum.

from the contingencies of matter, that is, from chance” (133). Music in the Wagnerian/interartistic configuration participates as a formalizing and aestheticizing presence that orders meaning, while in the Mallarméan/intersemiotic configuration it operates by quality and suggestion that deepens meaning.

So far, I have only used monomedial works as illustrating examples: De Quincey’s essay, and Woolf’s novel. These examples belong to one side of the other dividing axis along which I formulate intermedial configurations: transmediality and multimediality. Transmediality is the phenomenon by which one medium, as in prose, deploys the qualities and forms of a foreign medium, as in music. The result of that combination would be musicalized prose. Therefore, there are two available configurations for transmediality: interartistic transmediality, as in De Quincey’s “Dream-Fugue,” and intersemiotic transmediality, as in Woolf’s *The Waves*. In both examples, intermediality is apparent in a text belonging to a single medium that utilizes the potentialities of another.

Multimediality describes the same integration of semiotic operations and sense modalities but when multiple arts are deployed within the same phenomenal space. For instance, Carlo Gesualdo’s madrigals, such as “Moro, lasso, al mio duolo” and “Beltà, poi che t’assenti,” both published in 1611, employ an expanded harmonic vocabulary toward emulating the operations of irony and oxymoron working within the poems. In this multimedia work Gesualdo’s compositional practice expands and develops so that the music participates in the rhetoric of the overall composition. In doing so, he modernizes his harmonic vocabulary but uses verbal irony as a model that makes such expansion and invention intelligible. The result is interartistic multimediality. One of the earliest examples of the intersemiotic multimedial configuration is the *Quem queritis* trope, an anonymously authored piece of sung text that was interpolated into the

Introit of the Easter Mass. While troping—the addition of new music to pre-existing chants—was a common practice in medieval liturgical music, this trope was sung as a dialogue before Christ’s tomb and was, as early as 980 AD, performed as a drama (Winn 69), providing an early precursor to the sung drama that would later become opera. In this brief instance of early intermediality, neither music, text, nor drama is used to conventionalize or systematize the other, but rather the three become undifferentiated and the principles by which each one operates collapse into a single instance where all three mediums co-constitute one another.

The case of word and music relations raises a significant issue regarding musical semiotics, an issue that must be addressed before continuing. A substantial discipline within musicology is dedicated to thinking through the possibilities and operations of musical signs. While this discipline has yielded several truly impressive texts that propose thorough methods of describing the workings of those signs,⁵ to pursue musical semiotics too far in the context of this study would be distracting and unproductive. Suffice to say that *meaning* as I use the term is not synonymous with signification. Discernible musical forms, emotive gestural arcs, tone-color qualities, as well as collectively registered affective responses are all meaningful insofar as they initiate intersubjective understanding of expressive and/or representational events.

The examples I have used toward defining intermediality and its four configurations

⁵ See Robert Hatten’s *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (1994), Raymond Monelle’s *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music* (1992), Nicholas Cook’s *Analyzing Musical Multimedia* (1998), and Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff’s *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (1983). These books vary in approach from adapting conceptual metaphor to musical analysis to applying Chomsky’s generative theory of grammar to tonal compositions. Texts that adapt Charles Sanders Peirce’s theory of signs to music are also worth highlighting. Among them are Naomi Cumming’s *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification* (2000), Thomas Turino’s “Peircean Thought As Core Theory For A Phenomenological Ethnomusicology” (2014) and “Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music” (1999), and Stephen Rumph’s “Fauré and the Effable: Theatricality, Reflection, and Semiosis in the *melodies*” (2015).

range from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance to romanticism to modernism, and they demonstrate the way in which intermediality is not exclusive to any single historical or national body of work. Instead, the integration of different mediums offers an almost endlessly adaptable means of making it new, of elaborating the meaning-events available to a text and demanding an expanded set of interpretive faculties brought to bear on that text. A study concerned with the history of intermediality would begin with the plays of Aeschylus and continue to web-based projects of the twenty-first century, but this study is concerned with the features of modernist intermediality that make it unique as well as how the analysis of intermedial texts can further elucidate the conditions of modernity.

2. Signs and Signals

Intermedial modernism is a category encompassing intermedial texts that negotiate the impacts of the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century media ecology⁶ as they relate to artistic combinations. It is both a way of describing how texts interpolate the operations of new media into the communicative capacities of their constituent arts as well as a means of theorizing certain causes and conditions unique to modernity as integral to the interdisciplinary texts of the period. The argument that the case studies in each of the following four chapters makes is that

⁶ The theory of the media ecology is useful in that it describes the study of media as a study of environments. Carlos Scolari helpfully extends the metaphor of media as environments when he writes that “media ecology tries to find out what roles media force us to play, how media structure what we are seeing or thinking, and why media make us feel and act the way we do” (205). He traces this theory back to earlier media theorists like Neil Postman, who writes that “technological change is not additive; it is ecological” (qtd. in Scolari 205), Marshall McLuhan who argues that media ecology “means arranging various media to help each other so they won’t cancel each other out, but buttress one media with another” (*Understanding Me* 271), and Chris Nystrom who describes media ecology as the study of “complex communication systems as environments” (1).

the intermedial configurations found within modernism are unique in that they are responses to and engagements with new media that are themselves intermedial. The media ecology of the late nineteenth century and throughout much of the twentieth is remarkable for the emergence of technological means of storage and dissemination that combined and integrated previously conceptually separate communicative, expressive, and representational methods. In intermedial works ranging from modernist opera to Harlem Renaissance poetry, from expressive dance to radio drama, we see media technology and its associated practices incorporated into the texts and performances themselves, suggesting that interdisciplinary modernism is inextricably bound up with modernist new media.

Following scholarship like David Trotter's *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain Between the Wars* (2013), I understand modernism as a constellation of aesthetic extremes closely related to the multiple media technologies that emerged alongside and interpenetrated such artistic experimentation. Before proceeding further, it will be beneficial to describe the new media of modernism, both literally and conceptually. What exactly were the new pieces of technology that reorganized the activities of meaning-making and what exactly makes a new piece of technology "new media"? Media encompass more than the devices and mechanisms but also their surrounding contexts—including how these mechanisms are used, misused, understood, and misunderstood. What makes new media *new* is less the novelty of the technology and more the expansion of the perceptual vocabulary and the epistemic expansions and disruptions their use potentiates.⁷ Friedrich Kittler memorably puts it: "A medium is a

⁷ Though it does not play an integral role in *Intermedial Modernism*, the discipline of media archaeology is worth mentioning. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka explain that "media archaeologists have concluded that widely endorsed accounts of contemporary media culture and media histories alike often tell only selected parts of the story, and not necessarily correct and relevant parts. Much has been left out of negligence or ideological basis" (3). Geert Lovink

medium is a medium. As the sentence says, there is no difference between occult and technological media” (*Discourse Network 1800/1900* 229). By taking this conflation seriously—understanding media less as a set of technologies and more as a set of imaginative considerations and engagements—I aim to account for Lisa Gitelman’s admonition: “If there is a prevailing mode in general circulation today, I think it is a tendency to naturalize or essentialize media—in short, to cede to them a history that is more powerfully theirs than ours” (*Always Already New* 1). Expansions of the perceptual vocabulary are, therefore, not results of the technology alone but rather of social and artistic negotiations with that technology, negotiations that become even more apparent in the texts in which that technology plays a role.

Though none of them is explicitly concerned with intermediality as I am here, critical works concerned with media and modernism help to direct, shape, and enrich the attention I pay to modernism’s interpretations and interpolations of new media. Most of these theorists position themselves in accordance with Walter Benjamin’s assertion that “during long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence” (216), which is to say that the experience and understanding of sensory material is subject to how that material is produced and disseminated. Michael North’s evaluation of modernism places this production and dissemination at the center of what defines the period. “That there should be some significant relation between aesthetic modernism and new media,” he writes, “seems true almost by definition. Modernism, after all, stakes its initial claim to fame on new modes and new methods, innovations so drastic they seem not just to change the old arts but to invent new and

describes it as a discipline of reading against the grain (11). Siegfried Zielinski describes media archaeology as *anarchaeology* and claims that “the body of anarchaeological studies should form a *variantology* of the media” (7). *Intermedial Modernism* is by no means a study in media archaeology, though the studies’ ethos is very much at work in this dissertation.

unrecognizable ones” (*Camera Works* v). Mark Goble, Katherine Biers, and David Trotter also all expertly explore the intersection of technology as mediating experience and experience as itself a mediation of the world by way of the senses.⁸ The most useful of modernist media studies in terms of examining the relationships between technology and artistic combinations is Julian Murphet’s *Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American Avant-Garde* (2009).⁹ “By pursuing the proposition that writers of the early Anglo-American avant-garde behaved as if new media were ‘causing’ the series of formal and technical breaks internal to their work,” he writes, “this study seeks to literalize, for critical purposes, a new myth of cultural modernism—that relations among the media governed the material complexities of modernist forms” (2). While his ambitions are greater than my own, we are in alignment insofar as I am interested in tracing how new media technology appears to have caused or inspired aesthetic and material experimentation. Murphet’s focus is primarily on visual media and is concerned with modernism’s view of the materiality of language, its non-signifying thingliness. In my case, I am concerned with aural media and how mediated sound and its related technologies did more than treat language as opaque, but rather as situated in a network of other interpenetrating means of creating intelligibility.

To borrow a phrase of Trotter’s, intermedial modernism is a negotiation of signs and signals (“Modernism’s Media Theory” 7). As new media technologies proliferated and the soundscape of modernity became marked by modulations in electromagnetic signals, by alterations in prearranged sonic codes, and by transmissions through currents, waves, or

⁸ See Goble’s *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (2010), Biers’ *Virtual Modernism: Writing and Technology in the Progressive Era* (2013), and Trotter’s “Modernism’s Media Theory” (2016), an edited version of the introduction to a forthcoming book-length project provisionally given the same title.

⁹ The similarity in titles between Murphet’s book and this dissertation is very much intentional.

inscriptions seemingly lacking in semantic content, meaning-making events increasingly demanded novel technology in order to be comprehended as meaningful. Much of modernism's new media were themselves intermedial—demanding the interpretive practice suited to a “foreign” medium—and I interrogate the cultural and aesthetic practices that grew up around four primary components of an intermedial media ecology. First, I take up the most iconic piece of aural media within modernism: the phonograph. Sound reproduction technology, including Thomas Edison's phonograph, Emile Berliner's gramophone, and Eldridge R. Johnson's Victrola, utilized an inscription to make audible phenomenon reproducible. Music could be captured as a line written onto wax, shellac, or vinyl, thus dislodging the music from its original spatiotemporal setting and recontextualizing it among a new set of visual, spatial, and aural features. This brought aurality into new forms of contact with other sense modalities and their associated modes of attention. Second, I investigate the evolution in the American soundscape that began in the mid-1920s with the transition from acoustic to electrical amplification. While early phonography depended on horns and other acoustical means of amplification, the presence of electrical amplification and playback made sound reproduction all the more portable. With its increased portability and increased volume, music was mobilized toward the creation and affirmation of sonic spaces. Musical practices, especially African American forms like blues and jazz, were no longer solely audible phenomena but events that sounded out the mutability of visual markers and cultural spaces. Third, I turn to dance, especially solo and expressive dance, to describe how it was bound up with music and undergoing an equally as profound aesthetic sea-change within modernism. I examine the role of new media technology in the form of electric stage lighting and costumes as prosthetic extensions of the body's semantic worth. New media in the context of dance performance made movement a kind of corporeal sign system, an

intelligible mode that introduced a new vector in the intersecting methods of onstage expression and representation. Finally, I study a ubiquitous feature of the twentieth-century soundscape: radio. Wireless transmission was not simply the broadcasting of a human voice, of music, of sound effects, or even of static and interference. Instead, it was a sonic phenomenon comprised of all these audible events. Because they remained in continual overlapping and interpenetrating co-presence, the interpretive strategies brought to bear on these sounds—the connections made by the listener between the sounds heard and the reality to which they referred—also overlapped and interpenetrated. These four primary features of the modernist media ecology—reproduction, electrification, movement, and broadcast—each initiated reconsiderations not only of how meaning is stored, encoded, and shared, but of how those processes of storing, encoding, and sharing multiplied the processes by which meaning is communicated. The proliferation of signals is bound up with the proliferations of signs, and modernism can be studied as a network of writers, composers, dancers, and artists who responded to these co-evolutions.

Because my focus is predominantly on aural media within modernism, I draw from the methodologies of sound studies and the contributions of those who have focused on the soundscapes and aesthetic negotiations of the twentieth century's evolving sonic environment.¹⁰ Sound studies helpfully triangulates technology, perception, and social stipulations in how sonic

¹⁰ In the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld write: “Sound studies has become a vibrant new interdisciplinary field with many different, yet overlapping, strands. Among the areas involved are acoustic ecology, sound and soundscape design, anthropology of the senses, history of everyday life, environmental history, cultural geography, urban studies, auditory culture, art studies, musicology, ethnomusicology, literary studies, and STS [science and technology studies]. New fields of study always come with competing definitions of what should be studied, and sound studies is no exception. Each strand conceptualizes its topic and thus the reality it constructs as its proper subject in different ways” (7). I do not engage with every variant and application of the discipline, though I quote Pinch and Bijsterveld here in order to emphasize its flexibility.

phenomena are discussed. It was initiated in large part by Bruce R. Smith's *The Acoustic World of Early Modern Europe: Attending to the O-Factor* (1999) which asserts and demonstrates how the sonic environment helped to condition subjecthood and lived experience. It builds from, as much of the sound studies discipline does, R. Murray Schafer's *The Tuning of the World* (1977). In his book, Schafer describes his theory of the soundscape, a theory that is usefully adapted in Emily Ann Thomson's *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (2004). In it she writes:

Like a landscape, a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment; it is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world. The physical aspects of a soundscape consist not only of the sounds themselves, the waves of acoustical energy permeating the atmosphere in which people live, but also the material objects that create, and sometimes destroy, those sounds. A soundscape's cultural aspects include scientific and aesthetic ways of listening, a listener's relationship to their environment, and the social circumstances that dictate who gets to hear what. A soundscape, like a landscape, ultimately has more to do with civilization than with nature, and as such, it is constantly under construction and always undergoing change. (1-2)

Here we encounter the ongoing entanglement between the mechanisms and the social forces that direct and shape the uses and understandings of those mechanisms, an entanglement especially pronounced in the twentieth century. As in media studies, sound studies does not examine sensory experience in isolation, but rather as socially and historically conditioned. Another exemplary engagement with the social as well as the technological in modernism is Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2003). In describing how sound reproduction technologies and their corresponding listening practices and interpretive strategies co-evolve, he writes:

As there was an Enlightenment, so too was there an 'Ensoniment.' A series of conjunctures among ideas, institutions, and practices rendered the world audible in new ways and valorized new constructs of hearing and listening [...] In the modern age, sound and hearing were reconceptualized, objectified, imitated, transformed, reproduced, commodified, mass-produced, and industrialized. (2)

Hearing, especially within modernism, is never hearing alone, but rather a mode of perception weighted with social, political, historical, and economic forces. Adrian Curtin describes what is at stake in sound studies more succinctly when he writes that “sounds, especially human-authored sounds, are often ideologically coded and are integral to social formations and identity constructions” (4). Avoiding a techno-hierarchical perspective, sound studies frames the audible as always already altered and altering. The intelligibility of amplified, reproduced, and mediated sound escapes an inalterable sign system in that it enters into the conjunctions of ideas and practices that direct and shape understanding. Therefore, if any insight into intermediality within modernism is to be gained, its study must account for the contemporary technologies—and the formations and constructions entangled with them—that modified the production and dissemination of meaningful content in addition to relationships between the arts as a strictly aesthetic concern.

In one of the most comprehensive and impressive interdisciplinary surveys of modernism, Daniel Albright describes modernism as a “*testing of the limits of aesthetic construction*” (*Putting Modernism Together* 5). By describing the period as such, he accounts for everything from Futurism, to Dada, to Vorticism, to Surrealism, to Primitivism, and beyond. While I make no claims as to a similarity in scope, my own study examines one particular through-line in how modernists tested the limits of aesthetic construction: testing the relationships between the arts as part of a response to the changing twentieth-century media ecology and audible soundscape. By following this thread across multiple case studies in four primary areas, I synthesize three methodologies found in interdisciplinary modernist studies: word and music studies, media studies, and sound studies. In doing so, I extend the contributions

of scholars like Josh Epstein, Eric Prieto, and Juan Suárez¹¹ by recognizing connections between musico-literary experimentation, technological invention, and the soundscape's alteration. Each chapter pursues one of the four primary components of modernist intermediality by way of a historical overview of technological and cultural changes followed by close readings of representative texts that demonstrate intermedial responses to those changes. Within each chapter, I include works that belong to the interartistic and intersemiotic configurations in order to illustrate the variety of combined modes of comprehension that new media potentiated. Because these texts are selected according to major modifications in the media ecology and their interpolation of those media's intermedial potentialities—as opposed to received boundaries of Anglo-American modernism—my study covers a broad timeframe. Spanning 1891-1991, these texts nonetheless emerge from the definition of intermedial modernism that I have described. My goal is not to diminish the usefulness of modernism as an aesthetic or historical designation, but rather to demonstrate how a designation developed by way of the criteria I have laid out productively presses against what have been thought of as the period's borders.

Chapter One examines the role of phonography in twentieth-century opera. Though phonography dislodged the musical component from the opera—thus seeming to cut against the genre's multimedial configuration—the fact that this component became rendered as an inscribed line and kind of writing system introduced new considerations of the relationships between text and music. This reconsideration inspired both intersemiotic treatments of musico-dramatic intermediality, as in the case of William Walton and Edith Sitwell's *Façade: An Entertainment* (1923), as well as interartistic works, as in Nicolas Nabokov and Stephen

¹¹ See Epstein's *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* (2014), Prieto's *Listening In: Music, Mind, and the Modernist Narrative* (2002), and Suárez's *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (2007).

Spender's *Rasputin's End* (1958). This chapter also elucidates parallels between the intersemiotic and interartistic configurations and the Wagnerian and Mallarméan versions of the total work of art that Bucknell describes. In doing so, I demonstrate how music, media, and intermediality can be braided together to create a new way of thinking through modernist opera. John Cage's final work, *Europera 5* (1991), extends these correspondences to such an extreme that the work offers a kind of elegy for twentieth-century sound reproduction technology and the total work of art that the technology helped reconceptualize. Herbert Lindenberger, in characterizing modernist opera, writes that "much operatic modernism consists of approximations of opera rather than what audiences have customarily viewed as full-blown opera" (175). Approximations like these include works that are consciously positioned in relation to a historical repertory and thus make for performances that are anti-theatrical, anti-operatic, or quasi-operatic in nature, therefore making room within the category of "opera" for performances like *Façade* and *Europera 5*. Despite the relatively obscure status of works like *Façade*, *Rasputin's End*, and *Europera 5*, I argue that phonographic operas like these offer valuable case studies that extend late nineteenth-century conceptions of the total work of art into the twentieth-century media ecology and, in the process, reflect the variety of semiotic convolutions modernist opera reckoned with.

While Chapter One explores twentieth-century multimediality on the opera stage, Chapter Two examines transmediality in poetry and prose, specifically African American modernist texts that engage with spirituals, blues, jazz, and bebop. I contend that works from the Harlem Renaissance and beyond, specifically Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923) and Langston Hughes' *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) and *Ask Your Mama: Twelve Moods for Jazz* (1961), reflect interpolations of black musical forms as much as the effects of aural media like player

pianos, jukeboxes, and stereophonic sound. Drawing from scholars like Alexander Weheliye and Fred Moten, I examine the technosonic qualities of African American music—the ways in which it negotiates the (mis)uses and (mis)understandings of aural media in its production and reception—and trace these same qualities in black musicalized literature. Toomer’s *Cane*, divided across the rural South and the urban North, is also divided across two distinct soundscapes: the acoustic realm of folk song and spirituals and the electric spaces of jazz clubs and city streets. The way in which the stories and poems that comprise his hybrid text explore and incorporate the musical styles and sonic textures of these zones showcases how the black experience of the 1920s was not only one of geographical migration but one of musical and technological navigation. *Cane*’s intersemiotic transmediality is complimented by Hughes’ interartistic configuration, which adapts the improvisatory styles of bebop to enact the same styles of negotiation black communities take on as they create spaces for self-expression and subject-formation. The last volume Hughes published in his lifetime, *Ask Your Mama*, utilizes the textual space to enact the binaural channels of stereophonic sound and its capacity to create virtual sonic spaces. In all three of these texts, aural media and its affiliated practices are bound up with the black musical aesthetic and the ways in which literature intermedially enacts that aesthetic. Music in literature has become a familiar focus within modernism, though it is a focus that privileges canonical texts by authors like Huxley, Joyce, Pound, and Woolf.¹² Directing the focus toward Toomer and Hughes concretizes how musical intermediality is bound up with a

¹² In addition to some of the texts already mentioned, a representative selection of critical texts on modernist musicalization would include Zack Bowen’s *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce: Early Poetry Through Ulysses* (1974) and “Allusions to Musical Works in *Point Counter Point*” (1977), Michael Ingham’s chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, “Pound and Music” (1999), and Charlotte de Mille’s *Music and Modernism, c. 1849-1950* (2011).

variety of media environments.

Chapter Three pivots away from musical and literary texts in order to situate new media within a set of connections organized around dance and movement. By turning to the work of the dancer Loïe Fuller and the painter, designer, and poet Florine Stettheimer, I argue that media technology offered a point of contact shared by dance, music, poetry, theatre, and visual art. Technology—in the form of patented costume and lighting inventions for Fuller and the aesthetic use of cellophane, modernity’s most famous plastic, for Stettheimer—simultaneously extended, highlighted, and obscured the moving body. In this way, kinaesthesia—the historically stipulated mode of communication through movement—was rendered more intelligible and affectively impactful when mediated. Such an alteration reframed kinaesthesia and the semantic worth of embodied motion as a fundamental means of expression and representation shared by multiple arts. For Fuller kinaesthesia mediated by the electric lighting arrays she designed and the robes she used to transform her body into a dynamic projection screen enables her performances to transcend the category of dance and achieve an intersemiotic integration, to become, in her words “something new, something composed of light, colour, music, and dance” (62). Her spectacles are the point at which music, motion, light, and color become undifferentiated. Fuller strives toward undifferentiatedness in an intersemiotic version of the total work of art, but Stettheimer’s ambitions are toward an interartistic unification. The play of light both against and through cellophane’s blank surface literalizes the principle of movement and artifice that extends throughout her work. I study the cellophane aesthetic as it connects the scenario and sketches of her unproduced ballet, her poetry, her paintings, and the stage designs for Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein’s opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1933) in order to make the case that this mediating plastic enables an interartistic transmediality that organizes nearly all of her

multidisciplinary output. Unlike that of word and music relations, the field of critical dance studies in modernism is sparse and inconsistent,¹³ but examining kinaesthesia—what Irina Sirotkina and Roger Smith call the “sixth sense” of the avant-garde¹⁴—under the larger framework of intermediality demonstrates how dance and choreography, as much as jazz and opera, impacted the nature of the relationship between the arts.

Chapter Four turns to a medium that was incredibly important to modernism and modernity and yet remains relatively unexplored in terms of critical and historical investigations: radio. The radiophonic medium consists of only one sense modality, the aural, but I argue that its audible content demands myriad intersecting and co-constituting interpretive approaches. In order to understand the referential operations of a given sound, to connect what is heard to the actuality in which such a sound can exist, many listening practices must be brought to the radio broadcast. Because these practices are under constant negotiation and because, as Karin Bijsterveld argues, sound is itself a “deeply contested phenomenon” (13), the radio comes to behave as an intermedial sonic space. This chapter examines two widely known works of radio drama and the ways in which they take up and elaborate on the intermedial condition of the radiophonic medium: Orson Welles’ *War of the Worlds* (1938) and Dylan Thomas’ *Under Milk Wood* (1954). Both productions hybridize the aesthetic qualities and representational functions of literature, newscast, documentary, and music as they take up the variety of audible phenomena afforded by broadcasting. Radio waves transmitted poetry readings, concerts, news flashes,

¹³ Despite the dearth of critical studies, there are a small number of helpful texts that are worth highlighting. Among them are Terri Mester’s *Movement and Modernism: Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence, Williams, and Early Twentieth-Century Dance* (1997), Mark Franko’s *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (1995), and Rishona Zimring’s *Social Dance and the Modernist Imagination in Interwar Britain* (2013).

¹⁴ See their *The Sixth Sense of the Avant-Garde: Dance, Kinaesthesia and the Arts in Revolutionary Russia* (2017).

lectures, comedy, ventriloquism, plays, operas, interference, and extended periods of silence. To direct our attention to the radio is to direct our attention to the many overlapping sonic occurrences that shaped how the actual, the fictional, and the virtual were mediated to listeners. This overlap was recruited to divergent ends by Welles and Thomas. Welles quite famously leverages an interpretive indeterminacy to create a broadcast that troubles the distinction between fact and fiction, therefore utilizing intermediality toward instilling anxiety in the listening public. Thomas, on the other hand, frames the synthesis of language, music, and sound as a recuperation of a kind of proto-language in his treatment of Milk Wood as a prelapsarian space of spiritual and sexual freedom. For Welles, the illegibility afforded by the intersemiotic configuration enables him to create a work of horror, and for Thomas the interartistic configuration organizes the utopic sonic space he imagines. Radio also illustrates the extent to which intermedial configurations were not isolated to the work of avant-garde writers, musicians, and artists, but also figure prominently in the mass entertainment of the twentieth century.

The texts I have selected as case studies suggest a reorientation away from the names and dates typically associated with Anglo-American modernism. Spanning from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries and placing at its center artists and writers that are often only labeled “modernist” with one or two modifiers, *Intermedial Modernism* nonetheless takes up features fundamental to modernity. Technology like the gramophone, the player piano, cellophane, and the radio were so ubiquitous as to have become almost invisible. By using the mediating materials and mechanisms that defined the media environment within which modernists worked as the guiding principle of my chosen case studies, the familiar key players and historical boundaries begin to feel unconsidered. Intermediality studies—with its integration of word and music studies, sound studies, and media studies—reframes modernist studies in turn.

What follows is an exploration of the interdisciplinary combinations made practically and imaginatively possible by new media, one that also clarifies the extent to which the most familiar features can sound out modernity's unseen components, contours, and patterns.

Chapter One

Phonographic Opera: The Total (Re)Work of Art

Intermediality occurs when one medium's potentialities become integrated with the those of another, often in contexts where multiple mediums are co-present in the same phenomenal space. Informing the intermedial aesthetic, and directing its various configurations, is a fundamental question that it begs: where does meaning take place? In the case of music written as a setting for a dramatic text, is what we understand as "meaningful" within the accompaniment, like the chordal structure harmonizing the vocal melody? Is it the emotional response of the listener to a particular cadence? Or is it the involuntary and unreflected-upon quickening of the listener's pulse? Does meaning occur in the score, the performance, or the body? Because intermediality is fundamentally something a text or performance does, a phenomenon that its combination of arts precipitates, there is no single answer to the question of where the meaning-event occurs. When a librettist and a composer collaborate toward synthesizing their respective mediums, they have—intentionally or unintentionally—moved to answer these questions. Harmonic ambiguity may serve as the aural equivalent of dramatic irony; musical motifs may refer to characters and themes; or melodic gestures may follow the intonational arc of speech. In the case of opera, the major points of contact between language and music in the multimedial context—the consonances and dissonances between these communicative modes—are determined by the choices made by the composer and the librettist and the nature of their collaboration.

This is not to suggest that every opera is the product of a wholly unique version of intermediality; popular perceptions and shared cultural practices inform the nature of the relationship between words and music, and these can inform our interpretive approach to musico-dramatic multimedia in turn. This chapter examines a substantial feature of the modern soundscape and its influence on twentieth-century Anglophone opera: phonography. With its invention in the late nineteenth century, the phonograph converted musical sound into a line inscribed on a moving surface housed in a piece of furniture, therefore instituting new listening practices, forms of musical literacy, and understandings of music's relationship to performance. In the case of opera, the presence of sound reproduction technology restructured the relationship between music and other media and complicated ambitions toward a total work of art. If music was dislodged from the performance by being rendered as an inscription, cut short to fit on the cylinder or disc, amplified and distorted through the gramophone horn, and recontextualized among other recordings, could it be said to achieve the same meaning-making function as it did in its original operatic setting? And could such dislocated, truncated, and distorted music ever be incorporated back into opera? Three works from across the twentieth century—William Walton and Edith Sitwell's *Façade: An Entertainment* (1923), Nicolas Nabokov and Stephen Spender's *Rasputin's End* (1958), and John Cage's *Europera 5* (1991)—are based on performance texts that include phonographs as prominent features, often as anthropomorphized singing characters. In this chapter, I argue that these musico-dramatic performances foreground treatments of the phonograph as an inherently intermedial technology; it offers the means of treating music as a written text that can be fragmented, collaged, and voiced as well as the means of treating language as a complex of gestural and affective musical qualities. In other words, these operas point to the phonograph as a site where music operates as language and language operates as

music. For these collaborators, it is in the mediation that integrated meaning-making occurs.

Each of these three operas' experiments in the combination of mediums—revisions of the total work of art—are entangled with an interpolation of aural media's functions and effects.

The three works this chapter interrogates are far from the canon of modernist opera and even test the boundaries of the genre. Walton and Sitwell's "entertainment" fits uncomfortably in the high modernist milieu from which it emerged, Nabokov and Spender's opera enjoyed a much longer production run in the German translation than it did in Spender's original English, which was never performed outside of a Kentucky high school's auditorium, and Cage's final *Europa*, though composed at the end of his enormously successful career, is far from among his most well-known works, to say nothing of the fact that Cage is rarely considered an operatic composer. Despite these operas' relative obscurity, they indicate a through-line within twentieth-century Anglophone opera in which librettists and composers imbue the phonograph with a kind of agency in the integration words and music. Sitwell recited her sonically extravagant poems to Walton's genre-agnostic accompaniment through a megaphone, turning herself into a sort of human phonograph shuffling through a stylistically varied catalogue; Spender's libretto uses the disembodied voice of a gramophone as a piece of the conspiracy to murder Rasputin as well as a means of stitching together non-linear and unreliable accounts; and Cage's performance instructions employ chance operations to govern which recordings a Victrola plays back during the operas' unrepeatable performances. For all these artists, their moves toward renewing the relationship between language and music, toward finding new interrelations between the mediums, depends upon animating the phonograph as a piece of sound reproduction technology implicated in the production of meaning. That which implies a break away from the total work of art is actually recruited in attempts to fundamentally rethink and reimagine it.

1. Writing Music, Recording Words

The aspiration toward combining arts in experimental multimedia was by no means unique to the twentieth century. Understanding poetry and music as linked art forms has roots in the ancient Greek concept of *mousike*, and by tracing this concept's transformation into its modern operatic interpretations, I will point to the two primary models of the total work of art and more general models of intermediality found in modern opera. *Mousike* was the composite discipline that encompassed dance, melody, and elementary education; Plato adopted the term to encompass music, poetry, rhetorical theory, and music theory. These four features of *mousike* became disconnected from one another over the course of the first few centuries of the common era. Due largely to the spread of the written alphabet and the influence of Latin on Christian liturgical music, encouraging a move away from Greek meters, *mousike* became the disciplines of music, poetry, and rhetoric, and philosophy—what James Anderson Winn identifies as the four coordinates to emerge from its breakdown (15). During the Renaissance, with renewed interest in the art and philosophy of the ancient Greeks, a reimagined version of the unified discipline came about in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Florence. As part of a recuperative mission for a lost unity among the arts, the Florentine *camerata* developed the musico-dramatic form that would come to be known as opera. Composers like Jacopo Peri, Giulio Caccini, and Claudio Monteverdi modelled their compositions after what they imagined the sung-speech drama of Greek tragedy looked and sounded like. Embedded within the development of opera is a contradiction that would inform many of the innovations to follow; opera is simultaneously a restoration of an ancient condition of artistic unification as well as an invention of a wholly modern genre. Musicologist Vlado Kotnik points to “the birth of opera as [a] paradox of the dialectics of historical repetition” (322), but this paradox persists far beyond

opera's birth.

In what would be an admittedly reductionist though helpful summary, the history of opera can be framed as a centuries-long series of revisions to the relationship between music and text that the Florentine *camerata* had hypothesized. From the Italian Renaissance, to the English masques of Henry Purcell, to the French reform operas of Christoph Gluck, to the Bel Canto works of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti, the dialectics of historical repetition continued as composers and collaborators privileged one art over another or imagined new ways of synthesizing them in a salvaged version of *mousike* that was both the artwork of the past and the artwork of the future. It was in Richard Wagner's nineteenth-century theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that the relationship between the arts was meant to be resolved in a complete intermedial synthesis. His operatic theory was designed to bring together music, poetry, drama, and even architecture to produce what he literally deemed "the artwork of the future." In his volume of that name, though he often revised and reframed his theories for the total work of art, he most fully describes his aims:

Thus supplementing one another in their changeful dance, the united sister-arts will show themselves and make good their claim; now all together, now in pairs, and again in solitary splendour, according to the momentary need of the only rule- and purpose-giver, the Dramatic Action. Now plastic Mimicry will listen to the passionate plaint of Thought; now resolute Thought will pour itself into the expressive mould of Gesture; now Tone must vent alone the stream of Feeling, the shudder of alarm; and now, in mutual embrace, all three will raise the Will of Drama to immediate and potent Deed. (191)

His operas are not simply multimedia spectacles in which singers and musicians share one expansive stage, but rather spectacles that unify literature, dance, and music in service of what he understands as providing the rules, purpose, and formal organization to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: drama. As in Greek drama, which Wagner, like the *camerata*, believed to include a sung-spoken delivery of text, all arts are combined toward the cathartic realization of tragedy. His music,

therefore, was composed according to a system of leitmotifs in which epigrammatic musical motifs corresponded in fully legible relationships to specific characters, objects, and themes. Each leitmotif, as Daniel Albright describes them, is “a shard in which speech and music are inextricably one” (*Untwisting the Serpent* 51). Music, text, and stagecraft are synthesized in such a way that they achieve total synthesis and yet retain intelligibility in their service of the drama. Like the *camerata* before him, Wagner developed his *Gesamtkunstwerk* as modelled after an imagined past but suited for the future.

Significantly, Wagner’s is not the only model of the total work of art to emerge from the nineteenth century and become a system after and against which composers and librettists would position themselves. Outside of the musical tradition and yet thoroughly influenced by it, Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Le Livre* serves as an alternative to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in ambitions toward the total work of art. *Le Livre* occupied Mallarmé from 1866 to his death in 1898. It was to be his magnum opus, a kind of encyclopedic volume that would describe and contain the relations between all things; however, it was always thought of as nothing more than an ordinary book. Though accounts of its proofs exist, all extant materials related to Mallarmé’s book were burned shortly before his death, and so what exactly it contained or was projected to contain remains out of reach. Perhaps it was his intention all along, but by never writing *Le Livre* Mallarmé created a conceptual total work of art, a text that claims totality while simultaneously maintaining totality’s condition as just beyond realization. David Roberts argues that “the transposition of the world into The Book, conceived of as a work of negative creation, refuses Wagner’s transformation of the world into Theatre” (139), and instead of striving toward the performative presence of drama, recedes toward the conceptual absence of abstraction. Wagner’s system was based on absolute legibility—using the shapes of musical melodies to amplify the

impact of the text which, in turn, gives the leitmotif a referential function. These co-operations were synthesized under the larger ambition of drama. Mallarmé's goal was to avoid the ideal of the "living presence" in favor of the ideal of the living absence. His total work of art pursued connections between the arts in the exact opposite capacity as Wagner, by leveraging the shared insensible qualities of each of the arts.

By treating Wagner and Mallarmé as indicators of opposite and yet related tendencies in the nineteenth century taken up by poets and composers in the twentieth, I am building on the valuable contribution of Brad Bucknell to literary modernist studies. He describes these two approaches, the Wagnerian and the Mallarméan, as the two poles of musical aesthetics in literary modernism. Focusing on the ways in which modernist literature takes up and adapts musical forms, qualities, and poetics, Bucknell identifies and traces occurring and recurring practices modelled after Wagner's legibility and Mallarmé's dematerialization. He describes the Wagnerian approach as one in which music supplies text with "a formal ideal" and "a sense of art's potential integrity" (24). Like the *Gesamtkunstwerk* itself, music is mobilized as illustrating a utopic and even mythic potentiality for the text. The Mallarméan musical aesthetic "joins music and literature not so much at the level of their transcendence, but at the level of their obscurity, in precisely the place where they do not speak" (32). Where Wagner sees a utopian possibility, Mallarmé sees the impossible. Music, in this approach, does not provide an additional, empowering aesthetic dimension but traces an immeasurable dimension that conceptually, not formally, joins the mediums. Equipped with Bucknell's system, we can see how Wagner's and Mallarmé's musical aesthetics were adapted for theories of intermediality, each one pointing to where the musical meaning-event occurs and, therefore, what feature of music must be integrated with language.

The intermedial configurations described in the introduction—the interartistic and the intersemiotic—helpfully correspond with Bucknell and Roberts’ division of modernist musical aesthetics into the Wagnerian and Mallarméan respectively. The interartistic configuration allows for an intermedial artwork to strive toward invention within a primary medium but to employ artistic principles of a different, secondary medium to remain grounded in the familiar terms of that secondary art. Essentially, the interartistic configuration uses the forms and structures of one medium to modernize the other while maintaining a systematic organization perceptible to the audience. Wagner’s Tristan chord, for instance, tests the limits of harmonic theory, but it follows the literary operations of symbolic motifs and its deployment in the opening of the opera presents a sort of “future-tense” version of similar chordal structures to come. United with a linguistic function, the opera’s prelude is musically unfamiliar but artistically graspable. The intersemiotic configuration pursues the points at which the arts become undifferentiated; instead of combining the arts in a system of exchange, the arts are oriented in relation to an abstract and inaccessible condition that exceeds the communicative capacities of all the involved arts. That Mallarmé’s book would contain the relations between everything and yet would never exist as an appropriate model. These two versions of the total work of art, Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* and Mallarmé’s *Le Livre*, reflecting the interartistic and intersemiotic configurations respectively, were the same models that inform attempts at understanding the impact of the phonograph on opera as the total work of art.

That phonography dramatically revised the modern soundscape and generally transformed how audiences listen to and understand opera should come as no surprise, but the way in which it was regarded as new media and encouraged a series of epistemological renegotiations demands a more careful review. Invented in 1877 by Thomas Edison for the

purpose of voice-recording, by the beginning of the twentieth century, owing mostly to Emile Berliner's invention of the gramophone in 1888 and Eldridge Johnson's Victrola in 1906, the phonograph's function had shifted from being a personal voice recorder to being a piece of in-home entertainment. The shift in the twentieth-century soundscape was felt especially in opera. In 1903, HMV released the first complete opera recording: Verdi's *Ernani* recorded on forty single-sided discs (Leppert 103). By 1929, the Victor recording company was selling *Aida* on nineteen two-sided discs and Columbia was advertising seven complete recordings, including *Tristan und Isolde* on twenty discs in three separately priced volumes (Leppert 109). In 1932, HMV released the "Potted *Ring* Cycle" which was essentially a collage of segments excerpted from different recordings and compiled into a 122-side recording of all four operas. The more common "opera" discs, however, were not complete recordings but rather compilations of a single vocalist performing a collection of popular arias, folk songs, hearth-and-home ballads, and a mix of other genres (Kenney 45). Sold with their opera discs, the Victor also published the *Victor Book of the Opera* annually; it provided descriptions, synopses, and contextualizing information related to the pieces included in the recordings (Kenney 95). These multimedial components, it seems, were necessary to make up for both the isolation of the aural mode and for what was lost in the distortion and acoustic interventions of the mediation itself. Acoustic phonographs were quiet, relying on the mechanical amplification of the horn, and could not accurately reproduce pitch and timbre, especially in the upper register. As Wagner and Mallarmé reached the end of their lives and their substantial posthumous fame began, the phonograph seemed to announce a finality to the total work of art: excising, excerpting, and distorting the sound-based component of operatic performance.

However, new aural media in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not as

destructive to opera as one might assume. As Lisa Gitelman argues, “new media are less points of epistemic rupture than they are socially embedded sites for the ongoing negotiation of meaning as such” (*Always Already New* 6), sites in which an expanded perceptual vocabulary is tested and put into action. With this in mind, it is important to recognize the phonograph as a site of renegotiating the total work of art, of revising and reinterpreting it according to the two different intermedial configurations. Not long after its invention, many artists recognized that phonography was based on a kind of writing system and that the sound etched onto the disc operated in the same manner as a legible written text. Victor even famously used as its logo the image of a cherub reclined on a disc and writing on it with a quill. In these perceptual terms, the phonograph could be rendered familiar and its operations made intelligible through the interartistic configuration. Theodor Adorno, for instance, writes that “through the curves of the needle on the phonograph record, music approaches decisively its true character as writing” (280) and suggests, in a surprising reversal of Pater’s dictum, that music strives toward the condition of language. Wittgenstein also contends that “the gramophone record, the musical thought, the score, the waves of sound, all stand to one another in that pictorial internal relation which hold between language and the world” (4.014). Laszlo Moholy-Nagy takes this evaluation further when he argues that phonography permits the writing of sound as opposed to simply the composing of music. He contends that “we must strive to turn the apparatuses (instruments) used so far only for reproductive purposes into ones that can be used for productive purposes as well” (289).

Still, others were quick to recognize the defamiliarizing work of the phonograph, its ability to give voice to some invisible elsewhere. In this understanding, phonography made audible an abstract and undifferentiated source of meaning integral to the intersemiotic

configuration. Such a configuration is apparent in the ontological status of the phonograph as a mediator not between the written and the heard, but between the real and the unreal. For instance, Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924) includes the appearance of the "Polyhymnia," the record player described as "a gently simmering chest of wonders" from which comes "the ghost of a world-famous violinist [...] as if behind veils" (629). Later, John Cocteau writes that "the universe of sound has been enriched by that of ultrasound, which is still unknown [...] We shall know that fish shout, that the sea is full of noises and that the void is peopled with realistic ghosts in whose eyes we are the same" (63-64). Even Victrola advertisements from 1913 show the hostess of an elegant gramophone listening party shaking the hand of an Ottoman apparition having emerged from the phonograph as a small crowd of other spirits dressed in various Orientalized costumes wait to be greeted as well. According to this perspective, the phonograph had a thoroughly visual component in its ability to represent through a more conceptual and abstract conflation the immaterial entities contained in the mechanism. Instead of turning operatic performance from the intermedial work of art to the monomedial sound of music, the phonograph pointed to new imaginative points of contact between sound and other mediums.

Phonography, therefore, did not undo the intermedial aesthetic, but rather amplified the markers that differentiate the interartistic from the intersemiotic. The operas chosen as examples for this chapter point to illustrate divergence and one significant attempt at a convergence. Edith Sitwell describes the poems of *Façade* as populated by "ghosts, moving, not in my country world, but in a highly mechanized universe" ("Some Notes" xvii). Additionally, her experimental poetry was motivated by a Symbolist-inspired system she referred to as "condensement," a kind of synesthesia emerging from a pre-discursive register that exceeds any

single sense and is expressed by extreme sense-confusion. William Walton's accompaniment is based on an expressionism derived from tone-color melody and spiritualism. These combined arts suggest an intermediality at the center of *Façade* that belongs to the intersemiotic configuration. By performing as a kind of human phonograph—obscuring her body and speaking through a horn that both amplifies and distorts her voice—Sitwell's performance figures the new media of phonography as not disrupting the combination of the arts but potentiating a mode of accessing an occult system which further entwines them. Engaged in the interartistic configuration, Spender's libretto is unique to twentieth-century opera in its non-linearity and exploration of conflicting accounts of a single historical event: the assassination of Grigori Rasputin. Just as opera discs excerpted, rearranged, and rendered indistinct pieces of the operatic repertory into new combinations, Spender's narrative enacts the same process on the events within the opera. These events are set into motion by a gramophone: a central device in the conspiracy, transformed into a singing role for a tenor, and producing the motivic material that brings legibility and cohesion to the opera's indistinct plot structure. By modelling the writing of the music after the "writing" that is the music etched on the gramophone disc, Spender and Nabokov elaborate on the interartistic intermediality aural media offer toward a musico-dramatic combination. John Cage's *Europera 5* follows a similar approach regarding the phonograph's ability to excerpt and rearrange pieces of music by employing chance operations from a computer program. However, because this music is determined by chance, Cage demonstrates a concern for the technology as a site less of meaning per se, and more as a site of meaning's potential. By balancing the writerly feature of the phonograph's interartistic configuration with its capacity to realize unforeseen combinations, he also leverages its intersemiotic capacity, thus illustrating a synthesis of both intermedial configurations. What follows are three case studies

arranged chronologically, each of which explicitly incorporates the phonograph on stage and more implicitly interpolates phonography in its intermedial configuration. By tracking this practice across twentieth-century Anglophone opera, a largely unexplored commonality connecting uncommon performances comes into focus.

2. The Strange Séance of *Façade*

“You will meet strange people, Queen Victoria and Venus, Circe and Lord Tennyson.” This is how Osbert, the middle of the three Sitwell siblings, introduced the first public performance of Walton and Edith’s *Façade* (Cumberland 288). On a Sunday afternoon in the Aeolian Hall in London, Edith Sitwell stood behind a painted curtain and recited her poetry through a megaphone while Walton conducted the accompanying chamber ensemble. The premier of their unusual musico-poetic collaboration was met with equal parts derision and bafflement by an audience who would go on to write it off as a piece of triviality from the ever-eccentric Sitwells, lampoon it in send-ups of the snobbish highbrow, level scathing critiques at it, or simply forget about it altogether. Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Noël Coward, and Evelyn Waugh were all in attendance, but their general disapproval only contributed to the minor scandal *Façade* became.¹ It is perhaps unfairly blunt, but Osbert’s calling the entertainment “strange” is a reasonable description of even its current estimation. Despite a small

¹ Woolf wrote in a letter afterward: “Though I paid 3/6 to hear Edith vociferate her poems accompanied by a small and nimble orchestra, through a megaphone, I understood so little that I could not judge” (356). Coward also attended, and he parodied the Sitwell’s in his musical revue *London Calling!* (1923) and a book of poems, *Chelsea Buns* (1924) published under the name Hernia Whittlebot. An anonymous reviewer for *The Evening Standard* sarcastically wrote how “three members of the audience went out hurriedly—presumably to weep in the vestibule” (qtd. in Lloyd 288).

collection of studies that take seriously Sitwell's experimental poetics and performance,² *Façade* remains a modernist peculiarity. I argue, however, that Sitwell and Walton's collaboration, in both its composition and performance, illustrates a notable interpretation of the Mallarméan total work of art, one that figures aural media as a way of pointing to the abstract, generalized, and, for Sitwell, mystical meaning-making that exceeds any single communicative medium or sensory mode. Intersemiotic intermediality permits a synthesis of poetry and music, not at the point of formal unity but at the point where they recede from meta-discourse. Her sonically extravagant, elaborately patterned, but nearly nonsensical verse merges with the gestural cadences and symbolic tone-color melodies of Walton's score. By transforming herself into a disembodied and distorted voice—a mediator that straddles the function of phonograph and spirit medium—Sitwell mobilizes an understanding of new aural media's intermediality toward staging her encounter with a pre-discursive and occult register where music and language are indistinguishable.

Contextualizing *Façade* within the lives of Sitwell siblings and their relationship with Walton, including the unusual kind of collaboration that led to *Façade*'s composition, will help to elucidate both the fascination with occultism and with the relationship between poetry and music. Walton, then only nineteen, met Osbert at Oxford and was soon after introduced to the younger brother Sacheverell and older sister Edith. Work toward *Façade* began not much later. Edith wrote in April 1922 that the poems were to be “set by a youth called Walton—(whom I

² See Gyllian Phillips' “Something Lies Beyond the Scene [seen] of *Façade*: Sitwell, Walton, and Kristeva's Semiotic” (2002), Deborah van Durme's “Edith Sitwell's Carnavalesque Song: The Hybrid Music of *Façade*” (2008), and Marsha Bryant's “Sitwell Beyond the Semiotic: Gender, Race, and Empire in ‘*Façade*’” (2007). Gyllian Phillips and Allan Pero's edited collection of essays *The Many Façades of Edith Sitwell* (2017) is remarkable, though the overall dearth of Sitwell studies is striking.

believe most strongly to be the best composer we've had since Purcell, though he is only just twenty)" (qtd. in McBeath 52). The collaboration, however, did not follow the traditional order in which the librettist creates the text and then the composer creates the music; instead, as Edith recalled in 1963, "Sometimes I wrote the poems and he put the music to them and sometimes it was the other way around, he showed me the rhythm I wanted. We made it bit by bit" (qtd. in McBeath 37). The result was a work full of musical allusions, metrical experiments, and collaborative play. Before the work was even ready for its first performance, Osbert suggested Edith and Walton's ensemble stand behind a curtain painted by Frank Dobson, and Sacheverell suggested Edith shout her poems through a megaphone. Walton balked at the idea, but the siblings threatened to ask Constant Lambert, another young composer, to do the music instead. Walton, seeing no room for compromise, agreed (Lloyd 29). It is worth stressing that this musical performance was not the first event the Sitwells hosted. They were, in fact, avid practitioners of spiritualism and regularly hosted seances; Sacheverell even published a volume titled *Poltergeists: An Introduction and Examination* in 1940. As Deryn Rees-Jones points out, there are striking similarities between *Façade*'s premier and these seances; most notably, the megaphone Sacheverell proposed recalls the practice of spirit mediums using "spirit trumpets" (43). These large amplifying cones were held in front of the medium's mouth so that, as the medium quietly spoke while transmitting the spirit's voice, the attendees could better make out the ghostly words.

In unpacking Edith Sitwell's discussions of her poetic theory of condensement, it becomes clear that a collaboration lending itself to intractable fusion of music and poetry along with a fascination in spiritualism and the occult were not separate or superficial interests. Her theory of condensement, an elaboration of literary synesthesia, clarifies the relationship between

Façade and the Mallarméan total work of art as well as the role of occultism in the entertainment's intersemiotic configuration. Daniel Albright describes synesthesia as "a technique for restructuring commonplace nature into something fresh, for indicating intuitions of some indwelling transsensuous beauty, a beauty that (since it is beyond the usual range of our sensory apparatus) expresses itself through an unusual, 'wrong' sense organ" (*Untwisting the Serpent* 12). Symbolist synesthesia, therefore, relates to an emergent sensory quality that exceeds a single perceptual mode. For the Symbolists as well as Sitwell, transsensuousness is not strictly sense confusion in figurative language but the registration of some phenomenon that exceeds the perceiver's capacity to perceive it through the "correct" sense organ. Sitwell gives the most detailed explanation of her ambitions toward expressing this excess in the introduction to the 1957 edition of her collected poems, entitled "Some Notes on My Poetry." In it, she writes in reference to the *Façade* poems:

It was said that the images in these poems were strange. This is partly the result of condensation—partly because, where the language of one sense was insufficient to cover the meaning, the sensation, I used the language of another, and by this means attempted to pierce down to the essence of the thing seen, by discovering in it attributes which at first sight appear alien but which are acutely related—by producing its quintessential colour (sharper, brighter than that seen by an eye grown stale) and by stripping it of all unessential details. (xix)

Condensation, therefore, is not confusion, though it may appear that way, but rather a condition in which an object's attributes exceed their correlating sense modality—the eye grown stale—and must be expressed in another. When Sitwell claims to have arrived at "a vital language—each word possessing an infinite power of germination," the sonic qualities of each word—what Gyllian Phillips calls the "active and embodied space between written language (a shared code) and the individual experience" ("Glittering Like the Wind" 127)—initiate, create, and elaborate on a larger sound-based organization without regard for semantico-referential correspondence.

Condensement becomes a condensing of sound and substance through a language that creates rhythms, dissonances, shadows, and sensations, losing that which made it identifiably language and turning it into something organized around musical gesture and magical thinking. The language nearly becomes nonsense in order to take on the qualities and operations of other sense modalities. Take, for instance, her description of “Fox Trot:”

The ground rhythm of the beginning of this poem is partly the result of the drone sounds in the first line, the dissonances, so subtle they might almost be assonances, of ‘Faulk,’ ‘tall,’ ‘stork,’ ‘before,’ ‘walk’—each having a different depth of darkness [...] All these drone sounds seem pleasant country shadows, varying slightly in depth, in warmth, in length. In the fifth and seventh lines, the words ‘honeyed’ and ‘reynard’ are a little rounder than ‘peasant-feathered,’ and each casts a light dipping, reversed shadow. (xxvii)

The fifth line of the poem mentions “the honeyed fruits of dawn” (137.5), but that is not the kind of sense confusion animating this poetry. Instead, Sitwell is more interested in the involuntary and unreflected-upon effects—the senses of depth, warmth, roundness, and shadow animating the poem.

The quality that exceeds any single sense modality is the principle which the Mallarméan version of the total work of art and the intersemiotic configuration is based upon. For Sitwell, that quality, and the practice of condensement undertaken to represent it, is occult in nature. Leigh Wilson notes the magical thinking that informs condensement when she argues that each word is a performative utterance, like “abracadabra,” and offers “a release of the power of sound in order to bring something about, to effect change” (75). James D. Brophy, in one of the earliest critical studies of Sitwell, supports the same assessment when he writes that the shadow “grants body and endurance to the sustaining source,” the source being the word which casts the shadow, and “suggests difference of contrast, the complexity of reality” (41-42). “Dark Song,” a poem from the 1923 premier and included in the *Collected Poems* but for which no musical score is

extant,³ makes clear Sitwell's concern for accessing, through poetry, the occult complexity within language that resists the syntactic and sense-making operations of the semantic:

The fire was furry as a bear
 And the flames purr...
 The brown bear rambles in his chain
 Captive to cruel men
 Through the dark and hairy wood.
 The maid sighed, 'All my blood
 Is animal. They thought I sat
 Like a household cat;
 But through the dark woods rambled I...
 Oh, if my blood would die!
 The fire had a bear's fur;
 It heard and knew...
 The dark earth furry as a bear,
 Grumbled too! (149)

The poem's constellation of images—the fire, the bear, the wood, the maid, the dark earth itself—finds coherence in the suggestion of a primordial energy coursing through each one. As the speaker describes it: “All my blood / Is animal.” It is a kind of dispersed and mystical condition, but also a sonic one: the alliteration of “fire” and “furry,” the rhyme of “furry” and “purr,” the purring cat that sat while the maid, in an assonant shadow of “sat,” “rambled.” To enact this condition, for Sitwell, is to utter “abracadabra” and bring about, through the power of sound, a strange reality. Sitwell's language is by turns childish, hysterical, and nonsensical, like when she writes in “Fox Trot” about “The nursery-maid Meg / With a leg like a peg,” “An old dull mome / With a head like a pome,” and boiling water hissing “Like the goose-king's feathered daughter” (137-38. 15-16, 28-29, 39). As the language recedes from the semantic register though, it progresses toward the musical and, more importantly, a kind of magical

³ Both Stewart Craggs' preface to the William Walton Edition of *Façade Entertainments* (2000) and Stephen Lloyd's Walton biography *William Walton: Muse on Fire* (2001) include tables detailing the songs included and the order of their performance in all of the major stagings. In them, “Dark Song” is listed as having been included in only the 1923 premier and no others.

thinking based on the evocation of sounds through sonic similarity, “call[ing] forth a system from the shadow,” as she describes it (qtd. in Ower 534). This calling forth emerges amplified and distorted through the megaphone as she performs the roles of spirit medium and gramophone all while accompanied by Walton’s score, which is equally as invested in occult systems.

The ways in which Walton’s expressionist composition is like Sitwell’s condensation and is conducive to intersemiotic intermediality makes clearer the nature of the fringe of contact between music and poetry that aural media offered to the collaborators. The philosophical and cosmological stakes of Walton’s expressionism derive largely from the pre-serialist compositions of Arnold Schoenberg.⁴ Schoenberg’s first meaningful break from tonality came with his second string quartet in 1908, a move informed by the theosophist writings of Rudolf Steiner and Madame Blavatsky (Etter 156-62). This piece also initiated the development of his expressionist style of composition, a style based on “raw sense data concentrated into hieroglyphs, terse equivalents of psychological states” (*Untwisting the Serpent* 74), with the goal of making legible such pre-discursive sense data. The central component of Schoenberg’s—and Walton’s—expressionism is tone-color melody, a principle by which timbre, pitch, and melody combine to create colors, textures, and symbolic meanings that, according to Schoenberg, are the concentrated hieroglyphs “capable of heightening in an unprecedented manner the sensory, intellectual, and spiritual pleasures offered by art” (431). Musical hieroglyphs function as signs that, by their most basic qualities, represent the non-stipulated sensation of embodied affect. One

⁴ The clearest analogue and inspiration for *Façade* is Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), a song cycle concerned with a clown’s night-time insanity sung with the ambiguous speech-like delivery of *Sprechstimme*. The first performance of *Pierrot Lunaire* in England occurred a year after *Façade*’s premier at the Aeolian Hall, but Walton was familiar with the cycle and had the sheet music during his collaboration with the Sitwells (Lloyd 33). Furthermore, the definitive version of *Façade* is seven groups of three poems, mimicking the three groups of seven poems that make up the text of *Pierrot Lunaire*.

example of this expressionist tone-color melody at work is in the opening measures of *Façade*'s "Gardener Janus Catches a Naiad," where the clarinet and flute play a unison one-measure figure of descending fourths in the D-minor Phrygian mode, marked "legato, senza espress." (179, mm.1-5).⁵ The droning, repetitive melody creates a sense of hollowness and artificiality, and this quality is echoed in Sitwell's opening lines describing birdsongs suspended in air (179, mm. 3). The operation of this unreflected-upon quality shifts with its correspondence to the text, coming to operate as both raw sense data and then complementary sound-image of the suspended birdsong. Walton's accompaniment, like Sitwell's condensed verse, is organized around an understanding of music's various semiotic operations, an ability for music to communicate on an affective and embodied level as well as an allusive and citational level.

Taken individually, Sitwell and Walton's theories of composition suggest the potential for intermediality and the synthesis of the arts in a single total work of art. In examining the conditions of the 1923 premier, it becomes apparent that Walton and the Sitwells were striving to both puncture the Wagnerian ideal of opera as *Gesamtkunstwerk* and to create a performative mode that finds totality and completion in sensory undifferentiatedness, the same principles foundational to Sitwell's condensation and Walton's expressionism. The 1923 performance was actually the second time the work was staged, following a private performance in 1922 in the Sitwells' home. The two were quite different in terms of the songs included and their order. In fact, for the first two decades of *Façade*'s performance history, songs were continually being

⁵ The Oxford University Press edition of *Façade Entertainments* takes into account David Lloyd-Jones research of textual variants and Walton's own autograph and fair copy manuscripts in its compilation of the definitive version of *Façade*, the songs that would comprise the later *Façade 2: A Further Entertainment*, and four additional songs that were each, at some point, a piece of the entertainment. I will refer to this most recent and most thorough published edition of *Façade* when referencing Walton's score.

added, removed, rearranged, and occasionally lost altogether. This was the case until the “definitive” version of 1942, which consisted of a fanfare and seven groups of three songs. The label of “entertainment,” given its revue-style approach to performance, is an appropriate label for *Façade*. In the first public performance, Sitwell, Walton, and the instrumentalists were situated behind a screen painted by Frank Dobson depicting two primitivist masks.⁶ Sitwell recited her poems in a rhythmically notated but unpitched delivery, somewhere between speech and song not unlike Schoenbergian *Sprechstimme*, through a megaphone pointed out of the mask’s mouth. The specific model of the megaphone was a *Sengerphone*, named after Alexander Senger, who designed it to amplify the bass singer’s voice in the offstage role of Fafner in Wagner’s *Siegfried* (Craggs xii). Amplifying the voice through a mask alludes to the chanted delivery of ancient Greek tragedy and speaks to the consideration of opera as recuperative of ancient *mousike*. Additionally, the incorporation of a piece designed specifically for Wagner’s most epic version of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* suggests an intentional engagement with the total work of art as salvage of an imagined past for a utopic future. The masks, however, are not classical but primitivist, problematically referring to an inscrutable otherness. Primitivism carries connotations of occultism and permeable ego boundaries (Clinton 44), and it points to the same primitive and occult substance suggested in “Dark Song.” Moreover, the *Sengerphone* distorted as much as it amplified Sitwell’s voice, which hovered between song and speech, not quite synthesizing the two into a single mode of delivery. The result is a parodic treatment of

⁶ Stephen Lloyd’s biography includes Dobson’s sketch for the screen, the same one included in Marsha Bryant’s article that also appeared in the 1923 issue of *British Vogue*. The 1951 Oxford University Press edition of Walton’s score, the first published version, includes on its cover an unauthored illustration purported to also depict the painted screen used in the premier. In this version, the masks do not have the same primitivist features but are more reminiscent of those used in Greek drama. It may be impossible to know what exactly appeared on Dobson’s screens, though the attributed sketches would seem to be the most reliable model.

Wagnerian opera, a derangement of the total work of art into a performance in which the combined arts are not unified but undifferentiated. In her published notebooks, which include a variety of quotes and her reflections on them, Sitwell transcribes Wagner's assessment in his volume *Beethoven* that "Music... would seem to reveal the most secret sense of scene, action, event, environment," and responds with: "Is not this also true of Poetry?" (*A Poet's Notebook* 159). Sitwell was familiar with Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* and concerned with troubling the categories of the arts and the potentialities supposedly unique to each, a troubling apparent on the stage of the Aeolian Hall in 1923. *Façade*, therefore, behaves as both an opera and an intervention in the conception of what an opera can and should be.

At the center of the derangement of the Wagnerian total work of art and the pursuit of the Mallarméan is an interpolation of aural media's features and effects. The shifting definition of opera in the first decades of the twentieth century was tethered to the shifting media ecology. That Sitwell and Walton's songs were performed for over two decades as a continually changing collection—compounded with Walton's heavily citational music that shuffles through hornpipes, polkas, waltzes and even a cheekily titled "Popular Song"—makes the entertainment less like opera and more like the opera discs compiled and pressed by record companies. Also, by shouting through a megaphone, Sitwell performed the distorting effects that early phonography had on the upper register of the female voice, an effect that led to the rise in popularity of singers who performed by belting. Additionally, her voice amplified by a megaphone leveraged the association between aural media and the spirit medium. Since its invention, new media was closely associated with mediumship and the occult, an association that led to mediums being considered, according to Jeffrey Sconce, as "wholly realized cybernetic beings—electromagnetic devices bridging flesh and spirit, body and machine, material reality and electronic space" (27).

New aural media had been understood as haunted almost since its invention, as providing an audible trace of an occluded unknown. By making herself unseen, by turning herself into a piece of media, Sitwell's performance brought her closer to the occult condition at the heart of her poetics and of the intersemiotic configuration. The effects of media—erasing the performer's body, collaging distinct musical pieces, distorting the human voice, and transforming that voice into that of ghosts made suddenly perceptible—make possible a total work of art based on the connection between music and poetry on a fundamental, and a fundamentally inaccessible, level. Phonography's capacity to make word, music, and reality strange is indispensable to an entertainment so full of strange characters.

It is in Sitwell's iconic megaphone that the most prominent elements of Sitwell and Walton's intermediality crystalize into a single artifact. It refers to three distinct areas: Wagnerian opera, phonography, and mediumship. Being a *Sengerphone*, the megaphone points to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that *Façade* is invested in repurposing for a different kind of total work of art. As a gramophone horn, it underlines the function of Sitwell less as performer and more as mediator, turning the deathly silent vividly audible. As a spirit trumpet, the horn amplifies a voice not belonging to the speaker but emerging from another occult space altogether. In this way, *Façade* is as much an opera as it is a staged séance and a gramophone party, an entertainment that is comprised of, in Sitwell's own estimation, "deep plunges into the subconscious soul" (qtd. in Ower 534). Found throughout this plunge are the operations of her condensed poetry and the point at which poetry and music become indistinguishable, where the systems used to shape different mediums fail and are expressed in terms of one another. Aural media, like a spirit medium's voice amplified by a spirit trumpet, make the registers at which musical and linguistic communication operate undifferentiated, a condition toward which

Sitwell's poetry and Walton's composition strive in their sustained combination and intermedial integration.

While this undifferentiatedness between music and poetry is apparent throughout *Façade*, it is especially apparent in "Trio for Two Cats and a Trombone," occasionally published under the title "Long Steel Grass." The poem begins by showcasing the fragmenting and distorting effects of mechanical and spiritual mediation alongside the excessive operations of condensement and intermediality:

Long steel grass—
 The white soldiers pass—
 The light is braying like an ass.
 See
 The tall Spanish jade
 With hair black as nightshade
 Worn as a cockade! (120.1-7)

Metrically irregular tercets interrupted by monosyllables which Sitwell delivers with dramatically elongated vowels come through the megaphone like a dim reverberation of Bizet's *Carmen*. The Spanish scene, with its exotic women and gallant soldiers, is rendered in fragments by a disembodied voice that troubles the boundary between song and speech. The lines resist a wholly mimetic reading, but instead present a scene of contrasting colors echoed in contrasting speech sounds. White soldiers in the braying light offer the bright opposite to the dark Spanish jade just as the sibilant, unvoiced "-ass" of the first three lines compliments the voiced alveolar stop of "-ade." The scene is rendered in sounds and colors, like a synesthetic Seville. Sitwell here is performing an opera composed for a cybernetic voice enunciating condensed verse, a condensement that intensifies with the lines:

The hard and braying light
 Is zebra'd black and white,
 It will take away the slight
 And free

Tinge of the mouth-organ sound,
 (Oyster-stall notes) oozing round
 Her flounces as they hit the ground. (120.13-19)

It is through this mouth-organ, an aperture that functions in equal parts as the vocalist's instrument and a mediating device, that Sitwell's text written according to the principles of an occult intermediality emerges. The zebra'd light parallels the alternating light and dark phonemes that contrast within this pair of tercets in the same manner as the first pair; the result is an intermingling of signifying operations. The sound of the language evokes each word that follows, such that the text follows according to a set of sonic, even musical, associations and reverberations. The poem concludes with the Spanish captain calling across the battlements "come kiss me harder" while the jade is distracted by voices that are "thin and shrill / As the steely grasses' thrill," making "the sound of the onycha / When the phoca has the pica / In the palace of the Queen Chinee" (120.36, 121.2-6). Though it is possible to parse the final image and describe what exactly the simile describes, that would disregard how the final image is comprised of a set of sound associations and combinations; the conflated word/thing function of each sound voiced from behind the mask calls forth another and another. Conjured by the thin and shrill voice amplified by the spirit trumpet/gramophone horn comes a shadow version of a mechanically reproduced opera: ghostly stock characters and emotional states that exceed the linguistic and aural modes.

Walton's music for "Trio for Two Cats and a Trombone," demonstrating the system of tone-color central to his expressionism, interacts productively with the emergent characteristics of Sitwell's text, taking up the evocative and affective resonances and transforming them into the psychological states of his musical hieroglyphs. The piece opens with a major-key fanfare on trumpet punctuated by castanets where one would expect to hear snare drum. A staccato rhythm

on the castanets efficiently, if clumsily, declares that the piece is a Spanish Romance. Following this overt allusion, much of the ensemble falls silent while the bass clarinet plays a slithering melody in a minor key and dark tone-color. Its gentle rise and fall create a soft but persistent undulation: the dark and soft “-ound” complimenting the fanfare’s bright and sharp “-ight.” At the phrase “mouth-organ sound” the music returns to major and takes on, like the oyster-stall notes, a lively lilting rhythm (26, m. 27). Here, the music animates the text and brings a more sensible immediacy to the language’s referential obscurity. Later, as the poem spins out its elaborate sonic associations, the music takes on tonal and rhythmic confusion, shifting from one tonal and timbral context as quickly and unpredictably as the poem follows sonic associations. The quality of rhythmic confusion reaches its climax when Sitwell’s verse reaches its climax as well. At the line “He is green as a cassada and his hair is an armada,” recited in a duple meter, the ensemble plays a dynamically rippling triplet figure, but when the recitation suddenly begins to follow a quintuplet rhythm along with the flute and bass clarinet, the saxophone plays eighth-note triplets, the castanets play sixteenth-note triplets, and the cello continues its persistent eighth-note ostinato (29, m. 44-46). Sitwell’s verse verges on the nonsensical as the sonic association result in semantico-referential confusion; at the same time, Walton’s polyrhythms translate that confusion into an audible density. His accompaniment does not comment on or organize the text as it recedes from legibility; instead, it recedes as well as the mediated, truncated, and distorted drama represented in “Trio” shifts toward non-mimetic syllables, thus making the conditions of material reality and immaterial sound indistinguishable.

New media, as Gitelman describes, do not cause an epistemic rupture and sudden opening of new perpetual faculties. They do, however, offer an expansion of the perceptual vocabulary and a new set of signs for representing the world. For Sitwell and Walton, that new

set of signs potentiated by phonography was the same as that of spiritualism and occultism: ghosts in a highly mechanized universe. These signs are not decodable representations, but rather raw sense data, unreflected upon qualities, and interconnected sonic associations. David Trotter describes the media cosmology as how we “imagine an elemental universe forced by our appearance in its midst gradually to mediate itself to us in such a way that we learn to know it better, and exploit it ever more effectively; while, at the same time, mediating us to each other” (“Modernism’s Media Theory” 6). A modernist media cosmology understands the world as inherently mediated, as perceived through a system of signs and signals; therefore, the interpolation of new media’s sign system reflects a shift in media cosmology, an expansion of the perceptual vocabulary that accounts for new ways the world is mediated to the perceiver. What makes Sitwell’s media cosmology remarkable is that media do not allow the perceiver to understand and exploit the world more effectively, but rather they give access to the points of the world that resist understanding, that demand the operations of another medium—music in this case. New media invite strange characters and an intersemiotic configuration; they do not make for a world more easily exploited.

This study is not the first to see value in Sitwell’s tendency toward inscrutability. Gyllian Phillips’ “Something Lies Beyond the Scene [seen] of *Façade*: Sitwell, Walton, and Kristeva’s Semiotic” (2002) is a valuable article in its reading of Sitwell’s poetry through the framework of Kristeva’s semiotic, locating in the excesses and nonsenses a tendency toward the pre-linguistic and feminine mode of communication. Though Marsha Bryant has productively pointed out that such a reading disregards Sitwell’s propensity to enforce imperialist and highly masculinist thought, Phillips’ work suggests, as I have here, that there is value in Sitwell’s resistance to semantic correspondence. By verging on pure sonic association, she points to the extremity

where language fails to adequately signify, the same place that spiritualism and its new iteration in aural media can access. Sitwell's intermediality is far from Kristeva's feminism, though it does reject the Wagnerian system of total unification and propagandistic glorification in favor of the Mallarméan total work of art. The voice of the other—whether it is from the other race, the other side of the boundary between the living and the dead, the other piece of communication technology, or the other art—is a voice of resistance that can be recruited but never wholly assimilated. In the interartistic configuration, unlike the intersemiotic, the “other” mode of meaning-making is subsumed in the total work of art and utilized as a systematizing and regulating form with the goal of creating an idealized or idealistic artwork of the future. For Sitwell and Walton, phonography is the site of a generalized and extra-linguistic quality endemic to both music and poetry, but for Nicolas Nabokov and Stephen Spender, it potentiates the systematic integration of music and narrative as two consonant forms of writing.

3. Remembering the Record in *Rasputin's End*

In *Façade*, the phonograph functions as a piece of technology receding from decipherability; both the music and the poetry coming from the cybernetic phonograph emerge from a pre-discursive register of occultism and nonsense. This register resists semantico-referentiality, but its reliance on the combination of the arts creates an intersubjectively intelligible if ineffable configuration of sounds and emotional states. In that way, the phonograph is put to use illustrating a relationship between the arts based on the common qualities of each that resist meta-discursive analysis. Over three decades later, late modernist poet and godson of Sitwell's, Stephen Spender, served as a librettist for the relatively obscure composer though highly regarded civil servant Nicolas Nabokov. Their opera is remarkable for its inventive

narrative structure: a series of non-sequential episodes with ambiguous scene changes and time-slips that trouble the boundary between historical record, faulty memory, and imagined fantasy. The narrative structure seems to imitate the shortened, shuffled, and distorted songs compiled in early opera discs. What prevents the opera from becoming an indecipherable mixture of dreams, drunkenness, and political intrigue is the phonograph itself. The conspirators at the center of the opera use a gramophone to deceive their victim, Rasputin, and the music it plays—alternately a setting of a Max Jacob poem and quiet instrumental jazz—offers fundamental motivic material that organizes the episodes and provides coherence across the many temporal and spatial disjunctions. Just as Wagner leveraged the writerly function of the leitmotif to recruit music in serving the drama of his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Nabokov uses a similar strategy to clarify Spender's opaque libretto. As the text becomes like mediated music, the musical setting pursues the semiotic operations of written text to emphasize principles of cohesion. *Rasputin's End* interpolates the impacts of phonography in the opposite way as *Façade*; instead of pointing to phonography as giving voice to the uncanny and unknowable, it points to phonography as sound converted into writing. By treating recorded sound as a kind of inscription system, despite phonography's distorting effects on music, those effects can be understood as themselves systematized. Nabokov and Spender's total work of art is more aligned with the Wagnerian model than the Mallarméan in that, by treating recorded music as a writerly system in their interartistic configuration, it figures the technology as a point of commonality between music and writing, rendering the unfamiliar as precise and measurable.

Before collaborating on their opera, both Spender and Nabokov worked for the Congress for Congressional Freedom, or CCF, and their work significantly informed their mission of composing an opera that was both modern and accessible. Though their functions in the CIA-

funded organization is material enough for its own book-length study, a brief explanation of how they were tasked with recruiting art and mass-culture in a fight against communism will shed light on why legibility was paramount to their operatic experiment. The CCF was a group of American and European artists and intellectuals who worked to combat Soviet communism through the promotion of anti-communist art, literature, music, and performance. Peter Coleman describes the activities of the CCF as follows:

It lasted for seventeen years and at its height had offices or representatives in thirty-five countries [...] It thought of itself as “a movement” leading a liberal offensive against the Communists and their fellow-travelers [...] It sponsored a network of magazines [...] It conducted large and small international seminars [...] It orchestrated international protests against oppressive intellectuals [...] It organized festivals and helped refugee writers [...] Above all, the Congress helped to shatter the illusions of Stalinist fellow-travelers. (9)

In effect, the CCF put to work modern media—ranging from print to radio to record distribution—toward recruiting art and thought in a fight against the idea of communism’s creative and intellectual superiority.⁷ Nabokov, an American citizen stationed in Paris during his appointment to the CCF, said that the aims of the Congress should include waging “a constant, intense, secret fight against totalitarianism in countries beyond the Iron Curtain, all the way to the Soviet Union” (qtd. in Giroud 237). His primary contribution and role in this fight was as an organizer of concerts and festivals. He coordinated festivals of contemporary compositions in Paris, Rome, Venice, and Tokyo in order to promote the work of young composers with anti-communist politics, or at the very least communist sympathies that remained unpublicized. For instance, these festivals showcased the work of Arnold Schoenberg and Virgil Thomson but

⁷ In 1966, a year before the CCF’s dissolution, it was made public that the network was in fact funded by the CIA, making plain that an organization which behaved as an independent body was a government-funded arm in a battle over intellectual life. In their published journals and autobiographies, both Spender and Nabokov claim to not have known about the source of the CCF’s funding prior to it being made public.

excluded Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergey Prokofiev, once a good friend of Nabokov's. Nabokov also contributed to the founding of *Encounter*, the literary magazine published by the CCF for which Spender served as co-editor.⁸ The CCF was tasked with showing to the world that it was the anti-communists who were creating the most artistically and intellectually ambitious work; therefore, it had to negotiate the sometimes contradictory goals of supporting art that was both aesthetically inventive and broadly appealing.

Though *Rasputin's End* was not commissioned by or explicitly affiliated with the CCF, it is difficult not to view the opera in the context of the political work both artists were engaged in at the time. That Nabokov pursued an opera about the assassination of a Russian villain, despite Spender's protestations that the topic is "such a bore...and so vulgar" (*Bagázh* 247), makes it reasonable to assume that the opera, like the work supported by the CCF, had to balance the avant-garde and the popular as well as the aesthetic and the propagandistic. Such a balance makes the opera a representative work of certain trends in late modernism. In Robert Genter's estimation of how the modernist aesthetic intersected with other media and communicative modes during the Cold War, he writes:

For late modernists, the spoken word, the written work, the musical refrain, and the abstract canvas were all calls to action on the part of the artist as rhetorician, that is, an artist who interweaved rational arguments, libidinal enticements, and poetic pleas in his works in order to produce a commitment or at least a response from the viewing audience. (4)

The aesthetic extremes in modernist arts were, according to Genter, put to work in inducing

⁸ Like many poets of the Auden Generation, Spender had a more than passing fascination with the Communist Party in the 1930s and was even a party member from 1936-37, but the Spanish Civil War resulted in a profound disillusionment with the far left. As Spender wrote in his contribution to the essay collection *The God That Failed* (1949), he had lost "faith in the automatism of history" (237). As with the promotion of Stravinsky's later work, Spender's earlier political alliances were carefully guarded by the CCF.

commitments from the audience. Though he does not deal specifically with the CCF, its mission is closely in line with Genter's theory. It also overlaps productively with Marina Mackay's description of late modernism as "multilateral" in nature, recruiting poetry, art, politics, and propaganda toward producing political alliances across mass audiences (20). Similarly, Thomas Davis sees late modernism as an aesthetic response to world-systemic distress and a search for those scenes in which that distress would attain legibility (17). Intermediality, in Nabokov and Spender's version of the total work of art, was a multilateral call to action and recruitment of multiple mediums and media toward making apparent these socio-political global changes. To deem it propaganda would be to oversimplify it, but as with the CCF itself, *Rasputin's End* takes up and combines various arts with a not unproblematic mission of education and collectivization.

Putting multilateral modernisms to work with both aesthetic and propagandistic ends is, though different in many regards, not unlike the political ramifications that inform Wagner's theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The interartistic configuration strives toward legibility across the arts, a system by which one medium modernizes another but, because such modernizing practices are adapted from a previously existing and familiar medium, that artwork of the future is intelligible to the people of the present. For Wagner, the fact that music, poetry, and architecture were united under drama and that each medium was composed according to his perception of a recuperated Greek theatre allowed him to conceive of opera as entertainment, education, and moral development oriented toward the goal of a collectively registered national culture. His operas aimed to be avant-garde and popular. Matthew Wilson Smith calls this the "curious fact," that the consumers of mass culture are the same ones attending Wagner's aesthetically radical operas (21), but that curious fact is necessary for Wagner's operas to serve their social function. He describes that function in *The Art-Work of the Future*:

The great United Art-work, which must gather up each branch of art to use it as a means, and in some sense to undo it for the common aim of *all*, for the unconditioned, absolute portrayal of perfected human nature,—this great United Art-work he cannot picture as depending on the arbitrary purpose of some human unit, but can only conceive it as the instinctive and associate product of the Manhood of the Future (88).

His artwork of the future is conceptually tethered to the society of the future. Given Wagner's extreme position, to say nothing of his troubling politics regarding national identity, it would be unconsidered to completely conflate the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* with the work of Nabokov, Spender, and the CCF in general. That said, both Wagner and these mid-twentieth century collaborators, in line with the socio-aesthetic trends of late modernism, were engaged in similar missions of creating total works of art that entertain and collectivize through combined arts. Intermediality, in both nineteenth-century Wagner and twentieth-century late modernism, serves an ideological function in its recruitment of combined arts as a means of recruiting attention and alliance from large audiences. The socio-political ends were much different, to be sure, but intermediality as a social mechanism was the same. Instead of mobilizing the opera house and its affiliated new media to incite nationalism, Nabokov and Spender did so to incite transnational opposition to intellectual and artistic life behind the Iron Curtain. To do so, their opera had to balance intellectual and artistic ambition with accessibility and familiarity. Interartistic intermediality, crystalized in the on-stage function of the gramophone, helps them achieve that balance.

Through eight scenes in three acts, *Rasputin's End* depicts Prince Felix Yusupov's conspiracy to murder Rasputin, the charismatic healer and self-proclaimed holy man who had become a close friend and trusted confidante of the Czar and his family. Though it takes liberties and demonstrates no real commitment to historical accuracy, the libretto maintains a tight focus on the events that transpired in the Prince's palace in December 1916. "The plot of the opera as

Stephen and I saw it,” writes Nabokov, “was to be an elaborate exercise in remembering” (*Bagázh* 248). This exercise turns a single night into a kaleidoscope of memory, history, and fantasy. The opera begins in the “murder-room,” where the Prince, Grand Duke, Deputy, and Doctor—none of the conspirators is named in the opera—are preparing for Rasputin’s arrival by mixing cyanide in wine and cakes. The conspirators place a gramophone in the upstairs room to give the impression that the Prince’s wife is throwing a party, a party that the Countess Marina, one of Rasputin’s close friends and the lure used to attract him, will be arriving to shortly. After Rasputin ingests the poisoned wine and cakes, the lights dim such that, according to the score, “only Rasputin’s face remains lit” (68) while the scene changes to ten years earlier when Rasputin first arrived to heal Czarevich Alexei from his hemophilic bleeding. After the successful healing achieved through a mix of prayer and magic, the second act begins back in the murder-room, with the gramophone still playing upstairs and the conspirators mystified at the poison’s failure to kill Rasputin. During the Prince’s aria, “He’s fast asleep, dreaming,” the lights fade and then come up on the palace of Countess Marina. The palace ballroom has been converted to a wartime hospital to accommodate those injured in the Great War. It is here that the Prince, Grand Duke, Doctor, and Deputy arrive and devise a plan with the Countess to use her as bait. The third and final act opens in Rasputin’s home, where women are having tea while Rasputin is in a back bedroom raping one of their daughters, Masha, under the premise of healing her. After he and Masha emerge, Anna, the Countess’ friend, enters to warn Rasputin of the conspiracy to murder him. In a rage, Rasputin forces all but his secretary to leave his home before he and his secretary steal away to a gypsy café. There Rasputin drinks and dances before one of the gypsies, tired of Rasputin’s wild behavior, smashes him on the head with a guitar. He falls unconscious on a sofa and an extended nightmare sequence begins. In this scene, Rasputin

is tormented by the Countess Marina in the form of “an ectoplasmic white shadow” (262) and a hunchbacked monk carrying a large crystal cross. Eventually the lights go dark on this nightmare and then come up with no interruption on the murder-room. Rasputin stares at the same crystal cross, now standing on the Prince’s mantelpiece, the gramophone plays softly from the top of the stairs, and the Grand Duke produces a pistol. As in the apocryphal account of that night, Rasputin does not die with the first or the second shot; he eventually crawls out of the room and into the snow outside where, offstage, the final gunshot rings out.

Even this synopsis reflects the ambiguities and contradictions in Spender’s libretto. Rasputin is depicted as a rapist and charlatan in one scene, but in the conclusion, he seems to become the mystic he had claimed to be, as his visions come to fruition. The monk carries the same crystal cross and Marina’s ectoplasmic form sings the same song played on the gramophone. Either Rasputin is endowed with supernatural powers or his memory has been retroactively changed after his death. Spender’s libretto suggests that the historical narrative is not a static master-code, but a collection of incomplete and misremembered recollections, like a collection of gramophone recordings. Recordings are depicted in *Rasputin’s End* as illusory, unreliable, and somehow dislocated from reality. Spender makes this clear in the opera’s opening as the conspirators are preparing the murder-room. When the opera begins, the characters stand “frozen, as if made of wax,” and remain that way until the gramophone begins to play (3). The lights come up on the past as stable but static; it is the gramophone, a role sung off-stage by a “cabaret-like mellow baritone” (4) that animates the scene. The gramophone’s voice is out of place for the opera stage and the song it plays is out of time for the story represented. It plays Nabokov’s original setting of Max Jacob’s Surrealist poem “Il se peut,” which was published five years after Rasputin’s assassination. It belongs to the future, to modernity, to the mass-

culture of gramophone discs and is therefore capable of revising the master-code of the past. The poem, in Wallace Fowlie's translation, begins:

It may be that a strange dream
Seized you tonight,
You thought you saw an angel
And it was your mirror. (43.1-4)

The song from the future prefigures the strange dream and ghostly angels in Rasputin's vision. Also, the purpose of the gramophone is to fool Rasputin into believing the Countess Marina is hosting a party upstairs, but his "angel" is only a mirror, a distorted reproduction.⁹ Beyond that, the gramophone itself also serves as a kind of mirror when the first words sung on stage belong to the Grand Duke imitating the gramophone. He hums along with the song, occasionally singing a phrase before reverting to humming. His voice is an indistinct and ventriloquized version of the reproduced song, which concludes:

May the muse of falseness
Bring to the end of your fingers
That scorn which is but a dream
Of the shepherd prouder than a king. (45.13-16)

After these lines, the Grand Duke orders the others to take the gramophone upstairs and "put on a record with a dance tune" (35). The music shifts to a muted jazz and, as far as their victim is concerned, becomes the very muse of falseness mentioned earlier. By acting as diegetic music, sounding from within the world represented on stage, the gramophone's sound becomes a kind of foreign element, inserted into and disrupting the scene we encountered before the gramophone began to play. Diegetic music also instills, on the part of the audience, what Stephen Rumph calls an "impure mode of attention," one that is split between hearing sound as sense data and sounds as a relational pattern—a semiotic system demanding interpretation (499). Such a system

⁹ The Victor Talking Machine Company's writing cherub also lurks in this image.

emerges in the form of Nabokov's leitmotifs that bring coherence to Spender's treatment of history as a collage of overlapping subjectivities.

Though the gramophone, with its out-of-time song and out-of-place musical style, is at the center of the conspiracy perpetrated against Rasputin as well as the indistinct and unreliable quality of the opera itself, its diegetic music is also the source of the opera's most meaningful leitmotifs. In this fashion, it operates as a major component of the interartistic configuration. Leitmotifs, famously implemented by Wagner, are brief musical phrases that become affiliated with specific characters, events, and themes. They leverage the gestural qualities of music in their signifying operation, as in the muted pastoralism of Rhine motif or the aggressive galloping of his Valkyrie motif in the *Ring* cycle, but it is their semi-linguistic referential capacity that allows them to operate as a signifying code, a set of stipulated symbols that turn the music into a narrative. Leitmotifs, especially in the case of musical gestures that work against received music theory, as in Wagner's "Tristan" chord from the opening measure of *Tristan und Isolde*, behave according to the interartistic configuration in that their semi-linguistic signifying capacity makes even the aurally unfamiliar into a consistent system. The gramophone produces two of the primary motifs that run through the opera and organize Spender's libretto: the "Il se peut" melody and the B-A#-B motif. The "Il se peut" melody (4, mm. 40-42) can be understood as the "strange dream" motif; moving stepwise up a major arpeggio from the dominant of the harmonizing minor chord, it represents a mirrored version of reality, reversed in the reflection. The brief B-A#-B gesture (44, mm. 371), heard in the opening measures of the gramophone's dance tune played to fool Rasputin, is tethered to Rasputin's consciousness and his version of events. It becomes the Rasputin motif and cues a turn from the events as such to the events as interpreted by Rasputin himself. Because the gramophone is the diegetic source of the opera's

organizing motivic material, it concretizes an understanding of phonography as a legible inscription, a view of new media as made intelligible by means of the signifying operations of older media. Like the opera itself, that which disrupts linearity and reliability achieves stability and predictability through the writerly operations of music.

The strange dream motif of “Il se peut” is one of the most salient features of the score, and its melody of an arpeggiated major chord is a straightforward and concise sonic cue. Musical motifs may function as anticipation, realization, or reminiscence in relation to the rest of the score and, therefore, are each assigned a kind of tense (Grey 98). The leitmotif sounds in the past tense when it recalls earlier voicings, the present tense when announcing itself as meaningful and relevant to what is occurring on stage, pointing to the “now,” or the future tense when it behaves as a sort of prophecy for what will come. In this way, despite *Rasputin's End*'s non-sequential narrative, the leitmotif that signals the story's condition as a combination of strange dreams helps to map the opera more linearly; the leitmotif functions as prophecy in the opening, a demand for attention to the present in the middle, and a memory in the conclusion. With the first moments of the opera, the audience hears a song quite literally from the future. Not only does the motif center around a text that had not been written by the time of the events on stage, but it sets events into motion. The leitmotif initiates movement and action, ultimately pointing to that action's final outcome. The strange dream becomes literal in the final voicings of the motif when, during Rasputin's nightmarish vision of ghostly women and demonic monks, Marina sings from off stage the gramophone's song (260, mm. 512-18). With this, the motif points to the past, when the events first began and the assassination was set into motion. As the story represented in the libretto changes temporality and setting frequently, the music systematizes events through its musical vocabulary. The music may point to the condition of strange dreams of the characters,

but it remains a coherent and organized creation of the opera's creators.

With the time-slip from the first scene to the second, from the murder-room to the healing of the Czarevich, the lights come down save for a single light on Rasputin's face. He sings the aria "Now I remember, as though it were yesterday," and at the word remember, the accompanying violins play the Rasputin motif: B-A#-B (68, m. 561). As indicated by the phrase "now I remember," what follows—where he uses his mystical powers to heal the Czarevich—occurs in Rasputin's memory. We can be confident that the miraculous healing and Rasputin's supposed heroism is his own version of events. The motif recurs throughout the scene in rhythmic variants but keeps the episode tethered to Rasputin's consciousness. In the final scene, while the Doctor, Grand Duke, and Prince are whispering to each other, the gramophone is silent and the Rasputin motif nowhere to be heard. And later, the gramophone's dance tune can be heard faintly but intermittently, though this time without the B-A#-B motif. When Rasputin finally speaks, asking himself "Where have I seen this cross before?" as he looks at the mantle, a swelling accompaniment in the strings voices the B-A#-B motif for the last time in the opera (283, mm. 645-47). The possibility that his dream was in fact a premonition, that the cross was a sort of warning, is punctured by the sound of the aural symbol for his own delusion. The Rasputin motif is more than a sonic tag attached to the character, but rather a signal that he is the one arranging the action as it unfolds on stage, as if the music is composed in the first person.

Beyond the half-steps of this motif, *Rasputin's End* is riddled with harmonic structures complicated by chromaticism and minor seconds. Like the Rasputin motif that reframes what is represented on stage from the master-code of history to the distorted version rendered in the conscious of the focalizer, structures like the minor major seventh chord ringing out when

Rasputin is struck by the gypsy's guitar (258, m. 500)¹⁰ or the tone cluster comprised of E, F, F#, and B that concludes the nightmare sequence (276, m. 613) are common throughout Nabokov's score. They indicate a harmonic vocabulary suggestive of incompatibility and incommensurability between memory and history. The opera ends with an abrupt G-sharp minor seventh chord, instead of the frequently heard minor major seventh chord, and resolves the competing tonalities suggested in that harmony with the flat seventh scale degree, thus finally moving out of the liminal space suggested by competing tonalities and half-step dissonances. Nabokov's chords become a kind of language, describing the world on stage as real, imagined, or something in between. Spender's text continually threatens to become impenetrable because it combines dream sequences, unreliable reminiscences, and moments lifted from the historical record in a series of events that not only does not follow reasonably but is unlike most other operas. His episodic libretto unfolds like a gramophone recording: out of place, out of time, out of order. Nabokov's score, however, is also like a gramophone recording: inscribed, legible, and progressing along a single, consistent line from beginning to end. Interpolating the effects of phonography allows Nabokov and Spender to create a mid-twentieth century version of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: unfamiliar but understandable. Phonography becomes the site at which, under the interartistic perspective, music becomes most like language.

In *Rasputin's End*, the gramophone is not represented by a prop but by a human voice, and it functions as much more than a convenient plot device; instead, the gramophone is a fully-realized cybernetic being and a kind of organizing consciousness for the narrative. In the case of

¹⁰ The guitar used to knock Rasputin unconscious is perhaps an allusion to how Prince Yusupov used his guitar-playing and knowledge of gypsy folk songs to ingratiate himself to Rasputin. Though not in the opera, a scene in René Fülöp-Miller's 1928 biography *Rasputin: The Holy Devil*, the primary source material for Spender's libretto (Giroud 281), describes how Yusupov "reached for his guitar as an assassin reaches for his weapon" (347).

Façade, Sitwell performed the cybernetic role as medium/media transmitting voices through a spirit trumpet/gramophone horn. In this function, she did not behave as an organizing consciousness, but rather a conduit through which what resists organization can be voiced. She makes sensible the spiritual, the nonsensical, and the invisible. Contrariwise, the gramophone in *Rasputin's End* behaves as an inscription device designed to play back a written record. The gramophone's music allows it to behave as a narrator, stitching together the various episodes. As a cybernetic narrator, the gramophone behaves according to the modernist tendency to treat the narrator as a recording device, a treatment developed in response to aural media. Sara Danius describes the widely shared modernist conception of the listening subject as a "sensorium," an all-perceiving inscription device (187). Melba Cuddy-Keane similarly describes hearing in modernist narratives as a "more inclusive, more integrative sense" that "constructs a meaningful representation of the narrative world" (386). Though Cuddy-Keane is not using the word "meaningful" in as loaded a capacity as it becomes in the context of intermediality, it is important to note how in the recording of what is heard, in the conversion of sound vibration into its writerly trace, the meaning-event becomes more inclusive and integrative. By turning sound into an inscription decoded by the reproduction device—by turning the aural modality into the linguistic modality as phonography allows—that which recedes from logic and sequence can become formed and organized. Raw sense data of the listening subject becomes an intersubjectively intelligible record.

For Nabokov and Spender, given their work in the CCF, the possibility of turning conflicting and irreconcilable views of politics and history into collective understanding must have been attractive. Media, Nabokov knew, can define and redefine one's view of events and the world. He describes how as a child in imperial Russia he first learned of Rasputin's death. In

1916, while riding a train on his way home from the opera, accompanied by his governess, he saw a man holding a newspaper with the headline “RASPUTIN MISSING,” but the rest of the front page, as he describes it, “was a smudge of censor’s tar” (*Bagázh* 85). In this striking image, though likely revised if not wholly imagined after Rasputin became the subject of his opera, Nabokov encounters the means of communication as not mediating the objects to which they refer but rather completely erasing them. In his opera, media offer the capacity to transform even the inscrutable and unverifiable, like what was written under the smear of censor’s tar, into a methodically organized aural representation.

Rasputin’s End and *Façade* employ two different forms of intermediality: one that looks for how one medium can systematize the other, and one that looks for how the mediums’ integration suggests expressive potential resistant to systematization. Behind these respective intermedial configurations are understandings of aural media: one that views the phonograph as a tool for turning sound into a kind of inscribed writing, and one that views the phonograph as an esoteric means of giving voice to the unseen and unknowable. Their respective renderings of phonographs as performative roles make the relationship between media and intermedial art apparent. What these differing but related configurations illustrate is that media consist of more than technologies and their effects; *Façade* and *Rasputin’s End* were not caused by the technology that they interpolate. Instead, media are more productively framed as networks of devices, uses, and imagination. How the devices were generally understood and in what capacities they were employed are partially responsible for how they are mobilized in works like the operas in this chapter. Whether sound reproduction was affiliated with mediumship and making ghostly voices audible or with culture wars and the struggle against communism impacts how the same piece of technology can be framed in such radically different ways. A little over

two decades after *Rasputin's End*, John Cage completed the last of the five operas he composed. *Europera 5* is noteworthy in that it completes the arc from the grand opera spectacle begun with *Europeras 1 & 2* (1987) to the subdued fifth, premiered a year before his death. All five employ sound reproduction technology and chance operations to create performances comprised of pieces of the operatic repertoire spanning Gluck to Puccini, but *Europera 5* makes notable use of an antique phonograph in a work that is simultaneously a celebration of opera and a negation of opera. Its dual tendencies toward the interartistic and intersemiotic configurations also suggest an appropriate conclusion to this chapter.

4. Cage's Victrola and Your Opera

In 1987 the Frankfurt Opera premiered John Cage's *Europeras 1 & 2*, a large-scale work that employed chance operations processed by a computer program to direct nineteen vocalists, 105 arias, 105 costume designs, 115 stage directions, seventy scenery flats, cues for 181 stage lights, and the orchestral arrangement of 2,611 instrumental passages from sixty-four operas (Kuhn 444). Hans-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn of the Frankfurt Opera had asked Cage to create an irreversible negation of opera as such. Not only did Cage fail to negate opera as such, if that was his intention, but he failed to negate the *Europeras* themselves. *Europeras 3 & 4* premiered in 1989 and *Europera 5*, commissioned by pianist Yvar Mikhashoff as a more portable chamber opera version of the others, premiered in 1991. Though still determined by chance operations, this chamber work involves only a single pianist, two singers, a radio tuned to a local jazz station, a television with the sound turned off, a tape of 101 superimposed opera recordings called the *Truckera*, named for the sound of a passing semi-truck it imitated, and, most importantly for this chapter's focus, a Victrola that played six antique recordings of

operas.¹¹ *Europeras 1 & 2* is an elaborate spectacle, bringing together numerous mediums and media in a single, randomly organized total work of art, but *Europera 5* takes a subtler approach to the combination of the arts. In the last of the *Europeras*, the Victrola functions as a concretization of the opera's dual tendencies regarding those combinations. On one hand, Cage's opera is profoundly expressive and nostalgic for the opera fragments his directions repurpose and reconstitute. In this sense, despite the difficulty of Cage's composition, the combination of music, text, and stagecraft enables a dramatic performance of opera history's decay, a decay that finds its interartistic legibility in the antique record player. On the other hand, Cage's reliance on chance operations drastically diminishes his role as composer and creator of meaningful content. His version of the total work of art is more appropriately a set of conditions under which art can emerge; it is an intersemiotic conceptualization of multimedia. *Europera 5* stages both intermedial configurations, and the Victrola is the site at which these co-occurring strategies play out. Though the opera emerged from a challenge to negate opera as such, it more precisely negates the difference between approaches to intermediality the phonograph had precipitated a hundred years before.

Like the *Europeras* that came before it, *Europera 5* follows the results of a computer program designed to rapidly generate outcomes of the I Ching coins. However, the scale and configuration of the work illustrate a treatment of opera and the total work of art unlike its predecessors. Instead of nineteen singers, *Europera 5* has only two. They are directed to select five arias from their repertoire and perform them within chance-determined time constraints. Though the two intermittently sing simultaneously, one of the two is directed to stand behind or

¹¹ According to David Metzger's research, an early draft of *Europera 5* also included a player piano that would play a series of roles titled "Echoes of the Metropolitan" (105).

under the stage at such times. Accompanying the vocalists, the pianist performs six opera transcriptions from Liszt's six fantasies. For three of these fantasies, Cage directs the pianist to "shadow play," lightly touching the keys so that the only sound the instrument produces results from the player accidentally pressing too hard. The *Truckera*, which featured prominently in the previous *Europeras*, is reduced here from the sound of a passing truck to a vague murmur, a hum that underlies the sparse music on stage. The antique Victrola, which does not run on electricity and, instead, operates according to the acoustic amplification of the horn and the mechanical force of the crank, emits a distant and distorted sound. It performs the recorded operas as much as the sound of the device itself. Though it is often the quietest of the elements on stage, functioning as what David Metzger calls the "sonic residue" of the vocal performance (106), Cage's Victrola illustrates the ambitions of *Europa 5*. It performs both depleted and distorted fragments of operatic history and it performs the conditions that have contributed to such depletion and distortion; ironically, they are the same conditions recruited in updating and reconstituting the operatic genre itself.

Given the significant body of critical work dedicated to John Cage, it would be unreasonable to fully situate my treatment of Cage in conversations regarding his media theory, spirituality, social mission, and other areas in the robust field of Cage scholarship. Instead, given that my treatment of Cage focuses on the role of phonography in *Europa 5*, the mention of only a few major interpretations of Cage will serve to illustrate the foundation I am building from. Laura Kuhn's dissertation on *Europeras 1 & 2* is one of the most thorough treatments of Cage's take on opera and, given her involvement as his assistant during the actual production of the first operas, it is a necessary starting point. Her work is concerned with the composition and production of the first *Europeras* as well as expounding on the various philosophical systems

underpinning Cage's work, including his understanding of the social function of art, the role of Zen Buddhism in chance operations, his adaptation of Marshall McLuhan's media theories, and his interpretation of R. Buckminster Fuller's theory of synergy. While there is much to unpack in Kuhn's work, the most prominent concerns in addressing Cage's intermediality in *Europera 5* are synergy and the social function of his composition. Regarding the socio-political function of his art, as Marjorie Perloff writes, "a cornerstone of Cage's aesthetic credo was that the sharp divide between 'art' and 'life' must be bridged—that, on the contrary, the art-life continuum is characterized by 'interpenetration and nonobstruction,' by the 'plurality of centers' and a democratic 'circus situation'"(29). In this decentered circus situation, all features of the entire field of sound are co-present in the total work of art. His synergetic bringing together of different acoustic elements was informed by a utopian ideal, one that reframed avant-garde music as a democratic event-space privileging the experience of the audience over the subjectivity of the composer. "Difficult perceptual shifts, new vectors of attention," Joan Retallack writes in reference to Cage, "have defined the province of the avant-garde" (184). Like Wagner before him, instigating new vectors of attention undergirded Cage's intermedial experimentation. However, that experimentation was in no way as straightforward as the unification of arts toward the dramatic *Gesamtkunstwerk*. As William Fetterman writes:

The supposed unification of the elements in conventional opera really only seems to be so because of the linear narrative structure. By shearing away the narrative structure of opera, Cage's isolation of elements provides a reflexive de-synthesis which explores and informs the integrity of individual components and performers. Cage was respectful of but not protective of tradition, using the past as a fluid source of pre-existent material for critical (and emotional) insights into our present situation. (183)

David Bernstein elaborates on the simultaneous synthesis and de-synthesis at work in *Europera 5* when he argues that "the result seems less transformation of traditional opera in a 'synergetic coming together of its separate elements,' than a focused effort to foreground these elements,

allowing them to sound” (85). These competing though not irreconcilable evaluations suggest that Cage’s final opera gestures toward the total field of sound in which individual arts reach synergetic unity as well as toward silence, the condition to which all arts decay. The Victrola is a material presence that makes concrete the critical and emotional insights of *Europera 5*. By functioning as both a site potentiating the synergetic coming together as well as making audible the inevitable decay of the operatic form, it offers interpenetration and nonobstruction as much as it does a sheering away and de-synthesis. Cage uses the Victrola in his final opera to demonstrate both the Wagnerian and the Mallarméan approaches to the total work of art operating on the same stage.

The interartistic configuration utilizes the operations of one medium to make sense of and make legible the unfamiliar operations of another medium. When Cage removes the narrative element from opera and de-synthesizes its combined mediums, it appears that he has effectively made the interartistic configuration unachievable. However, the Victrola concretizes the operations of synthesis that aural media make possible. It makes audible the distortions and interventions of sound reproduction technology such that the opera excerpts the phonograph mediations are explicitly rendered as antiquated traces of past aural phenomena. The music takes on a specific material and tactile quality as suggested by the means of its (re)production. The Victrola makes apparent the material condition of sound, the material condition that *Europera 5* leverages toward the transformation of traces of operatic history into a nostalgic treatment of that history. By using the Victrola to make apparent sound recording’s material condition and status as inscribed artifact, Cage points to phonography’s inherent intermediality and its reconstitution of sound into a physical mark and writing system. It is in the degradation of that writing system and the decay of its physicality—made perceptible in the Victrola’s cracks, hisses, and,

paradoxically, its near inaudibility—that Cage makes the intermediality of sound reproduction technology most salient. Other components of the *Europera*'s total work of art appear to resist synthesis; unaccompanied arias performed in various languages intersect and overlap while a piano plays ghostly versions of familiar operas and a jazz station redirects attention away from the performance altogether. These features lack the physicality on the Victrola, a physicality that makes plain *Europera 5* as a sustained elegy for the eighteenth and nineteenth European operatic tradition.¹² In this way, Cage's use of phonography also closely follows the social mission at the center of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the restoration and reconstitution of past performance practices for the sake of a utopic future, of expanding perceptual practices of audiences. Like the Florentine *camerata* framing their musico-dramatic performances as restorations of Greek tragedy, Cage's music is a restoration that makes explicit its condition as a historical artifact. Through the interartistic configuration, the collage of fragments and silences becomes intelligible, even expressive, through the process of reading operatic recordings as intermedial artifacts.

However, Cage's ambitions are not so straightforward. Though his opera is predicated on an operatic history refashioned as artwork of the future, that future remains unknowable. His artwork of the future is a field of potentiality and of privileging the listener's mode of attention over the genius of the composer. The Victrola points to, alongside the interartistic configuration, *Europera 5*'s intersemiotic configuration. Directing the chance operations that would determine the various parts of the performance but relinquishing control after a certain point, Cage's role as

¹² David Bernstein argues that *Europera 5* signals a return to the expressive music that Cage had abandoned in the 1950s (86). Similarly, Metzger puts *Europera 5* next to Luciano Berio's *Rendering* (1989) to demonstrate the expressivity attainable through representation of "musical decay" (113).

operatic composer is less one of creating an opera and more one of creating the conditions under which an opera could emerge. In a seeming contradiction, these conditions of potentiality and renewal are founded upon the material of the past. What allows for their reconstitution from the master-code of operatic history into a new perceptual vocabulary is the intervention of media technology. The Victrola is the most pronounced piece of technology in the refiguring of operatic history into something unknowable. Though it is not the only piece of technology on stage, the television and the radio speak to something other than opera and suggest an erasure of that history. Unlike those devices, the Victrola contributes only six antiquated opera recordings to the larger multimedia performance. These recordings are determined by chance and their function in the performance is directed largely by how the listener elects to perceive them; this is, after all, *your* opera. Those six recordings become a site of unpredictable consequences, of ongoing renewal out of finite material. Like Mallarmé's book, it contains the connections between everything but is nothing more than an ordinary phonograph. As Cage writes, "the observer-listener is able to stop saying I do not understand, since no point-to-point linear communication has been attempted. He is at his own center (impermanent) of total space-time [...] The complex of existence exceeds mentation's compass" ("Form is a Language" 135). He does not employ intermediality in a nostalgic treatment of the past, but he transforms the past, by way of the Victrola, into an active process exceeding "mentation's compass" instead of a static object reverentially revived.

The interartistic and intersemiotic configurations are based on two seemingly incompatible goals. The interartistic configuration has a pedagogical mission, using one art to model an interpretive strategy suitable for another art that may resist previously reliable reading and listening methods. The intersemiotic configuration strives to combine arts toward exceeding

interpretation altogether and resisting meta-discourse. In *Europera 5* Cage synthesizes both configurations within a single performance. In the interartistic capacity, he asks his audience to read the mediating structures and material qualities themselves, to interpret their interventions and distortions as the connective tissue converting fragments into an expressive elegy. The Victrola makes the indeterminate collage into a nostalgic reverie. At the same time, in the intersemiotic capacity, he demands the listener to stop saying she does or does not understand; the meaning-event is not the decoding of the event but rather the conditions that potentiate the event. In this way, it exceeds any attempt at interpretation. Cage makes the social function of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* central to the performance, equipping his audience with new perceptual faculties and refiguring popular ontologies. However, the Victrola is also a site of dematerialization, like *Le Livre*, existing as a point of possibility and therefore resisting the application of any perceptual faculties, no matter how thoroughly practiced. By using the Victrola in this way, Cage indicates its status in the second half of the twentieth century as very much old media, but he also maintains the possibility of its continued treatment as new media. The Victrola's sound operates as a metonym for the Western operatic tradition itself; opera has thoroughly incorporated the effects and practices of sound reproduction technology and become something else altogether.

The only commercial recording of *Europera 5*—featuring Mikhashoff on piano and Jan Williams on Victrola—begins with the high-pitched whine of the muted television¹³ before the

¹³ It is difficult to hear the whine of the television and not be reminded of Cage's famous account of the anechoic chamber: "It was after I got to Boston that I went into the anechoic chamber at Harvard University. Anybody who knows me knows this story. I am constantly telling it. Anyway, in that silent room, I heard two sounds, one high and one low. Afterward I asked the engineer in charge why, if the room was so silent, I had heard two sounds. He said, 'Describe them.' I did. He said, 'The high one was your nervous system in operation. The low one was your blood in circulation'" (*Silence* 8).

phonograph quietly enters only to be drowned out by the big band music coming from the radio. After two minutes of these competing mediated sounds, the radio host's voice can be heard telling listeners what they have been hearing and what will come next. Everything is distant, muted, nearly impossible to discern. Suddenly, a tenor, louder than anything we have heard so far, begins "*Che gelida manina*" from *La bohème*, sounding hollow and untethered without Puccini's swelling accompaniment. Between the anachronistic voice of the radio, coming from somewhere far from the world of the stage, and the ghostly otherness that such recontextualization brings to the operatic drama, it is easy to hear traces of *Façade* and *Rasputin's End* in *Europera 5*. A surprising connective thread emerges across these three pieces. First, from a modernist eccentric and a minor composer who created something that struggles to earn the label "opera," next, from two late modernists who were making sense of their political alliances and engaging in a culture war alongside their art, and finally, from perhaps the most well-known American composer of the twentieth century, though certainly not for his operas: in these three radically different intermedial works we encounter experiments in expanding the compositional and perceptual vocabularies that delimit the boundaries of opera. All three use the phonograph, one of the pieces of technology to mark the beginning of the first media age, as a model for combining and integrating music, text, and stagecraft in their respective re-interpretations of the total work of art.

Chapter Two

Technosonic Musicalization: From Swan Songs to Stereophonics

The operas of Walton, Nabokov, and Cage turn to phonography in order to reconsider the relationship between modern opera and the European operatic tradition that began with the Florentine *camerata*. These collaborations illustrate how intermedial modernism utilizes aural media to revisit the ideal of the total work of art. However, intermedial modernism extends beyond Western opera, beyond theories of the total work of art, and beyond phonography as the primary site of a changing media ecology. African American literature ranging from the 1920s to the 1960s is comprised of several transmedial texts, ones that incorporate the forms, qualities, and semiotic operations of music as a foreign medium. Beyond being transmedial as opposed to multimedial examples, what sets these texts apart from the performances discussed in the previous chapter is a different set of cultural practices associated with aural media so entwined with a radically different set of musical styles. Authors like Jean Toomer and Langston Hughes do not use the phonograph to position themselves in relation to the Wagnerian or Mallarméan conceptions of the total work of art; in fact, the phonograph is only one device among many that impact their musical aesthetics. These authors do, however explore the interartistic and intersemiotic configurations of intermediality, but they do so in transmedial texts, in relation to unique soundscapes and musical traditions, and in accord with specific social positions within their respective media ecologies. By pivoting away from Anglo-American musico-literary collaboration and toward African American musico-literary transmediation, this chapter

showcases the extent to which media and music were enmeshed with culture and community in contexts well outside of the opera house.

Toomer's arrival in Sparta, Georgia in the Fall of 1921 initiated his first meaningful encounter with the musical traditions of African Americans in the rural South. Coming from the metropolitan centers of the North, Toomer found in Sparta sounds unlike those of the fast-paced, mechanized, and loud cities in the American Jazz Age. Upon discovering this music, he also became aware of its possible disappearance within a modern milieu; it was simultaneously a recuperation and a loss of musical heritage. Such a conflict—between the tradition twentieth-century black Americans had inherited and the new jazz sound they were in the process of creating—became a point of tension in his first and most well-known book, *Cane* (1923). In notes for an unfinished autobiography, Toomer describes hearing the music of the South that would become so integral to the text:

There was a valley. The valley of “Cane,” with smoke wreaths during the day and mist at night. A family of back-country Negroes had only recently moved into a shack not far away. They sang. And this was the first time I’d ever heard the folk-songs and spirituals. They were very rich and sad and joyous and beautiful. But I learned that the Negroes of the town objected to them. They called them “shouting.” They had Victrolas and player-pianos. So, I realized with deep regret, that the spirituals, meeting ridicule, would be certain to die out. With Negroes also the trend was towards the city—and industry and commerce and machines. The folk-spirit was walking in to die on the modern desert. That spirit was so beautiful. Its death was so tragic. Just this seemed to be the sum of life to me. And this was the feeling I put into *Cane*. *Cane* was a swan-song. It was a song of an end. (*The Wayward and the Seeking* 123)

While Toomer felt as if he was returning to a place he had never been and regaining a music he did not know he had lost, that same music and those performing it were disappearing—an effect he ascribes to the Great Migration, new media, and the shocks and changes of the twentieth-century. Inextricably linked to the swan songs of Georgia's hymns, spirituals, and folksongs and the rise of blues, ragtime, and jazz are the player pianos, Victrolas, and other technologies that

impacted the production and reproduction of music. New media emerge from and initiate new cultural practices and new literacies, reconfiguring the musical styles and performance spaces that are bound up with those practices. The story of music and musical aesthetics in what became a foundational text of the Harlem Renaissance and modernism more broadly is also the story of technology and electricity.

Arriving after the Harlem Renaissance and bookending black modernism opposite *Cane* are Langston Hughes' long poems *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) and *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961). Like the majority of Hughes' prolific output, these poems are imbued with African American musical idioms and the transmediation of musical aesthetics into poetic forms. In his introductory note, Hughes describes its interartistic aesthetic when he claims that *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, "like bebop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of a jam sessions, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and disc-tortions of the music of a community in transition" (*Collected Poems* 387). It is also marked by jukeboxes, gramophones, radios, and film sound all stitching together scenes and sequences of a post-Renaissance Harlem. As in *Cane*, the music of a community in transition is inseparable from that music's recording, reproduction, and amplification. *Ask Your Mama*, an experimental depiction of what "is really happening in the shadow of world events—past and present" (*Collected Poems* 527), is a sequence made up of two juxtaposed bodies of text: one a poem printed in capital letters and the other a running notation for musical accompaniment. The result is a musicality from two audio channels: a stereophonic poem. We find in this poem an updated version of the black musical aesthetic and modern media's effects seen in Toomer's musicalized hybrid volume. The three texts incorporate the qualities of sound mediated by the player piano,

gramophone, jukebox, radio, and stereo as much as they do the forms and participatory features of African American musical styles. Their musico-literary composition, therefore, is based on an integration of musical and linguistic meaning-making as well as an interpolation of the sonic effects and cultural practices surrounding aural media.

Modern literature is replete with examples of poetry and fiction modelled after and striving toward the condition of music. From the late nineteenth-century work of Edouard Dujardin, to the high modernist novels of Joyce, Woolf, and Huxley, to postmodernist texts by Milan Kundera, Anthony Burgess, and Richard Powers, there is no shortage of prose works that employ musical features to complicate literary forms.¹ Eric Prieto raises four questions necessary for interpreting these intersections of music and literature in texts like these: One, what motivates this writer's turn to music in the first place? Two, how does the use of such and such a model affect the semiotic functioning of the text? Three, what consequences does the use of this model have for our interpretation of the text? And four, what are its implications for the study of literature (and music) in general? (19-20). Prieto's guiding questions force an analysis of musicalized literature to remain tethered to the reading practice a specific text demands, resisting widely applicable notions of metaphor and analogy. In even preliminary attempts at addressing these concerns, it is apparent that the motivations and consequences of Toomer's and Hughes' intermedial texts are substantially different from those of their European and Anglo-American contemporaries. Not only are the spirituals and blues of Toomer's *Cane* unlike the fugues, operas, and quartets of Joyce and Woolf, and the jazz and bebop of Hughes' poetry unlike the

¹ See Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1888), Joyce's *Chamber Music* (1907) and *Ulysses* (1922), Woolf's "The String Quartet" (1921) and *The Waves* (1931), Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928), Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979) and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), Burgess' *Napoleon Symphony* (1974), and Powers' *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991).

symphonies and variations of Burgess and Powers, but these African American authors take care to incorporate references to and elaborations on the aural media that black American musical forms were linked to. In this way, *Cane*, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, and *Ask Your Mama*—representative works of black American modernism—offer a related but unique approach to modernist musicalization, one that is concerned with the music of black sonic spaces as much as those sonic spaces’ relation to the broader media ecology. These writers demonstrate an understanding of music and media’s co-constituting and co-evolving effects on both literary aesthetics and the formation of shared black identity, and so any study of their modernist intermediality, any attempt to answer Prieto’s questions and turn those answers into interpretive strategies, must account for media and race alongside music.

1. Going Electric

In order to responsibly study representative works of twentieth-century African American literature, the relationship between Anglo-American and African American modernism, with attention to musicalization, must be sketched. These two threads, admittedly entangled within a much more complex global network, can be understood as distinct yet connected through artistic exchange. Houston Baker argues that artists we label as “moderns” are such because of their confrontations with and responses to profound shifts in the assumptions and meanings of human life (*Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* 5). Beyond shifts like Reconstruction, the Great Migration, and Jim Crow, even experiences ostensibly shared by white and black communities were confronted differently. For instance, 340,000 African American soldiers fought in the Great War, and while white modernists were reckoning with a sense of disillusionment and of belonging to a “lost generation,” black authors could understand the same event as irrefutably

validating their claim as full American citizens (Gosselin 40). Such parallel yet distinct responses to the same events were expressed in artistic output as well, resulting in a series of meaningful though sometimes antagonistic exchanges between white and black modernists. Michael Borshuk, Sieglinde Lemke, Michael North, and James Smethurst elucidate how features frequently associated with one racial category of modernism or another—hybrid form, radical representational strategies, primitivism, the registration of shocks and disruptions—actually emerged from points of contact and adaptive strategies between black and white twentieth-century writers, musicians, and artists.² Henry Lewis Gates describes a major form of that adaptation in his guiding theory of signifyin(g): a practice made up of the black revision of standard English signification, intertextuality among African American texts, and an indigenously African American interpretive approach (xxiv). Black modernism is marked by many of the same practices as Anglo-American modernism but repurposed and even aimed against the white artists and audiences that figured black culture as derivative, primitive, or simplistic—practices that embodied, in Baker’s phrase, “the mastery of form and the deformation of mastery” (*Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* 15).

For the purposes of this chapter, the mode of signifyin(g) of the greatest interest is the revised and reinterpreted relationship between music and literature. For black writers, musicalization offered more than a strategy of aesthetic invention but also a means of resisting subsummation within or ghettoization by the white artistic framework through the recuperation of cultural inheritance, like spirituals and folksongs, and the celebration of modern black musical

² See Borshuk’s *Swinging the Vernacular: Jazz and African American Modernist Literature* (2006), Lemke’s *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (1998), North’s *The Dialectic of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (1994), and Smethurst’s *The African American Roots of Modernism: From Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance* (2011).

forms, like jazz and bebop. Modernist musicalization for black writers could foreground oral cultural production and function as a point of resistance against that culture's oppression. At the same time, aural media presented both the threat of erasure to black performers—literally making the black performing body invisible—and the potential for recruiting those technologies in the development and dissemination of a sound-based and participatory black aesthetic. This chapter examines the relationships between music, race, and sound technology to understand the ways in which the conditions of media ecologies of twentieth-century African American communities are expressed in intermedial texts and how our reading practice can effectively respond to that expression. Here media are understood as structures of communication that include both the technology and its associated protocols. Communication is, in Lisa Gitelman's valuable definition, "a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation" (*Always Already New* 12). Anticipating Prieto's final question—what are the implications for musical and literary study in general?—the discussion of intermedial meaning-making will be more accurately directed by taking into account the cultural practices, popular ontologies, and intermedial literacies existing on the same mental map.

To that end, I will endeavor to describe the map of twentieth-century aural media in the United States. 1877 to 1925 spans what Mark Katz identifies as the acoustic era of sound technology, an era when the amplification of mechanical phonographs was achieved through means like amplifying horns. This time ended with widespread use of the microphone and electronic amplification (12). During the acoustic era phonograph companies like Thomas Edison's and Emile Berliner's were concerned with both selling the devices as much as training listeners to correctly listen to them. One such indoctrination method was the Edison Realism

Test. The test asked listeners to select a piece of music from a collection of cylinders, then to sit with their eyes closed and focus on when they last heard that piece of music performed live, recalling their emotional state at the time of the concert. A representative from the Edison company would play the recording and then ask listeners whether they found themselves in the same emotional state as in their recollection. The test, however, seems less concerned with demonstrating the realistic sound of the device and more with disciplining the listener into imagining the reproduced sound as “real.” As one set of instructions from 1916 unequivocally explains to the test subject: “If you do not obtain this reaction at the first test, it is due to the fact that you have not wholly shaken off the influence of your surroundings” (qtd. in Katz 44). If you were not convinced you were listening to the real thing, the failure was yours, not the technology’s.

From 1915-1925, the final years of the acoustic era, Edison’s Diamond Disc Phonograph travelled the country as salesmen administered a new assessment, the “tone test,” to great pedagogical effect. Again, whether it was an assessment of the device’s capabilities or the listener’s appropriate perceptions is ambiguous. In the tone test, a singer would perform onstage with the phonograph before a large audience, thus making the training process a highly public one. The performer would match the tone and quality of a reproduced voice played on the phonograph, and, as the stage lights were switched on and off, audience members guessed who was performing: the human or the machine. Of course, these completely mechanical phonographs sounded nothing like the live performers, but the test served to train the listeners’ perception. As Greg Milner describes them, “the tone tests posited the sound of the machine as the baseline and subsumed the sound of ‘reality’ within it” (7). Though the Diamond Disc Phonograph suffered a decline in sales in the 1920s with the advent of radio, which used

microphones and therefore amplified the voice, the acoustic era had instilled a sense of conceptual conflation between the invisible recorded voice and the embodied performance. Recorded sound's representational capacity extended beyond the aural mode and incorporated, through sustained indoctrination, visual signification as well. One lasting result on the mental map of American media is that as sound became mobile and reproducible, so did the inaudible features of that sound. Music could be reproduced in a space distinct from its origin, but everything from the visual appearance to the affective tenor of that original space could be—or at least should be with the listener's cooperation—reproduced as well.

While the electrically amplified record player was on the rise, enforcing the mobile quality of sound and soundscapes, other electronic aural media were rapidly gaining popularity as well. The first years of the 1920s saw the radio go from a fascination for hobbyists and tinkerers to near total ubiquity: in 1920 the returns of the presidential election between Warren G. Harding and James M. Cox were broadcast over the radio, in 1921 the landmark broadcast of the James Dempsey and Georges Carpentier prizefight took place, that same year twenty-eight new radio stations came on the air, and in the spring of 1922 the sale of radios reached \$60 million (Taylor 241). Another electric piece of musical technology, the player piano, achieved near omnipresence that same decade. Invented in 1899, the Wurlitzer Tonophone came to replace nearly all early versions of the jukebox in roadhouses, bars, arcades, and other public spaces in the twenties (Segrave 37). Not until automation and amplification became more reliable in the 1940s did the jukebox come to surpass the player piano in popularity. With technologies like the electric gramophone, Wurlitzer, radio, and jukebox, music's portability achieved an even greater potential. Such a mobility resulted in what R. Murray Schafer calls *schizophonia*: “a synthetic soundscape in which natural sounds are becoming increasingly

unnatural while machine-made substitutes are providing the operative signals directing human life” (91). One can imagine the smoke wreathes and pine trees of Sparta at odds with Tin Pan Alley pop songs and the synthetic soundscape of what T. Austin Graham calls the “jazz latitude” (*The Great American Songbooks* 13), coming from electrically powered player pianos.

Schizophonia achieved even more substantial impact with the development of stereophonic recording in the 1950s, which employed two different audio channels to simulate sound reaching one ear before another, thus simulating the principle by which we conceive of spatial relationships based on sound. In this way, stereo does not record the sounds of one space and transpose it to another—as in the case of phonographs, player pianos, and radio—but uses sound illusions to create sound images and the impression of a space that never existed. What began with the visual signification developed through the tone test reached a profound level of sonic realism through these binaural manipulations.

The associated protocol that new aural media from phonography to stereo demanded was an understanding, no matter how coerced or rehearsed, that the recorded voice was an accurate representation of its production; to hear the music was to encounter the performer and enter the performance space. Aural media became wholly audiovisual technologies. Herein lies the culturally and socially constructed relationship between recorded sound and race that Toomer, Hughes, and other black writers encountered in their incorporation of black musical styles. Despite aural media’s capacity to separate sound from its original context and from the visual markers of race, the listening practices of the twentieth century made it so that those markers were simply transmediated into features registered in the music itself. Aural media afforded visibility and self-promotion for black musicians, as in the Fisk Jubilee Singers who began selling recordings in 1909 or King Oliver who began in 1923. But it also served as an evolution

of blackface and the American minstrel show, as in the 1917 record of the all-white Original Dixieland “Jass” Band—probably the first jazz recording ever made (Myers 9)—or white “coon shouters” like Blossom Seeley, Nora Bayes, and Sophie Tucker (Kenney 102). With recordings of black musical styles and black voices, regardless of the actual race of the performer, listeners were trained to hear and see them as black. The black musical aesthetic was intermedial and its role in the definition of African American identity became, to adopt Alexander Weheliye’s term, a technosonic construct.

Sound reproduction technology, according to Gitelman, seems to be comprised of “instruments for the maintenance of ethnic identity” (“Recording Sound, Recording Race, Recording Property” 293), but Weheliye resists the “tendency to frame Afro-diasporic populations as inherently Luddite” (4), outside modernity, and shaped by, as opposed to shaping, technology and technological practices. He contends that orality and music served as the primary modes of black cultural production, modes that did not come to an end with modern aural media. Instead, beginning with the invention of the phonograph, twentieth-century African American music, art, and literature present a series of meaningful engagements with sound technologies. “The nexus of black culture and sonic technology,” he argues, enables “black subjects to structure and sound their positions within and against Western modernity” (8). African American music and musicalized literature navigate these positions, taking up and overtaking the technosonic construct of the black musical aesthetic. The twentieth-century media ecology potentiated a new and necessary form of signifyin(g) in which technologies often mobilized to commodify and stereotype black performers could be recruited to expand the semiotic potential of literary texts written by black authors.

Cane and Hughes’ long poems were published at significant moments regarding how

African American music was being recorded and listened to. The texts reflect an interpolation of musical aesthetics and mediating effects, but also the ways in which the communities at their centers shaped and were shaped by changing musical styles, modes of production, and related practices. *Cane*'s publication corresponds with the initial decline of the phonograph, rise of the radio, and prominence of the electric player piano. After nearly a decade of the Edison Company's tone test training listeners to "see" the performer in a device's sound and as radio broadcast quickly overwhelmed the soundscape with its amplified voices, *Cane* comes at a pivot point in African American cultural and musical history. Its experimental form reflects the evolutions of black music as well as the distinct musical spaces it sounded within and out of. Nearly three decades later, *Montage of a Dream Deferred* was published as bebop both destabilized and energized jazz. Bebop grew out of a reaction against big band music and the commodification of black musical forms by white-owned record companies and performance venues, so Hughes' long poem turns to bebop as a literary form and way of making legible the internal experience of shifts in an oppressive and violent external environment. In *Montage of a Dream Deferred* as well as *Cane*, music and media help define uniquely African American spaces, but stereophonic sound allows for the creation of virtual spaces. The stereophonic poetry of *Ask Your Mama* presents the virtual space of stereo as encircling a global, post-diasporic black community. From the use of technosonic musical aesthetics to describe the dynamism of the modern black experience of the 1920s to the same interpolation of music and media in the definition of black sonic spaces in the 1950s and 1960s, Toomer's and Hughes' texts synecdochally represent the mode of musicalization that sets black modernism apart from Anglo-American modernism. Intermediality for Hughes and Toomer offers literary experimentation regarding narration, poetic form, polyvocality, and linguistic signification, but it also mobilizes

an interdisciplinary literacy and technological interventionism that Anglo-American authors lacked.

2. The Amplified Soundscapes of *Cane*

Toomer complained of rural African Americans losing touch with the “folk spirit” due to the Victrolas and the player pianos that were displacing the embodied and participatory performances of spirituals and folk songs. *Cane* builds on this theme of disembodied music in poems that address the diminished musical vitality of the South. Across the book’s three sections, we find a series of portraits that clarify this concern. In the first section’s “Face,” describing “channeled muscles” like “cluster grapes of sorrow / purple in the evening sun / nearly ripe for worms (12.1-3, 10-13), and “Portrait in Georgia,” with its “Lips—old scars or the first red blisters” (38.4), the visages correlated to disappearing spirituals are marked by the place and its history. The songs of the South are conflated with the images of black suffering and disappearing black spaces. But Toomer complicates the swan song when, in the second section, he includes “Her Lips Are Copper Wire,” transforming lips from a metonym for folksong and black suffering to an eroticized pleasure center surrounded by powerhouses, telephones, and billboards. These poems make clear the book’s preoccupation with the dialectic of folk music and modern aural media in black identity and the place of black communities in the American landscape and soundscape. *Cane* explores the changing music of black Americans, from the oral folk music of the South to the electrified ragtime and jazz of the North, across a text that remains equally in flux and resistant to any totalizing form. The fluctuating and participatory qualities of black musical styles as meaning-events enable Toomer to integrate them with the literary medium, thus creating a work of intersemiotic transmedia. In doing so, he composes a text that is

less concerned with an accurate and legible translation of musical styles into linguistic forms, and more concerned with using the qualities of that music and its context to generate a registration of the African American experience in the acoustic South, the electric North, and the liminal spaces between them.

Born Nathan Pinchback Toomer on December 26th, 1894 to two parents of mixed racial background, Jean Toomer claimed a unique fluidity to his identity. He maintained that he belonged to seven races—“Scotch, Welsh, German, English, French, Dutch, Spanish, with some dark blood” (qtd. in Darwin Turner 92)—and his view of racial classification as inherently mobile and constructed would inform much of his worldview and later become a major concern to his biographers.³ Such an ambiguous racial identity allowed Toomer to move with relative ease across race and class distinctions as he grew up in the major urban centers of the North. In Washington D.C., Chicago, and New York, Toomer pursued music, body building, mysticism, socialism, and several other obsessions and occupations. Eventually, he turned to writing. While living in Chicago in 1918, he took his first step toward literary celebrity when he wrote “Bona and Paul,” the story of a mixed-race young man and his failure to achieve meaningful connection within the Chicago cityscape and soundscape. The counterpoint to the story’s urban setting, what would become indispensable to the larger vision of *Cane*, came into focus when Toomer took a position as the temporary director of the all-black Sparta Agricultural Institute in 1921. Though

³ Cynthia Earl Kerman and Richard Eldridge’s biography *The Lives of Jean Toomer: A Hunger for Wholeness* (1987) looks extensively at his mobile identity. Rudolph Byrd and Henry Louis Gate’s afterword to the most recent edition of *Cane* dedicates a substantial portion to primary documents that prove Toomer, especially later in life, “passed” for white. Barbara Foley’s *Jean Toomer: Race, Repression, and Revolution* (2014) takes a more nuanced approach by examining Toomer’s continually changing and frequently contradictory stances regarding racial identity, but a stance that ultimately results in an assertion that the future will see the end of such categorization.

the appointment lasted only two months, it allowed for what biographers Cynthia Earl Kerman and Richard Eldridge refer to as “an emotional identification with his African heritage similar to his sense of ecstatic connection with Whitman and Goethe” (81). In effect, his self-education toward becoming a writer was far from complete, regardless of what and how much he read, until he encountered the people and soil of the American South. In Sparta, and later on a trip to Harper’s Ferry with Waldo Frank, Toomer heard the folksongs that lace the first and third sections of the book, both of which take place in an analogue to Sparta named Sempster. Stories incorporate verses from imaginary spirituals, poems are modeled after the call-and-response of work songs, and a sonic richness runs through the text. A similar musical quality defines the second section, but it is replaced with the fast-paced, disjunctive, and syncopated rhythms of jazz coming from the northern cities’ dance halls and cabarets. In Washington D.C. and Chicago, Toomer describes how the African American “rhythm approaches the soft slow music of the black belt South. But above the stems of streets and pavements, their faces are deep clusters of macadam flower” (qtd. in Kerman and Eldridge 86). Both contexts of the quickly changing African American experience are musical spaces, but one reflects an idyllic if decaying repository of African American tradition, a place losing its face, while the other, without any face to speak of yet, is rhythmic, modern, and mechanical. The South is acoustic, and the North is electric, and the seemingly irreconcilable differences between them organize and hold in productive tension the lyrics, fragments, stories, and sketches that make up *Cane*.

Toomer has left behind several tempting clues as to how the experimental and genre-defying *Cane* holds together. In a letter to Frank in 1922, Toomer provides the most detailed, and potentially most misleading, account of the text’s form:

From three angles, CANE’s design is a circle. Aesthetically, from simple forms to complex ones, and back again. Regionally, from the South up into the North, and back

into the South again. Or, from the North down into the South, and then a return North. From the point of view of the spiritual entity behind the work, the curve really starts with Bona and Paul (awakening), plunges into Kabnis, emerges in Karantha etc. swings upward into Theater and Boxseat, and ends (pauses) in Harvest Song. (*Letters of Jean Toomer* 101)

Instead of searching for the tripartite circular structure described here, the most productive approach to the text, especially for this chapter's purposes, will be to interrogate the semiotic operations of language and the moments in which the participatory and affective features of spirituals, blues, and jazz musicalize that language. Donald Shaffer, Nellie McKay, and Karen Jackson Ford all contend that the book's disjointed and fragmentary form reflects a consideration of instances in which one discursive register must be augmented, adjusted, or replaced based on the changing contexts and conditions of the experiences being communicated.⁴ Music is Toomer's primary mode of extending the communicative and participatory faculties of his language. He bookends stories with folksong verses, interrupts pieces with musical refrains, uses musical scenes to initiate imaginative pivots, and eschews the semantico-referential function of language in favor of the rhythmic and gestural qualities of spirituals, blues, and jazz. To discuss the book's form as organized around interrogations of language's meaning-making potentials and failures, therefore, one must also discuss the role of music.

⁴ Shaffer, in "When the Sun Goes Down": The Ghetto Pastoral Mode of Jean Toomer's *Cane*" (2012), argues that the southern section, as signaled by the folk songs, presents the erosion of a pastoral ideal. The northern section, he contends, is an attempt to reconfigure that ideal and that musicality for urban spaces (120). The jazz and ragtime of Chicago and Washington D.C., therefore, reflect responses to an aesthetic shortcoming inborn in the apparently idyllic but ultimately violent and alienating South. McKay in *Jean Toomer: Artist, A Study of His Literary Life and Work, 1894-1936* (1984) identifies a similar kind of dialectic when she describes how "a language in concert with the sounds and vibrations of the city replaces lyricism and nature" (126). In her estimation, a language imbued with the qualities of its surroundings emerges from and plays off of its context. Ford in *Split-Gut Song: Jean Toomer and the Poetics of Modernity* (2005) perceives another dialectic, one between the poetry and the prose. *Cane's* poetry describes "a story not of awakening, reconciliation or promise," as Toomer's own description seems to suggest, "but one of nostalgia, fragmentation, and defeat" (3).

From the opening lines of “Karintha” to the poems “Cotton Song” and “Song of the Sun,” the first section of *Cane* returns consistently to oral African American musical forms. In the second section, with its settings of jazz clubs, theatres, and cabarets, those forms transform into the verses of opening prose sketch “Seventh Street” and the out of place “Harvest Song.” Studies of the music in Toomer’s book predominantly focus on the verses and poems of the first section. Though valuable, this tendency to underemphasize how that music is repurposed disregards a fundamental component to the book’s form and depiction of African American experience. Studies such as Daniel Barlow’s, Houston Baker’s, and T. Austin Graham’s⁵ point to the cultural status of folk musical traditions, the struggle to maintain those traditions in light of the pressures of modernity, and the participatory communicative practices they offer. Focusing too much on that musical and communicative practice, disregarding how it developed into the jazz and ragtime in the North, tends to discount the role of media and technology in maintaining or at least productively transforming these practices. By tracing *Cane*’s musical features through all three sections, however, the intersection between black musical aesthetics and the technosonic condition of those aesthetics becomes clear. Music can be understood as in a condition of co-evolution alongside technology, instead of preserved despite technological changes.

By turning to the relationship between music and technology in *Cane*, I am building

⁵ Barlow’s “Literary Ethnomusicology and the Soundscape of Jean Toomer’s *Cane*” (2014) focuses on the spirituals and discusses Toomer as an ethnomusicologist, working to record and preserve the southern soundscape (208). Baker’s *Afro-American Poetics: Revisions of Harlem and the Black Aesthetic* (1988) describes Toomer’s goal as to “capture the sounds of a racial soul and convert it into an expressive product equivalent in beauty and force to Afro-American folk songs, or ecstatic religious performance” (101). Graham’s “O Cant: Singing the Race Music of Jean Toomer’s *Cane*” (2010) stresses how these songs and spirituals, belonging to a given tradition but coming from Toomer’s imagination, resist standardization and reification, and instead serve “as opportunities for audiences to participate in something new” (729).

specifically on the work of Mark Whalan.⁶ In his research, Whalan interrogates Toomer's fascination with "the machine," an intentionally vague term that straddles both the concrete realities of mechanization and the idealized abstractions of modernity. Whalan convincingly argues that, especially in the second section, *Cane* is concerned with technology's potential to alter aesthetics, social relations, and perceptions of the racialized body; it offers "a way out of the closed circuit of aesthetics, oppression and violence within the rural south" ("Jean Toomer, Technology, and Race" 467). Toomer understands that "duality [is] a limitation in thinking about human relations to machinery" ("Jean Toomer, Technology, and Race" 462); in other words, the human and the technological do not belong to opposing poles but can sustain a condition of co-development. Technology—meaning both physical mechanisms and a more loosely realized set of social and cultural behaviors oriented toward them—allows for a kind of harmony. According to Whalan, the bodily rhythms of the population and the rhythms of the mechanized city could, in Toomer's view, be synchronized (*Race, Manhood, and Modernism* 193). In a complication of Baker's and Graham's observation, participation and collectivity are not exclusive to the musical traditions of the South but are also potential results of the mechanization and automation of the urban North.

The mechanized and electrified soundscape of the North, inextricably linked to jazz and its associated aural media, was not a threat to the southern soundscape, not a force against which folk music had to be protected. Instead, the sounds of the North and the South both present forms of musicalization and strategies for developing a literary style that exceeds the capacities of linguistic meaning by way of rhythm, motion, and co-identification. Toomer's mission is not to

⁶ See "Jean Toomer, Technology, and Race" (2002) and *Race, Manhood, and Modernism in America: The Short Story Cycles of Sherwood Anderson and Jean Toomer* (2007).

privilege or discount one of these forms, but to understand their positions and possible futures within modernity. In a letter to Lola Ridge in 1922, he writes:

The aesthetic of the machine, the artistic acceptance of what is undeniably dominant in our age, the artist creatively adopting himself to angular, to dynamic, to mass forms, the artist creating from the stuff he has at hand...And I think my own contribution will curiously blend the rhythms of peasantry [sic] with the rhythm of machines. Syncopation, a slow jazz, a sharp intense motion, subtilized, fused to a terse lyricism. (*Jean Toomer Reader* 17)

The rhythms of the peasantry and the rhythms of machinery, the oral culture of southerners and the mediated music of the northerners, offer points of access into the subtle but intense emotions within different black experiences in the twentieth century. As the broadly circular but ultimately fragmented form of *Cane* suggests, music and its relation to technology point to a state of fluctuation, migration, and ongoing self-formation. By tracing the co-developments of sonic spaces (from the South to the North), technology (from acoustic to electric) and musical styles (from folk to jazz) across the text, Toomer's concern with how these three vectors impact communicative and cultural practices becomes clear.

Among the musical forms of *Cane*'s first section are short verses ordered around rhyme and refrain, lending themselves to memorization and extending an invitation of the reader/listener to join. "Karintha," "Carma," and "Blood-Burning Moon" each incorporate verses to divide the narrative into discrete episodes and to describe an aural feature of the story, turning Sempter from strictly a geographic space into a musical one as well. The creation of such a space begins with the opening verse of "Karintha":

Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon,
O cant you see it, O cant you see it,
Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon
...When the sun goes down. (4)

The song resists a static metrical pattern in preference of a broadly accentual form incorporating

pauses and elongations in the cadence; it uses repetition to emulate an oral form and an ellipsis to create an inviting silence. Such a pause extends the opportunity for the reader to join in the call-and-response, already reflected in the punning “O cant,” and it suggests an unwritten musical component, heard but not written. In fact, when first published in *Broom* in 1923, “Karintha” included the note: “To be read, accompanied by the humming of a Negro folk-song” (qtd. in Barlow 199). A gap in the printed language, a feature of the linguistic and visual modes, represents music provided by readerly participation, a feature of the aural mode. The first four lines of Toomer’s swan song use the linguistic, the visual, and the aural modes to elaborate on one another’s representative capacities. His description of the southern landscape and representation of its soundscape are co-constituting.

Strangely, the folksong of “Karintha,” which establishes the story and the book’s musical quality, remains exactly that: a quality. Like all of the songs that Toomer incorporates, as Graham points out, these verses memorialize a musical tradition but are not drawn from any specific songs (“O Cant” 727). They are all of Toomer’s making and remain conceptual abstractions: indicators of an intersemiotic configuration. By introducing original poetry modelled after the slave song tradition, Toomer points to that tradition though it ultimately remains silent. He suggests music composed to accompany the text, but the specific melody must be provided by the reader, not the composer. Significantly, folksongs are largely collective compositions and often have no one single author. *Cane*, therefore, opens with a folk song without a folk. In making the reader responsible for the now silent melody, Toomer utilizes the silence at the center of the intersemiotic configuration in order to depict the position of African Americans and their musical culture in the twentieth century. Music here only exists in the abstract and within the imagination of the reader. Such a silence gestures toward the realities of

the rural South's soundscape during the 1920s. Though there are no gramophones or player pianos present in "Karintha," or any of the first sections stories, Toomer's musical aesthetics—comprised of modern folksongs that suggest but do not truly belong to a musical tradition—illustrate the uncertain position of folk music in the age of modern aural media.

Other poems of the first section are suspended in a doubled position as well: they recuperate traditional musical forms to experimental and participatory ends while also elegizing the very musical forms they take on. "Song of the Sun," the section's poetic centerpiece, offers a clear example of this dual function. The poem's speaker seems to be not unlike Toomer himself, encountering the music and landscape of the South:

Pour O pour that parting soul in song,
 O pour it in the sawdust glow of night
 [...]

 Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee,
 Thy son I have in time returned to thee. (17.1-2, 9-10)

However, the call-and-response contradicts an impulse to read the poem as voiced by the singular organizing consciousness of a lyric "I" in that it invites participation and creates a sense of collective performance. Toomer's song is transformed by its musical refrain from an autobiographical encounter with a disappearing tradition to a communal reconstitution of that tradition; it suggests permeable ego boundaries between the individual speaker and the participating collective. Even though the poem's traditional oral form works "to catch thy plaintive soul soon gone" (17.15), what it catches enables the collectivity afforded by co-presence within a given soundscape. The poem's final stanza makes clear the folk song's role in constituting that soundscape:

An everlasting song, a singing tree,
 Caroling softly souls of slavery,
 What they were, and what they are to me,
 Caroling softly souls of slavery. (18.1-4)

Both historical precursor and contemporary practice—a past and a present—for the African American poet and performer, folk music transmits the violent history of the place from which it emerges, but it also collectivizes through a shared registration of that history by way of rhythm and repetition. Sempter is a site of positioning and repositioning, of orienting the black subject in relation to African American musical forms and traditions as they are being recuperated by black artists, but also commodified by white performers and producers, and distributed across the country with gramophones, player pianos, and radios.

Interestingly, one of the first uses of the mechanical phonograph was the creation of field recordings, especially of folk music from the South. African American spirituals were a common subject of these field recordings, and musicologists and historians who visited the South in the 1920s went in search of a “genuine” folk tradition from the closest analogue to a peasant class that twentieth-century America offered. However, they often failed to find the folk music they had envisioned. Instead, they found African Americans singing the mass-produced popular songs of Tin Pan Alley (K. Miller 23-25). As pop songs were imported into the South, so were its songs exported. Alain Locke complained in 1934 that “As jazz has spread out from its Mississippi headwaters and become the international ocean it is now, it has become more and more diluted, more cosmopolitan and less racial” (qtd. in Anderson 169). Though scenes of Sempter lack the technology that Toomer bemoans in his description of *Cane* as a swan song, its effects are registered in the mute folk songs dependent upon a readerly participation that becomes increasingly more untenable as songs recede into silence. The soundscape of Sempter is suspended between the mute individual reading of a text and the shared performance of folk music just as African American music is suspended between unwritten oral forms and the inscribed music of the phonograph record and piano roll.

The effects of aural media on African American music and the interpolation of musical aesthetics in literature become much more pronounced in *Cane*'s second section, which consists of a collection of stories, poems, and hybridic prose sketches set in the sonic spaces of Washington D.C. and Chicago. Not only are Toomer's urban spaces filled with the sounds of jazz and ragtime, they contrast with the rural South by the overt presence of technology, mechanization, and electricity. The second section's musicalization is syncopated, fragmented, and amplified compared to the spirituals from earlier pieces. "Seventh Street" opens the section with a quatrain that initially appears like the verses of "Karintha," But instead of refrains and pauses, this verse's abrupt repetitions fill in any possible silences:

Money burns the pocket, pocket hurts,
 Bootleggers in silken shirts,
 Ballooned, zooming Cadillacs,
 Whizzing, whizzing down the street-car tracks. (53)

Trochaic repetitions like "pocket, pocket" and "whizzing, whizzing" place the emphasis in unfamiliar yet highly rhythmic patterns, creating a jazz-like syncopation. Following this sudden shift in the musical quality of the poetry, and instead of a pastoral musical space at dusk with violence quietly embedded in the spirituals sounding within it, we plunge into "a bastard of Prohibition and the War. A crude-boned, soft-skinned wedge of nigger life breathing its loafer air, jazz songs and love, thrusting unconscious rhythms, black reddish blood into the white and whitewashed wood of Washington" (53). This mobile and mutable musical space, a bastard cut out from a genealogy, is violently wedged into and grafted onto the urban soundscape. Such a sudden and noisy beginning along with the refrain "Who set you flowing?" serve two functions: it creates what R. Murray Schafer calls a "lo-fi" soundscape in which the sources of sounds cannot be clearly distinguished, and it undermines the sense of narrative that a hi-fi soundscape can produce (43). As Rick Altman argues, we conduct a form of "narrative analysis" to analyze

sounds and determine “how, by whom, and under what conditions that sound pressure was produced” (22). When sound sources become indistinct and the noises of the street, the cabaret, theaters, and drug stores are mixed up in echoic noise, such a narrative analysis is impossible and the result is an ongoing, cacophonous *now*. Recurring gerunds “whizzing,” “flowing,” “eddying,” and “swirling” reinforce a sense of collapse, of all the musical and mechanical sounds echoing in a single instant. Sonically rich, the poetry and prose of “Seventh Street” employ refrains and repetitions, but they are unpredictable and unhinged compared to the first section’s “soft listless cadence of Georgia’s south” (25). Jazz informs the rhythms and syncopations of the scene and those of the second section more generally, but these qualities are not those of jazz alone; they are also qualities of the mechanized and electrified urban noise filling the soundscape.

“Rhobert,” a prose poem hybrid that follows “Seventh Street,” is perhaps the strangest piece in *Cane* and indicative of the role mechanization and sound technology play in the book. A kind of cybernetic being, Rhobert wears a house like “a monstrous divers helmet” with “rods like antennae of a dead thing” (55). His name is an anagram of “brother” but also a pun on “robot,” cueing the reader in to the profound integration of the black body and technology. According to Karen Jackson Ford, Rhobert and all the male characters in *Cane*’s second part are “bewildered, fragmented automatons, struggling to survive in an urban wasteland that cannot sustain them” (68), but these opening sketches are not scenes of utter hopelessness. They are scenes of transition and uncertainty—“water that is being drawn off” (55) and a “man straining the raw insides of his throat against smooth air” (56)—not of a wasteland. What “Seventh Street” and “Rhobert” describe are sonic spaces in which the rhythms of human life and the rhythms of the electrically powered city have been laid over one another, zones where “the machine” offers a

means of rendering the organic and inorganic indistinguishable. That which powers electric lights, motors, and dynamos also powers player pianos and radios; cultural rhythms and urban rhythms intermingle in the sonic space of the street. Brandon LaBelle argues that the street as a sonic space is “the carrier of sonic messages, a site for musical expression, and the location for noises to congeal in cultural form” (130). What we find in Toomer’s sketches are scenes of congealing and the technosonic aesthetic in the process of formation, a formation we perceive in the erotic contact of black bodies in the poem “Her Lips Are Copper Wire.” Though the sonic messages are confused and cacophonous in the abrupt introduction of the urban and the electrical, their potential for musical expression becomes more fully realized over the course of the second section.

Musical spaces come to serve as sites not only of congealing but of intersubjective—though often abortive—connections between subjects in stories like “Theater” and “Box Seat.” Both stories take place in electrified spaces lit by stage lights, “soft, as if they shine through clear pink fingers” (67), that are also musical spaces where characters register their surroundings and their intersubjective connections in terms of sound. As Steven Conner explains it, offering an unintended variation of Toomer’s transparent skin image: “The self defined in terms of hearing rather than sight is a self imagined not as a point but as a membrane; not as a picture but as a channel through which voices, noises, and musics travel” (207). *Cane*’s second section has already sounded out locations defined by the porous meeting place of ongoing exchange, but “Theater” complicates this notion in a story of John and Dorris’ failure of mutual understanding. “Theater” begins with a description of the urban cityscape as a lo-fi soundscape in which all sound signals fade into background noise: “At night, road-shows volley songs into the mass-heart of black people. Songs soak the walls and seep out to the nigger life of alleys and near-beer

saloons, of the Poodle Dog and Black Bear cabarets” (67). Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter describe the concept of auditory spatial awareness as the internal experience of an external environment (131), registration on the internal side of the perceiving membrane of the sounds, vibrations, and music outside of it. Songs soak the walls as well as the mass-heart of black people and the collectivizing quality formerly offered by now disappeared spirituals is achieved with the jazz performances and player pianos of the city. That collectivization occurs nearly everywhere except, however, for the theatre in which John is watching Dorris dance, Dorris is returning John’s gaze, and the two are judging each other for being “dictie.” But the sonic space transforms around Dorris’ dancing such that “glorious songs are the muscles of her limbs. And her singing is of canebreak loves and mangrove feasting. The walls press in, singing” (71). The theatre simultaneously falls away and closes in, disappears into the pastoral and brings the two characters closer together. Space becomes song and music communicates on an involuntary and embodied register. Despite their momentary co-identification, their understanding is quickly undermined when John’s dream makes the space co-extensive with Dorris’ eroticized body, “the flesh and blood of Dorris are its walls. Singing walls,” and Dorris’ reality falls silent, turns to the “smell of dried paste, and paint, and soiled clothing” (72). The shared sonic spaces are as delicate and impermanent as the image of clear pink fingers suggests.

In “Box Seat,” Dan follows his love interest Muriel to a variety show where a similar kind of intersubjective rupture occurs. The combination of his failure to connect—erotically, romantically, or even personally—with Muriel and the grotesque spectacle of boxing dwarves inspires Dan’s mechanistic fantasy of destruction:

I am going to reach up and grab the girder of this building and pull them down. The crash will be a signal. Hid by the smoke and dust Dan Moore will arise. In his right hand will be a dynamo. In his left, a god’s face that will flash white light from ebony. I’ll grab a girder and swing it like a walking stick. Lightning will flash. (89)

Here, the machine does not offer synchronizing rhythm, and the soundscape is not a site of congealing; rather, modern technology is comprised of flashing and crashing instruments that wreak havoc on the musical space. In both “Theater” and “Box Seat,” we witness the auditory spatial awareness that Blesser and Salter describe, but the different internal experiences of a shared external environment result in violent alienation. Aside from brief moments of contact, the electric soundscapes of Chicago and Washington D.C. is as much a “modern desert” as the acoustic soundscape of the rural South. Even “Her Lips Are Copper Wire,” in which erotic energy is figured as electricity, is predicated on incandescence: the light, heat, and energy that results from resistance. Musicalization for Toomer is both an aesthetic mobilizing the affective capacities of the rhythm and cadence so notable in spirituals and jazz as well as an instrument for illustrating the liminal position of African Americans during these first decades of the twentieth century.

Music catalyzes moments of being in-between, whether it is between North and South, between slavery and freedom, or between eroticism and loneliness. Especially for characters that lack the visual markers of obvious racial categorization and are themselves in between identities, like Toomer himself, musical spaces operate as liminal spaces. The Crimson Gardens cabaret in “Bona and Paul”—described in similar terms as Sempter, “purple like a bed of roses would be at dusk” (106)—is where Paul most acutely registers the internal experience of his rejection from the external conditions: “Suddenly he knew that people saw, not attractiveness in his dark skin, but difference” (102). Sound and sonic spaces permit individual and collective perception of uncertainty and transitions that were by no means always for the better.

The non-teleological condition of media and cultural change makes necessary the final section of *Cane*: the standalone prose-drama hybrid “Kabnis” that returns to Sempter. Ralph

Kabnis, a mixed-race northerner like Paul, moves to Georgia to take a teaching position and has an epiphanic encounter with his own heritage and the history of slavery in the story's conclusion. This fictional avatar for Toomer⁷ represents a synthesis between the first two sections and a confrontation between the modern, urban African American with America's violent past in the metonymic Father John. In the final scene, taking place in the cellar beneath Fred Halsey's shop the morning after a tense and disappointing celebration, the ex-slave Father John breaks his long silence and utters: "O th sin th white folks 'mitted when they made the Bible lie" (159). Kabnis' eventual encounter with the past John represents is punctuated by a reverberating sound from above: "Boom. Boom. BOOM!" (159). In his discussion of underground sonic space, LaBelle pays sustained attention to echoes in subterranean zones. He writes:

The echo literally continues the vector of sound, staggers it and supplements it with a further set of sound events that ultimately fill a given space. The echo brings back the original event, though reshaped and refigured, thereby returning sound and rendering it a spatial object: the echo turns sound into sculpture, making material and dimensional its reverberating presence. (7)

LaBelle describes exactly what the reverberating "boom" that fills the underground space accomplishes; it brings the original event of the past, though reshaped and refigured, to bear on the present. Sound becomes sculptural and transforms into a physicality that fills the distance between Kabnis and Father John, thus reconciling the poles of African American experience that the two characters represent. The North is defined by sonic simultaneity and syncopated rhythms in a single sustained *now* while the South, with its folksongs and spirituals, has the sonic markers of the past. Fred Moten discusses the black musical aesthetic as "the ongoing event of antiorigin and anteorigin" (5), and *Cane's* two soundscapes productively align with these designations. In the sonic space of the book's conclusion, as a resonating boom fills the underground, that

⁷ Toomer wrote to Waldo Frank "Kabnis is *ME*" (*Jean Toomer Reader* 25).

antiorigin and anteorigin are synthesized in one ongoing event. The sound's production and its reproduction in the echo collapse into one another. In this way, the encounter between Kabnis and Father John signals a final coalescence between differing sonic spaces. It does not offer a resolution to the variety of modern African American experiences and their accompanying musics and sounds, but it gathers them momentarily into a single, echoic spatio-temporal zone.

Cane does not end in resolution—a return to tonic—but rather in an uncertain and indeterminate echo. Also, though shot through with references to music, musicalized verbal cadences, and a consistent concern with music and media's role in African American history and culture, *Cane* lacks a specific musical form after which the entirety is modelled, thus setting it apart from other musicalized modernist texts like *Ulysses* and *Point Counter Point*. Instead, we encounter an intersemiotic configuration not unlike the collage aesthetic Rachel Farebrother describes as fundamental to the Harlem Renaissance: “a technique that makes room for integrative representation and disorienting fragmentation” (4). *Cane*, like the black modernist aesthetic itself, exists at the intersection of music and media: a site of frictions, disruptions, silences, and the occasional connection. The book does not set out only to musicalize language or the form of the novel, but to make the borders of literary form reflect the porous borders of technologically portable musical spaces that twentieth-century African Americans moved through. Music in *Cane* is a means of demonstrating the technosonic construct of the African American aesthetic, drawing from a largely oral historical culture and negotiating the evolving modes of musical production and reproduction. Any unifying musical form would contradict the musical aesthetic's function as enacting liminality and transition, as permitting an internal registration of an external fluctuating condition.

3. Reclamation and Declamation of *Montage of a Dream Deferred*

On February 16th, 1944, a dozen jazz musician led by tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins gathered in a New York City studio to record three songs for Apollo Records. Though the word had not been coined yet, Hawkins and his band—which included Dizzy Gillespie, Leo Parker, Clyde Hart, Max Roach, and others—created the first commercial bebop recording that day. Bebop was a turn away from the big band sound that came from Kansas City in the 1930s and a turn toward fast tempos, unusual harmonies, extended solos, and no regard for the ability to dance to the new, ambitious music. As Martin Williams describes the genre: “Following a pause, notes fall over and between this beat and that beat: breaking them asunder, robbing them of any vestige of monotony; rests fall where heavy beats once came, now ‘heavy’ beats come between beats and on weak beats” (134). This was a music of ruptures, breaks, sudden changes, and unpredictability. It was also a music that grew from a response to the media ecology and entertainment industry. Entrenched in a system that began with Paul Whiteman’s “symphonic jazz” in 1923, Hawkins, Gillespie, and others were frustrated with the frequently white-led ensembles that monopolized the jazz scene. Bebop offered the opportunity to play in smaller combinations, reject the commodified melodies listeners had come to expect, and engage in experimental performance. In one of a series of articles published in 1948-49, Ross Russell writes:

Be-bop is music of revolt: revolt against big bands, arrangers, vertical harmonies, soggy rhythms, non-playing orchestra leaders, Tin-Pan Alley—against commercialized music in general. It asserts the individuality of the jazz musician as a creative artist, playing spontaneous and melodic music within the framework of jazz, but with new tools, sounds, and concepts. (qtd. in Hokanson 64)

Jazz’s shift in the 1940s and 1950s, like the genre’s emergence in the 1920s, was partially a reconstitution of existing musical genres, partially a rejection of standardized performance

procedures, and a not insignificant set of repositionings between black musicians and the media ecology. Bebop, for all its revolutionary sound, was a variation on the ongoing negotiation of black art, music, and technology.

Langston Hughes' *Montage of a Dream Deferred* is "marked by the conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms" (*Collected Poems* 387) and other musical features of bebop. His long poem is a thoroughly musicalized work, implementing the bebop style across the ninety-one pieces of the sequence toward an interartistic exploration of the African American experience in Harlem. Alongside the musical features of the poem are nearly as many mentions of aural media: jukeboxes, gramophones, radios, and sound film. References to media recur across the sequence and operate motivically to—like the breaks, interjections, riffs, and runs—unify the sequence with a consistent image-based vocabulary. To read *Montage of a Dream Deferred* as a poem musicalized in the style of bebop, as Hughes encourages, is to encounter both the semiotic complications such an integration creates as well as the evolving technosonic construct of black music. Hughes' use of bebop aesthetics and the resulting intermediality depict how community formation and self-definition in the sonic space of Harlem involve navigating aural media and their racial and social associations, including modernity, poverty, and mass-culture.

Probably the most well-known figure of the later Harlem Renaissance and among the most widely recognized American poets of the twentieth century, Hughes' musical intermediality and collaborations with composers, both classical and popular, were significant elements of his long and prolific career. *The Weary Blues* (1926) and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) derived their stanzaic form from the blues—from his attempt "to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street" (*The Big Sea* 167)—and defined a unique and uniquely African American

musico-literary style. Among dozens of collaborations, Hughes most famously worked as librettist with Kurt Weill on an adaptation of Elmer Rice's *Street Scene* (1947) and William Grant Still on *Troubled Island* (1949), the first opera to be premiered in the U.S. with both an African American composer and librettist. With money earned from the success of *Street Scene*, Hughes moved into 20 East 127th Street in Harlem where he wrote most of *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. At this point, Harlem was no longer home to a Renaissance but rather to a culturally rich but deeply impoverished community. In Hughes' estimation, it is from this community and ones like it, which remained ghettoized and disenfranchised after centuries of struggle, that bebop emerged. He writes in his Simple column in 1948 about these conditions and how they informed bebop's revisionary sound:

That is where Bop comes from—out of them dark days we have seen. That is why Bebop is so mad, wild, frantic, crazy. And not to be dug unless you have seen dark days, too. That's why folks who ain't suffered much cannot play Bop, and do not understand it. They think it's nonsense—like you. They think it's just crazy crazy. They do not know it is also MAD crazy, SAD crazy, FRANTIC WILD CRAZY—beat right out of some bloody black head! That's what Bop is. (qtd. in Rampersad 153)

After decades of experiments in different musical forms and mediums, from opera to spirituals, from Broadway musicals to film, Hughes arrived at bebop as the appropriate musical idiom to depict the suffering, uncertainty, sadness, and frantic, wild craziness endemic to the Harlem community and its transition from its Renaissance to the second half of the twentieth century.

Critical estimations of *Montage of a Dream Deferred* often point to the work's musical aesthetics as well as its filmic quality as a literary montage as fundamental to its depiction of communal identity formation and reformation in a post-Renaissance Harlem.⁸ Less frequently

⁸ John Lowney in "Langston Hughes and the 'Nonsense' of Bebop" (2000) examines the poem as an interrogation of the tensions that arise between publics and counterpublics in highly segregated urban spaces. He describes how "bebop, for Hughes, evokes the tension between established public and emergent counterpublic spheres" (368); music is the site at which this

encountered, however, are elaborations on Hughes' use of technology, though Bartholomew Brinkman, who argues that the authenticity of bebop is dialectically opposed to commercial film, is a notable exception. The authenticity of bebop as an African American art is "asserted against the standardization of jazz by a (white) U.S. culture industry" (Brinkman 85), an industry whose organs included film as well as radio and recorded music. Authentic live performance, according to Brinkman, contrasts mediated sound. I contend, however, that Hughes' musical aesthetic cannot be so straightforwardly opposed to aural media in a dialectic of sincere performance and inauthentic reproduction. As in bebop itself, the relationship between experimental forms and the media ecology that Hughes explores is more accurately a set of ongoing rearrangements, not a static binary opposition. Bebop emerged from a media ecology that had excised black bodies and black culture from jazz, replacing African American performers with commodified standards recorded for and consumed by the predominantly white listening audience. One feature of the bebop style that recuperated jazz from such commercialization and reframed the technosonic construct of the black musical aesthetic is the use of those same jazz standards in unfamiliar and even unrecognizable contexts. As Marshall Stearns points out in his history of jazz music, the piano, guitar, and bass would play the same harmonic backbone of the standard, though in an uncannily fast tempo. The soloist would then improvise freely but never play the familiar tune. "Bop made a practice of featuring variations upon melodies that were never stated" (Stearns 229), as in Charlie Parker's transmutation of "Cherokee" in his 1945 piece "KoKo." Bebop was,

tension becomes most apparent and audible. Daniel C. Turner in "Montage of a Simplicity Deferred: Langston Hughes's Art of Sophistication and Racial Intersubjectivity in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*" (2002) writes that "Hughes offers us a musical montage, in which hearing is made equivalent to seeing." This equivalence "signals the integration of a modernism practiced by predominantly black artists (jazz) and one practiced by predominantly white artists (modernist poetry)" (28).

therefore, not a straightforward reaction against the musical and media culture of the 1940s and 1950s, but a derangement and defamiliarization of that culture. It was a form of signifyin(g). As jukeboxes, gramophones, and radio turned jazz into a mass-produced commodity, black musicians took up the music emerging from those media and repurposed it, thus taking on the aural media as much as the music itself. By tracing the musical motifs and the recurring encounters with aural media, I will demonstrate that Hughes' musicalized poem, like bebop, is a sprawling constellation of reframed black art forms and mediating technologies, a sustained interrogation of the technosonic black aesthetic in late modernism.

Montage of a Dream Deferred's musical aesthetic emerges primarily from musical motifs that recur and develop throughout the sequence. As in the musicalized works of Dujardin, Joyce, and Kundera, the text achieves its intermedial condition through recurring references to musical figures and enactments of those figures on the level of syntactic structure, prosodic rhythm, and tonal register. As in bebop, however, that musical backbone is made unfamiliar by fast-tempos, sudden changes, jagged rhythms, and sonic defamiliarizations. Hughes introduces one such primary motif in the first poem of the sequence, "Dream Boogie," with the lines "The boogie-woogie rumble / Of a dream deferred" (388.3-4). The boogie bassline, with its step-wise repetition and syncopated rhythm, can be heard in the rhythms of the second and third stanzas:

Listen closely:
 You'll hear their feet
 Beating out and beating out a—

*You think
 It's a happy beat?"* (388.5-9)

The syncopated prosodic rhythm of "beating out and beating out a—" sounds out the boogie bassline, a bassline that comes to the brink of signification at the dash, as if the bassline is about to stand for a linguistic utterance, but there is a rupture in representation with the intrusive voice

and incredulous exclamation. The boogie rhythm points to the dream deferred, the Harlem community and the collective struggle, but the attempt at describing what exactly the rhythm is beating out—at accessing what is described later in the poem as the vague “something underneath” (388.12)—is interrupted with the emergent voice of the community itself. The boogie motif undergoes motivic transformations throughout the ninety-one poems, as in “Easy Boogie” where “that steady beat / Walking walking walking” is not halted by the intrusion of another voice but rather musically distorted with “Riffs, smears, breaks” (395.2-3, 9). Boogie is a foundational African American musical form, but also one being impacted by musical manipulations and communally-registered disruptions. It is a musical figure, a steady dance rhythm “Trilling the treble / And twining the bass” (411.5-6) as well as a site of African American disenfranchisement. The sudden changes and unexpected rhythmic shifts—the sonic markers of the bebop style—cut against the steady, participatory rhythms of boogie. As in bebop, we see and hear in these poems the black artist and the black community being repositioned in relation to a black musical aesthetic that has been commodified and distorted. The boogie is no longer a happy beat, but rather a point of aesthetic and cultural contestation.

Like Hughes’ musical forms, the recurring mentions of aural media are also sites of this ongoing negotiation with the music and mechanisms that make up the technosonic aesthetic. More than just pieces of a larger soundscape that Hughes depicts through poetry, these technologies make possible communality, subject formation, and intervention toward a renewed identity. The boogie motif signals disruption, deferral, and reclamation through deformation, but media technologies signal an equally as nuanced process of recuperation and revision. In “Jukebox Love Song,” for instance, the instructions are to “Take Harlem’s heartbeat, / Make a drumbeat, / Put it on a record, let it whirl” (393.7-9). Unlike the aborted drumbeat in “Dream

Boogie,” this drumbeat here is a transformed iteration of the collective experience in Harlem. The jukebox allows for the portability of music, so that the sounds defining one sonic space can be transposed to another and thus transform that one in turn. Turning the heartbeat of Harlem into a drumbeat on the jukebox means multiplying that heartbeat, amplifying and expanding the acoustic territory. However, aural media, like jazz and bebop, are sites of repositioning and reconsideration, of signifyin(g). Therefore, media are also frequently ironized or criticized in Hughes’ poem, as in the brief “Croon”: “I don’t give a damn / For Alabam’ / Even if it is my home” (394.1-3). Electronic amplification was necessary for radio broadcast as well as phonograph recordings after the acoustic era ended in 1925, and this amplification gave rise to the crooning style of singing in which a softer, more intimate vocal style became popular. Crooners were predominantly white men like Gene Austin or Rudy Valée who adapted and softened the work of African American jazz vocalists. The title “Croon,” along with its affiliation with gentle-voiced white singers, creates a disconnect from the dialect of the poem and subtly jabs at the disenfranchisement of black singers from the recording and broadcast industries. A similar criticism occurs in “Be-bob Boys”: “Imploring Mecca / to achieve / six discs / with Decca” (409.1-4). Bebop may ostensibly empower black musicians, but they must still pray before the gatekeepers of the industry. Turning the sounds of Harlem into a drumbeat played on jukeboxes and danced to in an expanding sonic space demands more than musical performance, but a reckoning with aural media, power structures, and cultural practices entangled with them. The constellation of musical styles—referenced, enacted, manipulated, and ironized—is superimposed on a constellation of aural media—satirized, dismissed, idolized, and revered.

Another component of Hughes’ engagement with the black musical technosonic construct, and clearly integral to the form of his poem, is the intersection between the linguistic,

aural, and the visual in film, especially the way in which sound sutures the disparate images of montage together into a single text. In the case of film, which is mentioned repeatedly throughout the poem, we find the Harlem community not passively registering the products of mass-culture, but actively participating in the interpretation and impact of these mediated sounds and images; intermediality here allows for entertainment but also protest and self-assertion. Montage, as Fred Moten describes it, “renders inoperative any simple opposition of totality to singularity. It makes you linger in the cut [...] a generative space that fills and erases itself” (89). That cut is filled and erased largely thanks to two components: the imaginative engagement of the audience, mentally stitching one shot to the next, and the film’s sound, creating a sonic bridge across a sequence. Montage consists of severances and attachments, a metaphoric violence enacted on the material of celluloid and erased by appropriate audience attention and carefully synchronized sound and music. In the case of film in “Montage,” however, no such appropriate attention is employed. The poem describes “Harlem laughing in all the wrong places” and the inappropriate but empowering misinterpretation:

(Hollywood
 laughs at me,
 black—
 so I laugh
 back). (395.2, 8-12)

The audience laughs in all the wrong places, fails to behave as Hollywood imagines their audience should in the co-creation of meaning and affect which is also the erasure of severance and violence. Like the juke joints, movie houses in Harlem are sonic spaces in which commodification and alienation are not passed over but actively registered.

“125th Street” is a very different poem from “Montage” and lacks any explicit references to film, but it is nonetheless another example of intervention in the technosonic construct of

African American art and identity. Its filmic quality makes the piece itself a short montage:

Face like a chocolate bar
full of nuts and sweet.

Face like a jack-o-lantern,
candle inside.

Face like a slice of melon,
grin that wide. (407.1-6)

Operating according to the logic of visual association, the poem presents a series of graphic matches as metaphors toward the contorted and racist depiction of an African American portrait. Montage breaks up the black body into a sequence of fragmentary and disembodied components, but *Montage of a Dream Deferred*'s primary mode of resistance to this violence and visual dismemberment is bebop: the musical analog of African American protest against the twentieth-century media ecology. Whereas the film sequence is one of amputation and dislocation, bebop is the point at which the individual black body and the social body become indistinguishable as in the fragmentary speech of African Americans that add up to the polyvocal and intermedial poem that is *Montage of a Dream Deferred* itself. Harlem's heartbeat and Harlem's drumbeat are co-extensive in bebop and in Hughes' long poem. Music, therefore, potentiates resistance, self-assertion, and the derangement of popular forms. Intermediality—an interpolation of the effects of new media—allows Hughes to reclaim or declaim the mediations that African American music and culture have to pass through. Musical spaces in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*—zones like juke joints and movie houses—function as what Günter Lenz calls liminoid spaces in that they are where everyday rhythms, values, and behaviors are suspended and where the counterfactual and imaginative dimensions of communities are empowered (270). They grant their creators and occupiers an agency and authority to imaginatively and creatively counter banal rhythms. Beyond the capacity to communicate by non-verbal means, music serves a

powerful function in its ability to shape and direct a community's ambitions within liminoid spaces. "To be in control," as Tia DeNora argues, "of the soundtrack of social action is to provide a framework for the organization of social energy" (17). Within each miniature lyric of Hughes' long poem, and across the Harlem that he sounds out, we see and hear African Americans creating the soundtrack or resisting and repurposing that soundtrack; intermediality is a tool for taking control of social energy.

Despite their enmeshment in distinct media ecologies, both *Cane* and *Montage of a Dream Deferred* foreground sonic spaces, specifically their permeability and portability in historical moments of radical transition in African American life and sound technology. In addition to a concern with the porousness of sonic spaces and the consequences of such mutability in the definition and redefinition of twentieth century black American identity, both texts are comprised of combined and recombined pieces arranged in a collage or montage fashion. Toomer's hybrid text and Hughes' long poem resist a sense of completion or finality, preferring a structure that is partially circular but largely open-ended. Kabnis' journey to the South represents a return to the repository of folk forms and "Island" ends with the lines "Good morning, daddy! // Ain't you heard?" (429.11-12), another circular conclusion. However, both texts resist a complete synthesis of individual pieces within a unifying cyclical form. Instead, they offer a series of positions and repositions in relation to modernity, music, and the black experience. *Montage of a Dream Deferred* arrived nearly three decades after *Cane*'s publication, and so what Greg Milner calls the "original recording dialectic" of acoustic and electric (10) had long since been resolved. Yet Hughes' late poem emerged from a media ecology equally as transitional as America in the last years of the acoustic era. With the invention of long playing records, widespread amplified sound, and a new set of artistic practices and racial politics

surrounding jazz and bebop, Hughes' 1950s were not unlike Toomer's 1920s. Sound technology and its associated practices were made up of a set of negotiations and interventions, so it follows that musicalized literature emerging from such a context would interpolate those aesthetics as a sequence of sketches. This is doubly true of African American artists, for whom music was a genre in which aesthetics and technology were constantly exerting pressure on one another. Aural media did not cause Toomer's and Hughes' literary experiments, but their integration of language with music's semiotic operations is profoundly entangled with the truncations, distortions, and amplifications of recorded music.

While Toomer's book employs the intersemiotic configuration—leveraging the emotive and conceptual resonances between language and music—Hughes' long poem turns to the interartistic—using the forms and features of jazz to create a distinctly African American style that repurposes one medium's conventions toward the creation of new means of expression in another. Scarlet Higgins writes that “if white players ‘stole’ jazz from blacks, bebop was one way of stealing it back” (9). Bebop allowed for black musicians to reinject jazz with the unfamiliar, the aggressive, and the modern—to once again use jazz as a means of registering and representing the African American experience. It is a genre that refuses assimilation and retains a quality unapologetically alien to white audiences. Emily Petermann describes intermediality as the “phenomenon in which a foreign medium is involved in the signification of a given media product” (28), and Hughes' literary bebop puts a great deal of pressure on the music's condition as foreign, as unassimilable, and as productively incommensurable with other modes of communication. Treating jazz music as a foreign medium is to utilize intermediality as a modernizing aesthetic and an interrogation into the fraught relationship between black music, modernity at large, and the technologies that mediate one to the other.

4. Quarters Ringing in and out of *Ask Your Mama*

Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz, the last of Hughes' poetry published in his lifetime, involves a level of textual and graphic experimentation not seen anywhere else in his body of work. Printed on pink paper with blue and brown ink along with abstract illustrations between each of its twelve "moods,"⁹ it is a fully multimodal text that many reviewers found underwhelming. As one anonymous reviewer wrote of Hughes' stylistic reinvention: "The transformation, unfortunately, is not too successful" (qtd. in Dace 635). Despite its tepid reception, the text is remarkable for its incorporation of music in a typographical approximation of aural simultaneity. Integral to the poem and presenting a complication of musico-literary intermediality's concern with the limitations of transmediating harmony and counterpoint is the representation of stereophonic sound. This kind of sound is achieved with dual audio channels, represented in the poem's form, and made explicit in the title of the fifth section, "Blues in Stereo." Stereo was a substantial development in the history of aural media because of its ability to leverage how the human ear perceives space. By using the two audio channels to emit sounds that reach the listener's ears fractions of a second apart, stereo can create the illusion of distance and, therefore, use these illusions to depict virtual sonic space. In Toomer's book and Hughes' earlier poems, musical spaces in which the formation of African American communities may occur are portable and permeable. With stereo, however, music can be put to work toward depicting more impactful though wholly imagined musical contexts. Both *Cane* and *Montage of a Dream Deferred* emerge from their respective media ecologies and work to represent the

⁹ Jennifer Kilgore in "Music Making History: Langston Hughes's *Ask Your Mama*" (2004) relates the capital letters and colored paper to two possible sources of inspiration. First, she speculates that it is designed to emulate the capital letters of telegrams and, second, that the colored ink and colored paper imitates a letter Ezra Pound sent to Hughes in 1923. That letter was printed in red capital letters on orange paper.

intersection of changing musical styles and evolving media technologies in the black technosonic aesthetic, but *Ask Your Mama* figures stereophonic sound and a stereophonically formed musical poem as a means of creating, or at least imagining, a shared space for a post-diasporic community.

Hughes' ambitions for his experimental poem are entangled with two major influences: the riots at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1960 and the ritual of insult played by young black men and women called the Dozens. The events of the Newport Jazz Festival, in which a crowd of mostly white men turned into an angry and violent mob upon being turned away from Freebody Park and that night's performance, represented to Hughes the hypocrisy of wealthy white audiences who had, for decades, ascribed a racist primitivism and irrationality to jazz music. The anger at America's racism coming to a boiling point in an act of deranged aggression motivated Hughes to compose the ironic elegy "Goodbye Newport Blues" in the nascent musico-poetic form modelled after the Dozens that would evolve into *Ask Your Mama*. A game of exchanging insults, the Dozens centers around outrageous accusations of incest, adultery, and cuckoldry, and served, as psychologist John Dollard described it in 1939, as a cultural mechanism offering a means of control to an alienated and oppressed community (Rampersad 317). Hughes was familiar with Dollard's work and saw in the Dozens an expressive mode to match his frustration over what happened in Newport: sarcastic, incisive, a controlled burn to counter the riot's explosiveness. *Ask Your Mama* attempts a similar mission of intervention and communal identity formation as *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, yet the soundscape and network of cultural practices the poem existed within was different, tied up with yet another violent chapter in the relationship between African American music and white America.

The most common approach to *Ask Your Mama*, despite its radical poetics and complex

cultural backdrop, hinges on an uncomplicated understanding of the verbal and musical components of the text as parallel but separate features, creating a dialectic opposition but not admitting a complete semiotic fusion.¹⁰ I contend, however, that their separation does not illustrate an incompatibility between mediums but rather an intermedial transmediation of stereophonic sound. Separate audio channels, transmediated here into separate textual fields, allow for the simulation of echoes, reverberations, and the aural impression of spatiality. *Ask Your Mama* extends the missions of *Cane* and *Montage of a Dream Deferred* in its interrogation of music and sound's ability to create communal and participatory spaces, but stereo offers a new means of spatial delineation through its illusory construction of visual and architectural forms by sound alone. Instead of depicting the mutability of musical spaces for African American communities—a condition made more urgent when the musical space of Freebody Park incited a new form of racialized violence—Hughes suggests impossible soundscapes encompassing dispersed and disempowered peoples.

Binaural sound, the use of two sound sources, is leveraged in stereophonics to depict the contours of a space and give the listener a sense of the sounds coming not only from two sources but resonating from several and throughout an area with its own shape, textures, and features.

¹⁰ T. Austin Graham in *The Great American Songbooks: Musical Texts, Modernism, and the Value of Popular Culture* (2013) understands it as similar to *Cane* in that the musical element represents an invitation to participate and for the reader to complete the text by performing it (113-14). Graham's interpretation converts *Ask Your Mama* into a performance text—not a song itself but the potential to become song. R. Baxter Miller in *The Art and Imagination of Langston Hughes* (1989) explicitly addresses a musico-literary differentiation in his discussion: "My claim of its excellence and plan for reconsideration rest upon the dialectic between the verbal and the musical languages" (88). Günter Lenz elaborates on Miller's evaluation when he argues that Hughes creates a "new kind" of call and response pattern between poetry and music, a kind of extension of the spiritual tradition seen in earlier musicalized forms of Harlem Renaissance poetry. *Ask Your Mama*, for Lenz, is a field of interplays, of "common sounds as well as of jarring contrasts, discontinuities, and silences" (276).

Stereo comes from the Greek word *steréos*, meaning solid, and that condition of solidity and three-dimensionality is integral to the difference between binaural sound and its stereophonic implementation. Using multiple microphones, stereo recording inscribes both sides of a record's groove so that the two inscriptions can be played simultaneously from different sound sources. These different sources can emit the same sound at different times, so that it reaches one ear before the other. The delay in perception between ears is the principle by which we decode the distance of a sound source, so if a noise reaches the second ear soon after the first, the brain interprets it as emitting from a nearby source, and if there is a longer delay, the brain interprets the sound source as far away. Compounded with signals reaching ears at different volumes, dual audio channels permit near endless variations of distance and delay in order to represent specific spatial features. It plays upon principles of interaural time difference and interaural level difference so that a complex depiction of a space's size, shape, and resonant qualities is communicated via sound alone. Earlier in the century, phonographic recordings managed to both transcend and enforce the visual markers of the music's performance. With listeners trained to assign stereotypical features to voices and musical styles, phonography became intermedial in that it was an aural medium operating in a visual register. Stereophonic recordings elaborate on this principle to strengthen the illusory function so that aural media become entirely immersive; sounds become sound images and fully rendered soundscapes.

Critics have noted the role of stereophonic sound's capacity to develop a unique visual vocabulary and to construct and deconstruct spatial boundaries in African and African American art. Paul Gilroy describes double-consciousness as stereophonic in nature (3), but Jessica Teague extends this evaluation further to explore how stereophonic poetics create what she calls "black sonic space" (23), and Tsitsi Ella Jaji further argues that stereo can be "dubbed in for solidarity"

(11). Sound images enable imagined and projected images of global black experience. Permitting both an elaborate realism and an aural fantasy, stereo turns sound into an immersive virtuality. Importantly, virtual means that something is constructed but is, at the same time, potential. In this way, the technosonic aesthetic reaches toward the possibilities of creation and beyond re-creation. In *Montage of a Dream Deferred* intermediality transforms the sonic space of Harlem into the textual space of the poem, interpolating the musical aesthetics and aural media's effects into the sprawling, non-linear, and multivocal poem. *Ask Your Mama* is equally as expansive, but the sonic spaces rendered in poetry are virtual, offered as imagined black spaces forged despite global racism, violence, and diaspora.

Carefully considering why Hughes would be motivated to turn to music in his mission of describing and delineating black musical spaces, it becomes necessary to return to Prieto's second and third questions: How does a given model effect the semiotic functioning of the text, and how does this musical model effect our interpretation of a text? In other words, how should we adjust our reading practice and interpretive strategy to Hughes' intermedial experiment? Intermediality in *Ask Your Mama* operates according to two principles. First, the running accompaniment musicalizes the text by suggesting an ongoing aural component and harmonic structure. Unlike other intermedial poems, where the structure and sonic patterns are derived from musical forms, *Ask Your Mama* employs explicit descriptions of musical cues in order to treat the page as a performance space from which melodies and harmonies sound, thus inviting participatory engagement from the reader to imagine such an accompaniment and contribute to the meaningfulness of the text. Musical accompaniment provides a sonic quality, a "mood," that harmonically compliments the text to the left, sometimes enforcing, sometimes contradicting, and sometimes ironizing, but always synthesizing the fragmentary text within the

intersubjectively intelligible quality of a shared sonic space. The second principle of Hughes' musicalization is the sense of delay that his parallel columns create. Because the reader cannot read down both sides of the page simultaneously, there exists a slight temporal delay in perceiving what occurs simultaneously. Stereo is based on the principle of interaural time difference and interaural level difference. By creating a temporal difference in the perception of one piece of the text and then the other and by further stressing difference with the typographic marker of capital letters, Hughes transmediates the delays and differences upon which stereophonic sound depends into a written poem. Regarding the question of how a reading practice must be expanded in response to Hughes' version of intermediality, encountering a poem like this means hovering between the acts of reading, of performing, and of hearing. Experiencing the text is equal parts willing reception, participatory engagement, and attentive decoding. In his study of *Ask Your Mama*, R. Baxter Miller writes that its "constantly recurring dynamic between personal and communal memory reminds us of the degree to which the black American poetic text dissolves the alleged margins between the literary discursive 'me' and this musically feeling 'us'" ("Framing and Framed Languages" 3). The margins' dissolution is apparent in the dissolution of a singular lyric "I," a transformation of the unitary organizing consciousness into a multivocal chorus—an amplification of Toomer's spirituals in *Cane* and Hughes' earlier strategy in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. Hughes' musicalizing aesthetics here, however, further extend that dissolution between the individual and the collective by transforming the printed space of the poem into a co-created virtual space.

"Cultural Exchange," the first "mood" of the sequence, introduces the poem's concern with music's meaning-making and world-building capacities. On one side is a fragmented, opaque, and frequently agrammatical verse animated by the accompanying musical directions on

the other. It is through these binaural channels playing off one another that Hughes depicts the sound image and sonic space that is the poem's focus:

IN THE
 IN THE QUARTER
 IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
 WHERE THE DOORS ARE DOORS OF PAPER
 DUST OF DINGY ATOMS
 [...]
 LEONTYNE UNPACKING (477.1-5, 15)

With its paper doors and dust of atoms moving into, out of, and through it, the urban African American space is unorganized and indistinct; lines are incomplete, and borders are porous. Contrasting this impressionistic rendering, the accompanying music has a highly spatialized and nearly geometric quality: “*The / rhythmically / rough / scraping / of a guira / continues / monotonously*” until the “*flute call, / high and / far away*” merges with the sound of “*German / lieder*” (477.1-4, 8-10, 14-15). Sounds come and go in clear relation to one another, describing legible spatial relation through music. The sound of German lieder, a sonic signifier of Leontyne Price, transforms into African drumming that “*throb[s] / against / blues*” while, to the right, the combination of black musical styles is represented in an unpunctuated series of names: “SAMMY HARRY POITIER / LOVELY LENA MARIAN LOUIS PEARLIE MAE” (478.9-11). Music in the quarter has a physical presence, sounding out the contours of the space and initiating moments of highly physicalized contact. Names and linguistic signifiers, however, come in a chaotic catalog. The musical accompaniment reflects stereophonic sound's ability to describe the features of a virtual space: imagined and yet possible. “Cultural Exchange” begins in the transitional and largely invisible spaces that African American communities live in and move through, but the spaces that global black music creates are coherent and solid. Such a solidity transforms soundscapes of the ignored and impoverished into virtual spaces in which

futures and fantasies can be realized.

“Ode to Dinah” and “Blues in Stereo” highlight the presence of aural media in the musical space and make plain Hughes’ concern with not only the music but also its modes of reproduction and commodification. By taking up the stereo aesthetic in his musicalization, Hughes repurposes the technology that has been utilized to sell black music back to the black community. “Ode to Dinah’s” opening lines make apparent the role of sound reproduction:

DARK SHADOWS BECOME DARKER BY A SHADE
 SUCKED IN BY FAT JUKEBOXES
 WHERE DINAH’S SONGS ARE MADE
 FROM SLABS OF SILVER SHADOWS.
 AS EACH QUARTER CLINKS
 INTO A MILLION POOLS OF QUARTERS
 TO BE CARTED OFF BY BRINK’S,
 THE SHADES OF DINAH’S SINGING
 MAKE A SPANGLE OUT OF QUARTERS RINGING
 TO KEEP FAR-OFF CANARIES
 IN SILVER CAGES SINGING. (491.1-11)

The black female voice, with its construed darkness that racializes the song despite the invisibility of the racialized singer, emerges from the mediating technology: the jukebox. Aural media, as it had been for decades by the 1960s, are tools for ensuring the perceived “shades” of Dinah Washington’s voice. Here, the quarters of “Cultural Exchange” are transformed into the coins that maintain Dinah’s invisibility and empower the white producers. “Make a spangle out of quarters ringing” is a punning conflation of the quarters dropped into the jukebox and the music invented and performed in “the quarter of the negroes,” in black musical spaces. Sounds of black communities turn into clinking coins carted away from performers and their black audiences as “Hesitation Blues,” *Ask Your Mama*’s primary leitmotif, sounds from the right. The recurring song asks: “Tell me how long do I have to wait? Can I get it now or must I hesitate?” What was a popular blues standard with playful sexual overtones is now a complaint levelled

against actors within the media ecology that commodify black cultural expression. The black musical aesthetic as a technosonic construct makes possible the appropriation of and profiting from that construct by those controlling the technology. But by intervening in the technology's affiliated cultural practice and extending the (mis)uses of new aural media, black artists can disrupt such a system.

In "Blues in Stereo" that intervention in the form of the stereophonic aesthetic is made explicit. The section begins:

IN A TOWN NAMED AFTER STANLEY
NIGHT EACH NIGHT COMES NIGHTLY
AND THE MUSIC OF OLD MUSIC'S
BORROWED FOR THE HORNS
THAT DON'T KNOW HOW TO PLAY
ON LPs THAT WONDER
HOW THEY EVER GOT THAT WAY. (496.3-9)

Stanleyville, named after Henry Stanley, who helped open the Belgian trade in the Congo, was the furthest navigable point up the lower Zaire River and a kind of limit of white imperialism in Africa. Like the jukeboxes in "Ode to Dinah," the gramophone horn with its monophonic sound is a colonizing force entwined with the atrocities of Belgian colonists. However, imperialist expansion is counteracted by musical accompaniment:

*African
drum-
beats
over
blues
that
gradually
mount
in
intensity
to
end
in
climax.* (496.4-17)

Stereophonic sound moves in three dimensions, moving “over” other sounds and eventually “mounting” toward the climax. The colonists’ monophonic gramophone marks one set of borders—the limit of settlement in the Belgian Congo—but Hughes’ own stereophonic musical accompaniment does not follow the same cartographical limits. Music sounds out a virtual space that is not defined by European names and maps, nor by the repetitive circularity and two-dimensional surface of the gramophone disc, but rather by the synthesis of pre- and post-diasporic black musical forms. Aural media create a trans-historical and global space that rejects atomizing maps and borders in favor of collectivizing African drums and twelve-bar blues.

These musical forms, however, are not treated with absolute sincerity and are also subject to the ironic signifyin(g) of Hughes’ poetics. “Ask Your Mama” and “Bird in Orbit” leverage ironic disconnects between the poem and the music in order to both elaborate on the fantasy introduced earlier as well as deflate it. The result is a striking doubleness: sincerity and irony, hope and hopelessness held in suspension. Virtual space offers fantasy, but the fantasy that was a means of resistance in earlier sections becomes absurd in these. For instance, while “*Delicate / post-bop*” and “*a / musical / echo of / Paris*” (512.14-15, 25-28) sound on the right, on the left is:

LUMUMBA LOUIS AMRSTRONG
 PATRICE AND PATTI PAGE
 HAMBURGERS PEPSI-COLA
 KING COLE JUKEBOX PAYOLA
 IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES (512.24-27)

Sounds of black expression collide with the mass-culture of hamburgers, soda pop, and jukeboxes. The transcendence of this air-conditioned nightmare offered by musical expression begins to appear bizarre and silly. In “Bird in Orbit” the bizarreness intensifies:

THE REVEREND MARTIN LUTHER
 KING MOUNTS HIS UNICORN
 OBLIVIOUS TO BLOOD

AND MOONLIGHT ON ITS HORN
 [...]
 AND CHARLIE YARDBIRD PARKER
 IS IN ORBIT (517.5-8, 11-12)

All this is accompanied by cool bop that starts “*very / light / and / delicate*” before “*rising / to an / ethereal / climax... / completely / far / out...*” (517.1-11). King on a unicorn and Parker in orbit are extravagantly ironic images, but the climax offered by the music is strikingly sincere. Such a dissonance reflects the poem’s background: the frightening comedy of whites rioting to see jazz musicians and the ritualistic insults that cement social bonds in the face of frustration. Though the images are outrageous, they are not frivolous. Instead, Hughes’ strange visual vocabulary emerges from an ambivalence split between satire and struggle, between affirmation and defeat. Like *Montage of a Dream Deferred* or the simultaneously joyous and lamenting sound of the blues, this is a sustained navigation and negotiation of the poles of black experience. Musical expression can satisfactorily contain such a paradox, and stereophonic sound can describe the contours of a shape that contains these contradictions.

In another ironic and almost stereotypically modernist gesture, Hughes includes “Liner Notes: For the Poetically Unhep” to facetiously clarify the text for the sake of a presumably white audience. The liner notes further the analogy between the poem and a mediated musical performance while complicating, not clarifying, the poem’s concerns. The poem is loaded with citations and allusions to black artists, politicians, and public figures as well as obscure references to tribal practices and beliefs alongside old wives’ tales and other pieces of black American culture. Despite the opportunity to clarify and define these references, Hughes’ notes are instead an ironic admonishment. In his first note to “Cultural Exchange,” for instance, he asks: “What [...] is really happening in the shadow of world events, past and present—and of world problems, old and new—to an America that seems to understand so little about its black

citizens? Even so little about itself.” (527). Additionally, in his note to “Is It True?” he writes: “It seems as if everything is annotated one way or another, but the subtler nuances remain to be captured” (530). His resistance to annotation, pointing out that no number of notes will reflect the subtler nuances and betray what is really happening, perhaps corresponds to the specific lines: “UNDECIPHERED AND UNLETTERED / UNCODIFIED UNPARSED / IN TONGUES UNANALYZED UNECHOES / UNTAKEN DOWN ON TAPE—” (507.5-8). Hughes’ “Liner Notes” deny any kind of totalizing textual interpretation, treating the plethora of references as that which must remain undeciphered and untaken down. *Ask Your Mama* is not interested in telling the story of the black community, in putting it on record for posterity, but rather in depicting the musical spaces and the everyday conditions that black people exist within as well as those conditions’ transcendence toward a virtual sonic space.

By reading *Ask Your Mama* with attention toward intermediality and stereophonic sound, we can understand it as an extension of what began in the musical literature of the Harlem Renaissance forty years earlier. At the center of its musicalization is a negotiation of aural media, a series of actions and interventions in the use of gramophones, jukeboxes, and stereos toward the (re)definition of the black technosonic aesthetic. Aural technology enables a recuperation of cultural heritage and a modernization of cultural forms; for that reason, it is also a site of contestation as black artists struggle to maintain control over the means of expression. While the technological apparatuses may not always be the same and the stakes of that struggle may change over the course of the twentieth century, the same engagements in *Ask Your Mama* are apparent in *Cane* and *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. African American modernism is marked by a musicalization that is exploratory, interventionist, and frequently ambivalent to the point of containing contradictory perspectives. Craving the definitions of a shared history but traumatized

by slavery and Jim Crow, seeking a place in the modern musical soundscape but rejecting commodification, primitivism, and “slumming” whites, black artists pursued the black musical aesthetic with doubled ambitions. Such a doubleness is present regarding media technology. Does electronically amplified music result in more meaningfully intimate musical spaces or does it result in a swan song of the folk music tradition? Does recording technology empower the jazz musician or fully erase the black body from jazz altogether? Black modernist intermediality is a means of raising these questions, not answering them. *Ask Your Mama*, with its interpolation of musical aesthetics and stereophonic sound, does not cease to raise questions, but rather it raises new ones. How can artists take control of global spaces by taking control of the sound technology? How can writers and musicians (mis)use the means of production, broadcast, and amplification? How can stereo be dubbed in for solidarity?

Exploring how musical meaning-making extends the semiotic operation of a linguistic text—inviting participation, initiating co-identification, and creating virtual sonic spaces—allows African American authors like Toomer and Hughes to leverage music and media’s effects toward black subject formation and cultural production. Toomer figures this change in terms of the acoustic and electric dialectic intensified by the Great Migration. Hughes perceives a media ecology potentiating a variety of new positions within and around it. Ultimately, stereo presents a technosonic tool for pursuing potential global solidarity. Prieto contends that the first question we need to reckon with in reading a musicalized text is what motivated the author’s turn to music in the first place. Understanding the correlations between music, media, and race allows us to begin accurately answering these questions as they relate to African American modernism and to read these texts across and between the mediums they integrate. With the first media age of the twentieth century, consumers and producers were put in a situation in which they had to develop

an intermedial listening practice. In order to hear black voices as black, in order to perceive the contours of concert halls and cabarets in portable music, in order to perceive the racial markers of music and its performers, twentieth-century listeners developed the capacity to decode meaning-events across integrated modes of communication. While many listeners became indoctrinated into this perceptual practice, African American authors transformed it into a creative practice. They mobilized their literacy beyond decoding and toward signifyin(g), and we can develop our own literacy in turn.

Chapter Three

Mediated Kinaesthesia:

Less a Thing Than the Trace of a Movement

The previous two chapters use opera and musicalized literature to explore modernism in terms of its soundscapes, examining the technology that stored and disseminated music within and across its sonic spaces. In doing so, they build from an understanding of listening as more than sensory perception but as a historically and culturally stipulated practice. Modes of communication were combined and integrated as new media technology and the literacies affiliated with them asked users to develop new perceptual faculties. Composers, librettists, and authors leveraged these augmented listening and reading practices in their combinations and integrations of musical and literary arts. Linguistic, visual, and aural modalities were also synthesized in a related performance medium: dance. This chapter focuses on another stipulated mode of communication, kinaesthesia, and the way in which media technology enabled and extended its potentialities and led to new relationships between dance and other arts.

Kinaesthesia is the communication of meaningful content through movement. Specifically, it is communication by way of the empathetic registration of motion, tension, balance, and boundedness in the body of the viewer. This embodied registration and affective response is most salient in dance but was understood as an operation shared across the arts. As Henri Bergson wrote in 1913: “We may not be able to consciously comprehend an emotion that an artist tries to express but we can be made to feel it; artists set down those outward manifestations of their emotion that our body will mechanically imitate, however lightly, so as to

place us in the indefinable psychological state that caused them” (18). Artists—including poets, visual artists, musicians, and dancers—express emotion through tension, balance, and movement, and this expression in turn becomes a way for the audience to enter a shared indefinable state, as in a form of understanding that exceeds linguistic referentiality. With its interdisciplinary application, kinaesthesia offered modernists a means by which to understand the various arts as extensions of a single principle. Moreover, just as in the case of music, kinaesthesia was becoming profoundly mediated through newly invented mechanisms and synthesized materials such as prostheses, electric lighting, and plastics. Mediated kinaesthesia offered new semiotic and aesthetic possibilities for synthesizing dance with other arts or transmediating dance to other mediums, possibilities pursued by artists like Loïe Fuller and Florine Stettheimer. Both women incorporated modern technology and manufactured materials into their interpretations of dance, extending the representational limits of the medium in order to forge connections between it and other arts.

Fuller’s Serpentine Dance combined vaudevillian skirt dancing with experiments in costume design, electric lighting, and projected images. Her proto-filmic¹ performances in which she became a sort of three-dimensional projector screen earned her the nickname *la fée électricité* (Garelick 6) and made her a favorite of artists and writers ranging from Mallarmé to Marinetti.² She described her art as “something new, something composed of light, colour,

¹ Tom Gunning’s article “Light, Motion, Cinema!: The Heritage of Loïe Fuller and Germaine Dulac” (2005) makes the case for Fuller’s performances as a precursor to film. Elizabeth Coffman makes a similar case in her “Women in Motion: Loie Fuller and ‘Interpenetration’ of Art and Science” (2002) that Fuller’s name should, at the very least, be associated with the history of film (78).

² Mallarmé’s “Les Fonds dans le ballet” (1897) discusses Fuller’s contribution to dance, Marinetti refers to Fuller in his “Manifesto of Futurist Dance” (1917), and Yeats mentions “Loie Fuller’s Chinese dancers” in the poem “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” (1928). Other writers to engage with Fuller’s work include Roger Marx, Georges Rodenbach, and Paul Valéry.

music, and dance” (62), and through mediating technology she created an interdisciplinary art form of which choreography was only a part. Similarly, Stettheimer’s oeuvre includes painting, poetry, decorative art, stage design, and ballet. What stitches these together is a thoroughly modern semi-synthetic material: cellophane. Light moving against and through transparent, flexible film embodies the high camp style of her unproduced ballet, poetry, paintings, interior design, and stage design for the opera *Four Saints in the Acts* (1933). Both Fuller and Stettheimer locate a productive paradox in their implementation of media; bodies swathed in white silk under electric light and bodies wrapped in translucent plastic are alternately erased and foregrounded as the privileged sites of expression. They employ these technologies’ dual statuses as material and immaterial in order to treat dance as at once the expressive movement of a body and the phenomenon of movement itself. By isolating kinaesthesia through its mediation—separating the dancer from the dance—they utilize it as a potentiality shared across the arts.

1. Kinaesthetic Modernism

Kinaesthesia is closely related to proprioception, that being the perception of the body’s movement, balance, orientation in space, muscular tension, and sense of a boundary between interiority and exteriority. What sets kinaesthesia apart from proprioception and mobilizes it as an aesthetic practice is that it is predicated on embodied empathy and the registration of movement, balance, and tension in the body of the viewing subject, regardless of whether the subject’s body is the one in motion. Such an empathy creates a kind of affective entanglement between the audience and the artwork, or, as Irina Sirotkina and Roger Smith contend, “the claims for kinaesthesia hinge on the argument that the sense gives unmediated contact with the world, while other senses offer a mediated relationship” (4). Like the sense of touch, kinaesthesia

is a direct embodied contact between the perceived object and perceiving subject. Robin Veder contextualizes and complicates this notion of contact, however, when she describes it as socially constructed. She writes about how “the general public and modernism’s promoters and critics all expected the viewer’s body to unconsciously empathize with the movement and energy of the images” (36), and how it was this expectation as much as the sense modality itself that informed movement-based aesthetics. Though kinaesthesia was treated as a form of unmediated contact and holistic understanding, it was a historically situated sense that audiences were indoctrinated into developing. Kinaesthesia was the principle by which art could be comprehended as if felt or touched, by which our comprehension could transcend sense organs toward a holistic empathetic understanding; therefore, it offers an intermedial mode of perception. Just like the intermedial listening practices that phonography and aural amplification encouraged, that comprehension had to be developed, cultivated, and disciplined.

Kinaesthesia as a discipline bound to the sense modality becomes particularly salient in examining the set of practices and beliefs categorized under the “body culture” movement that emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first modern Olympic games in 1896, the English scouting movement’s founding in 1907, the American Posture League’s public-school pedagogy, and the Alexander Technique were all part of the larger body culture trend. But two of the most impactful components of body culture regarding dance aesthetics were the Eurhythmic exercises of Émile Jacques-Dalcroze and the movement system known as Delsartism. François Delsarte published *Cours d’esthétique appliqué* in 1840 and in it proposed the “Law of Correspondence,” which argued that “to each spiritual function corresponds a function of the body; to each grand function of the body corresponds a spiritual act” (qtd. in H. Schwartz 71). The movements and gestures Delsarte proposed as corresponding

to improved bodily and spiritual well-being later became internationally popular, especially from 1880 to 1920. Carrie Preston tracks what she calls a Delsartean genealogy of modernism from Delsarte's resurgence in popularity through English and American modernism, a genealogy that includes figures like Isadora Duncan and H.D. (4-6). Duncan's movements, without the semantico-referential operation of language or mimetic quality of pantomime, were nonetheless meant to be intelligible to her audience. Her medium's intelligibility depended on the inherent correspondence between a perceived motion and a felt spiritual function. It relied upon accessing that indefinable psychological state through a kinaesthetic understanding that exceeds representation.

In Dalcroze's Eurhythmics, practitioners performed motions and steps in time with music in increasingly complex combinations and meters in order to train their mental, physical, and emotional impulses and responses. As Dalcroze wrote in 1918, "Individuals who are rhythmically uncertain generally have a muscular system which is irregularly responsive to mental stimuli; the response may be too rapid or too slow; in either case impulse or inhibition falls at the wrong moment, the change of movement is not made to time, and the physical expression of the rhythm is blurred" (48). Physical, mental, and emotional expression, according to this system, could be hygienically systematized with strict adherence to rhythmic exercises. A genealogy of modernism based on Dalcroze would include the Ballet Russes under Sergei Diaghilev, perhaps the most famous reformation in modernist dance. Vaslav Nijinsky's choreography for *Le Sacre du printemps* (1913) rejected what Susan Jones identifies as the "anti-gravitational dynamic" (6) of classical choreography; instead, Eurhythmics-inspired movements and postures like a liberated torso and tension between the body and gravitational pull were the hallmarks of the new movement style. Three years after Nijinsky's scandalous premier, D.H.

Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1916) features Dalcroze exercises in a scene where Gudrun practices them while accompanied by Ursula's signing. What begins as hygienic exercise is adapted by dancers and other artists to represent non-semantic emotional, mental, and physical impulses in how a body moves.

What underlies Eurhythmics, Delsartism, and much of body culture is a treatment of the body, in Harold B. Segel's term, as "semantically worthy" (1). Dance is not a language; however, kinaesthetic expression exceeds the authority of language and communicates in a capacity so direct and immediate that it "speaks" to the entire body. The body in motion—for Duncan, Nijinsky, and others—is a site of non-referential comprehensibility. This comprehensibility and kinaesthetic modernism in general were very much historically and culturally situated phenomena that cannot be divorced from the popular imagination of the time. Through the popularity of body culture, the celebrity status of expressive dancers like Duncan, Mary Wigman, and Martha Graham, and the pronouncements of public intellectuals like Henri Bergson, audiences came to expect the holistic bodily registration of movement and tension. Modernism's "sixth sense" resulted from a series of adjustments to social, aesthetic, and scientific considerations.

Another significant site of this adjustment was media technology. In this chapter, I posit the idea of mediated kinaesthesia and aim to extend the work of Felicia McCarren in *Dancing Machines: Choreographies of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2003), David Trotter's theory of "techno-primitivism" from his *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain Between the Wars* (2013), and Mark Franko's understanding of the dancing body as medium as put forth in his *Dancing Modernism/ Performing Politics* (1995). I propose that kinaesthesia was not a rejection of technologized existence and modern alienation—as the label "anti-modernist" often

ascribed to artists like Duncan, H.D., and Lawrence suggests—but rather a way to negotiate the relationships between the body and the technology mediating its semantic worth to other bodies.

What I refer to as mediated kinaesthesia is the phenomenon by which a moving body and that movement as a meaning-event are extended, augmented, or replaced by a technological medium whose presence and function are pronounced. Such a pronouncement does not fully replace the moving body but troubles the distinction between it and movement itself. Modernist dance is rife with examples of fabrics and substances designed to disappear or become absorbed into the body: Duncan's light togas around her uncorseted torso or Nijinsky's coffee-colored tights in *L'Après midi d'un faun* (1912).³ Modernity itself, however, is riddled with instances of mediated kinaesthesia. Rubber-soled shoes,⁴ the automobile, and the Bake-Lite telephone receiver are three of the most obvious cases in which conspicuous technology is integral to the body's sense of movement, tension, balance, and boundedness. Position, motion, and speed were bound up with materials, machines, and media that made the modern kinaesthetic experience possible. The artists discussed in this chapter confront and embrace kinaesthesia's relationship to mediation. Fuller and Stettheimer's kinaesthetic arts were mediated by electric projection and transparent plastic respectively, and these technologies blur the boundary between the moving body and the mechanisms extending and elaborating that movement. Fuller's multimedial performances utilize kinaesthesia as mediated by her costumes and projections to make them more than simply dance alone, but rather spectacles that synthesized movement, music, and

³ One notable exception is Martha Graham's *Lamentation* (1930). In this solo, Graham's dance involves struggling against the confines of a long elastic tube. Rhonda Garelick draws a connection between Fuller and Graham's uses of contracting and expanding fabric in their choreography (190-94).

⁴ Connie Chatterley wears rubber-soled shoes but is otherwise naked when she performs *Eurhythmics in the rain*.

visual iconography. Stettheimer's cellophane aesthetic enables her to transmediate the kinaesthetic principles at play in her unproduced ballet to her painting, her poetry, and her design work.

Accounts of modernist dance typically include Loïe Fuller as a kind of precursor to the more well-known performances of the twentieth century—a pillar of the art nouveau aesthetic or an inspiration for Duncan's expressive solos. In the case of Florine Stettheimer, she is more frequently found in discussions of visual art, design, and opera than in dance. Neither artist fits unproblematically into narratives of modernist dance because neither one's work can really be unproblematically labelled as dance in the first place. Though they are not the only modernists to utilize dance and movement as points of contact among the arts,⁵ they are exemplary cases in that they reflect different but related approaches to kinaesthetic intermediality. In the case of Fuller, kinaesthesia enables the conceptual conflation of dance, music, visual iconography, and science into a single performance from which no single representative mode can be isolated. For Stettheimer, kinaesthesia is a through-line that allows her to translate her aesthetic from one medium to another. In Fuller's performance, we find intersemiotic multimedia; each medium involved strives beyond its respective sense modalities and communicative registers to be integrated according to kinaesthesia. This sixth sense, comprehended by way of affective and non-representational registrations, offers the point at which arts converge and their respective metalanguages fail. For Stettheimer, however, the vocabulary of kinaesthesia as a play of

⁵ See Terri Mester's *Movement and Modernism: Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence, Williams, and Early Twentieth-Century Dance* (1997) for analysis of dance aesthetics in the work of canonical literary modernists. Dance also plays a role in visual art by Fernand Léger, Francis Picabia, Pablo Picasso and many other twentieth century artists, and collaborations like Picasso, Jean Cocteau, and Erik Satie's *Parade* (1917) exemplify significant intersection between it and other arts.

surfaces and tensions is the shared component that connects her imagined ballet to her painting, poetry, and design. Across Stettheimer's work, we see interartistic transmedia: the use of ballet's movements and anti-gravitational aesthetic, literalized in cellophane, translated across disciplines. From the play of white light against the cellophane cyclorama in *Four Saints in Three Acts* to the eccentric pictorial structure of her group portraits, motion and tension energized by artifice and the explicitly synthetic create what Irene Gammel and Suzanna Zelazo refer to as "the intermedial exuberance at the heart of her oeuvre" (15).

In what follows, I examine the implementation of technology in Fuller and Stettheimer's related approaches to kinaesthesia and its function in combining different arts. Admittedly, studying modernist dance presents no small challenge. Individual performances for which no choreographic notation survives cannot be subjected to the same scrutiny as other kinds of performance texts. The surviving documentation of Fuller's performances and Stettheimer's designs will comprise pieces of an inherently incomplete archive. My methodology for approaching Fuller and Stettheimer draws from Susan Foster's proposed methods in *Choreographing History* (1995). In it, she writes:

This affiliation, based on a kind of kinesthetic empathy between living and dead but imagined bodies, enjoys no primal status outside the world of writing. It possesses no organic authority; it offers no ultimate validation for sentiment. But it is redolent with physical vitality and embraces a concern for beings that live and have lived. Once the historian's body recognizes value and meaning in kinaesthesia, it cannot dis-animate the physical action of past bodies it has begun to sense. (7)

Ann Cooper Albright summarizes such an approach as "a dynamic tango between traces and tracing" (4). Without the apparent authority that written texts present, and with an inevitably incomplete archive of images, films, and reviews, modernist dance demands a kinaesthetic reading practice, a tracing of the traces of motion. In a practical sense, this means that without complete source texts to refer to, I refer to a constellation of primary documents—including

autobiography, program notes, reviews, photographs, and other visual renderings—in addition to the critical and reconstructive studies of modernist dance and movement.⁶ In the place of close-readings, I supplant visual analyses of what images survive, assessments of the discourse in contemporary documentation, and kinaesthetic “readings” of choreography that account for embodied empathy and affective entanglement. Scrutinizing the tension, balance, posture, and torsion of bodies in motion through the same lens of kinaesthetic empathy that informed modernist dance will treat those bodies and their traces as semantically worthy and delimit appropriate interpretations.

2. Loïe Fuller’s Mere Mechanical Movements

Reading what Loïe Fuller’s contemporaries wrote about her, it seems as if her dancing transcended the genre to become something that could only be met with bafflement. French Symbolist Jean Lorraine asked, “Is it a dance, is it a luminous projection, an evocation of some spirit?” And Belgian poet Georges Rodenbach reacted by exclaiming “What miracles of metamorphosis!” (qtd. in Gunning 109). Where these writers see their language fail as they struggle to describe the transformations enacted on stage, Fuller speaks with certainty: “What is the dance? It is motion. What is motion? The expression of a sensation. What is a sensation? The

⁶ I also proceed with the same caution and awareness Gabriele Brandstetter describes in *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes* (2015). Her disclaimer is worth quoting at length: “The body-image in connection with this research is defined as a symbolic construct that migrates between scenic event and text. This enables access to pictorial as well as textual documents that influenced free dance iconography, without assuming the visual and the textual to be the same kind of evidence. When we introduce here an iconographically oriented pattern of reading dance through the body-image and figurations in space—always doing so with the knowledge that, in the long run, all attempts to historically understand forms of dance, movement patterns, and the underlying mental images are of course interpretive constructs in themselves and thus merely attempts at making them understandable—it is done explicitly in order to avoid the (ultimately unrealizable) fiction of reconstruction” (13).

reaction in the human body produced by an impression or an idea perceived by the mind” (70). For Fuller, her performances kinaesthetically communicate the sensations registered in her mind and body to those of her audience. While her commentators frequently come up against the limits of description, she understands her multimedia performances as capable of communicating that which resists language. In doing so, she approaches the ideal of the dancer’s “corporeal writing” that Mallarmé describes in his 1886 essay “Ballets:” “Through a commerce whose secret appears to spill from her smile, without delay, she delivers unto you, across the last veil which always remains, the nudity of your concepts and silently writes your vision, like a Sign, which she is” (110). Fuller’s corporeal writing presents hieroglyphic representations of familiar images—the butterflies, lilies, and clouds shaped from her robes—but it also offers meaningful content that exceeds principles of likeness and referentiality in order to disclose “the nudity of your concepts.” In her dances we find a dynamic rendering of musical harmonies and melodic arcs. Beyond this, by transforming embodied sensation into lighted and colored shapes and curves, she creates a technologically enabled externalization of interior bodily energy. Her performances are not strictly visualizations of shapes, sounds, and sensations; rather, they strive toward a condition of kinaesthetic meaning-making. Kinaesthesia—an embodied and non-linguistic comprehension—offers the point at which the different arts of Fuller’s multimedial performances converge in the undifferentiated condition of the intersemiotic configuration and Mallarméan total work of art. Augmented by the mediating technology of her patented costumes and lighting designs, Fuller’s body—continually on the brink of disappearance—becomes at once an iconic likeness, a musico-gestural motion, and an electrified apparatus translating sensation into shape.

My study of Fuller’s intermediality elaborates on and occasionally pushes against scholars who generally view Fuller in relation to Mallarméan aesthetics and his theory of the

invisible *idée*. They contend that Fuller, lost in the colors projected on the billowing fabric, becomes a sign in an abstract signifying system. Frank Kermode, in one of the earliest studies of her work, examines the “progressive extinction of the dancing body” (47) and the erasure of the body beneath the fabric in a form that is “expressive but impersonal” (25). Felicia McCarren examines the way Fuller’s continuous movement, like early motion pictures, “de-anatomizes” the body (*Dance Pathologies* 166). And Rhonda Garelick’s *Electric Salome: Loie Fuller’s Performance of Modernism* (2007) frames Fuller as a “direct forerunner of today’s modern media celebrities” (6) in its study of how she turns herself “into the invisible occupant of a mutable theatrical space” (35). For these dance theorists, the disappearance of Fuller’s body within the technological accomplishment of her work is integral to her impersonal and abstract modernist aesthetic.⁷ Helpfully, however, not all studies take Fuller’s invisibility to be the equivalent of disembodiment. Ann Cooper Albright, for instance, creates her own robe in order to understand the strength demanded from Fuller’s dancing and to inject a kinaesthetic intelligence and embodied understanding into a conversation that has largely disregarded the physical action required for the Serpentine Dance. I argue that Albright’s approach is not at all incompatible with the others and is, in fact, helpful in describing the signifying system Fuller disappears into. Though Fuller’s body becomes obscured under the bright lights and yards of silk, that these lights fall on a corporeal presence and that these robes are animated by physical exertion remain central to her aesthetic. Though she becomes de-anatomized and though there is

⁷ Similarly, readings of Fuller’s dances like Tirza True Latimer’s “Loie Fuller: Butch Femme Fatale” (1999), Sally Banes’ *Writing Dance in the Age of Postmodernism* (1994), and Julie Townsend’s “Alchemic Visions and Technological Advances: Sexual Morphology in Loie Fuller’s Dance” (2001) frame the erasure of the female body from the objectifying gaze and the transformation of the body into some other form altogether, thus queering it, as features of Fuller’s lesbian aesthetics.

a quality of impersonality in how her kinaesthesia is technologically mediated, it remains a meaning-event predicated on embodied empathy on the part of her viewing audience. She recedes into an abstract and multiform signifying system, like Mallarmé's conceptual *Le Livre*, but that highly technologized system strives to transcend isolated sense modalities toward an unmediated registration of motion, balance, tension, and torsion.

Her progression from an unremarkable amateur to one of the *fin-de-siècle*'s most prolific inventors elucidates the role mediation played in the development of her technologically enabled aesthetics. Before she became the electric fairy and muse of early modernism, Fuller was an American from Illinois who rarely landed onstage roles. Though her autobiography is riddled with exaggerations and suspect accounts, it depicts a career that took advantage of happy accidents as opportunities for invention. The first such invention occurred in 1891 when Fuller took a small role at the Casino Theatre in New York City. She acted the part of a woman hypnotized by the eponymous doctor in the play *Quack MD* by Fred Marsden. In an improvised dance, Fuller performed a scene in which her character was put under hypnosis. In it she gripped and twirled the hem of an oversized white gauze skirt as green lamps shined on her costume. The shapes she created by manipulating her costume, in her recollection, were immediately recognized by the audience who shouted, "It's a butterfly!" and "It's an orchid!" (Fuller 31). Despite her success in the minor role, a contract dispute forced Fuller out of the production, and her dance, which had become the main attraction of the play, was taken over by another performer, Minnie Renwood Bemis. To maintain legal control over her choreography, Fuller brought a case against the imitator. Though she ultimately lost the case, it marks a significant moment in her career as an inventor and engineer as well as in the history of dance in the twentieth century.

In his precedent-setting decision of *Fuller v. Bemis*, Judge E. Henry Lacombe ruled in the defendant's favor by arguing that the dance in question was not representational and, therefore, was not eligible for copyright. Published in the *New York Times*, Lacombe's decision includes this telling excerpt:

It is essential to such a composition that it should tell some story [...] The plot may be simple, it may be but the narrative, or representation of a single transaction, but it must repeat or mimic some action, speech, emotion, passion, or character, real or imaginary. When it does, its ideas thus expressed become [the] subject of copyright. An examination of the description of the complainant's dance, as filed for copyright, shows that the end sought for and accomplished was the illustrating and devising of a series of graceful movements, combined with an attractive arrangement of drapery, lights, and shadows, telling no story, portraying no character, depicting no emotion. The mere mechanical movements by which effects are produced on stage are not subjects of copyright (qtd. in Doran 22).

The problem with Fuller's claim, as the judge understood it, was her failure to tell, portray, or depict anything beyond attractive lights, colors, and motions—her failure to employ legible gestures in the telling of a story or even the mimicking of some feeling. Because Fuller's "mere mechanical movements" and "attractive arrangement" did not operate sufficiently like a legible signifying system, they were not be privileged to the same legal protections as written texts.⁸ What Fuller conceived of as semantically worthy was dismissed, in strikingly gendered terms, as essentially a frivolous improvisation. Without the ability to copyright her dances, Fuller instead copyrighted the technology she employed: the drapery, lights, and shadows. By the end of her life, she held a total of fifty-three patents for various costumes, stage lights, and set designs. Such

⁸ The United States Copyright Act of 1909 caused similar trouble for musicians. The copyright act included an article protecting composers from unlicensed reproductions of their musical compositions, though not their musical performances. Phonograph recordings occupied an ambiguous space between the written, and therefore protected, and the performed. Whether or not the tightly wound spiral inscribed on the phonograph disc was itself a mode of writing was both a point of legal debate and, as discussed in chapter one, a jumping-off point for reconsiderations of the intermedial relations between language and music.

a strategy is based on the semantic worth of the body mediated by technology where movement alone is not considered sufficiently representational and worthy. By extending her kinaesthetic art—in part quite literally—with technology, she achieved the degree of representational intelligibility demanded by the American legal system. This in turn led to a multifaceted approach to dance as an art based not on mimetic gesture, but on a broader variety of meaning-making operations integrated through mediated kinaesthesia.

Combining choreography with patented costumes and lighting enables Fuller to transform her signature movements into a vocabulary of visual likenesses—not a pantomime, but rather the synthesis of embodiment and iconicity. She becomes, in Mallarmé's words again, “not a woman, but a metaphor summarizing one of the elementary aspects of our form, knife, chalice, flower, etc.” (“Ballets” 107) by making her prosthetically extended body into a sequence of images through what Ann Cooper Albright refers to as “the morphology of her serpentine dance” (46). One of the first innovations Fuller brought to dance to enable this morphology was darkening the entire theatre. When she first did so in 1892, the only others who insisted on darkened theatres were Richard Wagner and Andrew Antoine (Gunning 110). Unlike Bayreuth, however, late nineteenth-century theatres like the Folies-Bergère were full of smoke and dust, so these beams of light appeared as semi-solid structures converging upon the moving shape at the center of the stage. This suggests that the site of iconicity was not her body alone but rather the entire phenomenal space upon which she produced shapes with light and motion. For instance, in “Lily of the Nile” from 1896 and reconstructed by the University of Washington Chamber Dance Company in 2008, Fuller is draped in 500 yards of white silk. Under blue and white lights, she spins continually and, with her arms extended by bamboo rods, lifts her skirt up over her head to create a spiraling conical shape. The visual metaphor of the lily is made possible not just by her

spinning, nor by her enormous robe, but also by the entire technologized area of the stage and darkened theatre. She literalizes Mallarmé's description of the dancer by extending the meaning-making capacities of the body's configurations in space, and comes to resemble the serpent, the lily, and even the night.⁹ Her robes' blankness reaches into the blankness of the dark stage itself, and all of it functions as a semiotic field for the production of signs.

Significantly, Fuller's morphology demonstrates ambitions beyond simply replacing her body with an image; instead, kinaesthesia enables an embodied as well as visual registration of her choreographic icons. The integration of the kinaesthetic and visual modes is especially evident in her 1896 "Fire Dance." The dance was reconstructed and recorded on DVD by dance historian Jessica Lindberg in 2003, and though there are inherent analytic limits to a recording of a reconstructed dance, Lindberg's performance, grounded as it is in archival research and practical experimentation in costumes and lighting, can be utilized to gain a more thorough understanding of the tension and torsion at work in Fuller's iconographic dance. The reconstruction begins with Lindberg shrouded in forty yards of lightweight silk and making her entrance with the opening notes of Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries."¹⁰ Over the course of the piece, which includes twenty-eight lighting cues, Lindberg takes on different shapes to evoke fire, ranging from a low flickering circle to broad licks of yellow. At one point, she makes rapid lateral turns, backlit in blue. The speed of the silk as Lindberg crosses her body with one arm and

⁹ Dance historian Patrizia Veroli describes Fuller's "Danse de la Nuit" thus: "The performer, in a costume of black gauze covered with rhinestones, by skillfully maneuvering the lights, made the audience believe that they were seeing the stars shine through the clouds, then that they were imagining the rise of the moon, and finally, when the color of the light was changing, that they were witnessing the arrival of the dawn" (134).

¹⁰ According to Lindberg, the earliest known accompaniment to the "Fire Dance" was Gabriel Pierné's original score for *Salomé*. That score is no longer extant. "Ride of the Valkyries" became clearly associated with the "Fire Dance" as its accompaniment only in 1922, almost three decades after it was first performed.

lifts the other over her head, alternating sides quickly and rhythmically in combination with the coloration of violet along the hem of the robe and yellow at the highest reaches turns the movements into convincing fabric flames. Her robe is not only the color of fire but takes on the violent and expansive motions of rising flames. Lindberg achieves such a rendering thanks to a liberated torso and torsion propelling the material outward and upward in a centrifugal arc as much as by the layers of colors shining on the swaths of fabric. What Lindberg's recreation demonstrates is the extent to which embodiment, despite its obfuscation under the robes, was integral to the performance. The torque that twists her torso from the solar plexus to her shoulders foregrounds a personal kinetics: the moving body that is not exactly visible beneath the robe but still perceptible in an empathetic understanding by way of the kinaesthetic register. What is seen and what is affectively comprehended work together in this intermedial depiction of fire. Fuller creates a dance style that melds iconic visuals with a vocabulary of motion through the technologization of her body and the erotics of presence and absence. Thus, she composes a choreographed poetics squarely situated in the space between woman and metaphor that Mallarmé describes.

We can see how this intersemiotic configuration presses against meaning-making's limits in her contemporaries' depictions of the "Fire Dance." These descriptions and images work to access such sensory excess shot through with eroticism but more often result in strangely convoluted representations, ones that struggle to account for the operations of kinaesthesia. Jean Lorraine's recollection is a telling example:

Molded in the middle of ardent embers, Loïe Fuller does not burn; she filters and oozes light, she herself is the flame. Erect in glowing coals, she smiles, and her smile seems a mocking grin under the red veil in which she is wrapped, the veil she moves and waves like a smokescreen down her lava-like nudity. It's Herculaneum buried under ashes, it is also the Styx and the infernal shores, and it is also Vesuvius with its half-open mouth spitting the earth-fire; this immobile nudity which is still smiling in the embers of a fire

from heaven, with hell as a veil. (qtd. in A. Albright 70-71)

In this dance, Fuller filters and oozes—a striking combination of the technological and the erotic can be heard in these verbs—across that which divides the moving female body and the shapes her movements suggest. We find in Lorraine’s description a kind of unlikely double-exposure of naked flesh and an erupting volcano, a fixation on the iconic shape of the robes as much as the bare kinaesthesia mobilizing them. The more Lorraine tries to get at the experience of seeing and feeling Fuller’s dance, the more ridiculous and excessive this nude smoldering coal, ash-cloud, volcano, and hell-fire combination becomes.

One of the most well-known images of Fuller, a Jules Chéret lithograph from 1893 advertising her show at the Folies-Bergère, depicts this dance in a similarly extravagant fashion. Though the color scheme suggests the “Fire Dance,” and the similarity between the eroticized dancer and fire is obvious, the poster is striking for the complete dissimilarity between the woman depicted and Fuller herself. A lithe, barefoot woman standing on one toe bends backwards and smiles to the viewer, her breasts bare and body visible through her robe. She looks nothing like the chubby Fuller, but she fits Lorraine’s description of lava-like nudity perfectly. It is difficult to reconcile the woman we see in photographs with Lorraine’s description and the poster’s image, but it is important to remember that, in addition to the sexualizing male gaze, we are dealing with representations of a representation and with attempts to render a dynamic, kinaesthetic phenomenon in the static vocabulary of reproducible print. To transmediate this intermedial spectacle is, as we can see, to encounter the limits of semiotics of the moving body that behaves, in Gabriele Brandstetter’s terms, as a “shifting sign primarily situated in the nonverbal and nondiscursive symbolic field” (13). Drawing from Lorraine’s hyperbolic description, Chéret’s lithograph, and Lindberg’s reconstruction, we are not much

closer to knowing what exactly Fuller's "Fire Dance" truly looked like to her contemporaries, much less to understanding the perceptual shock her audience's must have registered upon seeing it. We do, however, have a better understanding of the way in which meditated kinaesthesia extends the body toward the space between movement and metaphor. It is in these unrealistic descriptions and portrayals that the discursive limits—reached through the proto-filmic use of colored light and projection on her costume—of Fuller's intermediality become most obvious.

The musico-gestural feature of her intermediality reaches toward another kind of representational limit. Germaine Dulac referred to Fuller's dancing as "visual music" (qtd. in Gunning 107), but her choreography was more than a visual interpretation of sound; hers was a kinaesthetic representation of music. This is to say that instead of creating a sensory translation in which one sensory mode is rendered in the patterns of a different one, she leverages the principle of kinaesthetic empathy to transcend sensory organs altogether, thus causing her audience to register sound not visually but holistically. She summarizes her ambition toward a complete unity of sensory perception when she writes: "I wanted to create a new form of art, an art completely irrelevant to the usual theories, an art giving to the soul and to the sense at the same time complete delight, where reality and dream, light and sound, movement and rhythm form an exciting unity" (qtd. in A. Albright 185).¹¹ In her work to integrate light and sound as

¹¹ There are no sound recordings of Fuller's dances, and so we will never actually know the extent to which she was able to achieve her ideal synchronization. Even records of the music she used in performance are not always clear, though there is some information available. Based on the extant program notes, Fuller preferred the work of her contemporaries, especially French composers. Jules Massenet gave her unrestricted rights to her work, and Florent Schmitt wrote the music for her performances of *Salomé* in 1893, though none of it can be found (Kermode 37), as is the case with the original accompaniment for her "Fire Dance" by Gabriel Pierné (Lindberg). Later in life, along with her students, she staged ballets to Alexander Scriabin's *Prométhée* and Stravinsky's *Feux d'artifice* in 1914 (Veroli 142-43).

well as movement and rhythm into a single unity from which no single medium could be extricated, her ambition is less to create the visual analogue of music, but rather to perform the condition of music and gesture's intersemiotic undifferentiatedness.

According to the semiotics of musico-gestural choreography, the body's motions and dancer's emotions are co-extensive in the signs made up of musically directed movements. Gestures behave less as indexical representations or even visual approximations of the musical arc but are more closely linked to the "Law of Correspondence" that François Delsarte proposes. Whereas Delsarte organized his system of gestures according to a correspondence between the spiritual and the physical, Fuller's choreography gave to the soul and to the sense at the same time thanks to a correspondence between light and sound, movement and rhythm—between what is seen, what is heard, and what is kinaesthetically registered. With a musico-gestural form of representation that creates an intermedial integration between technologically mediated dance and its musical accompaniment, Fuller strives toward a representational strategy that is physical but spiritual, sensible but inscrutable. She creates this unity particularly when she deploys one of her signature maneuvers: the deep backbend with simultaneous figure-eights in her arms. We see her execute this maneuver in the final moments of the only extant film of her from 1905 as well as in highly stylized forms in many of the lithographs and sculptures of her likeness, including Cherét's. By moving her arms in continuous figure-eights, turning her back to the audience, and then slowly bending backwards, nearly inverting her upper-body as her arms continue in the same direction, she slowly creates the conditions for contrary motion. As her shoulders turn upside down, her figure-eights reverse direction and create increasingly more convoluted spirals. The sustained motion, visual confusion, and contortion of her upper body kinaesthetically represents contrapuntal polyvocality tending toward a unison melody that is not reached until she

rights her torso. The pull of gravity, the tension in her lower back, the imbalance of moving her arms in the same pattern even as her upper body is inverted, all these elements work toward creating a musico-gestural counterpoint and achieving intersemiotic undifferentiatedness.

Another component of Fuller's intermedial choreography, one that is central to Ann Cooper Albright's study of Fuller and to Hillel Schwartz's work on modernist movement in general, is torque. Schwartz describes how torsion is an energetic expansion from the solar plexus, "one's personal middle C" (78), and how the spinal column behaves like "a vertebral link to the earth as to the heavens" (75). He argues that torsion, in contrast to the widespread understanding of modernist bodily subjects as "dissociated, fetishized, ultimately empty and machinable elements," offers a "new kinaesthetic that insists upon rhythm, wholeness, fullness, fluidity and a durable connection between the bodiliness of the inner core and the outer expressions of the physical self" (104). In the lateral swings seen in all the morphological variations of the Serpentine Dance, especially the ones executed in Lindberg's reconstructed "Fire Dance," Fuller rotates through her entire torso and sends her arms, extended by bamboo rods and lighted swaths of silk, from her center out to the furthest reaches of her outer expression. Through torsion and the costume's expansion of her personal kinesphere, Fuller's gestures emanate outward as an externalization of internal registrations of music. Such a dramatic and technologically augmented form of emanation allows for her audience to register internally what her choreography externalizes in its transsensuous expression of music. In the case of these lateral turns in the "Fire Dance," we encounter mediated kinaesthesia at work in both the iconic representation of fire and the corporeal evocations of Wagner's music; it is the point at which the aural, the visual, and gestural lose what makes them distinct modes of meaning-making and are conceptually fused.

As Fuller's technological inventions suggest, she was keenly aware of scientific and technological advances of her time. Her engagement with the sciences informs another element of her intermediality, what I refer to as its energetic representation. This component encompasses the way in which technological mediation allows for the external representation of internal embodied phenomena, as in cycles of breath, the force of gravity, and the sense of bodily interiority. Her dances were, borrowing Bruce Clark and Linda Dalrymple Henderson's description of contemporaneous scientific representation, "visual analogues to phenomena that may or may not be available to normal channels of perception" (6). In the case of these analogues, seemingly abstract lines of motion were not strictly speaking abstract, but rather representations of corporeal energies. Fuller's use of technology in representing invisible bodily energies as graphical configurations, therefore, connects her choreography to scientific discourse and modes of representation. In her book *Literature, Modernism, and Dance* (2013), Susan Jones thoroughly explores the way in which Fuller's dances were bound up with contemporary science. She underlines how, from its very inception in *Quack MD*, Fuller's work showed the influence of medical practice as well as an interest in physics and chemistry. Fuller corresponded with Thomas Edison and Marie Curie regarding topics like phosphorescence, radium, and electricity and ceaselessly experimented with new chemicals and apparatuses to be used in her performances. Extending from this fascination with the properties of light, electricity, and radiation, the dances illustrate a profound intermixing of the corporeal and the technological, or, as Clare Parfitt describes it, they present "an image in which physical immediacy and technological mediation seamlessly coalesced" (110). Fuller's technologized choreography is not a borrowing of medical and scientific principles and theories, but rather a conflation of aesthetic and scientific modes of representation according to their shared kinaesthetic principles. Her

dances transform the impulses of a moving, breathing body acted upon by the forces of gravity into broad, lighted lines and curves. They are, in effect, graphical representations of physiological impulses and exertions: a combination of the kinaesthetic communication of expressive dance with the notational practices of electrically enabled anatomical study.

Her ambitions toward the externalization and representation of internal, invisible forces resonates strongly with late nineteenth-century discourse and practices of anatomical science. Robert Michael Brain's *The Pulse of Modernism: Physiological Aesthetics in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (2015) thoroughly chronicles the exchange between art and science found in *fin-de-siècle* techniques of reconfiguring the human sensorium into formal languages and graphical renderings. "Technical media," he writes, "appeared as an exteriorization of the living, and human-machine assemblages as a stage of an ongoing evolutionary interrelation" (xxiv). He goes on to argue that, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, "previously imperceptible events became instrumentally available to the eye and cognitive operations" (6-7). Brain does not examine Fuller's work, but her transformation of muscular tension into lines, traces, and dynamic flows offers a theatrical performance of the human-machine assemblage so central to the graphic method employed contemporaneously in the scientific fields. She makes perceptible both gravity and torsion through her costumes' prosthetics. The anti-gravitational dynamics that modernist ballet strived to evade as well as the muscular tension and speed of motion that electric light highlighted become available thanks to the mechanisms integrated with her choreography.¹² Science offered Fuller aesthetic and epistemic possibilities in that the scientific

¹² In an article by Stanley Hall published in *The Nation* in 1879, we can see that these advances in anatomy and physiology made the sciences a kind of theatre as well: "The graphic method is fast becoming the international language of science [...] It has revolutionized certain sciences by its unique logical method, and in one or two cases at least has converted the lecture-room into a sort of theatre, where graphic charts are the scenery, changed daily with the theme, and where

field, through technological means of observation, enabled and extended that which was fundamental to kinaesthesia—movement, tension, and balance. Access to these fundamental principles could only be achieved when perceptual faculties intersected with modern technological apparatuses.

Though they lack the primary source material to be rendered as full-scale reconstructions, as in the “Fire Dance” or “Dance of the Lily,” performances from Fuller’s later career draw explicitly on scientific concerns and technologies. Her “Radium Dance” from 1909, inspired by her conversations with the Curies, utilizes lighting effects to approximate the dim glow of the radioactive substance. In a manuscript version of a playbill, Fuller even includes in the director’s notes for the “Radium Dance” five pages of scientific information about the substance and its radioactive properties (A. Albright 192). In the 1914 “Dance of Steel,” Fuller utilizes a canvas backdrop onto which are projected abstract geometric shapes and laboratory photographs of cancer cells and fish skeletons (Garelick 54). There is nothing to confirm that Fuller was versed in the graphic method of physiological study, no evidence that she used devices like the myograph which transcribed muscular tension as curves against a coordinated grid, erasing, according to Brain, the “ontological distinction between living and non-living elements of the system” (18). However, the erasure of this distinction made possible by contemporary technological apparatuses and discourses—mediated representations of unseen forces and presences—clearly informs her interpenetrating choreographic and technological aesthetics. In this sense, Fuller performs the roles of both Doctor Coppélius and Coppélia; she is the mechanical automaton as well as the scientist who makes these mere mechanical movements

the lecturer is mainly occupied in describing his curves and instruments, and signaling assistants, who darken the room, explode gases, throw electric lights or sunbeams, simple or colored, upon mirrors or lenses, or strike up harmonic overtones, as the case may be” (qtd. in Brain 5).

possible.

By integrating visual likenesses, musically directed gestures, and technologically enabled representations, Fuller makes an intermedial art form that is a palimpsest of aesthetic and scientific operations. Such a simultaneity challenges one's ability to discuss her choreography without framing it in the terms of a sixth sense exceeding the other five, a challenge that Judge Lacombe in 1892 seems to have perceived as grounds for the dismissal of Fuller's rights to her own choreography. Lacombe's ruling, with its gendered language and dismissal of Fuller's "graceful movements" and "attractive arrangements," implies her dancing and her stagecraft to be decorative, feminine, and, in his estimation, inconsequential. By taking up the role of inventor as well as dancer, Fuller pushes against the demands for mimetic representation in dance, instead making it an intermedial form. At the same time, she challenges the gender binary that separates the masculine maker of technology and representative art from the feminine decorator and unconscious conduit for expressive art.¹³ Because her dances were not sufficiently referential, not enough like a language, Lacombe dismissed them as belonging to the same category of unreflected-upon movement: the involuntary gestures of a hypnotized woman. It is in trying to isolate the body's movements and understand her dance as dance per se, and not a narrative told through motion, that Lacombe encounters the limits of the definition. Mere mechanical movements—if one disregards the prosthetics of her costume, the gels and projections she employed, and the overall media spectacle she created—do not encompass the total artwork she

¹³ Several dance theorists have interrogated the ways in which Fuller rendered porous the division between masculine and feminine in the performing arts. See Catherine Hindson's "The Female Illusionist—Loie Fuller: Fairy or Wizardess?" (2006), Elizabeth Coffman's "Women in Motion: Loie Fuller and 'Interpenetration' of Art and Science" (2002), and Koen Vermeir's "Electricity and Imagination: Post-romantic Electrified Experience and the Gendered Body. An Introduction" (2015).

developed. Her intersemiotic multimedia makes different arts and their respective capacities undifferentiated by way of kinaesthesia amplified and augmented by apparatuses, prostheses, and related scientific discourses. An amalgamation of new media technologies transforms Fuller's mere mechanical movements into a synthesis of arts and sciences.

3. Florine Stettheimer's Four Saints and Four Arts

When Roland Barthes describes one of the most remarkable, versatile, and insidious materials of the twentieth century, he does so with a tone of mystification like that found in reviews of Fuller's performances. "More than a substance," he writes, "plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation; as its everyday name indicates, it is ubiquity made visible. And it is this, in fact, which makes it a miraculous substance: a miracle is always a sudden transformation of nature. Plastic remains impregnated throughout with this wonder: it is less a thing than the trace of a movement" (92). The word *plastic* covers a broad range of synthesized materials and includes those derived from natural substances like gutta-percha first derived from India rubber in the nineteenth century, semi-synthetic substances like cellulose-derived celluloid which began as a late nineteenth-century replacement for ivory billiard balls, and wholly synthetic substances like phenol-formaldehyde, or Bake-Lite, first synthesized in 1910 (Meikle 1-11). Each of these substances demonstrates a unique transformation of nature, but the miraculous substance most relevant to the purpose of tracing intermediality through the twentieth century is one whose miraculousness is only matched by its banality: cellophane.

When Judith Brown describes the semi-synthetic material, she writes: "The paper-thin, impermeable layer of cellulose sheeting offered the modern imagination new ways of seeing the mundane world: the glassy sheen of cellophane provided a protective veneer from dusty reality,

and, like lightweight and mobile glass, cellophane could wrap anything and thus transform it into a sparkling play of light” (150). The substance is mobile, flexible, and shines with the light that reflects off its surface and the light that passes through it. It is a waterproof but not moisture-proof boundary that marks out a shining barrier between surface and depth while inviting a transgression of that flimsy divider. It achieves a kinaesthetic and semantic worth through its ability to display motion, interplay, tension, refraction, and the boundary between interiority and exteriority even when static. Cellophane’s (im)materiality—less a thing than a trace of a movement—concretizes kinaesthesia. American painter, poet, and designer Florine Stettheimer draped her living room in cellophane curtains, wrapped her stage and costume designs in the film, painted portraits of herself and her friends swathed in transparent sheeting, and famously hung an enormous blue cellophane backdrop behind her set for Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein’s *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Whereas Fuller utilizes electricity and prostheses in her performances to combine several disciplines and representative operations, Stettheimer utilizes the aesthetics of cellophane as a materialization of kinaesthesia to relate each of the separate disciplines she works in to one another. Stylized motion, the dynamic play of light, and a perceptible boundary between exterior surface and interior depth connect each of her different artistic practices. Cellophane literalizes that connection and enables an interartistic transmediation of the kinaesthetic sense modality from dance to poetry, painting, and design.

Swiss chemist Jacques Brandenberger coined the word cellophane when he began developing it in 1904. The word comes from the Greek *kellon*, meaning “wood,” and *paino*, meaning “to be seen through,” a combination that speaks to the semi-synthetic, semi-organic nature of the plastic. The transparent film which began being mass produced in 1912 is essentially a sheet of plant fibers that are treated to remove the fats, oils, and waxes. The

resulting material, which can be dyed and shaped, is transparent, flexible, and waterproof, though moisture can still pass through it as vapor. With its increasing ubiquity through the twenties and thirties, cellophane became a favored material for both the avant-garde and commercial mass production. Perfumes and candy boxes came wrapped in the film, but it also appeared as the backdrop for Carl Van Vechten's portraits as well as on the set of Fred Astaire and Eleanor Powell's final dance number in *Broadway Melody of 1940* (1940). Brown's chapter on cellophane from *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form* (2009) offers an invaluable survey of the plastic's impact on art, fashion, and popular culture, though she is primarily concerned with the substance as "pure surface" and "the plastic without depth that gave the modern imagination new ways of seeing the mundane world, transforming it through its sparkling, if empty, play of light" (18-19). Though Brown's predominant interest is cellophane's alchemy of blankness and its capacity to signify both absence and presence in modernity's technological power, I aim to complicate her evaluation by interrogating the plastic's relationship to movement. Stettheimer's cellophane aesthetic is not strictly a matter of blankness, but rather it is based on the inter-dynamic between surface and depth, exteriority and interiority, the transparent synthetic skin and the sense of motion registered just beneath. By interrogating how she connects cellophane and its kinaesthetic qualities to her work in dance, theatre, and embodied motion, I will demonstrate how, across Stettheimer's output, cellophane's flexibility and reflectiveness augment such embodied communication through mediating it.

Before she became a mainstay in the New York art scene during the twenties and thirties, Stettheimer spent several decades practicing an unremarkable if technically proficient style of painting while travelling Europe with her family. She belonged to an affluent Jewish family from New York City, but her father left when she was a child and her older siblings severed ties when

they were married. She spent her youth and much of her adulthood in Germany, France, and Italy, but at the onset of World War I, a forty-three-year-old Florine, two of her sisters, and their mother returned to New York. Once there, Florine and her sisters built their circle of friends, which included several celebrated American artists and journalists as well as European expatriates. Florine began holding salons regularly in 1914, and they continued until the year before her death in 1944. Regulars included Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Georgia O'Keefe, Alfred Stieglitz, Marsden Hartley, Henry McBride, H.L. Mencken, Carl Van Vechten, Leo Stein, and of course Virgil Thomson. Despite her social circle of famous artists, Stettheimer's art and poetry received little to no attention during her lifetime. Her paintings saw only one solo exhibition, though she did share her paintings with friends, unveiling them privately in what she called "Birthday Parties." She wrote in her will that she wished all her paintings to be destroyed after her death, but Ettie stepped in, with Duchamp's help, to ensure they were preserved and shown in a memorial exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1946. Stettheimer's visual style was feminine, ornate, and, as Linda Nochlin describes it "mediated by a pictorial structure fantastically rococo, distanced by decorative reiteration" (115). This "rococo subversive" style, as Nochlin labels it, presents a unique visual vocabulary almost irreconcilable with the rest of the art world within which she was so deeply entrenched. H. Alexander Rich in his article "Rediscovering Florine Stettheimer (Again): The Strange Presence and Absence of a New York Art World Mainstay" (2011) points to this sense of her being out-of-step as the reason behind her perennial rediscovery as a lost modernist, continually being forgotten and then revisited, often accompanied by a minor celebration at the resurrection of a long lost artistic genius. During one of her cycles of rediscovery, Barbara Bloemink's important biography *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer* (1995) was attempts to gather the disparate components of

her life as an artist, of which her paintings were only a part.

In following Bloemink and engaging with the interconnected arts Stettheimer practiced, I begin with what would appear to be her least successful endeavor: ballet. In her sketches, designs, and libretto for the unproduced ballet, *Orphée of the Quat-z-Arts, or, The Revellers of the 4-Arts Ball*, we can see the early development of her mature visual style and begin to trace the co-operating and co-evolving occupations with kinaesthesia and the semi-synthetic film that became her trademark. In 1912, Stettheimer saw Nijinsky perform in *L'Après midi d'un faun* in Paris. While it would be an overstatement to say the performance completely redirected her artistic practice, the ballet she imagined in response to the performance reflects the stylization of bodies, high camp aesthetic, and depictions of movement that are the hallmarks of her mature work. Significantly, Stettheimer also began using cellophane as an artistic medium in her models and designs at this time. Bloemink calls the unfinished ballet a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (*Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer* 43), the same word she uses in a later essay to describe Stettheimer's paintings, "each of which is a fully realized scene with implied movement and sound, calling for full sensory engagement" ("European Influences" 46). By turning to the unrealized ballet with attention toward cellophane as a materialization of kinaesthesia and demanding that full sensory and fully embodied engagement, we can begin to understand the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that is Stettheimer's overall multidisciplinary output.

The ballet takes place in Paris one night in the spring, the same night as the Four Arts Ball. This ball, which was held in Paris every spring from 1892 to 1966 featured the students of the *École des Beaux-Arts* divided into four groups based on their disciplines: architecture, painting, sculpture, and engraving (Dillkofer 140). Stettheimer's ballet is essentially a bacchanal in which a young girl, Georgette, and her father, M. Dupetit, find themselves suddenly caught up

in the ball's extravagant and subversive celebrations. As simple as the scenario she wrote appears to be, it serves as the cornerstone for Stettheimer's work to come. Instead of architecture, painting, sculpture, and engraving, the four arts that comprise Stettheimer's *Gesamtkunstwerk* are dance, painting, design, and poetry. By conceptualizing a ballet, even an unproduced one, she can integrate each of these arts according to the principle by which they are connected. Within the scenario draft and the costume designs, we find that principle: embodied motion exaggerated and augmented by the play of light upon and through a shining surface. We find kinaesthesia and the cellophane aesthetic.

In its opening, Stettheimer's scenario for *Orphée of the Quat-z-Arts* demonstrates a fascination with the play of light against reflective surfaces that will become integral to her visual and verbal style. Though there is no cellophane mentioned in the scenario, the scenes and dances it describes indicate an aesthetic interest in movement's relationship with the synthetic and the mediating surface. The ballet begins in a "starlit mild Spring night" where the chestnut trees are in blossom; flowers "shine like white candles" while behind the trees can be seen the electric lights of a restaurant (136).¹⁴ Organic and inorganic sources of illumination are indistinguishable on the stage Stettheimer imagines as starlight, flowers, candles, and electric light create an indistinct glimmer. In the restaurant, we see a gentleman helping a woman into her wrap before taking his cane and walking away. Orpheus, an attendee of the Four Arts Ball, then leads a procession of revelers, including Eurydice dancing with a snake and Diana on a stag drawn by the night (138). When Georgette and Dupetit, arrive, Georgette is swept up in the

¹⁴ The scenario to *Orphée of the Quat-z-Arts* was never published during Stettheimer's lifetime. Suzanne Gammel and Irene Zelazo's edition of Stettheimer's poetry collected in the volume *Crystal Flowers: Poems and a Libretto* (2010), however, includes the ballet's scenario. All discussions of and quotations from the ballet's libretto are drawn from Zelazo and Gammel's edition.

collective dance. “Georgette discards her wrap before she dances,” Stettheimer writes, “and during her dance the artist removes her modern gown and robe her in some of their glittering things” (138-39). Her fashions are stripped away, but not to reveal the bare dancing body underneath; instead, they are only replaced with brighter coverings that move and glitter along with her movements. Bodies’ motion and bodies’ drapery are interrelated from the opening steps of Stettheimer’s imagined choreography. The fixation on fashion points to how, as Mary Davis describes it, modernist ballet “brought music and fashion into direct and dramatic contact” (15), but here that contact is predicated on a glimmering and dynamic surface. The mythic characters lampooning the stories they belong to are more accurately characters dressed up as characters. The revelers of the Four Arts Ball have simply donned these costumes, so the bacchanalian parade that crosses the stage is one of artifice and camp; we see a self-conscious performance of sensual self-forgetting, not the dithyrambs of Nijinsky’s faun or Russian pagans.

This staged recklessness and revelry end abruptly as the partiers carry on, Georgette is helped back into her furs, and she and her father ride away in a carriage. As if hygienically wrapped up and sealed off, the revelry of the ballet is safely contained in only a few moments of self-conscious performativity. The ballet’s bright surfaces and decorative baubles as well as the tableau-like quality of the choreography imagined for it work in concert to create a high camp aesthetic. Susan Sontag writes that camp “sees everything in quotation marks. It’s not a lamp, but a ‘lamp’; not a woman, but a ‘woman’ . To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role.” (4). The choreography of this ballet is not dance, but “dance,” in the same way the dancer leading the procession is not Orpheus, but “Orpheus,” and the bacchanal is only a passing, staged “bacchanal.” Stettheimer’s libretto is a play of surface and depth enacted by each character’s flickering between person and persona. Cellophane offers a material analog

for the quotation marks of Stettheimer's "ballet," so it is no surprise that the plastic makes its first appearance in her oeuvre as costumes designed for the ball's revelers.

Stettheimer's costume designs emphasize the same kind of self-contained quality as the tableaux she describes in her libretto; each sketch and painting depict a two-dimensional stylized rendering reminiscent of Nijinsky's choreography as the faun as much as *Vogue* fashion plates. In her plans, we encounter a visual version of the camp aesthetic and cellophane as fundamental to this aesthetic of moving and glittering surfaces. Eurydice, performing her snake dance, wears a low-cut brown tunic and transparent harem pants. Her legs cross at the knees as she steps from right to left, but her torso leans backward and her hips jut forward as, ironically, she turns her neck to look behind her. The elongated body appears broken apart at the waist and the upper and lower parts of the body move in opposite directions. Harem pants made of a transparent but luminous substance enshroud Eurydice's lower limbs. Light reflects off of her wide pant legs but her limbs underneath are visible through the fabric. Tension between the surface and the body that moves the surface corresponds with the bi-directionality of the dancer's body broken at the torso; cellophane breaks up and breaks apart, exaggerating movement to an impossible degree. In another tableau, Diana's model is literally draped in cellophane. She progresses from right to left and leans back on her stag, holding a spear behind her head. She wears a cellophane robe blown backward in the direction of her upraised arm. Shining against the matte paint of the character, the film seems a kind of plastic Nike superimposed on the body. The cellophane robe spreads open and is thrown back like wings, outlining the glittering posture of a form without a head and creating more spectacular motion than the body underneath it. The costume offers disembodied motion, moving in the opposite direction as the procession and yet extending from the dancer's body in a dramatic, kinaesthetic gesture.

Cellophane makes whatever it wraps hygienically cool and distant; it is ultra-modern but also hyper-mundane, a combination of the avant-garde and mass culture that can make it new but will make it flat and familiar at the same time. However, when draped on the bodies of dancers, it both reveals the body and obscures it beneath the phenomenon of abstract movement.

Cellophane offers a flat surface that, by way of its mobility and reflectivity, can mediate the kinaesthetic phenomenon to extend and exaggerate it in turn. Stettheimer's visual stylization and fixation on synthetic surfaces is not solely a style of artifice. Instead, such an artificiality points to the relationship between the surface and the body mobilizing it, between the play of glittering light and the corporeal dynamism that keeps it in play. Her cellophane aesthetic is a fundamentally kinaesthetic one; it concretizes and communicates embodied motion, tension, and dynamism. As simplistic as Stettheimer's materials for *Orphée of the Quat-z-Arts* may appear, the libretto and costume designs mark the starting points for two parallel but interrelated components of her mature practice: her poetry and her painting. By tracing the cellophane aesthetic from the ballet's scenario to her unpublished poems and from the costume designs to her painting, we can gain a fuller understanding of how mediated kinaesthesia organizes her body of work as a principle transmediated across the arts.

Ettie Stettheimer discovered Florine's poetry after her sister's death in 1944 and in 1949 she compiled and published the poems in a small edition titled *Crystal Flowers*. Only distributed to friends and family, *Crystal Flowers* and Stettheimer's poetry in general remained relatively unknown until Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo edited and published the collection in 2010. These unassuming verses, written almost exclusively in unpunctuated monostrophs, initially seem like unconsidered drafts, but they also demonstrate a careful consideration of surface structures' and artifice's capacity to play against interiority and subjectivity—a consideration

that first took shape in her unproduced ballet. As Gammel and Zelazo contend: “The poems and paintings [...] are so diaphanous as to insinuate the artist’s presence in a paradoxically assertive way, pushing against their own transparency, effecting the potentiality of blankness in an attempt to write an aesthetics of cellophane: the poems are painterly and tactile, yet also sonic; transparent and light, yet sealed from penetration” (“Wrapped in Cellophane” 15). We come closer to understanding Stettheimer the person and Stettheimer the artist through these poems, but a transparent barrier revealed by the slight refraction of light always interposes itself, exposing a shining surface stretched across the poets’ own body and consciousness. They offer glimpses into the movements of a “consciousness” sealed off in quotation marks.

The untitled poem *Ettie* includes first in *Crystal Flowers* demonstrates this poetics of cellophane. The poem beginning with the line “All morning” describes the act of gathering bouquets, stripping them of their foliage to brighten the petals and so that they “become more effective” (38.8), and arranging them “on the dining room table / On the filet-lace round / On the light-grey painted board” (38.14-16). The speaker announces assuredly and yet cryptically: “It helps—It satisfies” (38.17). In this aestheticized context and self-consciously constructed tableau, the flowers become like made objects, semi-synthetic arrangements that shed much of their organic condition before, ultimately, “they will wilt / they will smell” (38.21-22). After the effectiveness and satisfaction decays, the speaker comes to sympathize with “Marcel,” presumably Duchamp, “for preferring / artificial flowers” (39.2-3). The short, simple poem describes a scene of surfaces—petals, tables, and lace—and disdains those surfaces’ degradation. But despite its seeming transparency, the poem privileges opacity and impermeability and even enacts it in the evocative lines that gesture toward some sort of interiority on the part of the decorating speaker. How are these flowers effective, how helpful, how satisfactory? The poem

evokes a semi-synthetic image, negotiating the sheen of the artificial and the plastic in addition to what exists beneath the semi-permeable boundary. There is no mention of dance or music or cellophane in this poem, but it embodies tension and torsion in its camp treatment of material surfaces. Materials themselves, as Susanne Böller puts it, “play leading roles” in the drama of Stettheimer’s art; “they outline fantastic situations or evocative objects, their patterns toy with the fine line between reality and absurdity, the combinations of their colors are both subtle and gaudy” (119). In “All morning,” we negotiate the precipitous movement between the subtle and the gaudy over the course of a description fixated on the glossy surface of a scene yet indicative of an interior life just beyond the barely permeable boundary.

Two poems, “My attitude is one of love” and “A pink candy heart,” make clear that the speaker’s “adoration / for all the fringes / all the color / all tinsel creation” (68.2-5) extends beyond the material in and of itself and toward the ways in which glittering surfaces and synthetic substances take on qualities of motion. Stettheimer writes in “My attitude is one of love,” with affected naivety:

I like slippers gold
 I like oysters cold
 and my garden of mixed flowers
 and the sky full of towers
 and Maillard’s sweets
 and Bendel’s clothes
 and Nat Lewis hose
 and Tappé’s window arrays
 and crystal fixtures
 and my pictures
 and Walt Disney cartoons
 and colored balloons (68.6-18)

Her ironic adoration for mass-produced kitsch, alongside a dismissal of her art and paintings as “pictures,” accrues to the point of excess. What begins as a kind of static arrangement, a still life of slippers and oysters, quickly becomes a kinaesthetic phenomenon extravagantly extending

beyond the frame to incorporate skyscrapers, cellophane-wrapped candy, and window displays. The catalogue of all tinsel creation grows and expands to the point of pressing against the bounds of punctuation and ultimately ending without a period, as if the list will continue to grow. “A pink candy heart” follows a similar process of accrual:

A pink candy heart
 In fluted tin
 A spun glass rainbow
 On a lace paper sky
 a toy peacock
 That spread its tail
 A first beau’s picture
 With glossy curls
 Were early cherished treasures (122.1-6)

Here we see more kitsch, much of it presumably wrapped in cellophane, but it is all moving, spinning, and spreading, such that the poem strives toward a condition beyond the visual, toward a registration of motion. This short poem is not a snapshot of ephemera, but a sudden gesture, a still-life gone kinetic. Herein lies the distinction Nochlin articulates when she argues that “although Florine Stettheimer may have glorified in *artifice*—that is to say, the authentic and deliberate creation of fantasy through suitably recondite means—she absolutely loathed *phoniness*, that pretentious public display of false feeling she associated with the high culture establishment” (117-18). Though unapologetically bourgeois, the collection of objects in these poems reveals an internal kinaesthetic condition, a vitality that turns artifice from phoniness into an interplay between what is seen in the public and static display and what is registered in the dynamic and personal embodied sensation.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the same time as these poems’ composition, Stettheimer developed the mature approach to painting defined by her figurative style, the combination of different materials and materialities applied to the canvas, and the division of the visual field into

discrete, tableau-like quadrants. All these features first emerged in her designs for *Orphée of the Quat-z-Arts*, but the paintings also demonstrate a visual interpretation of the same cellophane aesthetic apparent in her poetry, especially the dynamic exchange between the visual, glossy exterior and the embodied and obscure interior. Arthur Danto even refers to Stettheimer's canvases as "ballets of modern life" (173). As in her writing, which highlights the permeable boundary between an artificial surface and a psychological depth, like lyrics sealed in cellophane, *Music* (c. 1920) offers a scene comprised of moving colors and shining surfaces that invite but never allow passage from one side of the translucent barrier to the other. Like her other group portraits, *Music* depicts several people from her life, including herself, in a proscenium-framed arrangement. To the left, Stettheimer sleeps on a couch below transparent triangles of a diaphanous pink fabric. Her presence on the canvas, reclined and asleep, suggests the rest of the scene is a sort of dreamscape; we are given a glimpse into the fantastical scene of her interior life. However, this arrangement announces itself as exactly that; the artificial arrangement is a carefully organized scene displayed upon a clean white background. Though the stark white background seems to recede as a representation of a three-dimensional space, a large silver tree-like shape stands smooth and vertical, as if a semi-synthetic form is superimposed and flattens the perspective. In the foreground, colorful spheres with organic tendrils reaching downward suggest three-dimensionality and exacerbate this sense of visual confusion. Their placement nearer the viewer creates a sense of naturalistic depth to the scene. Ironically, these translucent spheres, like the cellophane balls Stettheimer will use in later stage designs, are anything but natural. The glowing balls in primary colors and the towering silver tree-like shape contradict one another: one suggests a dreamscape we penetrate and the other suggests total flatness with nothing beyond it. In *Music*, we see both the carefully arranged and costumed dreamer and the

unconscious dream; we see the light reflecting on the bright synthetic surface and the light emanating from beyond it. One function of proprioception is registering the embodied boundary between interiority and exteriority, and one function of kinaesthesia is the communication of that same sense of a boundary in the embodied viewer. The cellophane aesthetic as it is executed here in a play of surface and depth allows the viewer to affectively comprehend this boundary, turning the visual representation of the dreamer and her dream of music into a field potentiating multisensory experience.

The other three figures in this group portrait are also arranged in an ambiguous relation to the scene's apparent depth and the canvas's flat surface. To the right, an unknown player sits at a magenta piano with a sun shining out of it. In the lower corner, Adolph Bolm dressed as the Moor from *Petrushka* (1911) juggles on his back. At the center, Nijinsky strikes his famous pose from *Le spectre de la rose* (1911) and a bright white light emanates from him; he appears almost like a religious vision, though too garish to be divine. Looking at *Music*, we can perceive two sorts of dance stages superimposed upon one another: the three-dimensional dreamscape that recedes from the viewer's position, and the two-dimensional surface upon which the dancers, musician, and dreamer are affixed. The viewer registers kinaesthetic empathy with the dancers and musician in their stylized postures, but also in the interplay of surface and depth—light shining from within the scene and light reflecting off its surface. The cellophane aesthetic, depicted here in the pronounced boundary of translucent surfaces, enables a mediated kinaesthesia that works in concert with the bodies frozen in the middle of their motions. Significantly, this kinaesthesia is the principle behind Stettheimer's transmediation; it allows for the painterly depiction of music and dance. Beyond mere visual representation, though, the play of light and surfaces enables affective registration. *Music* does not try to use dance as a kind of

music we hear with our eyes, but rather it uses the tension between embodied interiority and performed exteriority—the foundational tension of proprioception and its application in kinaesthetic art—as that which unites music, dance, and painting in this total work of art. *Music*, therefore, is a work of simultaneities. It depicts two superimposed spaces of different dimensionalities while also depicting different arts integrated through kinaesthesia.

Music is one of the many group portraits in which Stettheimer experiments with visual methods of stylizing bodies and movements. A few years after that painting's completion, we see in *Portrait of Myself* (1923) the same eye toward representational experimentation brought to bear on herself as the subject. This portrait clarifies the relationship between kinaesthesia and cellophane suggested in earlier works in that it literally depicts Stettheimer's dramatically curved body wrapped in the translucent plastic. In the portrait, Stettheimer reclines on a red couch that floats on a bright white backdrop. Unlike in *Music*, where Stettheimer depicts herself in a similarly supine position, her exposed body is on full display beneath the reflective film that begins at her shoulders and stretches down to her ankles. Unusually, her body is sexless and almost totally featureless. Without breasts, with narrow hips, and with legs that taper down to miniature shoes, the body we find here is not simply desexualized but almost decorporealized. Exposed and yet uncannily smoothed out into a single elegant curve, the body beneath the cellophane lacks a solid presence and is far more like the "trace of a movement" that Barthes describes. Though she wears nothing but transparent film, the reflective blankness of the film turns the moving body into the phenomenon of movement; cellophane mediates the kinaesthetic empathy we register upon seeing the thing such that kinaesthesia replaces the thing altogether. Above Stettheimer's androgynous body we can trace an echo of the same strategy in how she has signed her work. An extravagant but nearly transparent signature of "Florine St." arcs over her

head. This looping gesture is a sort of hieroglyph of her name in that it is more a depiction of decorative whorls and curling motion than the name itself. It flickers between a linguistic signifier of the artist and a dynamic trace left by the artist's hand. Even her name is less a sign referring to something than a motion in and of itself.

Cellophane also acts as a cool and distancing barrier in the portrait. As in *Music*, where we encounter a play between what the dreamer's interior vision creates and what our exteriorized vision permits, *Portrait of Myself* depicts a fascination with the relationship between vision and the visionary. The title itself suggests a more esoteric approach to portraiture. Instead of "self-portrait," *Portrait of Myself* signals a break from a more masculinist tradition of the genre that emphasizes the aesthetic and even erotic in preference for something more interested in the consciousness of the subject. Nochlin even contends that Stettheimer's self-portrait "draws upon the eccentric and visionary art of William Blake, whose reversal of natural scale, androgynous figure style, and intensified drawing seem to have stirred a responsive chord in Stettheimer's imagination" (112-14). Certainly, those features are apparent of Stettheimer's rendering of herself as reclined and pensive but dynamically bowed and lifted against gravity at the same time. Even the subject's eyes betray this kind of contradiction. Stettheimer's wide eyes with their exaggerated lashes seem to be painted onto her eyelids, as if she is seeing with her eyes closed, perceiving by way of a trance-like state. Ironically, Stettheimer suggests this transcendental perceptual register by way of gaudy eyes imprecisely placed on the face and amplified with a cartoonish brightness. This is a camp kind of vision, a cellophane vision. Draped in plastic, Stettheimer floats upon a pale, dimensionless backdrop while the viewer contends with layers and layers of surfaces: eyes painted on her eyelids, a shining film wrapped around her body, and the bright white surface of the canvas her body is painted onto. We look at this portrait as if

through a series of plastic veils, alternately perceiving that which is on the other side and that which mediates our perception. Donna Graves points to veils and fabrics in Stettheimer's work as an "intermediary image" that is interposed between self and society, private and public, art and life (24). Cellophane, with its bright reflections and total transparency, offers a camp version of this material intermediary. Marsden Hartley, after first encountering the portrait, also commented on the quality of both seeing the painting and seeing through a surface into the painting. She writes: "It is as if these beings had come to bloom freely and clearly in spite of alien temperature and alien insistence; perhaps chiefly under glass if you will, subjected to special heats, special rays of light, special vapor, but they are replete in their own beauty, their own hyper-sensitized charm" (qtd. in Graves 27). More accurately, however, what gives a painting like *Portrait of Myself* its hyper-sensitized charm is that the body is not under glass, but under a moving, malleable, and permeable glass analogue made of plastic.

A few years before this portrait, Stettheimer had her first and last solo exhibition at the New York gallery, M. Knoedler & Co. This exhibition, curated by Marie Sterner in 1916, failed to garner much attention and is summarized in two blunt words in Stettheimer's journals: "Nothing sold" (qtd. in Rich 4). Notably, Stettheimer decorated the Knoedler Gallery with furniture, draperies, and a canopy based on her own designs. The paintings, she contended, were not to be seen outside of the carefully designed domestic space; therefore, she remade the gallery space into an extension of her bedroom. Her interior designs and her canvases belonged to the same aesthetic impulse and were not, she insisted, to be separated. Such a display points to the combination of painting and design that Stettheimer felt to be integral to her larger body of work; her paintings demanded an intimate space, an invitation into a private inner life. Following her showing at the Knoedler Gallery, Stettheimer came to prefer showing her paintings in private

unveilings to her friends and attendees of her salon. She did not cease to show her artwork, but rather further committed herself to showing that artwork in an ultra-curated decorated space. It should come as no surprise that Stettheimer's interior designs were stuffed with rococo embellishments; fluted columns, gold fringes, and filigrees filled her studios and living rooms. Of course, so did cellophane. Broad cellophane curtains were hung in passageways, lamps were wrapped in the plastic as if freshly purchased, and tufts of the film were stuffed in vases like shining, otherworldly flowers. Her interior designs transmediated movement and the tension between the inner and outer bodily experience. With its transparent and yet reflective quality, cellophane transforms any decorative object into a camp display of light and motion. Lamps, vases, and knickknacks become glittering phenomena and cellophane curtains make visible the interpenetration of the two sides of a permeable barrier. Interior design was, for Stettheimer, not a static art, but rather a kinaesthetic one enabled by the semi-synthetic material she draped her spaces in.

But no space was ever quite so famously draped in cellophane as the set of *Four Saints in Three Acts*. According to Daniel Albright, Thomson and Stein's opera with costumes and sets designed by Stettheimer demonstrates a kind of apotheosis of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. He writes: "On the far side of surrealism lies a kind of stressless grace, where the *Gesamtkunstwerk* abandons its struggle for integrity, liquidates its internal tensions, goes to heaven" (*Untwisting the Serpent* 326). In his estimation, the total unification of *Four Saints in Three Acts* comes from its liquidating any attempt at unification; a composite of irreconcilable components of music, poetry, dance, acting, and stagecraft is both a rejection of the total work of art as well as its final realization. There is certainly a flatness to the opera, a liquidation of internal tensions in preference of a lightweight and stressless simplicity, and largely at the expense of sense-making.

Stein's libretto, ostensibly about Spanish saints, is also a libretto about libretti, constantly keeping track of itself as it tallies saints and acts before losing count altogether. Similarly, Thomson's score utilizes a brazenly simple harmonic vocabulary comprised of simplistic diatonic chord progressions and oom-pah rhythms. After completing the score in 1929, Thomson came to the Stettheimers' home and performed the entire opera for Florine and then, as she tells it, asked her "to do the visual part of the opera" (qtd. in Watson 74).¹⁵ Her term for her responsibility, "the visual part," is telling. Stettheimer was not tasked with designing a set or the costumes; instead, she was tasked with developing a distinct and yet integral component, a part of a whole. The visual part for a work so preoccupied with self-referential blankness could be nothing other than cellophane. Thomson himself, in praising Stettheimer's design, claimed the opera "is a cellophane opera, a theatrical wraith, a flimsy and transparent artifice" (qtd. in *Untwisting the Serpent* 358). It is worth emphasizing that this cellophane opera does not become as such simply because it is without depth; instead, integral to the opera's cellophane aesthetic is that it is mobile, a wraith, flimsy, and, to borrow Stein's phrase, "a space that is filled with moving" (161). Stettheimer, therefore, created a large-scale rendering of moving, glimmering, and glimpsing through a bright surface.

Stettheimer began her first and last foray into stage design for *Four Saints in Three Acts* in a manner not unlike her work two decades earlier on *Orphée of the Quat-z-Arts*; she experimented with materials by making miniature models. She built three shoebox sets—about

¹⁵ In addition to this "visual part," Stettheimer painted a portrait of Thomson. *Portrait of Virgil Thomson* (1930) depicts the composer at a piano as the names St. Virgil, St. Gertrude, St. Therese, St. Ignatius, and Florine St. float around him. Above everything, a mask of Gertrude Stein hovers above a miniature stage, making tiny puppets dance. Klaus-Dieter Gross points out the "shrill whiteness" of the canvas as a precursor of the "glaring white lighting" Stettheimer requests for the opera's production (211). The painting, with its depiction of movement imposed on the blankness of a white background, demonstrates another point of intermedial connection.

eighteen inches high and twenty-six inches wide—that functioned as three-dimensional scale models for the set she would see enlarged onstage at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. The sets include several maquettes, each of which wears a unique costume. Scraps of lace, foil, and cellophane are pinned and stitched to tiny dolls posed in the diorama-like designs. The maquettes are all arranged as if frozen in the middle of a dance. Some raise their hands in ecstasy, others lift a leg in a light-footed tap dance, and others jut out a hip while waving their arms. Like the sketches for her ballet, these models show the dynamics of embodied motion more so than they showcase the roughly stitched and crudely affixed clothes they are wearing. They model how the fabric will appear once set into motion more than the clothing the fabric will be shaped into. The model set includes palm trees with feathers for fronds, a lace proscenium, and a sky-blue cellophane backdrop (fig. 13). Against the cellophane backdrop, these dolls frozen in their choreography crowd into a box brimming with materials both modern and mundane, all in a camp take on religious iconography.¹⁶ The candy-box sets and their full-scale realization illustrate an achievement of the artistic ambitions Stettheimer first developed for *Orphée of the Quat-z-Arts* in that the ostentatious artificiality of the spectacle and her love of shining surfaces are synthesized in an intermedial show of light and motion.

On stage in the 1933 premier, the palm trees, canopies, fringed platform and lace proscenium were all enlarged. When the lights came up, they came up on a cellophane scene: the backdrop was an enormous cellophane cyclorama and two arches at the center of the stage were

¹⁶ On Stettheimer's high camp aesthetic in combination with the opera's religious subject, Thomson wrote: "Florine's paintings are very high camp, and high camp is the only thing you can do with a religious subject. Anything else gets sentimental and unbelievable, whereas high camp touches religion sincerely and its being at the same time low pop. People who have been cured of an eye disease put little toy eyes in front of the statue of a saint. And then the world of tinsel can only be sincere" (qtd. in Watson 74).

built from cellophane balls (fig. 14). Judith Brown makes the case that cellophane's inherent blankness, like a photograph without an image, gestures toward nothingness. Stettheimer's "billowing sky, then, suggests this multiply constituted nothing, the window that offers no information except the gleam of its own blankly transparent surface" (160). Considering Stettheimer's concern for the kinaesthetic, however, it is more appropriate to say that cellophane does not gesture toward nothing, but rather that it simply gestures. It is a material of motion: a billowing sky that, though it refers to a multiply constituted nothing, still billows.

Joseph Wood Krutch's review announced that *Four Saints in Three Acts* was "a success because all its elements—the dialogue, the music, the pantomime, and the sparkling cellophane décor—go so well with one another while remaining totally irrelevant to life, logic, or common sense." He concludes that the opera offers "a kind of intelligibility without meaning" (qtd. in Brown 151), and this is an apt description of Stein's libretto, Thomson's music, and Stettheimer's set. Each component of the American *Gesamtkunstwerk* resists any attempt at interpretation, instead yielding only a surface of syllables, diatonic chord progressions, and blue plastic. What makes these features intersubjectively intelligible, what gives them meaning without signification, is their kinaesthetic condition. Each art is non-signifying and yet constantly in motion, and therefore operates according to a perceptible and empathetically understood principle. Kinaesthesia presents a mode of contact with the artwork, an embodied registration of motion and tension. That kind of corporeal engagement, in which the perceiver and the perceived come into a direct relationship with one another without literally touching, is the same paradoxical quality that gives cellophane its uniquely modern status. Cellophane, a mediator of kinaesthetic intelligibility, therefore, presents the connective function that unifies the disparate arts of Stettheimer and her collaborators' *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It offers both a through-line across

the four arts of her career—dance, painting, design, and poetry—and it stitches together the arts of *Four Saints in Three Acts*.

By tracing the appearance of cellophane and the implementation of a cellophane aesthetic across Stettheimer's body of work, we can see how mediated kinaesthesia was the principle behind her intermedial exuberance. Kinaesthesia is predicated on the idea of unmediated contact with the moving world, with the embodied registration in the viewing subject of motion in the viewed object. Cellophane, the thin and flexible wrapper, seems to contradict such a predication in that it creates the hygienic boundary interposed between the observer and the observed. It replaces tactile immediacy with a clean, smooth, homogenous layer. However, Stettheimer treats cellophane not only as the mundane plastic film but as a flexible, mobile, and shimmering extension and augmentation of motion. Kinaesthesia, in its early twentieth-century context, was based on the principle of the body's dynamic expressivity as semantically worthy. Beyond mimetic pantomime and legible gesture, the body's emotive and affective gestures allow for meaning beyond signification. The idea of meaning beyond signification is fundamental to the treatment of kinaesthesia as potentiating intermediality in that it offers a point of contact between both representational and non-representational arts. Language, music, visual art, and dance can all be composed according to kinaesthetic operations, and cellophane literalizes such an operation in that it is the blank materialization of motion, tension, and balance. Its flexibility, sheen, and transparency—especially when draped around the body of a dancer or hung in broad swaths as a backdrop—makes it a substance that is both the moving thing and the movement alone.

With their contributions predominantly in testing the aesthetic limits of popular and decorative arts, Stettheimer and Loïe Fuller do not easily fit into narratives of modernist

performance and avant-garde experimentation, but in part that is because few of those narratives are easy in and of themselves. As Arthur Danto writes of Stettheimer, “the Modernism that marginalized her has itself been marginalized” (171); furthermore, the very notion of centers and margins in a view of modernism that aims to account for interdisciplinary arts and collaborations feels profoundly misguided. Though the few who take seriously Fuller and Stettheimer’s work are vocal advocates, it is unsurprising that these marginal modernists have received little critical attention. Both women moved freely across artistic and generic division as well as across Andreas Huyssen’s “great divide” between the masculine, modernist innovator and the feminine consumer of mass culture. Fuller’s dances emerge from experimentation in art and science but are ultimately popular entertainments that draw from the cancan as much as the avant-garde. Stettheimer’s cellophane aesthetic is unabashedly feminine, decorative, and camp, mixing the color palette of the Fauves with the fashion and packaging of the department store. Deeming Fuller and Stettheimer proto-post-modernists would belabor the point that the total work of art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries extends beyond the high-art spectacles of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* or the abstract conceptualism of Mallarmé’s *Le Livre*, though the intermedial configurations involved remain the same. Ultimately, by prioritizing something as familiar as electric lighting or clear plastic film, a new set of critical priorities follows in turn. Socially stipulated senses, newly invented technologies, and the work of queer female artists all intersect to redirect how we conceptualize modernity and how we read modernism with our entire bodies.

Chapter Four

Radiophonic Sound:

Listening In, Listening In Between

So far, intermedial modernism has been understood as a complex of aesthetic and technological concerns with music as its focus. Whether written onto a gramophone disc, spatialized through stereophonic speakers, or transformed into choreography, the audible phenomena at the center of the preceding chapters have been melody, harmony, rhythm, and counterpoint. Of course, what is stored and disseminated by modern aural media is not strictly musical but rather sound in its multiple forms. To explore music in literary modernism is to encounter the site at which music comes into the most direct contact with speech, drama, literature, and various other sounds. This is not the European opera house nor the avant-garde theatre stage, but rather a zone so omnipresent and yet so ephemeral that it is often overlooked as instrumental in shaping the dynamics of modern art and life.

It began in 1895 when Guglielmo Marconi developed the technology to transmit electromagnetic waves without the use of wires. These waves—invisible and omnipresent—were powerful enough to make iron filings “cohere” to form a circuit or “discohere” to break it, and Marconi’s transmitters could manipulate these waves with enough precision to communicate by morse code. The wireless transformed mute electromagnetism into a means of communication. Only five years later the human voice was transmitted for the first time, and from there the history of radio opens like a telescope held backward, expanding and widening outward as those filings recede further and further away. In 1927 the British Broadcasting Company became the

BBC, and the Columbia Broadcasting System became the third dominant radio network in the United States after NBC's two networks. Soon, audiences on both sides of the Atlantic were "listening in" at all times and to all kinds of programming. What began as an electrical impulse that moved a switch from on to off had become a ubiquitous broadcast medium that carried musical performances, news reports, staged dramas, serialized soap operas, war bulletins, documentaries, lectures, emergency warnings, comedic sketches, detective stories, romances, minstrel shows, poetry, history, ventriloquism, and all varieties of static, interference, and silence. In barely more than three decades, wireless transmission went from dots and dashes to the inescapable but often banal mixture of sounds that was—and still is—modern radio.

Though relying on a single sense modality—the aural—radio makes audible a range of phenomena. Words, music, and intentional and unintentional noises intersect and overlap in the broadcast soundscape. As a result, different forms of representation and expression occur in continually shifting combinations. Such arrangements combine the sounds that are heard as well as how these sounds are understood, asking listeners to bring a multitude of interpenetrating interpretive frameworks to bear on what radio brings into their homes. The medium's singular method of communication demands a multivalent listening practice in order to fully engage with its potentialities. The radio listener is asked to recognize drama as the voices of actors portraying fictional characters and news bulletins as indexing a shared actuality. The reality effect of diegetic sound, even when produced by a foley artist, encourages listeners to imagine the sounds' sources and situate them in either an actual or fictitious context accordingly. Different categories of sounds demand different ways of understanding and interpreting them, but radio consistently asks its listeners to adopt interpretive strategies that stretch across or exist between these different approaches. In this chapter, I argue that radio's combined communicative operations

make it intermedial and render conceptual distinctions between audible features like sound effects, drama, news bulletins, documentary, music, and noise difficult or impossible to outline. Such an indeterminacy was recruited in both popular and avant-garde radiophonic arts,¹ including some of the most renowned radio programs of the last century.

This chapter focuses on two radio productions representative of such generic and semiotic hybridity: Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* (1938) and Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* (1954). Both broadcasts incorporate dramatic and documentary aesthetics alongside music and sound effects all toward the creation of a multilayered sonic composition that continually asks listeners to attend to the ways in which sounds are referential and intersubjectively intelligible. As the last chapter clarifies, the intermedial configurations of the intersemiotic and the interartistic extend beyond the Mallarméan and Wagnerian total works of art and toward popular entertainment. Just as dance aesthetics demonstrate how intermedial experimentation includes multiple cultural registers, radio further showcases how these experiments are recruited for popular audiences. Welles' utilization of uncertainty and undifferentiatedness with the aim of generating horror and anxiety aligns with the intersemiotic configuration, whereas Thomas' unification of sounds as demonstrating a social and spiritual unity offers a variation of the interartistic. Welles' and Thomas' broadcasts take up the interdisciplinary affordances and potentialities of radio while also commenting on how this piece of new aural media makes such combinations and convolutions of communicative registers possible. Therefore, these texts demonstrate how the most familiar feature of the modern media ecology precipitated profound

¹ Perhaps the most well-known of the avant-garde to advocate for radiophonic art was F.T. Marinetti who, in the manifesto co-written with Pino Masnata "La Radia" (1933), writes in favor of "a pure organism of radio sensations" (267). His conceptualization of radio sensations as a distinct category of sensual experience has striking resonances with kinaesthesia discussed in the previous chapter.

aesthetic reconsiderations of how sound is mediated and made meaningful in the process.

1. “The Radiobody Cannot Give a Straight Answer”

Despite its near omnipresence during modernism, the radio has been largely under-interrogated by modernist studies, so much so that it has become common practice to open any critical survey with a brief note on the dearth of other surveys followed by mentions of what scholarship has been completed. Because this body of knowledge remains quite small and because the contributions of those who have studied the radio archive are estimable, it is worth tracing the state of radio studies within modernism here.² Though not exclusively concerned with the radio, Hugh Kenner’s *The Mechanic Muse* (1987) helpfully describes the connection between literary modernism and the second machine age, which he, following Richard Cork, places in 1880-1930. Kenner’s text considers how radio enables the superimposition of multiple competing voices and discourses, and this principle of superimposition implicitly or explicitly informs most studies that have followed. Generally speaking, modernist radio studies coming after Kenner take up two interrelated features of the medium: first, its capacity to redraw spatial and geographic boundaries toward the definition of imagined communities, and second, its capacity to communicate by way of synesthesia, to utilize visual and embodied experiences and interpretations of the aural mode toward more participatory forms of engagement. For example, Michelle Hilmes’ *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (1997) interrogates radio’s

² Alongside critical studies, collections of primary texts have also helped in developing a more comprehensive understanding of modernist artistic and social practices involving the radio. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead’s edited collection *The Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (1992) tracks the role of the radio in the twentieth-century avant-garde, and Neil Strauss and Dave Mandl’s *Radiotext(e)* (1993), a far quirkier anthology, offers a collection of texts by turns foundational and idiosyncratic theorizing and historicizing radio.

capacity to “escape visual determinations while still retaining the strong elements of ‘realism’ that sound—rather than written words—supplies” (xvi). The realism of radio, the ability that broadcast sound seems to have in effectively indexing a shared actuality, blurs spatial boundaries and encourages listeners toward a synesthetic sense of co-presence with the original sound source. Co-presence and communality is fundamental to radio’s social power within modernism, a power Susan Merrill Squier emphasizes when she describes in her introduction to the edited collection *Communities of the Air: Radio Century, Radio Culture* (2003) the medium’s ability to enact discursive superimposition, “to weave together a variety of different discourses into imagined communities, and to shift the dominant sense from the visual to the aural” (7). Still perhaps the most important work on radio in modernism, Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle, and Jane Lewty’s edited collection *Broadcasting Modernism* (2009) showcases how “the unprecedented power of radio in its time is almost impossible to overstate; its presence intermittently ebbed and flowed as direct subject matter, as a platform for artistic expression, or as a subliminal force shaping the dynamics of Modernist textualities” (2). Though modernist studies has acknowledged the importance of radio in how it shaped both art and life, the manner and extent to which it altered the mental map across which twentieth-century listeners communicated is too often couched in the same terms of imagined communities and synesthesia.

In what follows, I aim to explore an alternative vocabulary and to subsequently complicate what modernist studies has described as the listening practice that radio cultivated in twentieth-century audiences. Primarily, by reframing the radio from a synesthetic medium—a convergence of sound, sight, co-presence, and touch—to an intermedial combination—an integration of referential functions and meaning-making operations—the participatory component of listening to the radio will be reframed in turn. Steven Conner in his seminal sound

studies essay “The Modern Auditory ‘I’” (1996) writes that “the auditory self is an attentive rather than investigatory self, which takes part in the world rather than taking aim at it” (219), and this process of taking part in the world can be understood as occurring by way of a continual re-evaluation of how that world is being mediated through transmission. Because sounds retain a “realist” quality, as Hilmes contends, the radio listener must do more than comprehend the sound as referring to something “real,” to something present in the world; the nature of that relationship is in continual flux on the airwaves and the listener must navigate those fluctuations. The semiotic operation of any piece of communication requires a sufficiently stable understanding of that communication’s context and conditions. Lars Elleström describes these conditions—the material, sensorial, and spatiotemporal media modalities—as shaping and directing the semiotic media modality and the “production of cognitive import” in the perceiver (*Media Transformation* 37). This is especially true when dealing with the strictly aural and can be helpfully distilled into a set of questions all listeners must answer in order to comprehend what they hear: What is making this sound? Where is this sound coming from? And when was this sound produced? Without reasonably assured answers to these questions, or a thoroughly disciplined listening practice such that the answers are intuited, the sound event becomes referentially obscure. Once listeners can make clear and stable mental connections between sound and world, their bodies are incorporated into the imagined communities of the airwaves. However, from Marconi’s first wireless transmissions into the post-WWII era and on both sides of the Atlantic, continual technological, aesthetic, and social developments demanded the constant relearning of how to listen, how to combine or disentangle the various sonic phenomena being broadcasted. A few synecdochally significant events in broadcast history illustrate how the listening practices cultivated by radio persistently morphed, initiating audiences not into synesthetic sense

confusion but into interpretive flexibility across and between the possible relationships between the sound and its world.

While they played a significant role in a few high-profile events, like the transmission from the *Titanic* at the time of its sinking, radios in the first two decades of the twentieth century were mostly found in the homes of amateurs scanning the airwaves, attempting point-to-point communication. This brief period in which radio was a predominantly narrowcast medium came to an end in the 1920s, especially with the help of RCA's broadcast of the Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier fight on July 2nd, 1921.³ Broadcasts such as this changed not only ownership and spectrum allocation but, as Jeffrey Sconce contends, initiated a "fundamental *experiential* change in the institution of radio" (93). Narrowcast communication permitted the ghostly encounter with the invisible voice coming from the ether—an uncanny prospect, to be sure—but broadcast reconfigured the ghostly voice into a corporeal presence. Douglas Kahn, in describing this transition from narrowcast to broadcast, explains how "in transmissional space the object was ostensibly replicated in itself as it was transported over an equivalent distance." He goes on to explain how this "disembodiment meant that an object or body existed in two places at once." (20). Sound phenomena were referential in the radio of point-to-point communication, but sound phenomena became duplicative when radio became a broadcast medium. Kahn's use of the word "disembodiment" is worth putting pressure on, in that the word typically refers to the divestment of the body, not its duplication. Here, we see the term taking up both valences: broadcast erases the object in its reduction to a sonic occurrence while also reconstructing that object in a new

³ David Trotter helpfully discusses the way in which the switch from narrowcast to broadcast was not a sudden and uncertain transition. Instead, he writes of the first years of broadcasting that "even then, while amply representing the world through reportage, chronicle, and fiction, [radio] retained its connective credentials. Like telephony, radio spoke directly to the individual listener in her or his own home" (*Literature in the First Media Age* 8-9).

space. Disembodiment, as used here, occupies the space between invisibility and solidity, between the aural and the visual. Communications historian Carolyn Marvin makes clear the significance of Kahn's word choice in how we imagine the radio when she contends that "the body is the most familiar of all communication modes" (109). Embodied co-presence made possible by broadcast turned the uncanny into the familiar, into the seemingly unmediated.⁴ It is appropriate that one of the first major broadcasts would be a boxing match, an event so gladiatorial, so attractive for its embodied violence, that listeners did not tune in to hear the fight of the century while it happened in New Jersey, but to transport—by way of transmission—the bodies of those fighters into the space of their listening. In the transition from the cool media of point-to-point communication to the hot media rich in sensory data of widespread radio transmission,⁵ listeners also made the transition from hearing voices to registering an embodied co-presence between their own position and the object duplicated by means of sound. The Dempsey vs. Carpentier fight signals one of the first major slippages between the means of understanding the correlate to aural and visual sense modalities.

Across the second half of the 1920s, radio underwent a further expansion, going from the obsession of a few hobbyists, to a popular pastime, to a far-reaching feature of the shared soundscape. By the 1930s, twenty-six million American households had at least one radio (Hilmes 183) and in Great Britain, the monopolistic BBC under the leadership of John Reith was

⁴ What occurs in radio during the 1920s and persists through the twentieth century relates to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's twin theories of immediacy and hypermediacy. In their *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (2000), they describe how the heightened awareness of the medium in hypermediacy "(in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy" (34).

⁵ These designations of hot and cool quite famously come from Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964). He categorizes radio as a hot medium, though the point-to-point communication of narrowcast radio makes it much more like the telephone, which he designates a cool medium.

operating according to the motto “Nation shall speak unto nation.”⁶ Corporate broadcasts formed a tight network around the audiences who tuned in, but the occasional rent in this network did occur. Emergency broadcasts, which disrupted the predictable flow of information and entertainment, shocked listeners into an interactive mode of engagement as they correlated the audible phenomenon they heard privately to an external, shared actuality separate from the ongoing and temporally featureless broadcast studio. For example, on May 7th, 1937 the LZ 129 *Hindenburg* caught fire and crashed in Lakehurst, New Jersey. Listeners tuned in at 11:45 am that day to hear Herbert Morrison, a correspondent from Chicago’s WLS, voicing his terror: “It’s burst into flames. Oh my! It’s burning, bursting into flames...Oh, the humanity, all the passengers!” Not only did listeners find the typical programming disrupted and the standardized blocks of time that create a reliable rhythm to radio suddenly undermined, but they heard the sounds of heard explosions, of screaming bystanders, and of scratches and silences when the recording needle was knocked off. The May 7th broadcast of a crashing airship and Morrison’s cries are as much a part of the *Hindenburg*’s history as the crash itself.

However, the *Hindenburg* had actually crashed the day before, on May 6th. Despite announcements from the major broadcast networks that what listeners were about to hear had transpired earlier, many believed coverage of the *Hindenburg* was a live broadcast (R. Brown 141-42). What we hear in Morrison’s voice is a kind of disintegration of lucidity; his precise, dry, and even bored description of an airship touching down in rural New Jersey gives way to

⁶ Though both the American broadcasting companies and the British Broadcasting Corporation extended a broad reach across their respective countries, it bears emphasizing one key difference in their ethical missions. Todd Avery discusses this distinction at length in *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938* (2006) when he describes how American radio broadcasting was meant to cater to the masses and achieve a level of broad appeal for the sake of selling advertising space. The BBC, however, was less concerned with entertaining the masses than serving a social function of educating and elevating them (13-14).

incomplete sentences, shouts, cries, and a shocking silence. As he loses control over his words and the linguistic content of the broadcast begins to slip toward nonsense and panic, the non-linguistic sounds, including the very tenor of his voice, enable a kind of referential convolution that exceeds the operations of spoken language. The cool detachment afforded by the correspondent's seemingly bodiless discourse slips unpredictably into the affective immediacy of terrified shouting and the immersive quality of ambient sound. Considering the diegetic sound of screams and flames, how Morrison's level-headed voice gives way to an emotionalized wail, and the abrupt silence when the condition of these events' mediation becomes suddenly perceptible, listeners' assumption that the events coming in over the wireless transpired concurrently with their listening does not seem unreasonable. Adelaide Morris writes that "when the ear is evoked primarily to signal moments of destabilization, slippage, or even psychosis, it becomes the one sense through which nothing much can make sense" (3). The *Hindenburg* coverage evokes the ear as the privileged site of perception and understanding such that what is heard becomes what is real, and the disclaimer that the coverage was previously recorded is quickly forgotten. Attempts to situate the events in a past time and another space, to make sense of the crash, disintegrate along with Morrison's removed lucidity. Listening to the coverage becomes a variation of what Steph Ceraso calls "multimodal listening."⁷ The perception of an aural phenomenon exceeds the aural modality to become both a visual experience—in the sonically imprinted visualization of the crash—and an embodied one—in the affective registration of the disturbed temporal flow of the broadcast schedule, of the cracking of Morrison's voice, and of

⁷ See her article "(Re)Educating the Senses: Multimodal Listening, Bodily Learning, and the Composition of Sonic Experiences" (2014). Though her work is predominantly concerned with multimodality as a pedagogical tool in the composition classroom, her vocabulary is applicable here.

the sudden silence of the recording itself. The intended representational function becomes increasingly unclear as the affective entanglement with sound merges with the semantico-referential operation of language.

Radio this fosters variation of Ceraso's multimodal listening—what I refer to as intermedial listening—by way of frictions and interpenetrations between meaning-events. In the case of the *Hindenburg* disaster, we hear Morrison's voice slip from an objective observation to an anguished cry; we register not only the change in his meaning but a change in how his meaning is to be interpreted. No longer is his voice a vehicle for the language, but rather an indicator of the terrifying scale of the disaster, operating in the same way as the overheard cries and explosions. His linguistic meaning rubs against the meaningfulness of his failure at linguistic clarity. Similarly, the Dempsey vs. Carpentier fight is a matter of (dis)embodiment, of a blurring of the distinction between aurally and affectively registered presence and visually comprehended absence. Radio does more than ask for engagement through multiple perceptual registers, but for continually shifting between and across those registers. Put another way, to adapt Gregory Whitehead, “the radiobody cannot give a straight answer” (256).

While it was in the non-fiction broadcasts and news coverage that American radio listeners encountered the radiobody's evasiveness, British listeners encountered a similar tendency predominantly through a genre that came to be known as the “radio feature.” The Features Unit of the BBC began under the control of the Drama Department in 1937 and was initially conceived as part of a morale-boosting and propagandistic mission initiated just prior to the war effort (K. Whitehead 110). A mix of documentary and drama, the first features recounted events in a dramatized and sometimes fictionalized manner. Following WWII, the features were no longer controlled by the Drama Department, and the Features Department began to produce

hybrid performances that were often dramatic in delivery but rarely followed the narrative arc of staged drama; moreover, they frequently employed sound effects and music toward more immersive sonic experiences. Douglas Cleverdon offers this persistent if ambiguous definition of a genre resistant to definition:

A radio feature is, roughly, any constructed programme [...] that derives from the technical apparatus of radio [...] It can combine any sound elements—words, music, sound effects—in any form or mixture of forms—documentary, actuality, dramatized, poetic, musico-dramatic. It has no rules determining what can or cannot be done. (17)

One notable example is Dorothy Sayers' *The Man Born to be King* (1943), a twelve-part depiction of the life of Christ. It became embroiled in a censorship battle because Sayers' controversial depiction of Jesus speaking in modern slang was considered by many to be a blasphemous representation and therefore illegal. Because this Christ existed in voice alone it was decided to not be, in fact, a representation at all, and therefore not subject to laws regarding blasphemous representations (Goody 85). Another feature, Louis MacNeice's *The Dark Tower* (1946) is a parable play and chivalric quest that combines the medieval morality play with music composed by Benjamin Britten and the sounds of such a variety of spaces as to include both castles and cruise ship casinos. These examples demonstrate how the BBC features did more than hybridize genres of documentary, drama, and poetry, but they hybridized those genre's respective representational capacities. By synthesizing the artifice of the morality play with the spatial contours suggested by sound effects with the harmonic density of Britten's music, MacNeice's sounds resist any single interpretive approach and demand a multiplicity of them. The extent to which listeners should follow the didactic story from a critical distance or become immersed in its sonic evocations is under continual contestation throughout the piece. Similarly, Sayers' Christ, a sacrilegious depiction to some and a bodiless voice to others, also exemplifies what made radio features remarkable: their liminal position between sounds' various meaning-

making abilities. Features' lack of fixity extends to an unfixity in their content's material, sensorial, and spatiotemporal media modalities. Laurence Gilliam provides what is perhaps the most helpful clarification when he writes that "actuality" is the primary tool of the feature artist (qtd. in K. Whitehead 115). While the radio dramatist composes scripted performances to be broadcast, the feature allows for and even encourages the incorporation of sounds as they occur in the material and spatiotemporal conditions of actuality. Listeners are not asked to hear voices as if on a stage, but voices, music, and sounds as if from a real space. Therefore, fictionalized narratives and "actual" sounds intermix.

This intermixture offers a productive reconsideration of what earlier studies of modernist radio have proposed. Instead of framing twentieth-century listening practices as a version of synesthetic sense confusion, we can understand those practices as ongoing reconsiderations that account for the technology's capabilities, the content it broadcasts, and its affiliated listening practices. Beyond the broad reach of the BBC or advertisement-funded networks like NBC and CBS, the imagined communities that radio helped foster resulted in no small part from participatory listening, a sustained if occasionally misguided evaluation of how the transmitted sounds do or do not correspond with a shared reality. An intermedial listening practice—and the resulting perception of boxers in New Jersey as bodies in the room or an airship crash yesterday as occurring in the present moment—was the mechanism by which these communities were imagined. Participatory engagement between and across methods of interpretation pushes against the act of "listening in" as perception across senses—synesthesia—and suggests that it is an understanding across and between semiotic operations—intermediality.

In short, modernist radio persistently eschews a clear indication as to the relationship between sound and its source, and the persistence of this ambiguity makes for a medium that is

marked by semiotic slippages. Radio programming that enacts these slippages—whether unintentionally in the case of the *Hindenburg* crash or intentionally as in Sayers’ Christ—enacts the most fundamental features of the radiophonic medium. In these broadcasts, listeners encounter a kind of actuality by way of the aural mode, but the nature of the relationship between the sound and the actuality it refers to is held in a sustained state of semiotic uncertainty. The referential stability of language is undermined when that language becomes audibly and semiotically enmeshed with music, sounds, noises and silences. Histories of radio drama like Tim Crook’s *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice* (1999) and Jeff Porter’s *Lost Sound: The Forgotten Art of Radio Storytelling* (2016) underline the results of such an instability. Porter is especially helpful in describing this uncertainty, what he calls “phonophobia,” as both attractive and anxiety-inducing. “When sound calls attention to itself” he argues, “it evokes a capacity to transcend its referent, resonating in ways that are closer to music than language. Such sound-centeredness ushers in other meanings, including unintended association, and therefore possesses the power to disturb word-meaning, thus upsetting the semantic order of language” (7-8). It is in these ruptures that I am most interested and where the potentialities of radiophonic art are realized. Radiophonic art—the term preferred by most of the artform’s practitioners⁸ and that I

⁸ A grouping of early twentieth-century theoretical texts help clarify radiophonic art as a distinct genre. Paul Deharme’s “Proposition for a Radiophonic Art” (1928) contends that the aesthetic potential of the wireless signal is not only its capacity to transmit the sounds of actuality, but also the opposite: they provide access to an unreality, they make visible what has not yet been seen. Hilda Matheson’s *Broadcasting* (1933) similarly describes radio in visual terms, ultimately describing it as “choreophony” (113). Rudolf Arnheim’s *Radio* (1936), a fundamental if turgid early piece on radiophonic art, follows this convoluted relationship between sound and actuality to more lyrical ends when he contends: “In wireless the sounds and voices of reality claimed relationship with the poetic word and the musical note; sounds born of earth and those born of the spirit found each other; and so music entered the material world, the world enveloped itself in music, and reality, newly created by thought in all its intensity, presented itself much more directly, objectively, and concretely than on printed paper: what hitherto had only been thought or described now appeared materialized, as corporeal as actuality” (15).

will use in order to avoid confusion with terms like “radio drama”—recruits the same intermedial condition heard in American emergency broadcasts and BBC radio features. Though modernism contains several examples of radiophonic art fully and productively engaging with its semiotic indeterminacy, two of the most well-known works for radio, Welles’ *War of the Worlds* and Thomas’ *Under Milk Wood*, exemplify radio’s intermediality taken up for aesthetic purposes.

2. Uncertainty and Silence in *War of the Worlds*

No other broadcast has so famously leveraged the radiobody’s indirect answers as Orson Welles’ *War of the Worlds*. Though the popular imagination remembers it otherwise, Welles’ adaptation of H.G. Wells’ 1898 novel does not masquerade strictly as an emergency radio broadcast. Instead, the piece is a pastiche of multiple broadcast genres: concerts, news reports, interviews, live field coverage, communications between military personnel, intercepted shortwave distress signals, and a full twenty minutes of scripted radio drama. One of the most famous hours of radio history is not a fake news bulletin, but rather a stylistically varied constellation of multiple forms of radiophonic sound. If the semiotic operations of radio function only with a sufficiently stable understanding of its material and spatio-temporal condition—an answer to the questions of from what, from where, and from when the sound is resonating—then *War of the Worlds* persistently resists providing listeners with an assured understanding of these conditions. The adaptation is as much a story of invasion from Martians as it is a meta-commentary on the listening practices radio demands. The broadcast’s continual revision of the representational methods it employs asks listeners to revise their mode of attention—a revision that a large number of listeners quite famously failed to accomplish. *War of the Worlds* generates horror and anxiety in its audience by pointing to the multiple ways in which sounds make

meaning and by continually demanding that the audience adjust, synthesize, and ultimately question how they make cognitive connections between the sounds they hear and the story those sounds tell.

Putting the show in the larger context of American broadcast practices of the 1930s can shed some light on how Welles and his team developed their program and extended radiophonic conventions toward unconventional listening practices. First, it bears emphasizing that *War of the Worlds* was a highly collaborative effort. Welles' weekly prestige program for CBS, *The Mercury Radio on the Air*, involved the contributions of several writers, producers, and performers. The script of the broadcast, which aired on October 30th, 1938, was written by Howard Koch the week prior to the performance, substantially revised by John Houseman and Paul Stewart after a dismal rehearsal, and finally read and revised by Welles himself on the afternoon of the broadcast. Welles' work as a director and radio actor is estimable, but the production was not his alone. Furthermore, the performance could not have been as effective as it was—as entertainment or as panic-inducing hoax—without the established norms already bound up with the broadcast medium. By 1938, events like the *Hindenburg* crash and the Munich Crisis had introduced listeners to the emergency broadcast and the interruption of regularly scheduled programming in order to deliver real-time coverage of events as they unfolded. What Jeffrey Sconce calls “panic broadcasts”⁹ inadvertently suggested new aesthetic possibilities for radiophonic art, but Welles and *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* were not the first to emulate them. The first fictionalized news broadcast likely aired from a BBC station in

⁹ He also clarifies in *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (2000) the way in which the panic broadcast began with the radio but persisted through multiple forms of mass media; the *Hindenburg* crash, the attack on Pearl Harbor, the JFK assassination, and the Challenger explosion are all variations of the panic broadcast (112-13).

Edinburgh. Father Ronald Arbuthnott Knox's *Broadcasting the Barricades* (1926), a satirical piece about an unruly mob storming the National Gallery in London was the first such piece to trouble the distinction between fact-based broadcasting and fictitious stories (A. Schwartz 54). *Time* magazine's *The March of Time*, which aired from 1931 to 1945 and featured the voice-acting of a young Welles, dramatized current events to the point of rendering the divide between fact and fiction indistinct. Welles also performed in Archibald MacLeish's *The Fall of the City* (1937), the first verse play ever written for radio. The play was composed in the form of a newscast detailing the defeat of a fascist dictator, though the meter and rhyme made it so that there was little confusion over its genre and fictitiousness. MacLeish's *Air Raid* (1938), which aired only three days before *War of the Worlds*, resisted such aestheticization, instead preferring a more realistic rendition of an emergency broadcast. The fake broadcast or overheard dispatch was also a familiar feature of low-brow crime dramas like *Gang Busters* and *Calling All Cars* (Hayes and Battles 56). I include these examples of fake broadcasts to make clear the fact that *War of Worlds* was not unique in its recognition of the referential possibilities afforded by radio. Showcasing how live emergency broadcasts enabled affective immersion and disruption, works ranging from detective stories to verse dramas took up the affordances offered by radio as a doppelgänger of actuality. However, as Edward Miller contends, the doppelgänger bodied forth by Welles and his team presents a sort of aural equivalent of Capgras Syndrome (110), an alarming interpretation of an aesthetic strategy others had already deployed.

Though I am not concerned with debating the degree of panic that ensued from the broadcast, it is worth noting that no small number of listeners experienced very real anxiety at a radio drama telling the story of an alien invasion. The exact extent of the panic is largely unknown, though before the performance was finished, reports from New York, New Jersey,

Atlanta, New Orleans, Chicago, Milwaukee, Kansas City, Detroit, and Los Angeles all covered anecdotes about hysteria, evacuations, and even suicides. Published anecdotes largely came second- or third-hand and time has inflated the panic to the level of a nationwide hysteria, making a full evaluation of the broadcast's effects largely intractable. Hadley Cantril's *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic* (1940) is the most influential publication regarding the panic, though it is also the most responsible for both its inflation and its persistence. Cantril makes the "conservative estimate" that six million people listened to the broadcast, 1.7 million heard the broadcast as a genuine news bulletin, and 1.2 million were "frightened or disturbed" by it (58). Cantril's study is hardly considered authoritative at this point, but the general consensus is that though the extent of the panic has been exaggerated, it still illustrates the power and reach of radio and mass media more generally.¹⁰ Admitting room for hyperbole, that anxiety ensued and that popular imagination has maintained an inflated view of this anxiety both speak to the way in which *War of the Worlds* troubled the relationship between sound and actuality. It asked listeners to bring a variety of interpretive approaches to bear on a single hour of radio entertainment, and many listeners could not. The anxiety registered by the audience is an effect created by Welles and his collaborators by troubling the relationship between the sound content and the actuality it refers to. By analyzing the broadcast as a literary and intermedial text, sidestepping the morass of determining the exact extent of the hysteria, I will illustrate the intentional destabilizing of sounds' referential functions at work in the

¹⁰ Among the helpful studies that further this argument are Christopher Sterling's entry on *War of the Worlds* in the *Museum of Broadcast Communications Encyclopedia of Radio* (2004), which treats the broadcast as evidence of radio's authority and influence, Michael Socolow's "The Hyped Panic Over 'War of the Worlds'" (2008), which maintains that radio is the specific medium that proves the power of media more generally, and Bruce Lenthall's *Radio's America: The Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture* (2007), which contextualizes mass media's influence within the Depression era.

integrated discursive registers, music, sound effects, silences, and interferences.¹¹

At 8:00 pm, after the announcement from CBS that *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* would present *War of Worlds*, Welles begins the production with a near word-for-word recitation of the opening paragraph of H.G. Wells' novel. One fundamental difference is that Wells begins, "No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century this world was being watched closely by intelligences far greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own" (1). Welles, however, begins, "We know now that in the early years of the twentieth century..." (Cantril 4).¹² After introducing the program with the extended quote from Wells' novel, Welles continues: "In the thirty-ninth year of the twentieth century came the great disillusionment. It was near the end of October. Business was better. The war scare was over. More men were back at work. Sales were picking up. On this particular evening, October 30, the Crossley service estimated that thirty-two million people were listening in on the radio" (5). He does so slyly, but Welles reveals that the events about to be portrayed take place exactly one year in the future. Listeners in 1938 are hearing what future listeners will hear. Doing so cuts against the ephemerality and ongoingness of the radio by situating the audience at a critical distance: hearing what will be heard and reflecting on how it will be heard. Sconce argues that "the program's shock effect depended on the audience's having naturalized a new set of listening protocols attendant to network radio, a listening pattern of social control based on the rhythms of schedule, flow, and segmentation"

¹¹ In this chapter, I am following the examples of Mark Wollaeger's *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative From 1900-1945* (2006), Jeff Porter's *Lost Sound: The Forgotten Art of Radio Storytelling* (1991), and Jonas Ingvarsson's "Literature Through Radio: Distance and Silence in *The War of the Worlds*, 1938/1898" (2013), all of which treat *War of the Worlds* as a literary text and not strictly as a symptom or consequence of media's social situation.

¹² Cantril's *The Invasion from Mars* includes the first published transcript of the broadcast. I will be referring to his transcript throughout, noting discrepancies between the transcript and the broadcast when necessary.

(112). Welles, however, asks his listeners to adopt a more self-aware stance toward these protocols. Instead of simply cuing listeners into the events' fictitiousness, the opening commentary cues listeners into the mode of attention they take on when listening to radio drama and other fictitious broadcasts. As Mark Wollaeger contends, Welles in his introduction illustrates how high modernism "did not have a monopoly on the cultural work performed by aesthetic self-reflexivity" (220) and how popular entertainment could perform such a meta-commentary as well. From the beginning it becomes clear that *War of Worlds* is less concerned with aping the features of the emergency broadcast, but rather more interested in mobilizing all features of radiophonic communication toward a radiophonic art. It interpolates the medium's conditions and affiliated practices toward a commentary on the medium itself. We hear in this adaptation the beginning of a work about listening to and the representational limits of the radio. We are asked to listen to the radio, not the radio broadcast. This speaks to Friedrich Kittler's insight on *War of the Worlds* when he writes: "Nobody listens to the radio. What loudspeakers or headsets provide for their users is always radio programming. Only in emergencies, when broadcasts are interrupted, announcer voices are stifled, or stations drift away from their proper frequencies are there any moments at all for hearing what radio listening could be" ("The Last Radio Broadcast" 17). Even before he endeavors to effect the stifling and drifting of the broadcast medium, Welles raises the question of what radio listening is and can be. A component of this mode of listening is also alluded to in Welles' mention of the Crossley service. The Crossley service was a series of surveys conducted over the phone and offering a form of interactivity between the listener and the radio, a chance for the consumer to be heard. In this instance, Welles is again foregrounding the active participation of the listener, putting pressure of the available modes of attention and asking his listeners to reflect on that attention.

Following these introductory comments, the opening sequences of *War of the Worlds* occur in three distinct spaces and one intentionally indistinct one: the Park Plaza Hotel, Richard Pierson's observatory in Princeton, the crash site in Grovers Mill, and the featureless vacuum of the studio itself, which provides the connective tissue across the other three soundscapes. Beginning in the studio, we hear voices that are temporally and spatially dislocated. They operate according to the broadcast schedule, persistent and utterly dependable, and therefore lacking any distinct sonic features corresponding to actuality beyond the practiced delivery of the announcer. Trained to speak as if engaged in conversation with the listener, the announcer is both in the studio and in the space of listening (Hayes and Battles 52): duplicated and dislodged from reality, disembodied in Kahn's terms. We hear an announcer giving a weather report: "...for the next twenty-four hours not much change in temperature. A slight atmospheric disturbance of undetermined origin is reported over Nova Scotia..." (5). We come into the broadcast *in medias res*, dropped into the complex of radio's referential functions. By opening in the middle of things, the ongoingness and apparent dependability of the studio broadcast is immediately laid bare. With each transition away from the studio, however, with each use of the phrase "we take you now,"¹³ Welles enacts what Michele Speitz refers to as "aural chiaroscuro." This sound-based system of contrasts "draws its charge from the darkened backdrop of 'normal radio time,' consisting either of prerecorded or regularly scheduled live programming, as it simultaneously infuses a revelatory currency into the auditory equivalent of a lightning-white shock" (194). What Speitz describes as the revelatory currency of the emergency report or the transition away from the dark backdrop of the studio's spatiotemporal obscurity are significant moments of intermediality in which sonic features—whether they are the ambient sounds of the space or the

¹³ The phrase is used, with some variety, seven times throughout the broadcast.

emotionalized tenor of the reporter's voice—suddenly make perceptible the time and location of the events represented.

As the drama unfolds in the opening sequences of *War of the Worlds*, these spatial contours become increasingly better defined. From the studio, to the Park Plaza Hotel, to Pierson's observatory, and finally to Grovers Mill, the intermedial components of the broadcast become more pronounced. *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* leverages sound's capacity to transform spatial contours into resonant features—the soundscape as sound-image—to showcase radio's ability to transport audiences from one time and place to another. With each transition, however, listeners are challenged to put any demand for narrative realism on hold in favor of an acoustic realism as the believability of story depicted in spoken language and of the story depicted in non-semantic sound become increasingly incommensurable with reality. After the weather report and opening commentary, the announcer says, "We take you now to the Meridian Room in the Park Plaza in downtown New York, where you will be entertained by the music of Ramon Raquello and his orchestra" (5). Following this, we hear the music of Raquello's orchestra as well as the space it sounds from; we are asked to listen to both the music and the virtual space of the hotel lobby. Carl Solander helpfully describes the way in which Welles troubles notions of virtuality in *War of the Worlds* when he defines virtuality as "not something that is merely a symbolic representation of the actual world, but something which exists in parallel to actuality as pure potential" (11). The imaginary hotel a year in the future is a virtual space in a virtual time, but the aural mode's capacity to sound out the contours of that space and situate the listening body within that same space can enable the merging of virtual and actual spaces. At this point in the broadcast, however, certain features prevent a totalizing sense of merging the virtual and the actual. Not only are the songs Raquello performs cheekily titled—

“La Cumparsita,” or “little carnival,” “Stardust,” and “I’m Always Chasing Rainbows”—but the music is intentionally bad. Bernard Hermann—who was the more than capable conductor and composer responsible for the score to *Citizen Kane* and *Psycho*—leads the orchestra through plodding, out of tune renditions of popular Spanish jazz songs that verge on parody. The parodic quality of the music further emphasizes the sort of distancing effect Welles and his collaborators instill. Audiences are taken to the Park Plaza Hotel, but they are also invited to exercise an awareness as to the listening practices that enable one to be “taken” in the first place. For the first few minutes at least, we do not hear the sounds of actuality, but a self-consciously virtualized space, a holding in suspense the distinction between the potential and the actual. Such an ironizing treatment of sound’s representational capacity, however, does not last long.

We are soon taken to the observatory of Professor Pierson, voiced by Welles, in Princeton, New Jersey where correspondent Carl Phillips is interviewing him regarding the eruptions and disturbances lately detected on the Martian surface. Before his conversation, though, Phillips explains one of the noticeable features of this new soundscape: “The ticking sound you hear is the vibration of the clockwork” (7). We are in a specific place and a specific time; the clockwork even points to both that location’s spatiotemporal situatedness and the condition of temporality itself. We are listening to the time and space of the conversation as much as the conversation between Phillips and Pierson. We are listening radiophonically and intermedially to the merging of actuality and virtuality without the comfortable self-reflexive distance encouraged earlier by the poorly performed jazz.

With the diminishment of that distance and with Welles’ sound engineers recruiting a greater variety of intermedial strategies, our ability to draw distinctions between actuality and fiction becomes troubled. Pierson and Phillips are called to Grovers Mill, eleven miles from the

observatory, and they arrive there about sixty seconds later, though Phillips reports it took them ten minutes to make the drive. In whatever case, we are asked to suspend our reliance on the clockwork-like dependability of radio and reality operating according to the same time-scales. Instead, the correspondence between actuality and its mediated representation is accomplished by way of acoustic indexes that suggest a reality shared between listener and broadcast. In the Grovers Mill sequence, the ambient sounds and sound effects, though produced in a studio and indexing something wholly unbelievable, extend the representational capacity of language toward realizing the virtual. Despite this impossible transition of eleven miles covered in sixty seconds, we arrive in time to hear sirens, crowds, and a distracting, high-pitched humming. This is, so far, the most fully rendered and immersive space we have been taken to. Importantly, the details are products of the sounds picked up by the microphone, not of Phillips' narration. Phillips even encounters the limit of his descriptive abilities as a reporter, faltering in his objective stance and verging on the emotionalized fragmentation heard in Morrison's coverage of the *Hindenburg*: "Well, I...I hardly know where to begin, to paint for you a word picture of the strange scene before my eyes, like something out of a modern Arabian Nights. Well, I just got here. I haven't had a chance to look around yet. I guess that's *it*. Yes, I guess that's the...*thing*" (11). A crowd of people is pressing closer to the cylindrical ship that has crash landed so, in irritation, he says, "They're getting in front of my line of vision. Would you mind standing on one side please?" (12). Language fails to operate synesthetically, to paint a "word picture," while Phillips' own ability to see is hindered. The scene we as listeners are meant to comprehend emerges from sounds indexing their sources and outlining the resonant features of the space combined with a correspondent's voice that comes to fail more and more to correspond to the visual content of the scene he is attempting to relay. We are not perceiving synesthetically

in that there is no sense confusion; but rather we are asked to listen intermedially, attending to the partial nature of all the different sonic phenomena, and to integrate them toward forming a detailed and thorough comprehension of that which resists description.

Our comprehension hinges upon the use of sound effects, those non-linguistic phenomena that signify and represent with a level of clarity that language, especially Phillips', may at times lack. Eventually, Phillips draws our attention to one of the uncanniest sound effects of the broadcast, the strange humming heard at Grovers Mill: "Listen: (LONG PAUSE)...Do you hear it? It's a curious humming sound that seems to come from inside the object" (15). When we were taken to Pierson's observatory, we were immediately offered an explanation as to the clockwork sounds, but here that explanation comes later, after the sounds have already become a part of our multimodal registration of the scene. At Grovers Mill we are not afforded the rationalizing explanations and critical distances of earlier sequences but rather must contend with the art of Ora Nicholls and the rest of the sound effects team on its own terms. While the secrets of the foley artists have remained as such, the apocryphal account regarding the opening of the Martian spacecraft's hatch is that Nicholls created the sound by unscrewing a pickle jar in the bathroom (Gosling 40). That we do not confidently know how she produced the sound, that we cannot connect the sound to an event within a shared actuality and must instead merge that actuality with the broadcast's unreality, speaks to the slippage from one semiotic operation of sound to another. Radiophonic sound offers a kind of reality effect, signaling a spatiotemporal intelligibility and actuality despite its unbelievability.

Following the hatch's opening, Phillips' voice reaches a shrill panic and his stammering description riddled with gaps and silences becomes an expert recreation of Morrison's horror: "Ladies and gentlemen, this is the most terrifying thing I have ever witnessed...Wait a minute!

Someone's *crawling out of the hollow top*. Some one or...something" (16). The cracking panicked voice and the limits of linguistic precision achieve a representational accuracy not despite language's failure and its transformation into emotionalized cries, but because language has ceased to operate as such. As language slips into sound, the cognitive connection listeners make is rhythmic, emotionalized, and affective. Phillips' voice is as much a sound effect, an intermedial component of radiophonic art, as the ambient humming and unscrewed pickle jar.

The simplest and most dramatic of the sound effects can be heard, or rather not heard, immediately after the Martian has emerged and begun terrorizing the crowd with its heat ray. Phillips is in the middle of his coverage when, suddenly and without explanation, he is cut off. Six seconds of silence follow. This is the most disruptive slippage of the program: the failure of the radiophonic medium itself. At this moment, we lose contact with Phillips and from the field coverage altogether. We are suddenly reminded that what was immersive and what ostensibly offered immediate access to events as they unfolded was profoundly mediated. This has been a representation of some event that now exceeds the sense modalities and mediating technologies we have, up until this point, comprehended it through. Jonas Ingvarsson helpfully describes this feature of the broadcast and its source material in Wells' novel: "Both the radio play and the novel, despite all remediations, are primarily reminders of the *silence* created by the *absence* of communication, an absence that paradoxically makes the media present" (274). Listeners are shocked back into the position of self-reflexivity, recognizing the consequences of radio's mediation as such. Alternatively, as was the case for a million Americans according to Cantril, listeners are shocked into imagining the scene wholly independently now that silence is its only representation. In either case, by this moment, eighteen minutes and twenty-seven seconds into the broadcast, Welles has utilized dispatches from the studio, music performed in a New York

City hotel lobby, ambient sounds from an observatory in New Jersey, the sound effect of a Martian spacecraft opening, and the panicked cries of a correspondent failing to describe what he sees. If the sound can be captured on a microphone, Welles has put it toward demonstrating the variety of interpretive approaches we bring to the radio as we connect what we hear to the world. Such a chaotic assemblage of sounds and their representative functions highlights the distinctions and frictions between them, making apparent the insufficiency of one mode of attention for one set of audible phenomena when applied to another. Throughout these slippages between sound's representative functions, events have become increasingly more unrealistic, but the critical distance provided to listeners to reflect on these sounds' operations has become increasingly diminished. Whether or not Welles' broadcast truly did create nationwide hysteria is only marginally relevant; what is remarkable is his ability to leverage intermedial indeterminacy to create such a sense of anxiety.

Jarkko Toikkanen's *The Intermedial Experience of Horror: Suspended Failures* (2013) can helpfully elucidate how Welles' use of sound and silence is mobilized toward inducing anxiety and fear. Though his focus is primarily the literary deployment of images through hypotyposis, Toikkanen's theories clarify how Welles' broadcast uses representative suspension and indeterminacy toward creating anxiety and dread. Toikkanen writes: "In literature, where images as such are frequently absent and the reader, through her imagination, works from words alone, the experience of horror hinges on a certain failure of the imagination [...] The reader's experience is intermedially suspended" (viii). When the reader, Toikkanen contends, encounters a description of the horrifying in literature, there occurs a phenomenon of suspension, of pausing within the timeframe of the narrative to confront that which exceeds the narrative's capacity to adequately represent it. This rupture of narrative time, more so than any detailed description of

the grotesqueries themselves, creates the kind of tension and anxiety found in horror. Horror occurs when the literary, by taking up the operations of the visual, encounters its limit and the reader encounters her own imaginative limit in turn. In the case of radio, we are dealing with an even more invisible medium than literature, one that from its inception has had to reckon with its inability to broadcast images. Despite broadcasters' best efforts to make radio a synesthetic medium, it remains an intermedial one. The fundamental difference between the synesthetic and the intermedial is, like Toikkanen contends, the intermedial cannot help but encounter a limit. In the case of literature and the radio, that limit is the visual. As Brian Massumi writes, when the phenomenon is perceived to loom in the near future but is never actually perceived in and of itself, when the phenomenon encounters a perceptual limitation, that is when fear sets in: "Fear is the anticipatory reality in the present of a threatening future. It is the felt reality of the nonexistent, looming present as the *affective fact* of the matter" (54). For both the characters and the listeners of *War of the Worlds*, the horrifying event, an affective fact for all its unbelievability, once it morphs from the threatening future to the immediate present, from the "not yet" to the "now," is met with silence and an aporia. Both the content of the drama and the medium of communication itself fall silent. The six seconds of silence that conclude Phillips' coverage is the most horrifying moment of the broadcast because the radio, an intermedial mode of communication that has been deploying myriad modes of representation all within the first eighteen minutes of the broadcast, reaches its limit and ultimately gives way to a centerless collage of voices, a collage that only admits more room for the imagination and its subsequent failures.

Between losing Phillips and the midway break in the broadcast, which actually occurs ten minutes after the halfway point, *War of the Worlds* spirals outward into a mixture of voices, each

of which sounds from its own time and space in relation to the events at Grovers Mill. With every transition to a new voice, the aural mode operates according to a different relationship to the constructed actuality, thus growing increasingly more indeterminate and generating over twenty minutes of the most thoroughly modernist content of the broadcast. After the prolonged silence, the studio announcer returns with the cryptic apology, “Ladies and gentlemen, due to circumstances beyond our control, we are unable to continue the broadcast from Grovers Mill” (18). Fortunately, after a brief piano intermission, the announcer receives a telephone message from the crash site. A moment ago, we as listeners were encountering the sounds of the event itself, now those events are doubly mediated and receding toward that imaginative failure Toikkanen describes. At the same moment, however, the separation between the “there” of normal radio time safely contained in the studio and the “here” of real-time events and emergencies is compromised. The emergency crosses the barrier separating the two spatiotemporal zones. Suddenly, the announcer introduces General Montgomery Smith of the New Jersey State Militia who announces the deployment of more troops and the institution of martial law. Smith is followed by Pierson, back in Grovers Mill and speaking through the heavy distortion and crackle of a microphone presumably exposed to radiation. Next is Harry McDonald, the vice-president of CBS, then Captain Lansing of the Signal Corps, and then the Secretary of the Interior, sounding rather like Franklin Roosevelt. Within just a few minutes entire battalions of troops have been mobilized, but as if that were not unbelievable enough, the announcer lets us know that “we’ve run special wires to the artillery line in adjacent villages to give you direct reports in the zone of the advancing enemy” (25). We then lose any orienting center of the broadcast studio and begin to hear the chatter of gunners, officers, and pilots bombing the Martians. After those attacks prove futile, the voices of five ham radio operators,

somehow interfering in the “special wires,” can be heard: “How’s reception? How’s reception? K, please. Where are you 8X3R? What’s the matter? Where are you?” (30). In a move reminiscent of Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, the radio drama recedes away from the events themselves and toward a fragmented arrangement of inherently limited subjectivities. Each voice offers another perspective of the events unfolding. From the pilot looking down on the Martians to the operator struggling to make contact with anyone else on the airwaves, each voice renders the virtual events as an actuality in a different, though always incomplete, capacity.

Finally, the announcer returns, but only to describe the view from the roof of New York City under attack. He watches the approaching Martian tripods and offers a variation of the clockwork in Pierson’s observatory as he marks their distance and counts down to the end: “Sixth Avenue...Fifth Avenue...100 yards away...it’s 50 feet...” (31). The destruction of the building is followed by the sounds of collapsing rubble, bells, sirens, and then silence. The studio, the epitome of radio’s virtuality, slowly merges with actuality as the two time scales eventually collide and are destroyed. A moment after this destruction, the voice of one of the operators quietly calls out to no one: “2X2L calling CQ...2X2L calling CQ...2X2L calling CQ...New York. Is there anyone on the air? Is there anyone... 2X2L—” (31). This final moment of desolation, where the mixture of radiophonic voices and sounds is reduced to a single unanswered question, signals the climax in the broadcast’s horror. Incredibly, the climax is achieved by complete referential indeterminacy. It is not what the sounds refer to, but their failure to refer to anything other than themselves that makes them so affecting. We are, at this point, listening to the radio and only the radio—an aural equivalent of Mallarmé’s book that contains nothing and everything, a radiophonic version of the intersemiotic configuration. Only twenty minutes after the crash landing in Grovers Mill, the narrative authority of the announcer

letting us know where and when we are being taken has been systematically dissolved. We have become completely untethered in what Gaston Bachelard calls the *logosphere* of the radio (218).

Given how the popular imagination has remembered Welles' broadcast, the most surprising moment comes in the third act, when Welles in character as Professor Pierson delivers a full twenty minutes of what is essentially dramatic monologue in the style of a radio drama. "All that happened before the arrival of these monstrous creatures in the world now seems part of another life," he says, "a life that has no continuity with the present, furtive existence of the lonely derelict who pencils these words on the back of some astronomical notes bearing the signature of Richard Pierson" (32). Pierson's monologue is a non-diegetic voice-over, comprised of his own notes read aloud after the fact. However, his distanced perspective is resituated within the timeframe of the narrative he recounts when, as Pierson tells of his explorations through New York, he comes across a stranger. Suddenly, the stranger speaks and Pierson replies; both are engaged in a dialogue unfolding on the dramatic stage of the audible "here and now" though the scene began as a recollection. The stranger speaks of what the Martians will do, of how they will enslave the human race. At this moment, we are hearing Pierson's past recollections, his present conversation, and the stranger's future speculation. Though the transition to radio drama initially seems to have stabilized the narrative, we remain confronted with the task of negotiating the referential difficulties and ambiguities of broadcast sound. After leaving the stranger, Pierson concludes his monologue in a new present: "Strange it now seems to sit in peaceful study at Princeton writing down this last chapter of the deserted farm in Grovers Mill" (42). When we were first taken to that farm, it was with the help of the radio announcer guiding us through the indeterminate relationship between transmitted sound and the soundscapes captured by the microphone. By the conclusion, however, we are still subject to these transitions from one

spatiotemporal zone to another, but without such guiding directives. After the decentering of the narrative since the Martians' arrival, we come to occupy a liminal and intermedial area between where/when we listen from and where/when we listen in on.

War of the Worlds is at bottom an interrogation of the representative potentialities and representative limitations of radio as an intermedial mode of communication. Welles' broadcast was not horrifying because it expertly imitated emergency broadcasts; it did not. What it did do was imitate the emergency broadcast, the live music performance, the darkened backdrop of the studio, and the theatrical sonic space of the radio drama. Through the proliferation of destabilizations that occur over the course of the broadcast as we transition from one soundscape and interpretive framework to another, we are not only confronted with the multitude of listening practices the medium demands of us, but we also encounter how that medium's limitations and slippages effect horror. Intermediality can point to a representative indeterminacy—to the ambiguous divisions between mediums—and that same indeterminacy creates the mental blank-spot that instills panic. Welles in his final sign-off cheekily describes the broadcast's self-reflexivity:

This is Orson Welles, ladies and gentleman, out of character to assure you that *War of the Worlds* has no further significance than as the holiday offering it was intended to be. The Mercury Theatre's own radio version of dressing up in a sheet and jumping out of a bush and saying Boo! Starting now, we couldn't soap all your windows and steal all your garden gates, by tomorrow night...so we did the next best thing.¹⁴ We annihilated the world before your very ears, and utterly destroyed the Columbia Broadcasting System. You will be relieved, I hope, to learn that we didn't mean it, and that both institutions are still open for business. So good-bye everybody, and remember, please, for the next day or so, the terrible lesson you learned tonight. That grinning, glowing, globular invader in your living-room is an inhabitant of the pumpkin patch, and if your doorbell rings and nobody's there, that was no Martian...It's Hallowe'en. (42-43)

¹⁴ In the broadcast Welles actually says "so we did the best next thing." A. Brad Schwartz speculates that this uncharacteristic mistake resulted from Welles' nervousness upon seeing police officers enter the CBS studios.

Welles reduces the broadcast to an elaborate prank and piece of radio ephemera; not only did *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* “not mean it,” but we are only supposed to remember it only “for the next day or so.” Ironically, Welles and his team had just produced one of the most memorable hours in broadcast history, one that we can turn to in order to concretize the functions of intermediality in radiophonic art. Another example, Thomas’ *Under Milk Wood*, utilizes this intermedial principle of combining the different semiotic operations of sound toward a very different end, one more concerned with the idealization of radio’s sonic spaces, not their annihilation. Porter claims that “no two voices had a greater impact on literary radio than those of Orson Welles and Dylan Thomas” (130), and by pairing their two most well-known works we can more fully sound out the combinations and integrations of the arts enabled by broadcasted sound.

3. The Multisensory and Mad Utopia of *Under Milk Wood*

Taking up the possibilities offered by the emergent genre of the radio feature, *Under Milk Wood* is a dizzying sonic portrait of the Welsh town of Llareggub and twenty-four hours in the lives of its residents—more than sixty characters in all. Drawing from poetry, drama, and documentary while incorporating music and sound effects alongside the sonic flourishes of its narration and dialogue, Thomas’ “play for voices” is by turns a radio play full of memorable characters, a poetic rhapsody loaded with aural excesses, and a field recording of a fictitious village. The lives Thomas’ radio feature describes are full of bawdy humor, frank sexuality, and sorrowful songs; however, Llareggub remains an almost Edenic space in which, despite their schemes and peccadillos, its residents live in social and spiritual unity. Welles used the dislocations and slippages in sound’s signifying functions to create a sense of anxiety and horror,

but Thomas' comparable approach points to a pre-discursive register in which music, language, and effects are unified through sound. Pure sound—as in non-semantic sonic phenomena—offers a kind of protean ur-language in which the semiotic and the sensual are intertwined. Like the Florentine *camerata* or Wagner and his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Thomas in his feature turns to an imaginary past in order to figure a utopic, imagined future; *Under Milk Wood* utilizes the intermedial condition of radio broadcast toward a recuperative and restorative mission. The hybrid genre of the radio feature as well as the hybridized means of representation and expression that Thomas incorporates allow him to use the fringe of contact between different audible phenomena to depict the content of dreams, sexuality, and thoughtforms as preceding and evading language; new media permits a return to an interartistic unification of word, music, and sound.

Despite a widespread admiration for *Under Milk Wood*, scholarship on the feature generally tends toward biography—drawing as many parallels as possible between Llareggub and the Welsh village of Laugharne where Thomas lived—or paroxysms of praise for what Kate Whitehead calls “the most successful piece of creative writing to have emerged from the history of radio” (121). Though I do not want to rehearse the story of *Under Milk Wood*'s composition in full, clarifying the conditions of its creation and reception will be helpful. Thomas worked for the BBC from 1943 to his death in 1954 and participated in over 150 programs as writer, speaker, or actor. Early in his radio career, Thomas was invited by T. Rowland Hughes, a Welsh Region producer to develop “Verse Features,” what Hughes described as “long dramatic programmes in verse” (qtd. in Davies xvi). Thomas initially declined the offer, claiming: “I take such a long time writing anything, and the result, dramatically, is too often like a man shouting under the sea” (qtd. in Davies xvi). Thomas was reassured, however, that radio features were not

radio dramas, that he would be given the freedom to write with or without a dramatic structure, eschewing whatever conventions of theatrical storytelling were unfit for his style or the radiophonic medium. The result of Thomas' commitment to the genre is a sizeable collection of experiments in the combination of poetry, interior monologue, and documentary. These include *Reminiscences of Childhood* (1943), *Quite Early One Morning* (1945), and *Memories of Christmas* (1945). Such ventures contributed to the larger sense of experimentation within the Features Department which was, as producer Douglas Cleverdon describes it, "for twenty years the avant-garde of radio" (7). *Under Milk Wood* was commissioned by the BBC Third Programme¹⁵ and was aired posthumously on January 25th, 1954. It went on to become one of the Third's biggest successes and won the Prix Italia for radio drama that year. Henry Treece, a contemporary reviewer, described *Under Milk Wood* as "an anthill, which is quite static from a distance of ten yards and only comes to life when observed from ten inches. It is a pointillistic technique too refined for the theatre" (qtd. in Lewis 100). On the granular level of character and dialogue, this play for voices seems quite conventionally dramatic and theatrical. On a larger level, however, the play loses any discernible structure to become a nearly vibrating collage of sounds and voices, a sonic rendering of a multivocal space.

The anthill that became Llareggub did not begin in Thomas' imagination as a radio feature. Instead, the earliest iteration of what would become *Under Milk Wood* was the idea for a stage play titled "The Town That Was Mad."¹⁶ Taking seriously the question of "madness" in

¹⁵ The BBC Third Programme was initiated in 1946. It was named as such because it was the third program after the Home Service and Light Programme. Aimed primarily at discerning, culturally inclined listeners, the Third was heavily criticized for being elitist. *Under Milk Wood* is remarkable for its ability to reach beyond the snobbishness that had long been ascribed to the Third.

¹⁶ A [thirty-nine-page holograph fair-copy of the first half of the "The Town That Was Mad" is housed at the University of Austin at Texas. Dating from late 1950, it shows an earlier version of

Thomas' utopian soundscape and in the intermedial context more broadly can yield meaningful insight into the meaning-making at work in the radio feature the play would become. In early versions, the play centered around a plot that was ultimately abandoned altogether. Thomas imagined residents in the town of Llareggub receiving an official government statement which reads: "There appears to be no reason why this town should not be declared an Insane Area. As it is not expedient to commit the whole population of the town to a lunatic asylum, we now declare that this town itself to be a lunatic asylum. It will be cordoned off as such" (qtd. in Davies xxi). The town then goes to trial to defend its collective sanity, with Blind Captain Cat as legal representation. Upon learning how a "sane" town would behave, however, Captain Cat announces: "Yes, we are mad...This town is mad. We are content to be so. Cordon us off. Declare us an Insane Area. We will continue to live as long as we can, alone, a community of individual people" (qtd. in Davies xxii). The play's sonic flourishes and pointillistic technique give way to an awkwardly appended plot in this version, as if a narrative arc were grafted onto a polyvocal poem. Fortunately, Thomas gave up the more dramatic idea in favor of what he describes as "a piece, a play, an impression for voices, an entertainment out of the darkness" (qtd. in Lewis 99), an impression that resists telling the story of the town's madness but nonetheless places that town's madness at its center. I mention this early version of *Under Milk Wood* in order to contextualize Thomas' aesthetic decisions within a framework of an idealized insanity, a madness that is restorative.

Intermediality is the discourse of that idyllic madness—of being cordoned off and yet

what would become *Under Milk Wood* that, though abandoned, is helpful in indicating fundamental components of the piece. Walford Davies points out how the manuscript ends at exactly the point Thomas begins to implement the scenario he had in mind for the play's plot (xviii).

satisfied in utopic isolation—around which Thomas organizes the lives of Llareggub’s townspeople. The most fundamental feature of intermediality that Thomas’ text leverages is a conceptual conflation of language and non-signifying sound on the level of the spoken word. Sonic patterning continually challenges the representational function of language, pushing the linguistic medium away from mimesis and toward evocative and affective patterning. We first hear this conceptual blurring in the two narrating voices that describe the sleeping town in the opening sequence: “*It is spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the cobblestreets silent and hunched, courters’-and-rabbits’ wood limping invisible down to the sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack, fishboat bobbing sea*” (4).¹⁷ We are invited to listen in closer: “*Listen. It is night in the chill, squat chapel, hymning, in bonnet and brooch and bombazine black, butterfly choker and bootlace bow, coughing like nannygoats, sucking mintoes, fortywinking hallelujah*” (5). Language approaches an emotive, eccentric, and non-mimetic register of audible expression; dark vowels, softly voiced stops, and plodding rhythms allow us to perceive the town by listening to the sonic qualities of the language describing it, not the language in isolation. This is most apparent in the “sloeblack/slow black” pairing, which becomes almost inscrutable on the level of the word when spoken but becomes an astutely precise rhythmic variation of phonemic patterning at the same time. The madness of Llareggub is a pre-discursive one, one in which sensuality and sense-making are intermedially integrated according to sound’s rhythmic and evocative meaning-making operations.

This intermedial madness correlates to Roland Barthes’ theory of *signifying* and Julia

¹⁷ In the 2013 *New Directions* edition of *Under Milk Wood* edited by Walford Davies and Ralph Maud, the two narrating voices are combined into a single set of italicized lines. While there is some debate as to whether or not treating these two voices as one is a responsible editorial choice, I will be following the Davies and Maud edition for the clarity it provides.

Kristeva's notion of the *chora*, fundamental to her theory of the semiotic as a complement to the symbolic register. Barthes provides a helpful description of *signifying* when he writes of how listening leads to the "shimmering of signifiers" and how the perceiving subject is "ceaselessly restored to a listening which ceaselessly produces new [signifiers] from them without ever arresting their meaning: this phenomenon of shimmering is called *signifying*, as distinct from signification" (*The Responsibility of Forms* 259). The shimmering of signifiers and their ceaseless production of more signifiers, achieving a kind of semiotic excess that resists any containment within a set of signs becomes the "epitome of counter-narrative": "disseminated, reversible, trapped in its own temporality, it can establish (if followed) only an altogether different script, counter-logical and yet 'true'" (57). That counter-narrative, transgressive and "mad," is the same counter-logical register we hear echoing through Thomas' sonic patterning. Providing a helpful elaboration of this third meaning is Kristeva's theory of the *chora*. The *chora* is the pre-linguistic quality to communication that is "unnamable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to meaning" (133). Semiotic heterogeneity, as opposed to symbolic correspondence between word and referent, means that "sonorous distinctiveness" is no longer part of the symbolic system but rather involved in a mode of communication not reliant on language but nonetheless intelligible (135). Verbalized sounds retain meaning, but in a pre-linguistic and non-symbolic capacity. The semiotic *chora* is a site of perpetual renewal and thus dislocated from the temporal condition of the symbolic. Similarly, Barthes' "third meaning" is trapped in its own temporality, in a state of ceaseless signifying. Barthes' and Kristeva's proposed modes operate according to a temporal condition cordoned off from the flow of time other communicative registers operate according to. In this way, they correspond to Llareggub's utopic position. The "hovering aural dispersion" (5) that Garrett Stewart describes as endemic to poetic sound describes the same mode that

results from the sonically textural combined with the lexical. Such a combination of semiotic operations permits access to that which semantico-referential language cannot catch, allowing the madneses and temporal dislocations of dreams, sexuality, and thought-forms to become integrated within a text in such a way that staged drama or any genre less dependent upon the purely sonic would not allow. Significantly, by utilizing sound as non-referential and yet intelligible, as offering a point of resistance to the linguistic mode and yet still permitting shared understanding, Thomas puts into action an interartistic configuration that uses sound to modernize but also systematize the emergent qualities of his play for voices.

 Ringing out quietly after a direction indicating “[Silence],” *Under Milk Wood*’s sonic extravagance begins appropriately: “*To begin at the beginning*” (3). Thomas’ play for voices opens with two narrating voices guiding listeners through the town, visiting the dreams of each of its sleeping residents, interweaving the external space of Llareggub with the internal dreamscapes of its people—one distinct spatio-temporal zone with a more indistinct other. The town is dark and silent, the people equally so, but we are invited to listen in on and look upon this village under Milk Wood: “*You can hear the dew falling, and the hushed town breathing. Only your eyes are unclosed, to see the black and folded town fast, and slow, asleep*” (3). Radio enables listeners to not only hear the inaudible, but to see the invisible. After the initial description of the darkened seaside town, we are told “*From where you are, you can hear their dreams*” (4), as if our position as listeners on the other side of the receiver is a vantage point affording us a view into a network of unconscious minds. The first unconscious mind we eavesdrop on is Blind Captain Cat’s, whose blindness serves to indicate his role as a kind of avatar for us as listeners. In his dream, he is sucked “*down salt deep into the Davy dark where fish come biting out and nibble him down to his wishbone and the long drowned nuzzle up to*

him” (4). Like us, he is a sightless sounding board; his body is reduced to a wishbone, a resonating tuning fork and receiver picking up the voices of the drowned:

First Drowned: How’s it above?
 Second Drowned: Is there rum and lavabread?
 Third Drowned: Bosoms and robins?
 Fourth Drowned: Concertinas?
 [...]

 Third Drowned: How’s the tenors in Dowlais?
 Fourth Drowned: Who milks the cows in Maesgwyn?
 Fifth Drowned: When she smiles, is there dimples?
 First Drowned: What’s the smell of parsley? (6)

Thomas’ catalogue of sensory experiences imprinted on the memories of the drowned is among the most affecting moments of the feature for how it enacts Jackie Benjamin’s estimation of *Under Milk Wood*’s aesthetic: “sensory perception is prioritized but dislocated” (64). The aural mode is mobilized toward creating a vocabulary of suggestive multisensory experiences, from the sound of the concertina to the visual detail of dimples to the smell of parsley, crisp and simple as the drowned man’s question. Radio, Thomas demonstrates, troubles the distinction between the external actuality of the town itself and the unconscious experience registered internally by the dreaming townspeople. The external space is rendered in obfuscating sonic excess while the internal dream can render images, tastes, and smells with a sharp precision.¹⁸ Broadcast sound’s capacity to communicate the darkened and largely invisible externality of a town at night in sound patterns and the illogical internality of dream in distilled multisensory hieroglyphs speaks to intermediality’s ability to access that which exceeds semantico-referential

¹⁸ Cynthia Davis argues that this distinction is also apparent in Thomas’ decision to divide the narration into two voices. She argues for the primary difference between the voices when she writes: “Second Voice’s mythic language speaks for the elements common to all these visions. But First Voice works with both particular and universal aspects of the struggle, leading the audience through the ‘rhythmic, inevitably narrative’ structure that he imposes to a whole view synthesizing specific and general, external and internal elements” (89).

language, to access “*the movements and countries and mazes and colours and dismays and rainbows and tunes and wishes and flight and fall and despairs and big seas of their dreams*”

(4).

Thomas’ intermediality, the discourse of a productive madness, also admits the irrationality of dreams as they intersect with the desires and compulsions of the unconscious in more imaginative imagistic vocabularies. As we are taken from one dreaming mind to the next, hearing and glimpsing the inner lives of the town that is mad, increasingly surreal images come into focus. Evans the Death, the undertaker:

laughs high and aloud in his sleep and curls up his toes as he sees, upon waking fifty years ago, snow lies deep on the goosefield behind the sleeping house; and he runs out into the field where his mother is making Welshcakes in the snow, and steals a fistfull of snowflakes and currants and climbs back to bed to eat them cold and sweet under the warm, white clothes while his mother dances in the snow kitchen crying out for her lost currants. (8)

His childhood memory is mutated through dream into an image of his mother dancing in the snow while crying out for the fruit her adolescent son has taken away. Psychoanalysis is tempting here, but ultimately the image speaks for itself in its suggestion of childhood sexuality but resistance to any kind of decoding. Similarly, on the other side of town, Mae Rose-Cottage “*peels off her pink and white skin in a furnace in a tower in a cave in a waterfall in a wood and waits there raw as an onion for Mister Right to leap up the burning tall hollow splashes of leaves like a brilliantined trout*” (16). We listen in on Mae’s sexual fantasy that foregrounds the unsettling bestial component of fairy tales and covers an impossible geography—all of it unnamable, hybrid, anterior to meaning—and we are confronted with a nearly incomprehensible image vocabulary. Though the dream sequence verges on the inconceivable, the consonant patterns of labio-velar approximates slipping into the retroflex liquids ground the sequence in a perceptible, if not wholly scrutable, pattern. We may not be able to “Look” the way the narrating

voices have commanded, but we can listen and comprehend the roundly sensual sounds of the language as well as the gentle movement through the mouth of the speaker. Though unnamable and hybrid, the intermediality of dreams retains a non-referential significance for both the dreamer and the listener.

As the dream sequences reach a conclusion and “*the principality of the sky lightens [...]* *into spring morning larked and crowed and belling*” (19), the play takes on a documentary aesthetic, as if the microphone becomes a means of representing the town as actuality. The history of the radio feature is one of adapting the documentary aesthetic for radio, and the genre emerged from an ambition to transform John Grierson’s famous definition of documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality” into a set of broadcasting conventions. Among those conventions is the deployment of the microphone within the soundscape itself, using it to suggest that the listener is invisibly present within the site of the action as it unfolds. *Under Milk Wood*’s use of this documentary style was so effective and so successful that *The Times* printed a review claiming of the approach: “what radio is best at...[there is] nothing more moving, complete, and true than this” (qtd. in K. Whitehead 126). Once Llareggub comes to consciousness after the dream sequences, what we are granted access to comes to us as if by way of microphones situated throughout the town, allowing us to eavesdrop on the lives of the people within it. In doing so, Thomas sounds out the lives of his characters with such an immediacy that they appear not to be characters at all¹⁹ but rather fully-formed, non-fictitious subjects. Doing so encourages an interpretive approach that understands the sounds as indexing reality—much in the same way

¹⁹ In what might be the earliest iteration of the idea that became *Under Milk Wood*, Thomas proposed to Richard Hughes a play about the town of Laugharne in which all of the townspeople would play themselves (David Thomas 49). This comment, made in 1939, suggests that the idea of replacing the performative with the actual is at the center of the play.

Welles utilizes the emergency newscast format and the ambient sounds of given spaces. Unlike Welles, however, Thomas' play is interested in eavesdropping not only on the speech of these characters, but also on their thoughts—often unformed, frequently protean, nearly always perverted in some capacity. In directing the documentary aesthetics of the radio feature toward the representation of thoughtforms,²⁰ Thomas makes these thoughts audible and, by way of radio's multisensory dislocations, visible. These intermedial transmediations of thought's quality, nature, and definiteness externalize internally registered conditions toward an intersubjectively understood representation. The thoughts of Thomas' characters, though articulated linguistically, to be sure, are animated by way of the sonic features of the dramatic text, its shimmering of signifiers. In that way, radio's intermedial condition enables a rich representation of a pre-discursive and often delightfully deranged thinking.

Nowhere do we encounter such derangement as in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Pugh. Mr. Pugh, the schoolteacher, constantly schemes to murder his wife and will later in the day sit across from her at lunch reading a book titled *Lives of the Great Poisoners*. While he ponders his murderous fantasies, she nags at him endlessly. Though there is little but hatred between the two, that hatred sustains their connection and allows them to live together in a strange form of domestic compatibility. We hear Mr. Pugh's thoughts while he takes tea up to his wife in the morning:

Here's your arsenic, dear.
 And your weedkiller biscuit.
 I've throttled your parakeet.
 I've spat in the vases.
 I've put cheese in your mouseholes. (22)

²⁰ I use the word "thoughtform" as an implicit reference to Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater's *Thought-Forms* (1901), which renders abstract thought processes and emotional states as visual phenomena comprised of colors and shapes.

We overhear these thoughts until the sound of a creaking door, the sudden intrusion of audible externality, interrupts his fantasies: “Here’s your... / [Door creaks open] / ...nice tea, dear” (22). The imaginary microphone hidden in the Pughs’ home makes audible the characters’ interiority but also superimposes the sounds of the space they occupy upon their interior monologues. The documentary aesthetic—the creative treatment of actuality—is here repurposed for radiophonic art as a palimpsest of reality and fantasy. As Thomas wrote of *Under Milk Wood*: “At many levels, through sight and speech, description and dialogue, evocation and parody, you come to know the town as an inhabitant of it” (qtd. in Ackerman 241). Broadcast sound has the capacity to depict the acoustic features of a space, as in the creaking doors, as well as the private lives of the people within that space, thus inviting listeners fully into it. Later, at the breakfast table, we again overhear Mr. Pugh as he “remembers ground glass as he juggles his omelette” and his overbearing wife as she “nags the salt-cellar” (25). Though these lines are delivered by the characters themselves, they are written in the third person, thus heightening the sense of indistinctiveness between interior and exterior, between the character’s subjectivity and the supposed objectivity of the recording microphone. Such a modernist maneuver—erasing the boundary between the narrativizing consciousness and the narrating voice—becomes an intermedial one in the context of the radio feature. Integrating the operations of drama and documentary, two genres demanding two distinct approaches to the referential function of sound, potentiates a hybrid genre constituted by co-operating components of an aural totality we as listeners fully inhabit instead of listening/looking in on.

Under Milk Wood’s hybridity offers a form of representational excess, or, as Porter writes, “The play gave voice to an auralty so extreme that the practice of radio drama struggled to contain it” (130). That extension beyond the signifying activity of language alone and toward

the affective, immersive, and counter-logical features of sound enables Thomas to explore similarly affective and anti-rational components of his characters' lives. One component of their existence where the people of the town that was mad are maddest is in their sex lives. We have already encountered the unconscious desires of Mae Rose-Cottage, but elsewhere in Llareggub we find a pair of clandestine lovers, Mog Edwards and Myfawnwy Price, a bigamist, Dai Bread with his two wives Mrs. Dai Bread One and Mrs. Dai Bread Two, a twice-widowed boardinghouse manager who sexually dominates the ghosts of both of her husbands, Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard, and several other supposed sinners in this mirror-image of Sodom. The name of the town itself—"bugger all" spelled backwards—leads us to expect as much. Despite the apparent perversions of its residents, Llareggub retains an almost holy quality to it, as if it really is a reversal of Sodom—its townspeople not cursed to destruction for sexual deviance but almost beatified for it:

*The music of the spheres is heard distinctly over Milk Wood. It is 'The Rustle of Spring'.
A glee-party sings in Bethesda Graveyard, gay but muffled.
Vegetables make love above the tenors.
And dogs bark blue in the face. (39)*

Within this eroticized pastoral we encounter Mrs. Dai Bread One and Mrs. Dai Bread Two "sitting outside their house in Donkey Lane, one darkly one plumply blooming in the quick, dewy sun" (39-40), their conversation recounted in the musicalized language of this rustle of spring. Mrs. Dai Bread Two gazes into a crystal ball, sees the two women and their shared husband in bed together, with a text hanging above them: "God is love." These two women, so much like the "bronze by gold" sirens of Joyce's *Ulysses*, are not temptresses or harpies, but rather figures that voice entirely human desires and impulses, impulses that may be taboo and resistant to polite discourse. That resistance does not make them sinful, but rather blessed because of its ability to

transcend rigidifying linguistic conventions toward an intermedial music of the spheres and logosphere of radio waves.

Later, Blind Captain Cat, who like us must extrapolate entire scenes and lives out of what he sightlessly hears, stands at his window and listens to “*the naughty forfeiting children tumble and rhyme on the cobbles*” (43). The children’s game we overhear furthers Thomas’ frank treatment of sexuality by filtering it through the non-judgmental perspective of children. The song the children sing, a lengthy interruption to the feature, functions as a kind of centerpiece to *Under Milk Wood* that unifies the various sound forms utilized throughout. The song involves a group of girls calling on a child named Gwennie to taunt the boys for a kiss: “Boys boys boys / Kiss Gwennie where she says / Or give her a penny. / Go on, Gwennie” (43). Their chanting mimics the accentual patterns of nursery rhymes; they lack a syllabic pattern and so are punctuated with speech-like pauses and cadences, rhyming only occasionally. Gwennie singles out boys and improvises rhymes based on their names: “Kiss me in Goosegog Lane Billy / Or give me a penny silly” (44). Hovering between the tones of song and the cadence of speech, the children perform the same unchecked promiscuity as Dai Bread’s two wives, Mrs. Ogmored Pritchard’s two dead husbands, and Mog Edwards and Myfawnwy Price. In the case of childhood sexuality in Thomas’ treatment, the discourse used to examine it is playful and protean, between song and speech. Furthermore, the children’s voices demonstrate the most thoroughly considered attempt at a documentary aesthetic of the entire production. The producers of the Third Programme actually recruited the children of Laugharne to perform the game Thomas imagined. What we hear in the original broadcast are not the voices of actors, but the children of an actual town and a kind of field recording produced by literally situating the

microphone in the space, not by suggesting such a technique.²¹ These voices merge the virtual and actual; imagined Llareggub is synthesized with literal Laugharne. Appropriately, the song is itself an exploration of that space as much as of childhood sexuality. The boys are told to “kiss Gwennie where she says,” and this double entendre morphs into a process of mapping as Gwennie asks the boys to kiss her on Goosegog Lane, on Llareggub Hill, and in Milk Wood. This is one of the few mentions of the forest under which Llareggub is located and allows us, as listeners, to map the space and orient ourselves within the geography of *Under Milk Wood*. The sexually innocent, which is not to suggest inexperienced, body is co-extensive with the imagined and intermedial space it occupies. The children’s song—in a liminal space between song and speech, between innocence and experience, between what we hear and what we see—enacts the referential slippages and interartistic unification afforded by broadcast music, speech, and sound in order to enact the conditions of the fictitious village we, like Captain Cat, know fully without ever really seeing.

The last boy Gwennie demands a kiss from, Dicky, refuses and is shamefully chased away from the game. In the pursuit, the narrating voices meld together sonic excess with a gustatory indulgence and inject it with resonances of sexuality and violence. The ur-language underlying Thomas’ intermediality—the synthesis of discourse and embodied experience toward a mixture of sense and sensation—allows for the multisensory mapping of Llareggub:

His tormentors tussle and run to the Cockle Street sweet-shop, their pennies sticky as honey, to buy from Miss Myfanwy Price, who is cocky and neat as a puff-bosomed robin and her small round buttocks tight as ticks, gobstoppers big as wens that rainbow as you suck, brandyballs, wine-gums, hundreds and thousands, liquorice sweet as sick, nugget to tug and ribbon out like another red rubbery tongue, gum to glue in girls’ curls, crimson

²¹ In a 1988 EMI recording of *Under Milk Wood*, producers used the bell tones, ambient sounds, and even silences of Laugharne to make the play for voices a play for the sounds of a place as well. Blurring the boundary between drama and documentary has been a consistent element of the feature’s performance history.

coughdrops to spit blood, ice-cream cornets, dandelion-and-burdock, raspberry and cherryade, pop goes the weasel and the wind (46).

This passage helpfully depicts some of the spatial relationships within Llareggub, situating the sweets shop on Cockle Street in relation to the school, but it also describes a quality of movement among and between these locations. *Under Milk Wood* is not strictly a play about the lives of the characters, but rather about the character of the place—its madness of sexuality and sensuousness. Gwennie’s song gestures toward the synthesis of the self and space achieved through the synthesis of music, speech, and sound, and that synthesis is central to Thomas’ radiophonic mission: mapping and sounding out a space that exceeds our ability to sufficiently chart it by any singular sensory mode. Despite rough sketches of the town of Llareggub, like those seen in Thomas’ early drafts and J. Rea’s “A Topographical Guide to *Under Milk Wood*” (1964), such a visual representation provides only a portion of a multisensory experience of sound, taste, and motion. The contours and features of the town are enacted as much by the quality and condition of the sounds as what the sounds describe. To attempt a visual rendering of a town that is an intermedial construction is to diminish the integration of senses and semiotic operations that Thomas achieves. Ultimately, Llareggub is an extension of the radiophonic space in which multiple arts and communicative registers are combined. Mapping the town—this sound-based no-place—would be like mapping radio waves.

The town that was mad is not simply a case of pathological irrationality or murderous compulsions—or at least not only—but a utopia and total work of art in which non-referential sound offers a foundational and integrative form of expression. Llareggub’s madness is a sensual excess, an experience in sound that takes up the full range of the radiophonic medium’s potentialities. In doing so, the feature comes to represent an almost prelapsarian space comprised of all audible phenomena in co-constituting and co-evolving combinations:

The Wood, whose every tree-foot's cloven in the black glad sight of the hunter of lovers, that is a God-built garden to Mary Ann the Sailors who knows there is Heaven on earth and the chosen people of His kind fire in Llareggub's land, that is the fairday farmhand's wantoning ignorant chapel of bridebeds, to the Reverend Eli Jenkins, a greenleaved sermon on the innocence of men, the suddenly wind-shaken wood springs awake for the second dark time this one Spring day (62).

The town mapped out in rhythms and consonant patterns, surreal visions in the townspeople's dreams, and internal thoughtforms interpenetrating with external spaces is a town described in utterances anterior to linguistic meaning. "In place of categorical codes and referential systems and the work of designation," Porter writes, "what we instead find in the Ovidian world of Milk Wood is an ensemble of guiltless human types who, no matter how flawed, participate in the generative work of sound-making, and the incantatory rhythms and inexhaustible handiwork of wordplay" (139). My argument elaborates on Porter's by exploring how this inexhaustible handiwork mirrors the inexhaustibility of the radiophonic medium and the multiple referential operations of broadcast sound: from dramatic voice, to ambient sound, to music, to the embodied co-presence of listener and sound source. Thanks to the practices that developed around listening to these radio features during WWII and into the post-War era, wordplay, rhythm, song, and documentary are permitted to overlap and intermix, becoming a multisensory sonic experience. Llareggub could exist nowhere else than on the radio.

For Thomas, the integration of semiotic operations in the form of a total sonic phenomenon is related to a striving toward a kind of cosmic wholeness, a social and spiritual unity that precedes the organizing and hierarchical structures of language. Llareggub, seen through its intermedial treatment of childhood, sexuality, dreams, and the thoughts that escape and exceed a lexical vocabulary, is a site in which the orders of meaning-events have not been fully separated. The town illustrates a prelapsarian condition in which the Adamic ascribing of names has not been severed from a non-linguistic set of affects and corporeal rhythms.

Milk Wood comes to stand in as an Edenic space in which meaning-making is a holistic and communal endeavor extending from the holistic condition of the community itself. Here again, the function of the radio is bound up with *Under Milk Wood*'s ambitions. Radio's social function, its capacity to delimit imagined communities through perceived co-presence is reconstituted as the communal experience of Llareggub and co-presence with its residents' most intimate thoughts and experiences. This social unity is closely related to a cosmic unity as well, a cosmology that resists hierarchy in favor of a broad-reaching inclusivity. As John Ackerman writes, "The life-force that the play celebrates, subsuming and transforming death in this celebration, is at the same time spiritual, physical, and cosmic. Any reference to milk [...] includes not only associations with copulation, birth and growth, semen and mother's milk, but also the energies and otherness of the milky way" (263). As Ackerman contends, there is a profound connection between the mundane and bodily and the cosmic and supernatural. The entire town is itself unhinged from language and logic's articulating and hierarchical functions. Instead, the town is a shared condition in which a communal act of making meaning—spied on dreams, overheard thoughts, singing choruses—offers a point of contact between the individual body, the social body, the radiobody, and a collectivizing spirituality.

As *Under Milk Wood*'s combined and co-constituting sounds make evident, the radiophonic medium, and radiophonic art made specifically for broadcast, demands an intermedial listening practice. Whatever interpretive framework a listener brings to bear on the transmitted sound—whether it is an emergency broadcast, a concert, a radio play, or even interference and silence—must be continually reevaluated and recombined with other modes of attention. An audible phenomenon's relationship to actuality, to truth content, and to the conditions of its broadcast are in a continual state of overlap and flux; by extension, these

emergent semiotic operations cultivate an emergent form of engagement, a form that was encouraged in audiences of programs like *The Mercury Radio on the Air* and the BBC's Third Programme and Home Service. Upon considering the role of radiophonic sound, intermedial modernism comes to reveal itself in a surprising range of iterations and cultural contexts.

The two iterations in this chapter make clear the various effects radio's intermediality can be put toward. For Welles, the shifts and combinations radio demands are moments of slippage, of failures to fully imagine the actuality on the other side of the broadcast, of anxiety and horror. *The War of the Worlds* tends toward undifferentiatedness and silence. Radiophonic sound becomes the point at which disparate semiotic operations become indistinguishable and—like Edith Sitwell behind a screen or Loïe Fuller beneath her robes—commonality between the arts results in a multimedial combination that extends beyond the capabilities of any single medium and toward the indistinct and invisible. On the other hand, for Thomas, those same slippages point to an underlying principle that precedes and organizes the poetry, drama, documentary, and music of *Under Milk Wood*. Non-referential sound—as in rhythms, patterns, timbres, and tones—is what correlates each of the arts in his radio feature, turning it into a total work of art that utilizes the pre-discursive register as a means of accomplishing artistic, but also social and spiritual, unity. These two poles—isolating horror and cosmic interconnection—represent the intersemiotic and interartistic configurations as well as the larger potentialities offered by modern media themselves. Understandings and misunderstandings of media technology are adapted toward disparate aesthetic extremes in the combination of sounds and their semiotic operations. Welles and Thomas, two exemplary cases within the still unplumbed archive of twentieth-century broadcasts, clarify the synthesizing, hybridizing, and experimental work occurring in an inescapable but mostly banal feature of the modern soundscape.

Conclusion

An Intermedial Literacy

Intermedial Modernism has examined a century-long history of two related features: the proliferation of new media technologies and the interdisciplinary texts that combine the literary with the musical, kinaesthetic, and aural. By close-reading several representative texts organized according to the media that fundamentally altered the storage and dissemination of meaningful content in the twentieth century, I have demonstrated the extent to which such alterations impacted reconsiderations of the meaning-making capacities of the arts. As sensorial and semiotic categories became combined and convoluted through aural media, stage technology, and radiophonic broadcast, so were these categories integrated in interdisciplinary compositions and performances. The method of reading and interpretation applied to each texts' operations was informed by an analysis of the media's historical and cultural context. Intermediality, as mentioned in the introduction, is not something a text *is* or *has*, but rather something a text *does*. Therefore, the reading practice we bring to an intermedial text must be equally as dynamic and adaptable. *Intermedial Modernism* has demonstrated how intermediality is apparent in technologies, in texts responding to those technologies, and in the literacy those texts demand.

Intermedial literacy is the capacity to understand and interpret the generation of meaningful content that occurs between and across sense modalities and communicative registers. Such a capacity emerges in response to those texts which ask for such a reading, listening, and viewing practice. What makes intermediality a modernizing aesthetic practice is the demand it places on audiences: the expansion of a perceptual vocabulary and the interpretive

faculties. Interartistic and intersemiotic configurations are both predicated on synthesized modes of attention applied to texts. This synthesis achieved through reading across and between is part of what allows intermedial texts to “make it new” as well as what makes many pieces of new media exactly that. It is in this principle of intermedial literacy that the technologies themselves, the historically conditioned senses brought to bear on them, and the affiliated practices associated with them all converge. The twentieth century’s new media did not cause aesthetic intermediality, but they did precipitate different modes of perception and interpretation for both artists and their audiences. Over the course of four chapters, I have explored the conditions from which such capacities were cultivated during modernism. I have also modelled what a reading practice for intermedial texts would account for. It is not simply one that combines music theory with close reading, but rather one that frames the combinations as potentiated by a contextualizing media ecology and its stipulations. As sound studies proposes that hearing is historical, so does this study argue that all artistic combinations and their potentialities are equally so.

In addition to tracing a through-line within modernism, I have aimed to refine an intermedial reading practice and develop a set of strategies suited for texts like the case studies included here. Chapter One follows two parallel reconsiderations of the relationship between language and music that the emergence of phonography encouraged. Walton and Sitwell’s *Façade* and Nabokov and Spender’s *Rasputin’s End* depict sound reproduction as a way to reimagine how music, like a linguistic text, is written and read. The phonograph itself becomes a site where the reading practices suited for words and music intermix in various configurations, configurations taken to the extreme in Cage’s *Europera 5*. Chapter Two traces a different set of aural media technologies—electronically amplified sound, jukeboxes, sound film, and

stereophonics—and the ways in which these devices offered new possibilities of knowledge production and subject formation. Literacy—often ascribed to written texts and therefore discounting orality and aurality—is repurposed by Toomer and Hughes as a sonic, participatory, hybrid, and communal capacity mobilized by new media toward the self-definition of twentieth-century African American communities. Chapter Three takes the metaphor of dance as corporeal writing seriously in how it treats kinaesthesia—the generation of meaning by way of the empathetic registration of motion—as the point of contact shared by various arts. Not isolated to dance, meaning-making through motion connects theatre, painting, poetry, design, and music. Such transferable methods of communication, and by extension the transferable methods of understanding, are enabled by the incorporation of technology like electric lighting and semi-synthetic plastics. Finally, Chapter Four pivots away from texts that are explicitly experimental in its attention to popular forms of entertainment in the radio drama and radio feature. The presence of intermediality in radiophonic art indicates the extent to which the media ecology of the twentieth century cultivated an alteration of the perceptual vocabulary in broader audiences.

By using new media as the organizing principle, *Intermedial Modernism* has placed ubiquitous technologies, materials, systems, and practices at the center of its consideration of literary modernism. Foregrounding sound storage, reproduction, amplification, and dissemination—features that drastically reshaped the contours of modern life—has the effect of displacing some of the canonical texts that are typically foregrounded in modernist studies. One of the unexpected patterns to emerge in investigating how ubiquitous media informed interdisciplinary aesthetic practice is that the authors and artists typically central to critical studies of modernist aesthetics are pushed to the margins and modernists once considered marginal are centered. Poets like Edith Sitwell and Stephen Spender, both of whom are minor

modernists compared to the other writers of their respective generations, can now be seen as offering works of major significance in how we understand modernity. Similarly, Jean Toomer and Langston Hughes, renowned authors to be sure but rarely categorized as modernists without modifiers, align with and productively nuance the patterns I follow here. Loïe Fuller, Florine Stettheimer, and dance in general have never been key players in modernism, but electricity, fashion, and plastic are so integral to the make-up of modernity that twentieth-century art and everyday life could not be imagined without them. And though Orson Welles and Dylan Thomas both maintain widespread fame, their radio programs remain on the periphery of literary modernist studies in that they are rarely treated as literary texts. Though the case studies press against what is typically regarded as modernist, I was directed to them by following media and technology so widespread in the twentieth-century as to appear invisible. As a result, texts once rendered invisible themselves are brought into sharp focus as now synecdochally significant.

This centering of the once-marginal speaks to work that remains to be done in modernist studies. The case studies I have selected do necessary work toward more firmly situating female, queer, and African American authors and artists within modernism. New media offer a set of tools and practices particularly suited for empowering minority voices, for resisting imperialism, and for forming communities across socio-political boundaries. While *Intermedial Modernism* has taken a few tentative steps in interrogating aural media's ability to privilege multiple forms of knowledge production and to connect disenfranchised communities, a great deal more remains to be accomplished in understanding how intermediality centers not only marginal modernists but marginalized modernism.¹

¹ One text that pursues this direction is Susan Merrill Squier's edited collection *Communities of the Air* (2003). It includes a number of essays concerned with radio as a means of cultural production for minority communities, including Laurence A. Breiner on Anglophone Caribbean

In fact, what I have begun in the preceding case studies can and should be applied beyond the parameters I have set out here. In addition to utilizing intermediality as a framework for interrogating other and othered modernists, the literacy at work in the texts I have chosen and developed in my analysis can initiate studies of visual as well as aural media, can be repurposed for other social contexts and historical periods, and can even be mobilized toward new pedagogical methods in the teaching of literature and composition. Ultimately, the work that this dissertation has sought to accomplish—and that I hope will continue—extends beyond reconsidering literary modernism. It also includes the description of a set of concerns, the modeling of a reading practice, and the synthesis of various methodologies that all work toward broadening our understanding of literature, art, media, and knowledge production within the twentieth century and beyond.

radio, Kathy M. Newman on radicalism in black radio, and Lauren M.E. Goodlad on the gendering of “alternative radio.”

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