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Dissensual Women: Modernist Women Writers, the Senses, and Technology

Allyson DeMaagd

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Dissensual Women: Modernist Women Writers, the Senses, and Technology

Allyson DeMaagd

Dissertation submitted
to the Eberly College of Arts and Science
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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English

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ABSTRACT

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Allyson DeMaagd

My project, *Dissensual Women: Modernist Women Writers, the Senses, and Technology*, analyzes depictions of the senses and technology in modernist women's writing. I argue that modernist women writers challenge traditional sensory hierarchies that value the so-called masculine senses of sight and sound and denigrate the so-called feminine senses of smell, taste, and touch. H.D., Mina Loy, Virginia Woolf, and Elizabeth Bowen revalue the feminine senses, challenge sensory elitism, and advocate for an inclusive sensorium, one that features the perceptions and experiences of women, queer women, the lower classes, the nonhuman, and the differently abled. They wage their dissent through experimentation with various technologies, ranging from the X-ray to the telephone. While technological invention is not unique to the twentieth century, the twentieth century is oft-recognized as a period of rapid technological change, one that incited a "crisis of the senses." New technologies produced new sensations and prompted modernist subjects to question and redefine what it meant to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. I place modernist women writers at the center of this sensory reclamation. In so doing, I shift the scholarly conversation away from the masculine senses of sight and sound, which have historically been privileged in modern scholarship, and toward the so-called lesser, feminine senses of smell, taste and touch. By examining the confluence among the senses, technology, and gender, and by including heretofore marginalized perspectives, I contribute a synthesis that revises our understanding of modernist women's everyday, lived experience. I also expand the conversation to address the subversive potential of sensory integration. My project removes the senses from the limited framework of the single-sense study to consider their place in the larger sensorium. In so doing, I challenge popular thinking, which suggests that technological innovation has contributed to the atomization of the senses. Instead, I illuminate the ways in which H.D., Loy, Woolf, and Bowen deploy technology to re-unify sensory reality or to draw attention to its destructive disunity.

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According to the schema of the aesthetic revolution, the root of domination is separation”
 Jaques Rancière, *Dissensus*

Introduction

“The flux of life is pouring its aesthetic aspect into your eyes, your ears—and you ignore it because you are looking for your canons of beauty in some sort of frame or glass case or tradition. Modernism says: Why not each one of us, scholar or bricklayer, pleasurably realize all that is impressing itself upon our subconscious, the thousand odds and ends which make up your sensory [sic] every day life?” (“Gertrude Stein”)

“War and the slow recovery have been in all fields threatening us with a loss of standard: isolation, restrictions, substitutes and make-do’s bred a resignation, or thankfulness for anything in any form, which could affect art badly if we were not pulled clear. Aesthetically our senses need resharpening” (“Third Programme”)

In 1924, Mina Loy called for a sensory awakening. She beckoned fellow modernists to look to oft-ignored sensory impressions as a means of reinvigorating art and notions of beauty. More than two decades later, in 1947, fellow writer Elizabeth Bowen issues a similar call, but with a stronger sense of urgency. Bowen suggests that, in the wake of WWII, art and the senses are more dramatically in need of “resharpening.” Despite the years that separate Loy and Bowen, both women exhibit a mutual investment in the senses. More specifically, they share a concern that their fellow modernists do not value or engage sensory experience to its fullest potential, that the senses are being overlooked as important avenues to artistic creation. Their investment in the senses begs the question, how did they respond to their own prompts? How did they take stock, as Loy says, of “the thousand odds and ends which make up [one’s] sensory [sic] every day life”? What did they, and other modernist women writers, do to make the senses “new”? In asking these questions, I join the effort to recover modernist women writer’s radical subversion of literary forms and ideas through the body and its senses.

Dissensual Women: Modernist Women Writers, the Senses, and Technology seeks to answer these questions. This project examines how H.D., Mina Loy, Virginia Woolf, and

Elizabeth Bowen respond to traditional conceptualizations of the senses, revise sensory narratives, and reclaim power over their senses and sensing bodies. In so doing, it also examines the role technology plays in that reconceptualization. As Sara Danus observes in *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*, the modernist-period was “an age where technological devices increasingly claim sovereignty over and against the sensorium” (23). However, in the paradox common to modernism, technology also inspired individuals to reclaim that sovereignty. *Dissensual Women* responds to Danus’s claim that “the relation of gender and technology in literary modernism is a crucial yet strangely undertheorized topic” and concerns itself with sensual and technological reclamation among modernist women writers (11).

H.D., Mina Loy, Virginia Woolf, and Elizabeth Bowen are among those modernist women who took up the torches of synaesthesia, the intersensory, and the multisensual in order to challenge sensory segmentation, dismantle sensory hierarchies, and create sensory parity. In so doing, they question and complicate what constitutes “common sense.” Common sense or “consensus,” a term coined by Jacques Rancière, refers to those sensory practices that, over time, become common to and accepted by a given society—the sensory practices society values, as opposed to the practices they marginalize, ignore, or deem deviant.¹ These values are upheld within “consensual communities,” “in which the spiritual *sense* of being-in-common is embedded in the material *sensorium* of everyday experience” (Rancière 81). Through repetition, these everyday experiences become naturalized and normalized. However, when individuals or groups of individuals expose this process of naturalization and question these norms, they engage

¹ Rancière defines consensus as “an agreement between sense and sense...between a mode of sensory presentation and a regime of meaning” (144).

in “dissensus.” Dissensus “...breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the natural order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled, assigning them to private or public lives, pinning them down to a certain time and space, to specific ‘bodies,’ that is to specific ways of being, seeing, and saying” (Rancière 139).² The dissensual women highlighted herein make it their mission to offer alternatives to these norms: to articulate new ways of being, seeing, and saying.

Sensory Hierarchies, Privilege, and Power

To understand how H.D., Loy, Woolf, and Bowen trouble sensory norms, we must first understand those norms and their social implications. In the Western world, the senses are often organized into hierarchies. According to anthropologist and sensory scholar David Howes,

sensory rankings are always allied with social rankings and employed to order society.

The dominant group in society will be linked to esteemed senses and sensations while subordinate groups will be associated with less valued or denigrated senses. In the West the dominant group – whether it be conceptualized in terms of gender, class or race – has conventionally been associated with the supposedly ‘higher’ senses of sight and hearing, while subordinate groups (women, workers, non-Westerners) have been associated with the so-called lower senses of smell, taste and touch. (“Scent” 164)

Sight and sound earn praise as “high” or superior senses because of their supposed association with the reason, a so-called higher mental faculty; whereas smell, taste, and touch earn the label “low” or inferior because of their believed association with the body and its baseness. Such

² Simply put, dissensus is “a conflict between *sense* and *sense*” (139). In a longer definition, Rancière explains that dissensus “aims to produce a sensory clash *and* to mobilize bodies through the presentation of a strangeness, of an encounter between heterogeneous elements. That is, it aims to produce an effect of strangeness in order to engender an awareness of the underlying reasons of that strangeness, which is tantamount to suppressing it. In one and the same process, it endeavors to produce a fusion between the aesthetic clash of heterogeneous forms of sensory presentation and the correction of the behavior through representation...” (143).

distinctions reinforce stereotypes that equate certain bodies with certain sensory capacities, namely that white men are governed by the higher senses and their minds, while women, the lower classes, and minorities are slaves to the lower senses and their bodies. Along with Constance Classen, a cultural historian who specializes in the history of the senses, Howes reminds us that, historically, “The sensory typing of social groups was not thought simply to be a matter of associations and markers (so that, with the right clothes and perfume, a peasant might be transformed into a knight). People were believed to be *made* for their social roles” (*Ways of Sensing* 68).³

Popular thought suggests that women, for instance, were made to do domestic work, that their bodies were uniquely equipped for such activities, indeed, that their organic make-up demanded it. In the late eighteenth century, the French gastronome Brillat-Savarin commented that women better enjoyed “the pleasures of the table... [because] gourmandism... agrees with the delicacy of their organs” (qtd. in Jütte 140).⁴ Similar logic suggests that women enjoy baking because of their affinity with baked goods: women’s bodies themselves were perceived as “half-baked” and “doughy” (*The Color of Angels* 64).⁵ While all women supposedly possess sensitive bodies that gift them with a keener sense of smell, taste, and touch, class further dictates how they use their bodies and their senses. Lower class women were assumed to be natural cooks and caretakers, whereas upper class women performed “a refined version of... ‘women’s work,’ embroidering, arranging flowers and ‘tastefully’ adorning themselves and their homes” (WS 68).⁶

³ Hereafter abbreviated WS.

⁴ See Paul Victor de Sèze, *Recherches physiologiques et philosophiques sur la sensibilité des femmes, ou La Vie animale* (*A Physiological and Philosophical Enquiry into the Sensibility of Women, or Animal Life*) (1786).

⁵ Hereafter abbreviated CA.

⁶ For more on the intersection of gender and class as it pertains to the senses and sensory work, see Constance Classen, *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination*, esp. 66-68.

Common belief maintained that women's bodies were so sensitive, their lower senses so overdeveloped, and their minds so underdeveloped that they were susceptible to myriad sensory impressions. In *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, Robert Jütte notes that, because of their impressionability, women were thought to suffer a sort of sensory "tyranny," from which they needed protecting (138).⁷ Such narratives, in highlighting women's vulnerability, further justified women's place in the home, leaving hardened, broad-shouldered men to brave the rigors of the world outside" (CA 65).

While women's supposed sensory capacities confined them to the private sphere, men's assumed access to the higher senses granted them opportunities in the public sphere. The hard male body was believed to reflect the firm "masculine mind" which, in turn, "resembles the eye and the ear" (Jütte 140). The so-called privileged senses granted men sensory privilege. With their powers of vision, hearing, and subsequent intellectual prowess, men were sent into the world with confidence. Their (assumed) greater capacity to see and hear enabled them to undertake difficult mental work and "made intellectual endeavors such as the arts and sciences the prerogative of men" (CA 66). Women, in contrast, were discouraged from exercising the higher senses and "were expected to eschew mental labour for 'body work'"—work to which their senses, bodies, and minds (or lack thereof) were better suited (WS 68).⁸ More akin to the animal world than the human world, women were posited as sensitive, reactive, and instinctual,

⁷ Because women's ability to see and hear were deemed inferior, so too was their ability to reason and make sense of the world. As such, women were ill-equipped to convert their sensory experiences into higher knowledge and, instead, were at the mercy of their senses, indefensibly bombarded by sensory impressions (Jütte 138).

⁸ As Classen notes, "The weak eyes and soft bodies attributed to women were deemed to indicate that they needed to be guided by men and to stay within the protective shells of their homes" (WS 168). For more on the gendered sensorium, see Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch*.

as opposed to rational and thoughtful.⁹ These gendered, sensory categories are mutually exclusive and mutually constitutive, so that the lower women descend on the sensory totem pole, the higher men ascend. According to Jütte, men and women have long been positioned as “...paired opposites. Where man is a person of reason, woman is a creature of the senses” (139).¹⁰ The telling use of “person” when referring to man and “creature” when referring to woman underscores the sensory Othering inherent in exclusionary sensory hierarchies that divide society along gendered lines.

Sensory lines are not only drawn between men and women. Sensual inferiority was also associated with “[w]orkers, ‘primitives,’ and ‘idiots’” as well as racial, religious, and sexual minorities (“Charting” 120).¹¹ Of the lower senses, smell was one of the strongest indicators of social inferiority. George Orwell explains that as a boy, he and other middle class children “were taught—*the lower classes smell*” (160).¹² He maintains that those “four frightful words which people nowadays are chary of uttering, but which were bandied about quite freely in my

⁹ Perhaps the most compelling example of this is found in classical philosophy, which conceived of the uterus as “a kind of animal, endowed with powers of movement and its own sense of smell” (CA 69). When women fainted, physicians would use unpleasant incense at the woman’s nose and pleasant incense at her vagina to try to coax the uterus—susceptible to movement and migration, as animals are—back into place.

¹⁰ Jütte cites Henri Foquet’s 1765 article on sensibility as one of the first instances wherein philosophers and physicians acknowledged significant differences between men’s and women’s sensory capabilities (137).

¹¹ Race has historically been used to grant and deny sensory privilege. In the nineteenth century, historian Lorenz Oken went so far as to “imagin[e] a sensory hierarchy of racial types, with the European ‘eye-man’ at the top, followed by the Asian ‘ear-man,’ the Native American ‘nose-man,’ the Melanesian ‘tongue-man,’ and the African ‘skin-man’” (CA 67).

¹² Orwell continues: “Very early in life you acquired the idea that there was something subtly repulsive about a working-class body; you would not get nearer to it than you could help. You watched a great sweaty navvy walking down the road with his pick over his shoulder; you looked at his discoloured shirt and his corduroy trousers stiff with dirt of a decade; you thought of those nests and layers of greasy rags below, and, under all, the unwashed body, brown all over (that was how I used to imagine it), with its strong, bacon-like reek...And even ‘lower-class’ people who you knew to be quite clean—servants, for instance—were faintly unappetizing. The smell of their sweat, the very texture of their skins, were mysteriously different from yours” (160). Howes and Classen comment on this naturalization of difference when noting that “peasants were imagined to have coarse skins to signal—and enable them to endure—the coarse physical labour and hard living conditions for which they were suited” (WS 168).

childhood...[were] the real secret of class distinctions in the West” (159).¹³ Smell was a marker of inferior racial and religious groups as well: African Americans and Jews were thought to possess a malodor, the latter for whom “the only cure...was drinking the blood of a Christian” (WS 69). Here again, the dominant social group (in this case Christians) dictates norms and creates dichotomy, establishing both correct and incorrect, acceptable and unacceptable, and desirable and undesirable ways of sensing and being sensed. While, in some instances, sensory perversion can be “corrected” or overcome, typically, a person’s sensory status was understood as biologically unchangeable. According to Classen, “This biopolitics of the senses—conferring social values on sensory (or pseudo-sensory) traits for political ends—emphasized the futility of rebelling against one’s lot in life” (WS 68). Ultimately, sensory categories function to keep people in their “proper” place. Those who stray from these sensory identifications or who “misuse” their sensory faculties threaten the larger social order.¹⁴

The Modernist Sensescape

The threat to the socio-sensory order was particularly prevalent in the modernist period, when bodies refused to stay in place, and when social mobility and fluctuating identity categories became evermore the norm. Such flux incited a sort of frenzy, what Michael Trask calls a “crisis of modernity” (35). This crisis was brought on by “the terminal evasiveness of status fixity—as notable in the tendency of the affluent to lose caste as in the ability of the lowborn to pass for

¹³ Somerset Maugham echoes this sentiment, declaring that “‘In the West we are divided from our fellows by our sense of smell. The working man is our master, inclined to rule us with an iron hand, but it cannot be denied that he stinks...I do not blame the working man because he stinks, but stink he does” (qtd. in Orwell 161). For more on smell as a divisive sense in the modernist period, see Caroline Jones, Chapter Nine: The Modernist Sensorium in *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg’s Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*.

¹⁴ Women who use the so-called domestic senses for their own personal gain fall into this transgressive category. I address this phenomenon in Chapter Three: “‘A zoom severed it’: Sensory Interruption in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*.” See also Constance Classen, “The Witches Senses: Sensory Ideologies and Transgressive Femininities from the Renaissance to Modernity” in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Cultural Reader*.

affluent” (35). Here, lowborn designates not only the working-class, but other slippery individuals, including immigrants, women, and “sexual subjects whose desires were likewise unsettled and roaming, divorced from conventions” (35). While the conventions of which Trask speaks are not sensory specifically, nevertheless, the marginalized groups to which Trask refers, in their “restless craving and instability, [their] endless striving and motion” disrupt easy sensory categorization (2). To mitigate this threat, and to ensure the privileged remained privileged, sensory categories needed to be “fixed” in a way that the upwardly mobile bodies of women, the poor, and minorities were not.¹⁵

Such categories deny the integrated qualities of the sensorium. The sensorium, as described by modernist scholar Steven Connor, is “a kind of grammar, economy or system of relations whereby the senses are related to each other” (184).¹⁶ It is a holistic system that accounts for the intermingling of the senses. And the senses do mingle. As sensory historian Mark M. Smith asserts, the senses do not operate in isolation—in other words, they are not naturally separate—but are intersensorial (12). Intersensoriality “allows us to think in terms of how the senses are combined in a given society, how they work together” (12). Sensory experience is seldom isolated to a single sense but is, instead, relational and multiple—sound is often accompanied by touch, for instance, just as taste is often accompanied by smell. Eating is perhaps the best example of the intersensory in that when we consume food we not only taste the

¹⁵ Women have historically been associated with threatening movements, consistently overflowing the bounds of categorization (and, as Elizabeth Grosz notes, their bras). For further discussion of the ways in which society attempts to contain women’s bodies, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (Theories of Representation and Difference)*.

¹⁶ Or, to borrow a metaphor from Michel Serres’ *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, one might think of the sensorium as a tapestry wherein the senses are inextricably interwoven.

food itself, but might also see its colors, smell its aromas, and hear and feel its various textures as we chew.

The modernist period is an era of bodily and sensory regulation that, in many ways, resists the messiness of multisensuality and the intersensory. Modernist society often sought to stabilize bodies and sensation through bodily reform and sensory regulation movements.¹⁷ One form of sensory regulation is the phenomenon of sensory segmentation. Sensory segmentation denies the integrated sensorium and instead isolates one sense from another, underscoring the senses as separate and divisible. In *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*, Caroline A. Jones examines how sensory segmentation enables the powers that be to manage populations: to stabilize the ever-moving modern bodies to which Trask eludes by dictating which senses are used where and by whom. Growing alongside twentieth-century eugenics movements, sensory segmentation sought to isolate and purify sensory experience.¹⁸ Such divisiveness was a tool of governance and capitalism: by dividing the body and the senses into manageable pieces, so too were the masses divided into governable groups.¹⁹

¹⁷ I discuss bodily reform further in Chapter Two: “‘choked by a robot!’: Technology, Power, and the Battle of the Senses in Mina Loy’s *Insel*.” For more on modernism and bodily reform movements see Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study*, esp. Chapter Four: “Reform! Bodies, Selves, Politics, Aesthetics.”

¹⁸ For more on eugenics’ impact on modernist literature see Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History*, pp. 74-78. For a discussion of eugenics as it pertains to the life and work of William Yeats, specifically, see Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, pp. 155-158.

¹⁹ Jones paints a picture of the modern subject as a series of separate components, which are further delineated by material goods: “Halting or accelerating, creeping into the body and extruding into its prostheses, segmentation was key to being ‘modern,’ taking different forms at different moments. Monocles, dapper canes, bicycles, motor cars, elevators, water closets, tinned food, paint tubes, chemical perfumes, earphones, amphetamines—the body’s place as undifferentiated corpus was nowhere. The body’s limb, portals, products, and pathways, as separated functions and administrative units, were everywhere” (Jones 390-1).

Such divisions deny not only the intersensory, but the synaesthetic. Likewise, sensory segmentation posits synaesthesia as unnatural and unwanted. Synaesthesia derives from the Greek *συναίσθησις*, meaning joint perception (“synaesthesia”). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “a sensation in one part of the body produced by a stimulus applied to another part” (“synaesthesia”). Synaesthesia can be biological, as when letters of the alphabet or musical notes appear as colors, or cultural, as when artists intentionally feature synaesthesia or cross-modal sensory experience in their work. Historically, however, synaesthesia has been viewed as a neurological phenomenon and labeled either a “pathology or a gift” (WS 153).²⁰ In the centuries leading up to the modernist period, scientists and psychologists leaned toward the former. They viewed synaesthesia as evidence of a disturbed mind, one that forged irrational associations among the senses. In the eighteenth century, for instance, there was a general feeling that “the senses have been *confused* and mingled; what is needed is further purification and segmentation: the nose alone should smell, the eyes should only look, and taste should be reserved for the tongue” (Jones 395). At the end of the nineteenth century, the German physician Max Nordau echoed these claims. Nordau was a key figure in the vilification of synaesthesia in the arts. He asserted that the intentional use of synaesthesia by the Symbolists and other *fin de siècle* writers was a sign of degeneracy, which he describes in his monograph of the same name. Such sensual degeneracy could be found in all corners of the art world and, in the following example, Nordau elucidates how synaesthesia impacted (or, in his mind, infected) the dramatic arts:

²⁰ Howes and Classen explain that “standard psychological and neuroscientific accounts of [synaesthesia] hold it to be a rare neurological condition that causes an affected individual to experience such ‘irrational’ sensory associations as tastes being linked to sounds or the letters of the alphabet having colours” (WS 11). They go on to assert that “Viewing synaesthesia as either a pathology or a gift, misses the key ways in which it is socially elaborated,” the ways “cross-modal connections [are] generally shared by all humans” (WS 153).

A hose is set up in the theatre, by which the spectators are sprayed with perfumes.

On the stage a poem in approximately dramatic form is recited. In every division, act, scene, or however the thing is called, a different vowel-sound is made to preponderate; during each the theater is illuminated with a differently tinted light, the orchestra discourses music in a different key, and the jet gives out a different perfume. (14-15)²¹

While Nordau feared the corruptive and corrosive powers of synaesthetic art, he also believed that, as the twentieth-century progressed, so too would the human race. Synaesthesia would become a thing of the past. “Degenerates must succumb,” he proclaimed, reasoning that their hysterical and neurasthenic natures would eventually “end their race” (541). Differently stated, synaesthesia was thought to be “the product of soft, fuzzy thinking in an age that demanded clear minds and cold, hard facts. [In the modern age, s]ynaesthesia could no longer be taken seriously” (WS 173).

Though Classen maintains that “The multisensory aesthetics of the late nineteenth century, consequently, provide us with a compelling last glimpse at a shared vision of a world in which ‘sounds, fragrance, and colours correspond,’” I identify a shared vision among modernist women writers, one that spans the twentieth century (CA 113). I work from a culturally inflected definition of synaesthesia in order to examine how “synaesthesia can function as a fundamental vehicle for the production of cultural meaning” (WS 11). Sensory purification projects encouraged some modernists, like those women writers this project highlights, to undertake

²¹ For Nordau, the detrimental influence of such artists and works of art could not be overstated: “They corrupt and delude; they do, alas! frequently exercise a deep influence, but this is always a baneful one... They, likewise, are leading men along the paths they themselves have found to new goals; but these goals are abysses or waste places” (24).

sensory unification projects, but those projects were often dismissed or driven underground.²²

Constance Classen suggests that

[T]he theory of a unity of the senses had lost much of its artistic and public favor by the end of the First World War. It was generally taken to be no more than a quaint holdover from the *la belle époque*, hardly relevant to the changing social and intellectual climate of the new century. The fact that scientific studies had demonstrated that there was no agreement among synaesthetes as to which color corresponded to which musical note, and so on, seemed to emphasize the idiosyncratic, illusory nature of sensory correspondences... The ideal of a sensory interplay, if not entirely forgotten, was nonetheless deemed to be out of date. (CA 112)²³

Like Classen, Steven Connor consigns synaesthesia to sensory and literary subcultures. He submits that “[t]he very separation of the senses into different channels encouraged efforts to put them back together or amalgamate them in new and unexpected ways. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, there was a growing cult of synaesthesia” (187). He goes on to say that sensory unification projects “were validated by a romantic view that the senses were by nature a fluid continuum that was violently and illegitimately broken apart by social forces” (187). Connor seems skeptical of synaesthetic undertakings—his use of “cult” implies that synaesthetic writing was limited to a relatively small, perhaps misguided group of individuals who bought into a

²² This is true among modernist visual artists as well. Jones describes those artists of the anti-Greenbergian movements of the late 1950s as “transgressives who staged themselves against a segmented sensorium” from the “underground” (397).

²³ Elsewhere, Howes and Classen repeat this claim, maintaining that “As the twentieth century progressed... attempts to combine the senses in art (particularly when they engaged the lower senses) were generally marginalized by mainstream aesthetics” (WS 28). They go on to say that those works of art “that *did* become part of the cannon were shorn of their unusual sensory dimensions. The tactile tables of the Futurists, [for example], were transformed into visual icons of modern art” (WS 28).

“romantic” or naive view of sensory perception.²⁴ His comments provide insight into why synaesthesia, as a literary phenomenon, has not been widely explored among modernist scholars: synaesthesia is coded as feminine.²⁵ Connor’s critique draws attention to the similarities between the rhetoric used to disparage synaesthetes and that used to disparage women. Like women, synaesthesia was thought to be soft, messy, imbalanced, and irrational—a faddish triviality among misfits. However, like those modernist women writers to which this project turns, synaesthesia also surpasses boundaries and refuses limitations. My project continues to recover the projects of modernist women writers, which have been long overlooked. “It was decided that synaesthesia was a rare condition, most common among artists and other ‘marginal’ individuals” (WS 173). *Dissensual Women* brings much needed attention to those marginalized voices

Modernist Scholarship and the Senses

Modernist writers played a central role in rethinking sensory paradigms and reimagining the senses. In *Modernism: A Cultural History*, Tim Armstrong acknowledges the work of H.D. and Virginia Woolf as evidence that “a heightened sensitivity to sensation is central to modern experience” (90). Likewise, Ralf Hertel, who studies literary depictions of the senses, notes that “[i]n the modern period, with its technical extensions of the senses and its overflow of stimuli, perception itself becomes the focus of literary investigation” (176). Such literary investigations have, in turn, become the subject of modernist scholarship, much of which fruitfully attends to

²⁴ Connor seems to take issue with the cultural use of synaesthesia as a form of sensory fluidity. He comments that biological synaesthesia, for the true synaesthete, is not fluid, but “a fixation” characterized by “locked associations” (188).

²⁵ In 1938, psychologist and self-proclaimed Nazi E.R. Jaensch identified synaesthetes as the “Gegentypus or Anti-Type” (Brown 39). Jaensch equated synaesthesia with “a kind of perceptual slovenliness, the qualities of one sense carelessly mixed with those of another.” The Anti-Type, Jaensch contended, was “characterized by ambiguous and indefinite judgments and [was] lacking in perseverance.” He implies that the synaesthetic Anti-Type is womanly: its antithesis was “the tough, masculine, firm...man you could rely on.” Nordau, to his credit, maintained that men were just as susceptible to synaesthesia and hysteria as women.

literary depictions of the senses. However, modernist scholarship also reflects the sensory hierarchy in that it often privileges sight and sound. Monographs like Karen Jacobs' *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* to Sam Halliday's *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture, and the Arts* valuably examine modernist sight-and-soundscapes by focusing on the ear and the eye.²⁶ More recently, however, modernist scholarship reflects an interest in the less-studied, lower senses. Abbie Garrington's *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing*, is a noteworthy example of this lower-sensory turn. In *Haptic Modernism*, Garrington examines the way "modernist texts – literary, scientific, philosophical and journalistic – return with unprecedented alacrity to the haptic experiences of the human body" (50). Touch, Garrington claims, is central to the modernist experience, an integral way in which modernist subjects come to know themselves and their worlds. In reclaiming touch's centrality, Garrington refashions the "base sense," as Aristotle called it, as a foundational sensory modality, "a scaffold on which the other senses are built" (18). "To study touch," she proclaims, "is to study the whole body in its carnal, fleshly reality" (19).

It is to this "whole body" experience that my project turns. *Dissensual Women* continues the ongoing recovery of the lower senses in modernist literature, but it does so in the broader context of the larger sensorium. Although modernist scholarship has not ignored the roles of the senses entirely, it has, at times, overlooked their holistic representation. Because of this, most current studies on the senses have been single-sense projects. By their very nature, such works are limited. Considering the senses outside of the larger sensorium—with its intersensory

²⁶ This is not to say that such studies proclaim the superiority of sight or sound. Among those works devoted to sight, Martin Jay's renowned *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* challenges the supposed hegemony of vision that was once synonymous with the modernist period. He offers a more nuanced view of the relationship between modernism and sight, from "a palpable loss of confidence in the eye" during and following WWI (212), to an attempt at "visionary redemption" through a return to the innocent eye by Surrealists, Jay argues that modernism's relation to the visual is highly fraught (236).

relationships and synaesthetic connections—does not fully account for the complex ways in which the senses shape society. My project removes the senses from the limited framework of the single-sense study, places them in the context of the broader sensorium, and underscores their connectivity in order to more fully articulate their role in modernism. Unlike previous studies that focus on one or two senses, *Dissensual Women* transcends the single-sense paradigm in order to address the subversive potential of sensory integration.²⁷ I attend to this intersensory experience by demonstrating how H.D., Mina Loy, Virginia Woolf, and Elizabeth Bowen’s willingness to integrate the senses inspires them to breach other sensory borders: borders society erects between men and women, nature and technology, queer and “straight” bodies, the abled and so-called disabled, and the human and nonhuman.

Modernism, the Senses, and Technology

To better understand how modernist writers perceived the senses, modernist scholars often think through technology. Modernist scholarship widely acknowledges the impact of technology on the body, the senses, and modernist literature. In *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, Tim Armstrong observes that the modernist-period “both a fragmentation and augmentation of the body in relation to technology; it offers the body as lack, at the same time as it offers technological compensation” (3). Technology not only called into question the ways modernist subjects conceived of their bodies, but the way they conceived of and engaged their senses. In *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*, Sara Danius identifies the period from 1880-1930 as one marked by a “technologically-mediated crisis of the senses” (1). The camera, for instance, initiated a crisis of vision; it provided a more comprehensive, objective way of seeing that challenged the reliability, let alone the supremacy,

²⁷ Mark M. Smith points out that, as of 2007, the intersensory was a recent phenomenon and that intersensory were “only now being taken seriously by historians” (12).

of the naked human eye (Danius 14-15). Likewise, the telephone changed not only the way people communicated, but how they listened and conceived of listening.²⁸ Pamela L. Caughie summarizes this phenomenon when saying that “human perception...is organized differently by new media so that how we see and hear, even what we see and hear, changes” (xxi). By calling previous assumptions about the senses and their limits into question, technology encouraged modernist subjects to redefine the senses and reconsider relationships among them. New technologies “produced new sensual experiences, which in turn led to new concepts of national and personal identity and new understandings of the world around us” (Caughie xx).

Many important studies examine how technology influences modernist writers and writing about the senses. Some scholars view this question through the lens of a specific technology or group of technologies. For instance, *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, edited by Adalaide Morris, engages with a range of acoustic technologies—from telephones to microphones to loudspeakers—while *Broadcasting Modernism*, edited by Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle, and Jane Lewty, engages with the radio specifically, locating it at the center of modernist thinking and writing. Other works explore technology’s impact on specific writers, as does Pamela L. Caughie’s edited collection, *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Still other works examine technological influence through specific senses, as does Sara Danius’s *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*. According to Danius, her book “chronicles the adventures of the eye and the ear in the early twentieth century... [and] maps the specific ways in which aesthetic developments intersect with technological developments” (2). However, though Danius focuses

²⁸ The narrator in Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, for instance, notices how much sight—his ability to look into others eyes and observe their facial expressions—impacts the way he hears, so that when he hears his grandmother’s voice over the telephone, it was as if he was hearing “her voice itself...for the first time” (qtd. in Danius 12).

on the eye and ear, she examines literature that “may appeal to the all the senses,” remarking that “[i]n the age of sensory dissociation and reification, such a synaesthetic ideal is no coincidence” (4).

My approach to the senses and technology takes this synaesthetic ideal as its premise. I illustrate the ways in which H.D., Loy, Woolf, and Bowen challenge the assumption that “The spread of new technologies in sensory transmission and reproduction, such as the telephone, the phonograph, the radio and the movie camera, called attention to the divisibility of sensory reality, not to its unity” (CA 112). These writers take issue with the idea that technologies were often associated with a single sense or required that one sense be exercised more than the others: that the telephone and gramophone favored the ear, for instance, just as the fluoroscope and X-ray favored the eye.²⁹ While this project details how single-sense ideology persists, it also questions technology’s impact on the lower senses (those that might not correspond as easily or as readily to a particular technology) and interactions among the senses. How, for instance, does the X-ray impart touch or evoke taste? How might the airplane welcome new sounds, both (wo)man-made and naturally-occurring? How is the radio felt as much as it is heard? How does the microscope invite questions not only about sight, but about the way sight mingles with other sensations? The technologies I discuss can be loosely categorized as technologies of science or medicine, such as the microscope and X-ray; technologies of transmission, such as the gramophone, radio, and telephone; and technologies of transportation, such as the automobile and airplane. Some of the technologies I discuss are modernist-era inventions; others date to an

²⁹ In this way, my work follows that of Laura U. Marks who, in *Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, posits film as multisensual.

earlier time period, but saw an increase in use or an advanced iteration during the modernist period.

I begin my sensory exploration with a writer who has long been linked to the visual, H.D. In the first chapter, “H.D., ~~Imagiste~~ Synaesthete,” I examine the relationships H.D. forges among sight, sound, and touch in her *roman à clef*, *HERmione*. I demonstrate how H.D.’s willingness to integrate the senses inspires her to breach borders between human and nonhuman sensoriums. Using sensory theory and queer phenomenology, I argue that the novel’s heterosexual relationships discourage sensory integration and experimentation, while its lesbian relationship encourages it. Throughout the novel, male figures uphold traditional sensory hierarchies, privilege vision, and enact sensory violence against women. I implicate the microscope, an ocularcentric technology, in this violence and illustrate how it prompts Hermione, the novel’s eponymous protagonist, to re-envision the senses. Hermione’s queer relationship further counteracts male sensory imposition by encouraging her to explore nontraditional, or queer, sensory practices and to reconfigure her understanding of not only sexual relationships, but sensory relationships. While doing this revisionary work, Hermione crafts a synaesthetic sensorium, one that features sensory interplay. Specifically, she emphasizes the redemptive qualities of multisensuality by coupling touch with sight through hapticity, and touch with sound through vibration. Hermione’s exploration of sensory connections inspires her to explore and connect the human and nonhuman, and she turns to sea life as a model for sensory integration.

The second chapter, “‘choked by a robot!’: Technology, Power, and the Battle of the Senses in Mina Loy’s *Insel*,” continues to expose sensory violence against women. In this chapter, I posit the sex war as a sense war, a battle modernist women fought (and contemporary women continue to fight) for sensory access and affirmation of their embodied experience. In

Insel, Loy juxtaposes two artists, Insel, a character loosely based on the German painter Richard Oelze, and Mrs. Jones, a character loosely based on Loy herself. Through this juxtaposition, Loy attends to different approaches to the body, senses, technology, in art. The first is a “masculine” approach, one that Loy sees in the work of Surrealists and Futurists, and Insel himself. This approach regulates or altogether refuses sensory experience, especially related to the so-called lower, feminine senses. Insel seeks to rid himself of the feminine through technological intervention and fortification. He, and other male artists like him, use technology to discipline the senses and commit sensory violence against women. Loy shows the dehumanizing effects of such sensual violence and sensory suppression. In contrast, she offers an integrationist approach that combines the body, the senses, and technology. Mrs. Jones, who adopts this approach, elevates the female body and the so-called lower senses at a time when they were increasingly denigrated, especially in the sciences. She imagines the female body itself as a sensory technology, one that registers sensations that machines cannot. In so doing, she promotes smell, taste, and touch as valuable modes of knowing, both in scientific investigation and in literature.

The third chapter, “‘...A zoom severed it’: Sensory Interruption in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*,” further investigates the feminist repurposing of technology in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf invokes disruptive technologies associated with WWII, such as the megaphone and the airplane, to wage her own war on sensory habituation. Sensory habituation refers to those sensory practices that, over time, become sensory habits that we enact automatically, without much thought or consideration. These habits are reinforced by a given society which dictates which sensory practices are acceptable and which are not. Social norms dictate sensory norms. Woolf, however, asks her readers to sense anew. Using sensory theory and technology theory, I demonstrate how Woolf promotes non-normative

sensory practices and advocates for diverse sensory communities composed of the human and nonhuman. In *Between the Acts*, lower class characters, environmental interjections from trees and birds, and various rouge technologies serve as models for how to interrupt sensory habituation, challenge sensory normativity, and think beyond the human sensorium.

The fourth and final chapter “Sensory Dystopia: the Sights, Sounds, and Technologies of Elizabeth Bowen’s *Eva Trout*,” continues to theorize technological disruption by examining harmful visual and audio technologies in Elizabeth Bowen’s *Eva Trout* (*Changing Scenes*). In *Eva Trout*, Bowen communicates anxieties about technology and sensory impairment by crafting a limited, dystopian sensorium. She does this, in part, through the depiction of visual culture’s invasiveness, which illustrates society’s fixation on seeing, and through the character of a deaf child, whose disability illustrates society’s obsession with hearing. Using sensory theory, disability studies, and cultural histories of the radio, I demonstrate how Bowen argues for a more expansive sensorium and warns against the dangers of privileging the “higher” senses.

In *Women of the Left Bank*, Shari Benstock notes that women's names do not often appear on the literary manifestos that circulated during the modernist period and that “[t]hose called by Modernist manifestos to rally to the cause were men” (379). This has given the impression, in some circles, that women’s writing was not politically inflected or that women’s motivations for writing did not merge. *Dissensual Women* argues otherwise. Together, the sensory work of H.D., Mina Loy, Virginia Woolf, and Elizabeth Bowen reads as a manifesto, a commitment to disrupt sensory norms and expose how modernist society honors certain sensory experiences while marginalizing and maligning others. The pluralistic sensory projects of these women, whose approaches differ but whose aims are shared, demand that modernist scholars turn our eyes to the

long-overlooked value of the lower senses and open our ears to the too-often-unheard voices of female dissent. They remind us to continue to smell, taste, and touch modernism anew.

Chapter 1

H.D., ~~Imagiste~~ Synaesthete

“Carl Gart looked up from a superimposed bit of glass on a bit of glass that had already squashed flat a bit of alga [sic]. The thing, [Hermione] knew, would look odd, unholy in its beauty under the microscope that one thin hand was screwing, adjusting to his vision” (*Hermione* 99).³⁰ In this sensory-rich scene, H.D. crafts a link between sight, touch, and the scientific technology of the microscope. Her assertion that the microscope makes things look odd and unholy underscores modernist questions about the effects of technology and, in particular, the effects of technology on the senses and on perception. It is to these sensual perversions, limitations, and possibilities that H.D. attends in the posthumously published roman à clef, *HERmione*.

When writing *HERmione*, H.D. committed to reliving a particularly tumultuous time in her life: a time when sensory alternatives became ever more important to understanding and asserting herself both as a woman and a writer. During this time, H.D. felt especially excluded from society and family, and admits to being “severely depressed by a double sense of failure—as a student and as a woman” (*Psyche* 40).³¹ After withdrawing from Bryn Mawr College, to her family’s disdain, Hermione spends her days listlessly, unconcerned with socializing or success or any of the things a young woman “should” be. Hermione further mystifies her family by agreeing to marry the eccentric George Lowndes (the novel’s Ezra Pound figure—a man with a “reputation” as Hermione’s mother says), and later developing a close relationship with the even

³⁰ Hereafter abbreviated *H*.

³¹ H.D. confessed to her close friend William Carlos Williams that she “felt she had failed by all the conventional and scholarly standards. She had failed in her college career; she had failed as a social asset with her family and the indiscriminate mob of relatives and relays of communal friends that surrounded it. She had burned her candle of rebellion at both ends and she was left unequipped for the simplest dealings with the world” (qtd. in Guest 27).

more baffling Fayne Rabb (the novel's Frances Josepha Gregg figure) (*H* 99). However, this was a time wherein Hermione was failing to meet not only social expectations, but sensory expectations: a time wherein she failed to make "common sense." "Common sense" refers to those sensory practices that, over time, become common to and accepted by a given society—the sensory practices society values, as opposed to the practices they marginalize, ignore, or deem deviant.³² As a result, political theorist Davide Panagia explains, "We always already know it means to sense, what seeing, touching, and hearing are" (7). We take perception for granted—we assume that sensory practices are "natural" as opposed to socially constructed. Following Jacques Rancière, Panagia suggests that "sensory regimes" or "regimes of perception" (what Rancière calls "the 'distribution of the sensible'"), "confer what counts as common sense" (7). These regimes are often controlled by social elites: the wealthy, the powerful, the white, the male. There are moments, however, when these sensory regimes and their "common sense" practices are challenged—moments when sensory hierarchies are broken and when habitual sensory practices yield to personal sensory choices. Such is the case with H.D.'s *HERmione*.

H.D.'s so-called failure to conform to sensory norms is a productive one, I argue, in that it offers an alternative sensorium that challenges normative sensory practices and divisions. In so doing, H.D. writes a *dissensual* text – one that wages dissent through radical acts of sensing and radical reconfigurations of the senses.³³ This chapter reads H.D.'s *HERmione* as a highly dissensual novel, wherein H.D. resists male sensory imposition and sensory technologies that

³² For more on Jacques Rancière's theories of common sense and consensus, see the Introduction.

³³ "Dissensual," adapted from Rancière's "dissensus," combines "dissent" and "sensual" to identify those sensory practices or radical ideas about sensation and perception that challenge the status quo. Dissensus is, in the words of Davide Panagia, "an aesthetic-political moment that results in the reconfiguration of the regimes of perception that seize our attention, so that we can no longer assume the legislative authority of any one form of perception" (42). In other words, dissensus challenges socially constructed sensory hierarchies that privilege some senses and sensory practices while denigrating others.

divide not only the senses, but the sexes. Though H.D. fails to meet sensory standards, she successfully promotes sensory alternatives that challenge traditional sensory hierarchies and the damaging assumptions upon which they rest.

H.D.'s alternative sensorium has particular implications for women, especially queer women. Sensory scholar and anthropologist Constance Classen explains that, in the West, the senses have long been gendered, often to the detriment of women. To split sensory practices along gendered lines affords men particular privileges that women are denied. Men, for instance, are commonly associated with the privileged senses of sight and sound, which are, in turn, associated with reason. These “distance” senses enable men to engage in “distance activities’, such as traveling and governing” (*Color of Angels* 66). In contrast, smell, taste and touch, the “proximity” senses, confine women to the home, since these so-called “lower” senses were inherent in household duties.³⁴ Smell, taste, and touch were often conceived of as being more embodied than sight or sound and, in this way, more befitting women, whose minds were not as developed as men.³⁵ Heteronormative narratives, by reinforcing gender binaries, reinforce these so-called sensory “norms.” Such narratives suggest that coupling men with women results in the perfect balance of reason and emotion, pragmatism and sensuality.³⁶ In the twentieth century, women’s increasing social mobility and political agency put pressure on these narratives. Once-

³⁴ For further discussion of women’s work and sensory practices, see Classen, “The Witches Senses: Sensory Ideologies and Transgressive Femininities from the Renaissance to Modernity” in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Cultural Reader*, and Howes and Classen, “The Politics of Perception: Sensory and Social Ordering” in *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*.

³⁵ For further discussion of gendered sensory norms, see the Introduction.

³⁶ Like other gendered binaries, sensory binaries are mutually exclusive and mutually constitutive so that, the lower women descended on the sensory totem pole, the higher men ascended. Nineteenth century French and German physiologists and empirical sensualists position women and men as “paired opposites” where “man is a person of reason, woman is a creature of the senses” (Jütte 139).

contained female bodies—with their smells and sounds, and the threat of their touch—were more public, more visible, and more contaminating.³⁷ As twentieth-century women transgressed traditional sensory categories, they demanded new sensory identifications.

H.D. plays an integral role in rewriting sensory narratives for women. Because of H.D.'s association with Imagism and cinema, and because of modernism's links to the visual, it is not surprising that scholarship on H.D. often attends to the optic aspects of her oeuvre.³⁸ While such scholarship is important to understanding H.D.'s sensory project, and the larger sensory projects of modernism, H.D.'s rewriting of the senses extends beyond her revolutionary optics. Indeed, to read *HERmione* with an eye solely toward the visual devalues the other senses H.D. elevates and discredits the intersensory work she does. Karen Jacobs, author of *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture*, places H.D. among those modernists who share “a diminished

³⁷ The women's suffrage movement, in particular, fueled both social and sensual change, and the sound of women's voices in the political and public spheres promised further sensory disruption. Such feminism gave birth to subversive figures like the flapper, the quintessential example of the overly visible, ever-sensual modernist woman. For more on the flapper, feminine visibility, and woman as modernist spectacle, see Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s*. For more on the sensory aspects of the women's suffrage movement, see Howes and Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*, esp. 76-77. For more on the fear of sensory contamination and the regulation of gendered bodies in the modernist period, see Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History*, esp. 65-78 and *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study*; Tim Edensor, “The Social Life of the Senses: Ordering and Disordering the Modern Sensorium”; and Michael Trask, *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought*.

³⁷ See, for instance, Karen Jacobs, *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture*; Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*; and Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture, and the Arts*.

³⁸ A survey of titles alone illustrates this impulse: Rachel Ann Connor, *H.D. and the Image*; Christina Walter's *Optical Impersonality: Science, Images, and Literary Modernism*; and Charlotte Mandel, “Magical Lenses: Poet's Vision beyond the Naked Eye” and “The Redirected Image: Cinematic Dynamics in the Style of H.D.” That is not to say, however, that the other senses are entirely ignored by H.D. scholars. Notably, Adalaide Morris, in her edited collection *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, examines representations of sound and sound technologies in H.D.'s epic *Helen in Egypt*. In general, H.D.'s poetry garners the most critical attention, while her prose has yet to be fully probed.

For further discussion about the centrality of sight and modernist challenges to that claim, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*; Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*, esp. “The Modernist Sensorium”; and *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, edited by David Michael Levin.

faith...regarding the capacity of vision to deliver reliable knowledge” and who “critique the forms of violence that vision inevitability seems to entail” (3).³⁹ Likewise, Rachel Connor, author of *H.D. and the Image*, observes that “H.D.’s writing resists the dominant scopic economy” (61). I argue that H.D. does not resist sight as much as she revises it, along with the larger sensorium. In so doing, she underscores the intersensory—“the manifold relationships among the different senses”—and the synaesthetic (*Ways of Sensing* 5).⁴⁰ In their research on synaesthesia, David Howes and Constance Classen note that, “far from being solely a rare neurological condition, synaesthesia can function as a fundamental vehicle for the production of cultural meaning” (*Ways of Sensing* 11). H.D. produces new meaning not only by creating new ways of looking, but by providing an alternative to visual dominance by imbricating the senses in unexpected junctions. Her dissensual, synaesthetic imperative challenges attempts to stabilize or reinforce traditional ways of classifying both the senses and sensing bodies. Extending the visual work done by earlier critics, I articulate how H.D. provides an alternative to visual dominance not only by creating new ways of looking, but by imbricating the senses in unexpected junctions.

³⁹ Jacobs identifies three cultural developments that lead to the mistrust of sight: 1). “newly skeptical philosophical discourses of vision in the first half of the twentieth century,” 2). “the accelerating impact of visual technologies,” and 3). “the emergence of anthropology and sociology as academic disciplines” (2). Likewise, Hertel identifies “a rising interest in the other senses and a questioning of the sense of sight in the period after the Second World War,” (184). This interest appears earlier than Hertel suggests, however, as H.D.’s work attests.

⁴⁰ Synaesthesia, from the Greek word, *συναίσθησις* meaning joint perception, underscores unification— an interplay between the senses that is antithetical to more categorical sensory and social thinking. Like Howes and Classen, I work from a culturally inflected definition of synaesthesia that attends to the often simultaneous evocation of sensory impressions. This differs from “the standard neurological perspective” that views synaesthesia as “a physiological condition in which certain perceptions trigger unrelated sensations, for example, a musical note may elicit a mental sensation of colour” (*Ways of Sensing* 153). As Howes and Classen note, “Viewing synaesthesia as either a pathology or a gift, misses the key ways in which it is socially elaborated” and the ways in which “cross-modal connections [are] generally shared by all humans” (*Ways of Sensing* 153). For more on synaesthesia, see David Howes, “Scent, Sound, and Synesthesia: Intersensoriality and Material Culture Theory” in *The Handbook of Material Culture*, and David Howes and Constance Classen, “Synaesthesia Unravelling: The Union of the Senses from a Cultural Perspective” in *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*.

I attend to this intersensory experience in *HERmione* by examining the relationships among sight, sound, and touch and by demonstrating how H.D.'s willingness to integrate the senses inspires her to breach borders between human and nonhuman sensoriums. Using sensory theory and queer phenomenology, I argue that the novel's heterosexual relationships discourage sensory integration and experimentation, while its lesbian relationship encourages it. Throughout the novel, male figures uphold traditional sensory hierarchies, privilege vision, and enact sensory violence against women. I implicate the microscope, an ocularcentric technology, in this violence and illustrate how it prompts Hermione, the novel's eponymous protagonist, to re-envision the senses. Hermione's queer relationship further counteracts male sensory imposition by encouraging her to explore nontraditional sensory practices and to reconfigure her understanding of not only sexual relationships, but sensory relationships. While doing this revisionary work, Hermione crafts a synaesthetic sensorium, one that features sensory interplay. Specifically, she emphasizes the redemptive qualities of multisensuality by coupling touch with sight through hapticity, and touch with sound through vibration. Hermione's exploration of sensory connections inspires her to explore and connect the human and nonhuman, and she turns to sea life as a model for sensory integration.

The Microscope and Male Imposition: Limiting the Sensorium, Denying Sensory Agency

At the time H.D. was writing *HERmione*, sensory experience and questions about perception were complicated by technology. In *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*, Sara Danus identifies the period from 1880-1930 as one marked by a "technologically-mediated crisis of the senses" (1). While many technologies of this period called into question previous assumptions about the senses, their associations, and their limits, other technologies were rooted in tradition, and reinforced sensory and gender divisions.

Technologies of science, for example, often belonged to an antiquated social and sensory order and remained under the purview of men.⁴¹ H.D. understood this firsthand. Her father and paternal grandfather were well-known astronomers and botanists, respectively, and, in the novel, Hermione's brother Bertram, and father, Carl are also botanists, often glued to their microscopes. As a predominately visual apparatus, the microscope underscores sensory segmentation and resembles other so-called single sense technologies that proliferated at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a predominately visual technology, the microscope of H.D.'s day is also predominately male, a technology associated with the mind and not the body. Of the microscope, the German physician Max Nordau gushed, "What saintly legend is as beautiful as the life of an inquirer who spends his existence bending over a microscope, almost without bodily wants...without any other ambition than that perhaps one little new fact may be firmly established?" (110). Responding to this comment, Constance Classen observes that "the intense visualism of the scientist at his microscope 'almost without bodily wants,' provides a contrast to the artistic celebration of multisensory experience" (CA 119). Such single-sense, male oriented technologies are antithetical to H.D.'s intersensory aims.

Through the microscope, H.D. conveys masculine and visual dominance, the male-centric and ocularcentric sensory hierarchies against which Hermione rebels. For Hermione, the microscope functions as a sort of panopticon, looming in the background of the novel, amplifying her failures and unconventionalities, and serving as a constant reminder of how, as Rachel Connor puts it, "the economy of the scopic works to reinforce heterosexual privilege, as

⁴¹ In the aptly titled "The Death of the Sensuous Chemist: the 'New' Chemistry and the Transformation of Sensuous Technology," Lissa L. Roberts explains that from the late eighteenth century onward, scientists began to think of the human sensorium as untrustworthy, even obstructive. Roberts notes moments when "the presence of chemists' bodies were deemed a downright nuisance" (117). By extension, women's bodies, commonly associated with the lower senses, were a particular nuisance since, "In the 'new' chemistry, taste and smell virtually disappeared as formal media of chemical analysis" (123).

well as gender binaries” (67). The microscope and the scopic regime it represents depend, in part, on granting sensory access to some and limiting sensory access for others. Carl Gart enforces the sensory regime in his household and, in so doing, attempts to control which senses are used where, when, and by whom. This is most visible in Carl’s relationship to his wife, and the limited sensory agency he grants her. When Hermione asks her mother, “Why are you always knitting? Only old ladies knit and knit like you do,” Eugenia answers, “I can knit in the dark. I can’t sew in the dark. Your father likes the light concentrated in a corner. He can work better if I’m sitting in the dark” (79). Here, Carl hoards light and, along with it, the ability to see, leaving his wife in darkness. With an emphasis on what Eugenia “can” and “can’t” do, this moment emblemizes the division of sensory work common of the traditional, gendered sensorium: Carl employs vision to do public work, while Eugenia employs touch to do domestic work. H.D., however, is critical of these binaries, and positions Carl as a sort of sensory oligarch: “Father, your father. Eugenia sitting in the darkness, the green shade, fixed now here, now there over the just one blazing electric light, just one concentrated circle of light across the half of a desk, strewn with papers, only Gart’s papers were always piled in little heaps, folded up in little bundles” (79). The repetition of “one,” underscores Carl’s dominance—his way is the only way—and he uses his power to maneuver not only the light, but his wife’s sensory faculties. The space allotted for light/sight is painfully reduced—“just one” small circle on only half of a desk—and the more Carl sees, the less Eugenia can. Unable to do her own work, Eugenia tends to her husband’s. She keeps his papers—folds them into little bundles—since this is the only sighted work she can do freely.⁴²

⁴² Eugenia’s predicament, and the general state of Hermione’s home, reflect those of H.D.’s mother, Helen, and H.D.’s childhood. Guest describes Helen as “stranded in domesticity” and William Carlos Williams, “a frequent guest at [H.D.’s home] Upper Darby, gives a description of the household that suggests a combination of rigidity and confusion dominated by Professor Doolittle.” According to Williams, “Mrs. Doolittle led a harassed life and

Hermione's relationship with her father is just as fraught, and through their many awkward encounters, H.D. portrays the damage done by ocularcentric thinking. To think ocularcentrically is to subscribe to other tenants of traditional sensory hierarchies that not only value sight over all other senses, but devalue alternative sense-making practices and those who practice them. In other words, vision is linked to a damaging and damning ideology. In *HERmione*, Carl Gart and his microscope represent this system. In the eyes of Carl, Hermione's nonconformity is not only a failure to act properly—to graduate from Bryn Mar, to conform to gender norms, and so on—but to sense properly.⁴³ H.D. suggests as much when writing, "Hermione has some odd way of seeing...she had failed him" (*H* 100). The failure is mutual, however, and father and daughter cannot find common sensory ground. H.D. epitomizes their opposing social and sensory views when Hermione enters her father's lab with an important announcement and Carl fails to see her:

"Father. I am going to marry George Lowndes" ...Carl Gart pulled away his eye from the microscopic lens and with an effort jolted himself back, with a jolt brought himself back to—"Eugenia." "I'm not Eugenia, I'm Hermione." Carl Gart saw a tall creature, his own daughter, with odd unholy eyes. Eyes shone odd and unholy in a white face. Carl Gart brought his mind by a superhuman effort to readjustment to the thing before him. He saw an odd fury-ridden creature with white face and flame-lipped face and a face where two

showed it...the five children were all over the house...When they were at dinner and Mrs. Doolittle noticed that the Professor wished to speak, she would quickly announce: Your father is about to speak! Silence immediately ensued...It was a disheartening process" (qtd. in Guest 17).

⁴³ H.D. often felt pressured by her father's boasts that his "one girl was worth all her brothers" (qtd. in Guest 14). This led H.D. to feel that "she must, despite her own inclinations, please her father...This sense of duty makes her early escape from the family and her father all the more remarkable" (Guest 14). For more on H.D.'s family dynamics, see Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined*, esp. Chapter Two: "Moravian Heritage."

lips were drawn tight almost like dead lips across a skeleton. He saw ridges in the face, fine bones beneath the surface. (99)

Seeming not to hear Hermione, Carl stares at his daughter as if seeing her for the first time. “Face” repeats obsessively, suggestive of Carl’s scientific fixation on the “thing” before him, of which he tries, but fails to make sense. Similarly, he tries and fails to enact an empathetic gaze as he searches his daughter’s expression for signs of humanity, but sees only fury and rage. Hermione remains “odd” and unidentifiable, a “creature” more akin to a scientific specimen than a human being. Carl’s X-ray vision does not see Hermione as much it sees *through* her, rendering her “dead” and skeletal, the “bones” not of his daughter, but of a mere “thing.” This kind of seeing dehumanizes both Hermione and her father.⁴⁴ Ironically, by investing all his faith in sight, Carl is blinded: with one eye always open to the microscope, his other eye remains shut to alternative identities and their subsequent alternative sensory practices.⁴⁵ Under the eye and in the hands of men, the microscope represents single-sense engagement and a rigid worldview—a literally shrunken perspective—that shrinks and otherwise limits not only their own sensory capacities, but the sensory capabilities of the women around them.

Elevation of sight and sighted technologies, historically, rests on the fear of alternative, embodied sensory practices that are coded as feminine. Seeing was often thought of as the least sensual (feminine) and most rational (masculine) of sensory practices. The sight-driven microscope could, therefore, be easily divorced from the lower, feminine realms of sensation. Celebrating the microscope’s sensory elitism, the prominent German physician Max Nordau

⁴⁴ After leaving her father’s lab, Hermione, dehumanized and “defeated,” “Mechanically...went to the telephone. Mechanically she rang up the operator, mechanically she said hello, hello, hello” (100).

⁴⁵ Hereafter, Hermione obsesses over being seen by others. She repeats to Eugenia “Don’t you see?” in a desperate attempt to validate not only herself but her way of seeing (97).

gushed, “What saintly legend is as beautiful as the life of an inquirer who spends his existence bending over a microscope, almost without bodily wants...without any other ambition than that perhaps one little new fact may be firmly established?” (110).⁴⁶ Carl and Bertrand Gart echo Nordau’s praise of the rationale, and Hermione decries “Gart and the formula,” which invest in “conclusive things” (113, 17).⁴⁷ The “formula” rests on irrefutable facts: there are right and wrong ways to act, to work, to see, to sense. Such formulaic thinking relies on prescriptive sensory practices that foreclose not only the sensorium, but the possibility for more fluid and less prescriptive sensory identities like Hermione’s, which, she proclaims, “was not conclusive” (17).⁴⁸ In other words, the definite, knowable nature of facts contrast the indefinite, unknowable nature of embodiment and, by extension, womanhood. H.D.’s declaration that “Her Gart wanted a nobler affinity,” speaks to the less conclusive, more inclusive quality of H.D.’s feminist sensory project, which met with opposition (17).

Indeed, Carl and company remain “without bodily wants” by opposing the feminine—both by restricting women’s bodies and containing women’s sensory output. Such containment is apparent in Hermione’s angry avowal that “God, some sort of Uncle Sam, Carl-Bertrand-Gart God, shut [Hermione and Eugenia] up in a box, with temps too high and too low to breed new specimens like Bertrand Gart, like Carl Gart in their aquariums” (*H* 96).⁴⁹ Hermione implicates

⁴⁶ Classen notes that “the intense visualism of the scientist at his microscope ‘almost without bodily wants,’ provides a contrast to the artistic celebration of multisensory experience,” which Hermione lauds (*CA* 119).

⁴⁷ H.D. writes, “Seeing in a head that had been pushed too far toward a biological-mathematical dentition of the universe...She realized precisely that people can not [sic] paint, nor put such things to music, and science, as she saw it, had eluded her perception. Science as Carl Gart, as Bertram Gart defined it, had eluded her perception” (6).

⁴⁸ H.D. equates identarian restrictions with the United States, specifically, and says that “for them [in the U.S.] it was formulization and exact fitting to one type” (233).

⁴⁹ For a discussion of eugenics and gender, see Armstrong, “Yeats and Eugenics” in *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, pp. 155-158.

Carl and Bertrand in the larger patriarchal structures of nationalism and religion, all of which, she suggests, restrict women. Women do not have a room of their own, they have no room at all—they are boxed-in and denied use of their bodies and their senses. Carl and Bertrand seem so fearful of women's bodies and bodily capabilities, they divest women of the ability to breed and instead appropriate that power, as seen in father and son's laboratory-based breeding experiments. This regulation of bodies, along with Eugenia's very name, bring to mind eugenicist projects common of the modernist period, which waged "broadly based attempts to control gender, sexuality, and reproduction" (*Modernism, Technology, and the Body* 155). Such attempts at control speak to the challenges H.D. faced both as a woman and a writer. No one better signifies this attempt at control—the endeavor to "shut [H.D.] up in a box" and to contain her artistic reproduction—than Ezra Pound.

Ezra Pound's stand-in in *HERmione* is George Lowndes who, like Carl Gart, is a sensorially-dominating male. If Carl heads the scopic regime, George follows close behind, and just as Carl robs Eugenia of sight, George too tries to direct Hermione's vision. Vision both plagues and intrigues Hermione. Sight, in much of the novel, is linked to traditional, male ways of being in the world: ways that Hermione is unable or unwilling to adopt. Part of her struggle with sight is longing for old ways of knowing her world and herself, and the recognition that the old ways, though customary and familiar, no longer, and perhaps never did, befit her. This is apparent within the first few pages of the novel where Hermione complains of not being able to see clearly, lamenting that her perception has "grown translucent like celluloid" (*H* 7). She wants, instead, "to see through reaches of sea-wall, to push through transparencies" (7). In light of this, it is telling that Hermione seems least able to see with George: "George puts everything out of focus," causing Hermione to wonder, "Why couldn't George ever let me alone to see

things in my own way” (147, 133). Instead, George censors what Hermione sees as he does, when “tugging her at her elbow,” he pulls her away from the “old Academy” of artwork she admires and commands, ““Don’t look at those things”” (134-5). Here, George attempts to train Hermione’s sight and ensure that she maintains her position as the unseeing woman, so he can maintain his mutually constitutive position as the seeing man. Notably, George directs Hermione’s sight away from the art of her choosing. Such moments exemplify H.D.’s troubled relationship with the often elitist Ezra Pound, who also notoriously attempted to curate, or otherwise appropriate, H.D.’s vision through Imagism. H.D.’s vision—one of the many senses she employed in realizing her artistic vision—had particular stakes for Pound not only as a man, but as a writer who sought to maintain control over the artistic world modernist women writers, with their synaesthetic sensory agendas, were increasingly infiltrating.⁵⁰

H.D. executes her sensory agenda, in part, by detailing sensory violence that exceeds the visual and impacts the entire sensorium. H.D. describes the pressure that George/Ezra exerts as not just emotionally and mentally inhibiting, but physically and sensorially damaging. In so doing, H.D. illustrates Sara Ahmed’s contention that “the social pressure to follow a certain course, to live a certain kind of life, and even to reproduce that life” can manifest bodily, “like a physical press on the surface of the body” (555). This is most apparent in a disturbing physical encounter between Hermione and George:

Sound of chiffon ripping and the twist and turn of Hermione under the stalwart thin
young torso of George Lowndes. Now more than ever thought made spiral, made
concentric circle toward the darkened ceiling. The ceiling came down, down. The ceiling

⁵⁰ For autobiographical accounts of her vexed relationship with Pound, see H.D., *End to Torment: A Memoir of Ezra Pound* and *Bid Me to Live: A Madrigal*.

became black, in a moment it would crush down, crushing Her and George

Lowndes...like some horrible torture thing out of Poe's tales, the wall that came close out of Poe's tales was coming close, the wall was coming close.... Walls were coming close to suffocate, to crush her. (*H* 173)

Panicked repetition and dark imagery charge this scene with fear—fear Rachel Connor interprets as “Her’s horror of the stifling nature of heterosexual sex” (58). However, this scene also speaks to the stifling, physical pressure of heteronormativity, à la Ahmed. By conflating the walls with George’s body, H.D. magnifies the pressure to conform, socially and sexually, but also sensually. George’s touch “suffocates” and otherwise disables Hermione: she cannot move under his weight, and she loses bodily and, in turn, sensory agency. The encroaching walls increasingly reduce Hermione’s scope of vision, boxing-in and containing her sight. Though the scene begins with the violent sound of ripping, George’s violent touch seems to block out all other sensations and (temporarily) reduces Hermione’s sensory capabilities to ineffectual gawking.⁵¹ Her sensorium is flattened, just as the ceiling threatens to flatten her. Ultimately, the scene is one of sensory dominance, in which George attempts to divest Hermione of sensory agency and perceptual abilities.

George further enacts sensory violence through sound. When George speaks, Hermione hears “tin pan noises, little tin pan against my ear...striking, beating on it” (*H* 42). Sound, here, is painful, intrusive, and notably tactile. Hermione *feels* sound and uses the language of physical abuse to describe George’s damaging aural touch. His is a sort of disciplinary auralty, and here again we can liken this to descriptions of Ezra Pound elsewhere in H.D.’s oeuvre. For instance,

⁵¹ We might also read this as a denial of sensory expansion which Ahmed contends, is reserved for the straight body. Heterosexual orientation, she writes, “enables action, in the sense that [it] allow[s] the straight body...to extend into space” (560). Hermione’s blossoming bisexuality, however, results in “a failed orientation [wherein] the queer body does not extend into such space.”

in H.D.'s memoir, *End to Torment*, she recalls that "[Ezra] seemed to beat with the ebony stick like a baton...there is a sense of his pounding, pounding (*Pounding*) with the stick against the wall" (8). A noisy man, both in name and practice, Ezra's auralty is imposing, as H.D.'s violent description attests. And while George's "pounding" may not be as overt, his use of sound is just as aggressive. George is a wordsmith, his cooing of "bella, molta bella, bellissima," sickly sweet words that work on and against Hermione (*H* 42). Here, aural pressure translates into symbolic social pressure, as George uses sound to strike and beat Hermione out of shape, only to attempt to mold her into his own "beautiful" feminine ideal. Unsettling at best and misogynistic at worst, George's compliments and "praise" further objectify and gender Hermione, simultaneously denying her sensory agency.

Queer Possibilities: Countering Sensory Tyranny

Sensory violence does not go unchallenged, however, as H.D.'s synaesthetic writing, attests. According to Steven Connor, such writing "was validated by a romantic view that the senses were by nature a fluid continuum that was violently and illegitimately broken apart by social forces, especially that of technology" (S. Connor 187).⁵² As noted, the microscope is one such technology, and while H.D. does not conceive of the microscope itself as liberating, it does inspire her and Hermione's sensory liberation.⁵³ The divisiveness of the microscope inspires H.D. to write more inclusively, and the myopia of the microscope encourages Hermione to

⁵² Connor goes on to say that "The very separation of the senses into different channels encouraged efforts to put them back together or amalgamate them in new and unexpected ways" (187). He suggests that a "cult of synaesthesia" grows "from the mid-nineteenth century onwards," whereas Classen suggests that after the death of the Symbolists, "The ideal of a sensory interplay, if not entirely forgotten, was nonetheless deemed to be out of date" (*CA* 112). She contends that "The multisensory aesthetics of the late nineteenth century, consequently, provide us with a compelling last glimpse at a shared vision of a world in which 'sounds, fragrance, and colours correspond'" (113). Both critics imply that synaesthetic agendas belonged to the artistic underground and were driven underground in the years immediately preceding those in which H.D. began to write.

⁵³ H.D. enacts what Danisus calls the transition from "technology *prosthesis* to technological *aesthesis*" (3).

explore new ways of sensing and being sensed. Once freed from the male grasp and gaze, H.D. recognizes the microscope's potential to extend the human sensorium beyond its traditional limits. Microscopic vision, for instance, plays a role in Hermione's ideal perception, where she wishes to see "the peony petals magnified out of proportion and the people in the room shrunk to tiny insects while the teacups again would have magnified into hemispheres" (*H* 60). Here, Hermione's sight bulges and contracts, expands and recedes, in a literal and visceral stretching of the sense of sight. The experience is one which, though disorienting, enlivens and opens Hermione to the world of the intersensory—a world wherein sight is redefined and where one sense becomes inextricably linked to the next. In this way, H.D. evokes the microscope as "a magic lens" through which she not only re-envisions, but re-hears and re-feels a more expansive, holistic sensorium (Mandel 301).

H.D.'s synaesthetic thinking and synaesthetic descriptions disrupt oppressive sensory orderings, and the ensuing sensory disorder liberates. Consider, for instance, the following passage, where Carl continues to invade domestic spaces with visually-oriented, male technologies:

Screw of light that always had been there, burning incandescent in the room....Carl Gart calling to Bertrand across the hall where they had turned a sort of butler's pantry sort of little slice of a room into a laboratory, little room upstairs that ought to have been an extra linen cupboard turned into a darkroom, rooms eating out their slow and comfortable existence like black acids, rooms here and there, another slice in the cellar for aquariums, and Eugenia moving through it powerless, all powerful...and what am I between them? (80-81)

Initially, this passage reads as quite violent. Father and son commit sensory violence via the penetrating "screw," the damaging "slice," and the destructive "eating out" of the spaces they occupy. The few "little" spaces allotted women to carry out the domestic work of the lower-senses (such as the linen closet) are denied them, and the sound of Bertrand calling across the hall to his father, filling the domestic space where women's voices would otherwise predominate, serves as further evidence of their occupation.⁵⁴ Here, women's work, women's workspaces, and (so-called) women's senses are again devalued. Father and son enact a complete sensory seizure that impacts the entire sensorium. However, while the takeover itself is violent, H.D.'s description is synaesthetically liberating; as male technologies reduce women's spaces within her home, H.D. reclaims a synaesthetic sensory space on the page. Along with the sound of Carl and Bertrand's voices and the visual spaces of the laboratory and aquarium, H.D.'s description invokes taste, smell, and touch through the odors of acids and the butler's pantry alongside the feel of burning lights and forgotten linens. Every sense has a place in the shared space of the line. Tellingly, the words that seem the most violent—slicing, burning—are also the most stereotypically domestic, a move that muddies the sensory distinctions between male and female, high and low. Wielding synaesthesia as a weapon, H.D. combats sensory segmentation and gendered divisions even as her father and brother attempt to enforce them.

In carving out an androgynous, intersensory space, H.D. effectively queers the sensorium, an act fostered through her and Hermione's queer relationships. Responding to heteronormative narratives, H.D. reminds her readers that while men may seem all powerful, women are not powerless. "Men are not strong," Hermione asserts. "Women are stronger" (*H* 173). Indeed, H.D.

⁵⁴ For further discussion of gendered and domestic spaces in *HERmione* see Annette Debo's ecological reading in *The American H.D.* esp. 143-50, where she examines the ways in which "Hermione invites [the land] in to help her escape the rigidity of her gender role" (143).

suggests that women-centric relationships may counteract male domination by providing a space within which to reconsider sensory practices and to rework the relationship among the senses. Queer relationships, both in H.D.'s personal life and her work, open sensory possibility. Ahmed suggests that, unlike heterosexual cultures that "keep bodies in line" by inhibiting certain embodied practices and enabling others, "Queer cultures...draw different kinds of lines, which do not aim to keep things in their places" (565). In other words, queer cultures make room for different kinds of orientations, socially, sexually, and sensually. Sara Chinn conceives of lesbian relationships, for instance, as a "conduit" wherein women can "readjust the balance among the senses" and rework sensory associations that rely on gender binaries (196, 197). While heteronormative relationships often re-inscribe sensory norms—while men adhere to sensory practices "appropriate" to their gender and women adhere to others—queer relationships provide a counter-space within which to challenge and reconfigure these "norms."⁵⁵

Hermione regains sensory space and agency through her relationship with Fayne Rabb, the novel's Frances Josepha Gregg figure. Unlike George, who shrinks and restricts Hermione spatially, leaving her feeling claustrophobic and "dehumanized," Fayne grants space (*H* 77). Hermione describes Fayne as "This thing that made the floor sink beneath her feet and the wall rise to infinity above her head" (52). The walls that closed down upon Hermione in her earlier encounter with George, here, open with possibility. Tellingly, direct touch, so prevalent in Hermione's encounters with George, is absent from this scene. Instead, Hermione associates Fayne with an *indirect* sense of touch—a touch that manifests through movement. Hermione

⁵⁵ Queer desire, Ahmed suggests, supports this kind of work, and "Lesbian desire can be rethought as a space for action, a way to extend differently into space through tending toward 'other women'" (564). Ahmed describes this tendency not only as a story of "coming-out," but "as a story of 'coming to,' of arriving near other bodies, as a contact that makes a story and opens up other ways of facing the world" (565).

feels the space around her widen as the floor “sinks” and the ceiling “rises.” Within this space, Hermione is free to move as well, and this freedom has physical and sensual consequences. Hermione’s relationship with Fayne foils her relationship with George: while he entraps and attempts to stabilize, thereby limiting what Hermione can do with her body and her senses, Fayne offers and invites what Ahmed calls “alternative forms of world making” that have important sensory implications (565). Hermione acknowledges that with Fayne “A whole world was open,” and within this world, she finds a platform to stage her sensory revolution (62).

Making It New: Seeing and Sensory Unity

By denying traditional identifications, Hermione taps into sensual possibility, engaging the senses in innovative and rewarding ways. H.D. begins this work by refashioning sight, the so-called sense par excellence. Rachel Connor comments that *HERmione*’s “‘realignment’ of the gaze through an alternative paradigm of looking...is intrinsic to H.D.’s politics of the visual and her understanding of gender politics” (67). “Realignment” here is key: *HERmione* challenges the gendered, hegemony of vision by transforming, not merely subjugating, sight. The sighted relationship between Fayne and Hermione, specifically, serves as a model for reconfiguring sight in H.D.’s oeuvre.⁵⁶ In Jean Gallagher’s reading of H.D.’s literary and cinematic works, she associates lesbian desire with acts of looking that involve “contradictory, suspended attention—rapt, fixated and absorbed as well as destabilized and ungrounded” (412). This kind of seeing, according to some modern thinkers, contributed to “bad” sensory habits, with which Fayne is

⁵⁶ Sarah Chinn notes a trend, in other lesbian works, toward a subjugation of the visual—what she calls an “eyes-free sexual vocabulary” (182). H.D.’s work does not deny the importance of sight, nor does it privilege one sense over another. Her work, does, however, exhibit “an anxiety about visual access” and a pared-down visuality, which Jean Gallagher finds especially prevalent in H.D.’s cinematic work (411). See Gallagher, esp. 409-11.

closely linked.⁵⁷ Fayne's radical vision is first juxtaposed with traditional ways of seeing, such as those emblemized by Nellie Thorpe, Hermione's former Bryn Mawr classmate. Nellie, like George, represents the societal norms Hermione shuns and the restrictive identity categories from which she turns. When first introducing Hermione to Fayne, Nellie coaxes, first "come to see me—to see a girl I want to see you" (34). The repetition of the word "see" belies Nellie's insistence on the act of seeing and illuminates the importance of sight in the traditions she upholds: she does not encourage any other sensory interaction—only that each "girl" play the role of objective observer/detached onlooker.

Hermione is accustomed to such objectifying modes of seeing, but Fayne represents a different way of seeing, and a different way of sensing. In so doing, she enables and encourages Hermione's sensory transformation. Hermione is surprised that "*was* seeing Her" (52, emphasis original).⁵⁸ The emphatic "*was*" suggests that Hermione is not often seen—at least not in the way Fayne sees her. In contrast to Nellie's sister, Jessie, who "saw just around the corner" and Nellie herself who "could see as far as the room wall," Fayne's sight is more far-reaching. Hermione comments that "Fayne sees everything *and* nothing"—a sort of "intensification and cancellation" of perception—where "nothing" acts as a positive absence that invites nontraditional modes of seeing (*H* 52, Gallagher 412). This is further evident in Hermione's observation that

⁵⁷ For more on distraction/attention in the cultural context of the twentieth century, see Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History*, esp. 94-99. For further discussion of attention in H.D.'s work, specifically the manifestation of sound as attention in H.D.'s poetry, see Adalaide Morris, "H.D. on the Air" in *What to Do: H.D.'s Cultural Poetics*.

⁵⁸ Hermione's initial response to Fayne's gaze, "Don't look at the eyes that look at you," suggests her discomfort with this unusual offering of sighted exchange—an exchange wherein she is not only seen, but invited to see; not only looked upon, but encouraged to look with (*H* 52). Georgina Johnston notes that this act disrupts traditional modes of seeing: "Her and Fayne 'see' each other, their own desire queering patriarchal objectification by positing simultaneous subject and object, textualising themselves by reading themselves, both reader and read" (67).

Fayne Rabb saw like a bird, seeing nothing of importance. “All the things that make the world important...all the things, I mean mama thinks important...you don’t...you don’t...recognize. I mean you don’t see the things. It isn’t as if you were destructive. Nellie said you were odd and so destructive. You just don’t *see* them.” (*H* 144, ellipses original)

Of note here is not that Fayne is unable to see, but unwilling to see: she *chooses* not to see in the same way as others.⁵⁹ Her sensory choice is admirable and unexpected—indeed, Hermione seems almost puzzled by Fayne’s willful assertion of sensory agency. Fayne’s purposeful enactment of sensory difference is a threat to the sensory and social order, and may explain why Nellie finds her “destructive.” By not recognizing what others deem important, Fayne undercuts tradition and the principles on which it stands. In terms of offering sensory alternatives, however, Fayne’s way of seeing, in its bird-like alterity, is productive. She lacks a sighted agenda, and does not seek to limit what or dictate how Hermione sees.⁶⁰ Instead, Fayne draws attention to Hermione’s sensory subjugation by telling her “You are yet repressed, unseeing, unseen...” and encourages her to exercise her sense of sight (146). Such encouragement calls to mind the woman-centered community that emerged in the little magazines of the twentieth-century. Unlike similar projects governed by men, the little magazines edited by these women boasted “no initial guiding manifesto or project that would limit contributions,” but instead provided an alternative public sphere in which various voices could be heard (Taylor 7).⁶¹ The relationship

⁵⁹ In discussing creative uses of sight in H.D.’s work, Jean Gallagher points to the many moments of “rapt staring and shared hallucinations and trance” in both *HERmione* and its “sequel” *Asphodel* (412). She suggests that “it is precisely this kind of contradictory, suspended attention—rapt, fixated, and absorbed as well as destabilized and ungrounded—that emerges as a model for spectatorial subjectivity in H.D.’s film work, and it is one that is repeatedly associated with the literally entrancing effects of lesbian desire throughout H.D.’s oeuvre” (412).

⁶¹ Georgina Taylor invokes the Habermasian “counter-public sphere” to describe the relationship among these women.

Fayne and Hermione forge is similarly democratic and inclusive, as is the sensory work Fayne inspires Hermione to do.

Indeed, sensory acts become democratized through sensory sharing, wherein H.D. rethinks not only the relationship between the senses and technology, but between gender and technology. H.D. writes, “The two eyes of Fayne Rabb were two lenses of an opera glass and it was Hermione’s entrancing new game to turn a little screw, a little handle somewhere (like Carl Gart with his microscope) and bring into focus those two eyes that were her new possession. Her Gart had found her new possession” (*H* 147-8). Here, H.D. features two visual prostheses, the opera glass and the microscope, that alter sight-as-we-know-it. These lenses proffer two different gazes, and with them, different power dynamics. The gaze of the microscope is mastering: it derives power by looking *at* and objectifying. In contrast, the gaze of the opera glass, though it still differentiates between subject and object (the viewer and the viewed), provides a “participatory or empathic gaze...that emancipates from the distracted or abstracted visual gaze” of the microscope (Paterson 99). In other words, the opera glass gaze promotes communion and understanding, not mastery. Writing about the opera glass in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, H.D. likens it to “the over-mind,” and suggests that “When we are able to use this over-mind lens, the whole world of vision is open to us” (23). Juxtaposing the “whole world’ of the opera glass with the reduced perspective of the microscope makes the limits of the microscope all the more apparent. The microscope offers the same old way of seeing and, although Hermione repeats the same gestures as her father by “turning the little screw” of her opera glass as he does his microscope, the type of seeing she invokes is drastically different. Fayne’s eyes become a sensual technology that she does not look at, but *through*. By taking possession of Fayne’s eyes,

Hermione does not rob Fayne of her ability to see but, instead, *shares* sight with her.⁶² Fayne's eyes are Hermione's eyes too—in claiming them, H.D. reclaims vision and rewrites it, not as exclusionary and elitist, but as inclusive and unifying.

Hermione's new way of seeing exceeds the confines of the image and the Imagist agenda. H.D. proffers, in the words of Cassandra Laity, an "Imagism of different desires," one that "implant[s] alternative forms of...sensation in the Image" and posits seeing as a multisensory act (42). Sight, H.D. suggests, is haptic. "Haptic" refers not only to the sense of touch (a common, but overly simplistic definition), but to "the perception of position and motion (proprioception), and other tactile and kinesthetic sensations" ("haptic"). In *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing*, Abbie Garrington defines haptic as "an umbrella term denoting one or more of the following experiences: touch (the active or passive experience of the human skin, subcutaneous flesh, viscera and related nerve-endings); kinaesthesia (the body's sense of its own movement); proprioception (the body's sense of its orientation in space); and the vestibular sense (that of balance, reliant upon the inner ear)" (16). Hapticity is a sort of felt awareness of space and the tactile sensations that occur within that space. Though the hierarchy of the senses would lead us to think otherwise, the haptic is not the opposite of optic. According to Mark Paterson, whose research interrogates the relationship between sight and touch "the haptic does not oppose the eyes with the hands, but acknowledges the sensory interdependence of the whole haptic (hand-eye-motion) system" (86). H.D. illustrates this interdependence in the following exchange, as Hermione lulls Fayne to sleep:

⁶² Here, both Hermione and Fayne become sensual technologies themselves, and while elsewhere in H.D.'s oeuvre Gallagher identifies moments where the mechanization of the female subject causes "dyslogistic associations," here we see a "productive hybridization of body and machine" more typical of male-machine relations that further highlight H.D.'s technological intervention (418).

[h]ands pressed against the swallow-blue that were now the swallow-black great-pupiled eyes of Fayne Rabb, were the long cold hands of Her Gart. Her Gart dropped book, dropped affectation of sanity, sank down to the floor, through the floor, above the earth [...] Prophetess to prophetess on some Delphic headland, Her Gart pressed cold hands against the eyelids of Fayne Rabb. (*H* 180)

Syntactically, the first sentence of this passage creates sensory confusion, as “were” conflates Fayne’s eyes and Hermione’s hands. This confusion breaches the barrier between sensory organs, rendering them neither one thing nor the other, but both hands and eyes. As sensory organs merge, so too does the ability to see and touch. Hermione’s hands upon Fayne’s eyes may seem to interfere with Fayne’s ability to see, but this gesture expands, as opposed to impedes, sensation. Hermione’s touch interrupts “eyesight alone” and emphasizes the intersensoriality of haptic vision.⁶³ Through haptic vision Hermione sees and feels her place in her surroundings, noting depths, movements, and surfaces.⁶⁴ Haptic elements are at play in verbs that connote motion, such as “dropped” and “sank,” as well as through prepositions that connote position, such as “above” “through,” and “down.” The sense of movement that infuses this passage also speaks of movement in the sensory order, as one sense moves or transforms from its previous position in to a new, more nuanced one. Just as Fayne’s eyes were once “swallow-blue” but “were now...swallow-black,” so too were the senses of sight and touch once one thing, and now another. In short, touch heals the rift sight creates between itself and the other senses. Fayne says

63 The phrase “eyesight alone” comes from the art critic Clement Greenberg who proclaimed, in 1958, that “The human body is no longer postulated as the agent of space in either pictorial or sculptural art. Now it is eyesight alone...” (qtd. in Jones 411). For more on Greenberg’s theories on art and sensation, see Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg’s Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*.

64 Abbie Garrington suggests that “The haptic is intimately connected to the constitution of the self...by virtue of its very intimacy, its operation on the carnal border between self and world.” (16). By making one aware of her constitution and position, the haptic enables a radical re-constitution and a re-positioning of woman in her world.

as much about Hermione's hands: "Your hands are healing," she remarks. "They have dynamic white power... Your hands are white stars. Your hands are snowdrops" (180). The healing whiteness of this interaction between Hermione and Fayne starkly contrasts the threatening "darkened... black" of Hermione's physical encounters with George (173). The "dynamic white power" of Hermione's touch highlights the complexity of sensation, and the redemptive qualities intersensory experience.

Sound, Vibration, and Sensory Transformation

In addition to redeeming sight, touch redeems another characteristically masculine sense, sound. As H.D. writes sound anew, she underscores not only the way she transforms sound, but the way sound transforms her. In so doing, she highlights the transformative power sound holds for women, in particular. H.D. draws attention to sonic stifling at a time when women were often discouraged from making too much sound, especially in public and in politics. While the patriarchy seeks to silence women, H.D. suggests that communion among women can reverse this sensory damage. She illustrates one such rehabilitating relationship by associating the touch of Fayne's hand with the sound of Hermione's voice. With a "[s]mall, heavy swift hand... hard dynamic forceful vibrant hand," Fayne's touch works to "dra[g] words out of the throat of Her Gart" (*H* 145). Here, whereas others silence Hermione, Fayne coaxes her to speak.⁶⁵ Notably, Fayne's encouragement takes tactile form—her hand acts as metonym for the haptic and for sound's more-than-aural impact. In drawing attention to the throat, H.D. crafts a reverse eating moment, a moment of regurgitation. Where ideas and others' voices were once forced down Hermione's throat, here, Fayne "drags" or forces sound up from the depths. The ferocity of this

⁶⁵ George, for example, frequently urges Hermione "Don't talk... don't talk," and Eugenia bids her daughter "Hushsh" (*H* 68, 45).

interaction counteracts violent male imposition, and the description bears a striking resemblance to the forced feeding undergone by suffragettes, the images of which were widely circulated in the years before H.D. wrote *HERmione*.⁶⁶ H.D. aligns herself and Hermione with such women, for whom asserting one's sensory agency—whether by making a sound or denying the touch of food—is a heroic act.

H.D. continues to note the transformative experience of sound through the power of vibration, which incites sensory disruption. Vibration, Shelley Trower notes, “provides a basis for thinking about relations between the senses...in so far as it can be simultaneously palpable and audible, visible and audible” (5). Ever-unsettled, vibration does not stay in place but “crosses sensory thresholds” (5).⁶⁷ Hermione recognizes that she may have breached one such sensory threshold when she encounters the highly vibratory “AUM” (*H* 32). H.D. explains that Hermione “tried to forget the word AUM, said ‘UM, EM, HEM,’ clearing her throat, wondered if she had offended something (32). Here, “AUM” “offends” in part because it is intersensory. Indeed, the sight of AUM evokes elements of haptic vision: written in capital letters, AUM asserts itself visually, especially in comparison to the words around it, but also tactilely, by demanding and taking up more space on the page. AUM also draws attention to position, by looming over other words, and to motion, by seeming to grow in size.

In addition to offending sensory divisions, “AUM” and its sonic vibrations also offend Hermione's sense of self. Such offensives are typical of vibration, which David Bissell, in his

⁶⁶ Posters and newspapers often featured the image of a suffragette strapped to a table or chair while a male doctor loomed over her, forcing a feeding tube down her throat or nose. For more on force-feeding and the suffragette movement, see Carolyn P. Collette, *In the Thick of the Fight: The Writing of Emily Wilding Davison, Militant Suffragette*, esp. Chapter Four: “Paying the Price: Militancy, Prison, and Violence.”

⁶⁷ Trower notes that “Vibration commonly provides a means of conceptualizing resistance to boundaries and identities in contemporary theory” (5). For a discussion of vibration in H.D.'s cinematic work, see Jean Gallagher, “H.D.'s Distractions: Cinematic Stasis and Lesbian Desire,” esp. 409-413.

research on mobilities, affect, and bodies, deems “*becomings* that undermine stable forms and identities” (481). AUM’s vibrations alert Hermione to her own becomings that are, initially, quite jarring. H.D. writes, Hermione “hugged HER to Hermione Gart” and repeated “I am HER...The thing was necessary...It was a weight holding her down” (33). Against, the AUM’s disruptive vibration, Hermione holds tight to the stability and sensual reassurance of her name. “HER” soothes her sonically through repetition and tactilely like an embrace, but it also anchors Hermione to her “old” self—it weighs her down and acts as “ballast to her lightheadedness” in the wake of AUM’s vibratory unsteadiness (33). AUM’s vibrations are both unsettled and unsettling: they denote movement and particles in perpetual motion that resist stasis. Indeed, “AUM,” an alternative spelling of the Sanskrit “OHM,” is a sacred sound in many Eastern religions, often used during meditation to destabilize the individual in order to invoke a higher power and to get in touch with a higher self. In Hermione’s case, this higher self is of a different sensory order, one that embodies the intersensory, transformational qualities of the vibrating “AUM.”

Through her confrontation with newly-invigorated sound, Hermione newly constitutes herself within the sensorium and acknowledges not only its, but her, unlimited sensory potential. AUM, again, embodies this potential, and the realization of this shakes Hermione, as vibrations are wont to do. When Hermione sees “AUM” on the page of her book, she “dropped the volume. [AUM] frightened her. God is in a word. God is in a word. God is in HER. She said, ‘HER, HER, HER. I am Her, I am Hermione...I am the word AUM’” (32). Hermione’s observation that “God is in a word” seems to speak not only to semantics, but to sonicity, a point H.D. stresses through the repetition and breathy assonance of “HER” “God” and “AUM.” The sound of language here is perhaps more impactful than the meaning of language, and AUM’s sonic

vibrations shake things up, literally and metaphorically: they rattle the sensory structure by conjoining the senses, and they rattle the sensing subject by reverberating throughout her body,⁶⁸ In one revelatory sound bite, AUM does the work Hermione wants to do and that H.D. succeeds in doing—a jarring realization, indeed. AUM shocks Hermione by signaling sensory possibility: a BIG, god-like capacity that she finds unfathomable, yet desirable⁶⁹ By aligning herself with AUM and re-writing her name in an equally intersensory way, Hermione asserts her own limitlessness and ineffability. “God is in HER,” and HER refuses to be contained.

Sensory transformation begets personal transformation, as sound upsets Hermione’s conception of herself as a sensory subject (and the sensory status quo along with it), thereby granting her access to less rigid identities. Just as Fayne’s radical act of sight empowers Hermione to see differently, “AUM’s” radical vibrations further empower her to exercise her sensory agency. In so doing, she illustrates Brian Massumi’s suggestion that the human sensorium contains limitless bodily potentials through which we subconsciously sift until “the turning point at which...only one...is ‘selected’” (32-33). Hermione “selects” sensation in the following, as she tries on sound for size: “Clear throat, Em, Um, Hem. Aum. It was AUM. I am the word AUM” (*H* 38). Here, Hermione sifts through sonicity and *enacts choice* as opposed to automatic sensory habits. Initially stuck in her throat, “AUM” is a synaesthetic assertion: a tactile, rather phlegmy, articulation of Hermione’s selfhood, a means through which she hears, sees, touches, and tastes herself. In this radical articulation, the sensorium expands and the senses

⁶⁸ In so doing, it serves as a reminder that, as Serres says, hearing is not merely an act of the ear but “implicates skin, bone, skull, feet, and muscle” (“Michel Serres” 159).

⁶⁹ Such potential is common of vibrating, “audible language” which, Serres suggests, “tremble[s] from the multiple meanings contained within it” (118).

merge. Newly embodied and more freely sensing, Hermione re-orientes and re-positions herself in the larger sensory and social world.

“Synaesthesia is Bad Good for You”: A Story of Sensory Rebirth

Hermione's, and H.D.'s, embrace of a more fluid, synaesthetic sensorium had social and personal repercussions. After breaking her engagement with George Lowndes (in part because she is in love with Frances Gregg), Hermione suffers a three-month bout with mental illness. She takes to bed with a nurse watching over her and drifts in and out of consciousness, sometimes babbling incessantly, sometimes hallucinating. Often, Hermione sleeps, a side effect of the drugs, presumably, and her dreams are plagued by a sense of social and familial failure. She dreams of failing a math exam because she had “forgotten logarithm” and of failing a science exam because “she went on breaking test tubes and the hydrochloric acid was spilt and someone said ‘She needn’t take it. There’s no use forcing these things’” (196). Hermione's dream highlights futility and her failure to follow in her father's scientific footsteps, let alone complete school. The compounding “and” speaks to the forces piling against her, under whose weight she eventually buckles.

Hermione's illness also shows evidence of sensory strain. When she first takes ill, Hermione tells George, “‘There’s something wrong here’— [...] ‘I’ve got a—sore throat or something’” (*H* 193). Here, the dashes signify the stops and starts of a distraught mind, and Hermione's sore throat suggests that her sickness extends to the body. She cannot clear her throat and sound “AUM”; she can no longer use the sound and texture of her voice to orient herself. Isolated from the larger sensorium, Hermione again turns her attention to sight. Distressed, she tells her nurse, “I can’t see anything,” and her battle with ocularcentrism seems to overshadow all other sensory considerations (210). In fact, the lack of attention Hermione pays to the other

senses during her “crisis” seems to exacerbate, if not cause, the crisis itself. By positing single-sense perception and sensory segmentation as a cause, as opposed to a cure for mental illness, H.D. goes against the grain of popular opinion and challenges common thinking about the destructiveness of synaesthesia. According to H.D.’s contemporaries in the medical and social sciences, synaesthesia was symptomatic of insanity. In the tellingly titled *Degeneration* (1985), Nordau declared that “[s]ynaesthetic tendencies were evidence of ‘diseased and debilitated brain-activity’” (142). This was true not only of neurological synaesthetes, who were unable to control the sensory associations that arose in their minds, but of artists, who purposely employed synaesthesia in their work. However, while synaesthesia and multisensualism was thought to incite mental unrest, in Hermione’s case, single-sense engagement is the culprit. The “disease” of which Nordau speaks can be read as a disunity among the senses: a dis-ease that society reifies through sensory segmentation, and one which Hermione must cure.

Hermione remedies this dis-ease by undercutting sensory individuation and reuniting the senses. Upon waking from her “crisis,” Hermione’s first request underscores her commitment to synaesthetic and intersensory experimentation. Hermione tells her nurse, “I see clearly” and bids her, “Open the window ever so little, just enough so that I may hear the sun rise” (211). Hermione’s choice to listen to as opposed to look at the sunrise, and the rising sun itself, signify a sort of synaesthetic awakening. She does not fall back on the single-sense orientation of the microscope; she refuses to use the senses as prescribed. Instead, Hermione’s ability to see clearly entails a rejection of sight as the sense par excellence. Hermione’s choice to listen to as opposed to look at the sunrise indicates sensory interchange and signifies H.D.’s contribution to an expanded sensorium that promotes sensory cross-pollination. In this way, Hermione’s mental collapse —what Susan Stanford Friedman calls her “psychic death”—enables sensory re-

scaffolding and “becomes the chrysalis of rebirth, the emergence of a healed Hermione” (*Penelope’s Web* 115).⁷⁰ Hermione heals not only psychically, but sensorially, and her rebirth owes an unlikely debt to the sensorium of the sea.

Sensory DeRegeneration: Mining the Subterranean Sensorium

Hermione’s break from George and her temporary break from reality are evidence of larger breaks from the social and sensory status quo, which H.D. further illustrates by including sensory “others” and marginalized modes of perception in her ideal sensorium. In so doing, H.D. offers an alternative to what Peter Nichols identifies as a male modernist impulse “to defend the self against collapse into the other” (*Modernism: A Cultural History* 93). H.D., instead, enacts this collapse: she purposely plummets from the height of man into oceanic metaphor where she, in the words of Rachel DuPlessis, “claims Otherness...claims the uncontained self” (34). Hermione’s ultimate claim is a self without borders: she will not be contained to the earth and the world of the human. Instead, Hermione declares that “Undine was not her name, would never be her name, for Undine (or was it the Little Mermaid?) sold her sea-inheritance, and Her would never, never sell this inheritance, this sea-inheritance of amoeba little jellyfish sort of living creature separating from another creature” (120). Unlike Undine, who gives up her voice (sound) for human legs (touch), Hermione will not give up one sense for another, nor one sensory identification (merwoman) for another (human woman). Hesitating to name Undine “(or was it the Little Mermaid?),” H.D. also hesitates to name and, therefore, limit herself. She proclaims her nebulousness and her malleability—her likeness to the “amoeba little jellyfish sort of living

⁷⁰ Susan Stanford Friedman calls *HERmione* “a gestational narrative of artistic awakenings that serves vividly as a microcosm of this larger pattern in [H.D.’s] work. The story is really two stories, a birth and a rebirth, in which the second undoes the first to suggest the endlessness of the process of becoming” (*Penelope’s Web* 101). Likewise, Charlotte Mandel refers to Hermione’s “period of illness” as “an incubation that helps her emerge to a fuller sense of herself” (309).

creature” that cannot be qualified. Through the fluidity of her “sea-inheritance,” Hermione sheds a socially-imprinted sensory skin in favor of the shape-shifting abilities of the non-human. Much like she refuses to choose between the senses, Hermione refuses to choose between sensoriums, but draws on *both* the human *and* nonhuman in refashioning her sensory self.

To understand the implications of Hermione’s refusal, we must look more closely at the sensory make-up of sea creatures, specifically the mollusk, jellyfish, and amoeba, which feature not only in H.D.’s work, but in early twentieth-century scientific discussions of sensation. Nordau, for instance, posited the mollusk as the least privileged of sensory beings, in part because of the lack of differentiation among its sensory faculties. In the mollusk, eyes, skin, mouth, ears, and nose are one and the same. Because of this, sensation is not segmented or consigned to a particular sensory faculty, but registers across multiple faculties. That is to say, within the mollusk, synaesthesia occurs naturally. Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains that “[the] distinction between touch and sight are unknown in primordial perception. It is only as a result of a science of the human body that we finally learn to distinguish between our senses” (15). Science, in other words, attempts to naturalize certain forms of embodiment while pathologizing others, and to impose order onto what it deems disorderly. Nordau decries such disorder proclaiming, “It is a descent from the height of human perfection to the low level of the mollusc [sic]...if consciousness relinquishes the advantage of the differentiated perceptions of phenomena, and carelessly confounds the reports conveyed by the particular sense” (142).⁷¹ In

⁷¹ Nordau was especially critical of artists who elevated the lower senses, and he seemed to have a particular vendetta against smell. He proclaimed that “Smellers among degenerates represent an atavism going back, not only to the primeval period of man, but infinitely more remote still, to an epoch anterior to man” (503). For Nordau, men who sought to know the world through smell were no better than dogs since the human mind could not be inspired by scent alone: “In order to inspire a man with...abstract concepts by scents alone his frontal lobe must be depressed and the olfactory lobe of a dog substituted for it” (503). Nordau identifies Emile Zola, specifically, as one such artist who “shows at times an unhealthy predominance of the sensations of smell in his consciousness” and is no more than “a high-class degenerate” (502; 501).

short, science views the mollusk's sensory make-up as primitive and chaotic—qualities which many modernists drew upon to invigorate their art. Nordau was particularly condemning of such “art” and viewed “the synaesthetic strivings of contemporary poets and artists [were] ‘symptoms of degeneracy and cultural decline, an aesthetic effort to valorize a reversal of the progressive specialization of the human senses’” (qtd. in *WS* 173).⁷² When artists deny the one to one ratio between sensations and sensory organs and shun the unique ability to differentiate between sight, sound, smell, and so forth, they engage in subpar sensory acts, dishonor the elite sensory system, and abandon their position of human sensory privilege. This, of course, was just the sort of dissensual abandon H.D. desired.

Defying warnings like Nordau's, H.D. willingly descends into the sub-human water world, which she further mines for sensory inspiration. Therein, she finds creatures who, like herself, “fail” to pass sensory standards. Through creatures like the mollusk, namely the amoeba and the jellyfish, H.D. embraces sensory failure—what Tim Brain calls, the “fortunate failure of protoplasm to differentiate itself” (192). Indeed, by failing to differentiate between the senses—to segment them and assign them different values—Hermione, like the protoplasm, gains the “extraordinary powers to perceive the world in its original condition of undifferentiated unity” (192).⁷³ While, in popular opinion, the perceptive apparatus of creatures like the mollusk

⁷² According to Classen, the Symbolists whose work Nordau attacked directly, and other “supporters of a multisensory aesthetic responded that Nordau confused ‘the *sensory chaos*’ which precedes the development of the perceptual faculties’ with the current ‘*synthetic tendency*’ involving a conscious and complex elaboration of sensory relations” (CA 120). This statement belies the desire, on the part of male artists, to distance themselves from chaos, a quality often associated with the feminine. For instance, Bonnie Kime Scott notes this tendency in Ezra Pound of whom she writes, “the feminine to Pound is chaos” (13).

⁷³ See Brain, *The Pulse of Modernism*, esp. “Sensory Fusion” wherein he highlights the primitivism that informs this kind of thinking. Brain notes that many modern artists, such as the painter Edward Munch and the English writer Edward Carpenter, “believed there was a positive correlation between synesthesia and the shaman in so-called primitive societies, as well as between homosexuals and other ‘deviant’ sexual orientations (192).

signaled degeneration, H.D. posits such creatures as regenerative *because* of their devolution—because they have not been subjected to sensory ordering and are not bound by sensory mores.

H.D. writes,

The back of [Hermione's] head prompted the front of her head, slid a fraction of a fraction (of a tiny measurement on a thermometer or a microscope) away from the front of her head, actually almost with a little click, separated from the front of her head like amoeba giving birth by separation to amoeba. "Some plants, some small water creatures give a sort of jellyfish sort of birth by breaking apart, by separating themselves from themselves." (*H* 118)⁷⁴

Here, H.D. uses scientific rhetoric—the language of Nordau, her father, and her brother—to undo scientific thought. The same kinds of creatures that Carl and Bertrand Gart smoosh under microscope slides, breed, and otherwise objectify, Hermione values. Though their senses are not separate, these creatures have an ability to separate—from their former selves—that H.D. admires and enacts. She underscores the themes of separation and rebirth, of parting—the front of her head sliding away from the back—in order to impart. We can read this as a metaphor for H.D.'s artistic evolution: H.D. gives birth to creation by separating herself from social constraints and rhetoric that inhibit her.

⁷⁴ Hermione tells George that "Some plants, some small water creatures give a sort of jellyfish sort of birth by breaking apart, by separating themselves from themselves," and she wonders why "George was saying, as if her mind was still one mind, not separated like amoeba giving itself another amoeba, a sort of birth, a sort of twin repeating itself" (118, 120). Michel Serres speaks to pre-human sensory moments like these and suggests that, "The body remembers its previous aquatic life, gliding itself through the sound waves by instinct and force of will (141). Hermione appears to glide through the sound of George's voice "saying" in a similar way. It is also worth noting that, in the abovementioned scene, George is too busy kissing Hermione to listen to her, and tells her to "forget all that rot," a condemnation Pound often made when H.D. would "begin to cast her mystic spell and wander into the abstract, the vague" (*H* 118; Guest 24).

In the single-celled organism, unhampered by social codes, H.D. finds a structure-less sensory model ripe for the building, and upon which she did build her artistic manifesto. In *Notes on Thought and Vision* (1919) which, like *HERmione* was unpublished in H.D.'s lifetime, H.D. challenges the marginalization upon which sensory hierarchies stand by lauding what she terms the "jelly-fish experience."⁷⁵ The jelly-fish experience is a form of perception characterized by the "abnormal consciousness" of "the over-mind" (NTV 19). The over-mind, quite aptly, fits over the standard mind. H.D. writes that it "seems like a cap, like water, transparent, fluid yet with definite body, contained in a definite space. It is like a closed sea-plant, jelly-fish, or anemone" (NTV 18-19). Though the over-mind is "contained," "closed," and somewhat self-protective, its transparency and fluidity are plastic and permeable. It is not only a state of mind, but a state of body. Despite the essay's title, the over-mind is not solely visual. Instead, it evokes multisensuality through "a set of super-feelings [that] extend out and about us; as the long, floating tentacles of the jelly-fish reach out and about him" (NTV 19). H.D. conceives of the jellyfish as an empath, eager to commune with and explore the world around it. Notably, the jellyfish explores by feeling through tentacles or oral arms in which touch and taste—two stereotypically feminine senses—are not segmented, but are one and the same. Not only are touch and taste concurrent, they—not vision, the sense typically associated with knowledge—provide a means of comprehending the world. By elevating the feminine sensorium, H.D. combats male sensory elitism; by taking the jellyfish as a model, H.D. suggests that there are different ways of conceiving sensation and of knowing the world through our senses.

⁷⁵ Along with H.D., Armstrong identifies Rebecca West and Virginia Woolf as others who invoke the "jellyfish brain" (93). Elizabeth Bowen with her "flopping jellyfish" and Marianne Moore with her sprawling *Octopus* might be included in this group of women modernists, who turn to sea life for sensory inspiration (Hepburn 59). In contrast, Wyndham Lewis, like Nordau, was less laudatory of the jellyfish, Armstrong notes that what Lewis's novel, *Tarr*, "calls 'jellyfish attributes' are the enemy of art," which "lead to a melting of self into others rather than a concrete realization of the self in art" (93).

HERmione is an ode to this sensory difference. Declared “H.D., Imagiste” by Ezra Pound and consigned to the realm of the visual, H.D. reacts to that limitation. *HERmione* is a declaration of H.D.’s multisensuality: a dissensual assertion that she is more than a conjurer of images, just as she is more than an image herself. The resulting sensory revolution renegotiates the gendered, heteronormative, segmented sensorium that H.D. refuses to adopt. Her refusal begins by recognizing the sensory regime of the microscope and all it signifies. The microscope makes material an abstract, often invisible, sensory hierarchy that is complicit with other normative practices, and it sheds light on the compactness of sensory experience under normative dictates. Its prescriptive ways of seeing encourage Hermione to not only see differently, but to hear, smell, taste, and touch differently. This difference is rooted in uprooting—in challenging sensory norms and in committing dissensual acts that shake the sensory establishment. Hermione positions her mother and father within this establishment, though at opposite ends of the sensory spectrum, and her question “what am I between them?” underscores her struggle to navigate the gender and sensory divides that confront her (*H* 81). H.D. chooses, however, to break the binary: she remains in-between—“swing-swing between worlds”—wherein her sensorium flourishes and she claims her protean, sensory self (25). It is within this in-between, liminal, sensory space that Virginia Woolf, H.D.’s literary counterpart in sensory crime, wages her own sensory revolution.

Chapter 2

“‘choked by a robot!’: Technology, Power, and the Battle of the Senses in Mina Loy’s *Insel*”

Writing to her friend Carl Van Vechten, Mina Loy proffers a surprisingly cheerful description of her experience as a Red Cross volunteer in WWI. “You have no idea,” Loy wrote, what fallow fields of psychological inspiration there are in human shrieks and screams...I’m so wildly happy among the blood & mess for a change & I stink of idioform—and all my nails are cut off for operations—and my hands have been washed in iodine—and isn’t this all a change...I will write a poem about it—and you should hear what

a tramp calls the Madonna when he's having his abdomen cut open without anesthetic.

(qtd. in *Becoming Modern* 187)⁷⁶

Loy's gleeful response to the horrors she witnesses is unexpected, even disturbing. However, as readers, we have to question if Loy's comments are made more disturbing because of her gender. Should a woman, especially, celebrate such horrifying sights and smells? What kind of woman would do such a thing? The average woman, Loy might answer, whose sensory experience was too often limited to hearth and home. For this woman, as for Loy, the sensory-rich environment of war is a welcome "change" to an otherwise sterile, every day environment. For Loy, the sensual "mess" of the surgical hospital is a source of artistic inspiration. She conceives of the smells, sounds, and sights associated with the human body as fodder for her embodied aesthetic: an aesthetic that, as a woman, she was often prevented from or criticized for realizing. Carolyn Burke suggests that Loy's war poems often say less about the war men fight—"the machine war"—than about the war women fight—the "sex war"—and the same can be said of Loy's less-popular prose (*BM* 188). In the posthumously published novel, *Insel*, Loy situates the sex war on sensual grounds, uncovering and critiquing sensory violence done to women, often through technology. *Insel* is a site of sensory interrogation upon which Loy susses out divisions between the sexes and the senses, revalues the female body as a source of power, and makes a case for a uniquely female (often feminist) sensorium.

Insel charts the relationship between Mrs. Jones, a writer and the narrator of our story, and Insel, a surrealist painter with a surreal personality. Loy's novel is loosely based on her three-year relationship with the German painter Richard Oelze, whom she met and befriended in Paris while curating art for her son-in-law's gallery. Just as Loy encouraged Oelze and supported

⁷⁶ Hereafter abbreviated *BM*.

his work, so too does Mrs. Jones encourage and support Insel. Recognizing his creative potential, as well as his aimlessness, Mrs. Jones gives Insel a key to her Paris apartment to use as a studio space when she travels. So begins the story of their strange and intense relationship. Insel/Oelze epitomizes the rag-tag, underbelly of society that Loy/Jones finds so alluring.⁷⁷ When Mrs. Jones first meets Insel, he has taken the persona of “starving artist” to an extreme and is literally malnourished. A “clochard” and “wastrel” who seems both deprecatory of and dependent on women, Insel nevertheless emits a magnetism that appeals to Mrs. Jones (*Insel* 28, 40).⁷⁸ She is drawn to his rays or “Strahlen”—the “kind of radioactivity [he] gives off,” and asks permission to write Insel’s biography, of which *Insel* is the result (*I* 87, 95).

Though Loy wrote *Insel* in the years spanning 1933-1936, her novel was not published until 1991.⁷⁹ As such, it has yet to garner sustained critical attention. Andrew Gaedtke submits that “this strange novel has suffered the same disregard within contemporary modernist studies that it faced when Loy failed to find a sympathetic publisher” (143). While scholarship on Insel is still lacking, that which does exist often traces Loy’s “stringent materialism” (Ayers 228).⁸⁰ Elizabeth Arnold, for instance, suggests that “The arduous language with which [Loy] develops Insel’s character reflects a decision to persist in the struggle to hammer the ineffable out of the hard physical matter of language, paint, stone, and metal that were Loy’s media as a poet and visual artist” (169). For Loy, language itself is material, and she often employs its sensual

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Arnold suggests that Insel, “the ethereal bum belongs to a long line of materially destitute characters in whom Loy located spiritual riches” (*Insel* 169).

⁷⁸ Hereafter abbreviated *I*.

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Arnold discovered the typescript of *Insel* in 1990 in the Beinecke Library (*I* xiii-xix). In 2013, Sarah Hayden discovered an alternate ending to *Insel*, entitled “The Visitation of Insel” (*I* xix). For my purposes, I deal primarily with the original text and the original ending, though much of the alternate ending reinforces my argument.

properties for dissensual purposes. “Designated as Surrealist novel, Künstlerroman and modernist roman à clef,” *Insel* is also a dissensual text within which Loy outlines and critiques the fraught relationship among the senses, gender, technology, and power—power which men seek to deny women, but for which Loy ardently fights (Hayden xiv).

A Masculine Approach to the Body and the Senses

In many ways, Loy’s fraught relationship with *Insel* resembles her fraught relationship with her male modernist contemporaries. *Insel* has a misogynist streak, not unlike those artists with whom Loy is commonly linked. He is especially scornful of his former-lover, who left him for a lesbian, and of women-identified women, who do not center their identities on men. Such women threaten to render men obsolete, and men attempt to counter this threat through female erasure. In the art world, female erasure often occurs on the battlefield of creation. For the modernists, the ability to produce art and the biological ability to reproduce overlap. Concerns with male fertility are surprisingly characteristic among male modernists, *Insel* included, who covet and, in turn, denigrate creative, feminine power.⁸¹ We see this desire in F. T. Marinetti’s novel *Mafarka*, “a Nietzschean pastiche” in which the hero “dreams of generating a mechanical son out of his own body and ‘without the aid of the vulva’ or the ‘complicity and help of the female womb’” (Armstrong 154; Re 800). In a similar erasure of the feminine, when discussing *The Waste Land*, Pound and Eliot describe themselves as pregnant mother and midwife, respectively (Armstrong 135). In both instances, modernist fantasies of male motherhood exclude woman from the reproductive process: an exclusion that denies the female body—and its

⁸¹ Loy engages themes of male reproductive envy in her poetry as well as her prose. In the poem “Parturition” Lucia Re remarks that Loy “vividly discloses how much of futurism is in effect an attempt to co-opt and expropriate a female and feminine territory” (808). “The life-giving, energizing power of the ‘cosmically connected’ maternal female body,” Re continues, “is the ultimate object of a deeply-rooted envy which secretly motivates the futurist urge...to supplant or incorporate the power of the *mater*” (809).

messy sensuality—as a necessary component of biological creation. Tim Armstrong comments that “In expatiating, even in joke, on the engendering and energizing powers of semen and placing it near the center of modernists aesthetics, Pound followed a long tradition linking ‘genius’ to seminal power—with a matrix within which making is, as Wayne Koestenbaum indicates, ‘between men’” (135).

Insel also seems eager to keep things “between men,” or at the very least, eager to deny women’s role as creators. Insel “conveyed in silence” that “‘To make things grow...you would have to begin with the invisible dynamo of growth...As a rule it will only grow if planted in a woman—But my brain is a more exquisite manure. In that time in which I exist alone, I recover the Oceanic grain of life to let it run through my fingers, multiple as sand’” (*I* 86). The first irony in this exchange is that Insel, an artist whose work is faltering and, in that sense, whose “dynamo of growth” is, indeed, “invisible,” mansplains the “rules” of creation to Mrs. Jones, a successful writer. Secondly, by contesting the “rules” of nature, Insel suggests that nature somehow got it wrong: that his mind offers more fertile ground for creation than women’s minds. His fantasy resembles those of other modernist male writers since he, “alone” and without woman, attempts to “recover” the gift of creation denied him in order to correct nature’s mistake. Loy, however, implicates Insel: like the misogynist modernists he represents, Insel conceives of the masculine brain as the site of growth and rejects the feminine body’s role in creation.

By attempting to suppress the feminine body, Insel also suppresses sensuality for, as Constance Classen notes, women are encoded as the more sensual of the sexes—they are “all body, all feeling” (203). In devaluing femininity and sensuality, Insel participates in a history of bodily and sensory regulation common to the modernist period, and to male modernists in particular. Michelle Henning notes that femininity and sensuality “had historical associations

with fluidity—the female body ‘spills over’ while the (idealized) male body has defined bounds” (26). However, male modernists seem less certain of said boundedness. Their response to their sexuality demonstrates fear that their bodies, too, are fluid and given to spilling over. They attempt to mitigate this spillage by conserving seminal fluids that, according to popular thought, were a source of creative power. Ezra Pound, for example, viewed “The sexual act as a metaphor for artistic creation, and the brain’s fluids as analogous to semen” (Armstrong 135). In order to ensure these creative juices remained plentiful and potent, some turned to new medical technologies and “treatments,” such as the Steinach Operation. A popular procedure in the early twentieth century, the Steinach Operation claimed to redirect men’s sexual fluid for creative purposes. Though, as Armstrong notes, the operation was “simply a vasectomy [where] ‘the vas deferens was severed and sutured,’ patients believed that the procedure ‘diverted [energy] from the production of semen to the production of hormone’ (147). In so doing, ‘the system revitalized [itself] via a shift from external to internal secretion’ (147).⁸² The fluids men once released could now be retained and repurposed for their own artistic benefit.

Marinetti and his followers took a similar approach to sensation, believing that one could redirect sensual energy to reinvigorate a particular sense organ. For instance, in “Tactilism: Toward the Discovery of New Senses” (1924), Marinetti outlines a regiment for “Tactile Education” where he instructs his pupils to “every night, in total darkness, count and be aware of all the objects in [his or her] bedroom” (*Critical Writings* 375).⁸³ Abbie Garrington points out

⁸² Sara Danius notes a similar shift when considering “a certain progression, an ever-closer relationship between the habits of the senses and technologies of perception,” which “may usefully be grasped as a gravitation from externality toward internalization” (21).

⁸³ Hereafter abbreviated *CW*. In this essay, Marinetti claims to have invented “tactile art,” despite his earlier statements in “Tactilism: A Futurist Manifesto” (1921), where he asserts the opposite. “I have never claimed to have invented tactile sensibility,” he writes, “other writers and artists have previously been vaguely aware of Tactilism” (*CW* 375). For more on the controversy surrounding the origin of Tactilism and Marinetti’s public disagreements on the topic, see *Critical Writings*, pp. 496–7, note 20.

that this “familiar trope suggests that the tactile faculties will be sharpened by the absence of the visual sense,” and that one can re-appropriate visual energy into tactile energy (35). Although Marinetti breaks from sensory hierarchies by valuing touch over vision, his method is based on an either/or binary where one sensual act forecloses another—an aesthetics of denial that rejects multiplicity and the intersensory.⁸⁴ Marinetti conceives of touch as a sensual “appetite that can be increased through periods of deprivation or abstinence” (Garrington 35).⁸⁵ In short, while Marinetti’s aims may be noble, even revolutionary, his means are problematic. His “sense-educative undertakings” dictate “scale[s] of tactile values” that bolster sensory hierarchies (Garrington 35, Marinetti 372).⁸⁶ In so doing, Marinetti exemplifies a “masculine” approach to the senses based on separation, exclusion, and restraint.

Such restraint was often inspired by the machinal and technological. Disciplinary movements, which gained popularity in the twentieth-century, coincide with the “start of the age of machinery,” and offer a means of overcoming feminine softness and sensuality—those “effeminizing poisons” that Marinetti feared would “turn men into gelatine” (Classen 168; *BM*

⁸⁴ Marinetti was in the habit of not only distinguishing among the senses, but among people with particular sensibilities. Tactile art, he asserts, should “avoid, as much as possible, the use of any color on the tactile panels... [For this reason,] painters and sculptors, who naturally enough tend to subordinate tactile values to visual ones, are unlikely to have the gift for creating tactile panels of any significance” (375). Even in writings where Marinetti advocates for all five of the senses, he prescribes stringent, step-by-step instructions. For instance, in “A dish with sounds and scents,” Marinetti writes, “Eating futuristically, one uses all five of the senses... We put to the reader a few other rules for the perfect dinner which will help us to fully enjoy the taste of all the course to come” (*The Futurist Cookbook* 77). He continues with directions to “first use the art of perfumes” and “to next use in measured doses poetry and music” that show an obsessive level of sensual control, even as he attempts to evoke diverse sensual experiences (77).

⁸⁵ Garrington identifies a similar “mortification of the senses” in religious practices in the writings of James Joyce, see p. 51, note 7.

⁸⁶ For instance, there is a sexual hierarchy within Marinetti’s tactile program wherein he iterates “Tactile Panels for the Different Sexes” suited for “The two rival sensibilities” and “their competing sensations” (*CW* 374).

157).⁸⁷ Military drill and marching, for example, disciplined male bodies in “precise, regular, and inflexible” movements and reflected “a major concern of early machine makers: the need for uniform components” (Classen 168).⁸⁸ Such uniformity differentiated these machinal male bodies from more fluid, unpredictable, and sensual female bodies and helped “arm” men against the sensory. According to Michelle Henning, “the armored [masculine] body” functioned as a “protective shell...that far from simply taking on board sensory information...actually guard[ed] against it” (28).⁸⁹ Insofar as they helped fortify the body, technologies and machines can be considered “masculine” and were often employed in “masculine” ends.⁹⁰ Through technological intervention, such as the Steinach operation, and through training programs that sought to render

⁸⁷ In “Down with the Tango and Parsifal!” which Marinetti address to “some cosmopolitan women friends who give tango tea-dances and who Parsifalize themselves,” Marinetti renounces the softness of feminine dances, with their “niceties of the skin” (132, 133). He warns that “The epidemic of swaying back and forth is gradually spreading worldwide...and is threatening to infect all races, turning them into jelly” (132). As a remedy, Marinetti advocates for “the brutality of violent possession and the fine fury of a muscular dance that’s uplifting and invigorating...*To Hell with the tango!* For the Sake of our Health, our Strength, our Will, and our Virility” (133). Instead, Marinetti “envisioned a future in which human bodies would merge with machines... [in which] a mechanical evolution would refine mankind’s bodies and minds” (Parmar 75).

⁸⁸ Body reform movements generally targeted men. Armstrong notes that “the freedom offered by male bodily reformers to women was limited: women might be liberated from convention and sexual restraint, but not at the risk of jeopardizing their role as guardians of the future” (109-110). Likewise, Constance Classen notes that, on account of women’s perceived frailty—and in an effort to preserve that frailty—women were sheltered from physically aggressive, “masculine” forms of bodily discipline. Instead, in order to retain the soft sensuality of the feminine body, women were subjected to domestic discipline and sometimes performed mock, “fancy drills” with brooms and mops instead of guns (Classen 180-90).

⁸⁹ Freud and Simmel conceived of consciousness in a similar way, suggesting that an armored mind might serve as a buffer against the sensory shocks of modernism (Henning 28). Gaedtke posits another motivation for such fortification, noting that “the possibility that the machinery of one’s own body was somehow more accessible to others than to oneself was...a cause of great anxiety” in the modernist period (148). The German physician Max Nordau perpetuates connections between masculine fortitude and technological mastery. He claims that, in contrast to soft synaesthetes, “healthy ... more vigorous” individuals—those with “nerves of gigantic vigour [sic]”—“will rapidly and easily adapt themselves to the conditions which new inventions have created in humanity” and will birth “a new generation to whom it will not be injurious to ... be constantly called to the telephone ... to live half their time in a railway carriage or in a flying machine” (541).

⁹⁰ According to Tim Armstrong, the reverse is also true: the masculine body is “already a technology” (109).

bodies more machine-like than human, men sought to discipline the body and to rid themselves of “feminine” sensual proclivities.⁹¹

Modernists weaponized technology not only in actual war, but in the sex war, a point Loy communicates through sexually-charged language. Semen, it was often thought, “could offer a power like electricity,” and Loy conflates sexual power and electric power in descriptions of Insel (Armstrong 148).⁹² Mrs. Jones remarks that “One thing...as above all else menacing Insel was some climax in which his depredatory radioactivity must inevitably give out” (*I* 154). By describing Insel’s rays as “depredatory,” Loy calls to mind a predator-prey relationship, through which Insel pillages, plunders, and otherwise destroys his victims. Insel’s fear of losing this power—of “giving out” or expending his radioactivity—mirrors that of modernist men who were afraid to waste their sexual and creative energy. By associating electric energy with sexual climax, Loy underscores the ways in which technology, like sex, is a source of power that Insel, and company, are desperate to control.

However, technology, Loy suggests, is not so easily manipulated. At first glance, Insel enacts a male, machinal fantasy by becoming increasingly technological. Loy describes Insel as a hybrid being, a “gray man and an electrified organism at one and the same time” (*I* 77). Mrs. Jones remarks that Insel “might have served as his own fluoroscope... He had no need to portray. His picture grew, out of him, seeding through the inner-atomic spaces in his digital

⁹¹ It should be noted, however, that while men sometimes sought out the Steinach operation as a way to enhance their masculinity, Steinach was used for various reasons and with various results. For instance, the physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld encouraged Steinach in his research on ovarian implants because of its promise for transgender surgeries, of which Einar Wegener (later Lili Elbe) was among the earliest recipients. For more on Hirschfeld and Elbe see Tim Armstrong, “Making a Woman” in *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study*, esp. pp 164-176.

⁹² Thomas Laqueur traces a history that values semen as a source of heat and energy, from the seventeenth century when “‘impregnation... becomes metaphorically the igniting of women’” to the late nineteenth century, when some scientists believed that “‘the thriving of girls’ after marriage was a result of ‘the absorption of semen’” (qtd. in Armstrong 147-8).

substance to urge tenacious roots into a plane surface” (82-3). The inorganic, digital world of pictures and projections here entangles with the organic substance of Insel. Loy’s description naturalizes technology—fluoroscopic pictures seed and root—but this seeming naturalization is not entirely innocuous. The fluoroscope’s ability to “seed through” and plant “tenacious roots” imply an infiltration, an unauthorized transformation, a slow taking-over. Tyrus Miller notes this loss, commenting that “Insel’s very body...[is] thoroughly penetrated by a technology of seeing and recording” (208).⁹³ With this penetration comes a threatened embodiment and a loss of agency. Insel has “no need to portray”—his portrayal is automatic and mindless, even out of his control. While David Ayers suggests that Insel’s “personal power—as electricity, magnetism, aura or rays—increases in proportion to his physical decay,” Loy often questions the limits of that power (226).⁹⁴ Insel does appear increasingly technological and disembodied, but Loy frequently likens him to easily manipulated electric objects—“like a lamppost alight”—and to a variety of technologies—from the gramophone, to the projector, to the X-ray—that threaten to turn Insel into mere instrument (*I* 31). Loy cautions against placing too much faith in technology, which can overwhelm the body and limit, as opposed to expand, power.

In *Insel*, Loy does not glorify technology as a foolproof means of maintaining bodily integrity and power, but instead highlights its proclivity to breakdown and the body’s tendency to persist. As Andrew Gaedtke notes, Loy’s “descriptions fixate on [Insel’s] uncanny physiology,

⁹³ Miller goes on to say that Insel “literally *embodies* the predicaments of the artist during this time...As ‘fluoroscope,’ [Insel] sees through the bodies he turns to painting, yet what he ‘sees through’ above all is his own disappearing presence as an artist. In rendering himself as the ‘fluoroscope’ he has become, he at the same time exposes the remains of an avant-garde on the verge of disappearance: a few pale, floating organs rendered luminously visible by the very machinery that has dissolved their organic ‘context’” (208).

⁹⁴ Ayers suggests that “The narrative follows the increase in [Insel’s] power and near approach to death, which culminates in his apotheosis into the ‘man-of-light’” (226; *I* 77). In reading Insel’s total electrification as a high point in his development, Ayers draws on tenets of Christian Science and New Thought familiar to Loy and claims “the psychic rather than the object world as the preferred domain of *Insel*” (231).

locating him somewhere between human and machine, but a machine that seems to be in an entropic state of decay and dissolution” (145).⁹⁵ Insel is, in Loy’s words, “a wound up automaton running down” (*I* 13). Machinal fortification fails as Loy portrays Insel not as the impenetrable, machine-hardened, masculine ideal, but a permeable vessel that springs leaks and fails to operate properly. Mrs. Jones, for instance, expresses an “intuitional curiosity as to the leak in Insel’s magnetic coherence,” noting a “perceptible seepage in [his] torpor” (49, 109). In crafting Insel as leaky, Loy both feminizes him and parodies male modernists’ attempts at bodily mechanization—a mechanization, Loy suggests, that is bound to fail. For all his efforts at containment, Insel is unable to maintain and manipulate the “internal secretions” that male modernists so carefully guarded (Armstrong 147). In this way, Loy exposes the limits of the machine and the explosiveness of the body.

Insel’s attempts to regulate this explosiveness manifest in his paintings, wherein Mrs. Jones confronts his bodily and sensual denial. His paintings exemplify Henning’s notion of “bounded masculinity” in that they reject the body’s permeability and exhibit extreme physical restraint and strain (26). Examining Insel’s paintings, Mrs. Jones notices “an obsessive absence of a mouth [that] implied an inconceivable constipation” (*I* 82). Insel denies his subject a mouth by which to ingest and to expel, creating an aesthetics of “constipation”—a toxic sensory and bodily environment that quells production and creativity. In Loy’s characteristically biting tone, she suggests that, like the Futurists and Surrealists with whom Loy interacted, Insel and his art are, in impolite terms, full of shit. This fullness is most apparent in *die Irma*, the painting of a

⁹⁵ Armstrong identifies a similar trend in Loy’s poetry as well. ““The Oil in the Machine,”” he writes, “is typical of Loy’s poems on the mechanical in that it resists any simple equation of body and machine. Rather than the machine serving as a desirable replacement for the body, it is a reductive version of the body, while the body is a machine which fails to perform” (115).

woman Insel raves about, but Mrs. Jones finds offensive. Mrs. Jones notices that “the gutter of [Insel’s] upper lip was interrupted by a seam,” while Irma’s was not (*I* 111). Instead, “In this very same spot [,] she puffed to a swollen convergence.” Loy’s uncharacteristically succinct prose here conveys the surprise Mrs. Jones feels. ““But Insel,”” she protests, ““her upper lip is about to burst with some inavowable disease. You have formed her of pus. Her body has already melted.’ ‘Exactly,’ he answered with mysterious satisfaction” (111). Here, Insel displaces embodiment—the “inavowable disease” of the abject female—onto *Irma*. Instead of the body exploding, Insel attempts to melt the female form into diseased oblivion.

Insel’s fixation on bodily fluids manifests as a denial of sensual fluidity and negatively impacts his perceptual practice. In Insel’s presence, Mrs. Jones notes the absence of fluids where they otherwise should be. She remarks, “Always in [Insel’s] vicinity one had the impression of living in or rather of being surrounded by an arid aquarium,” and she compares his mind to “the unreal tides of an ocean without waves” (43). Here, we see a perverse lack of water and movement that render Insel dry and barren where he should be wet and fertile. Insel cannot think sensually or create sensual art, a point which becomes all the more obvious when juxtaposed with Loy’s sensual language and Mrs. Jones extra-sensory perception. Using a sort of sixth sense to view Insel’s thoughts, Mrs. Jones comments that they, “like drowned diamonds [,] blew out their rudimentary bellies—almost protruded foetal arms over all an aimless baton of inaudible orchestra — a colorless water-plant growing the stumpy battlements of a castle in a game of chess waved in and out of perceptibility its vaguely phallic reminder—” (43). Of note here, Loy invokes several senses to communicate Insel’s sensual lack: foetal arms and aimless batons invoke the sense of touch, drowned diamonds and colorless plants invoke the sense of sight, and orchestras, even inaudible ones, invoke the sense of sound. However, on all sensory fronts, Insel

falls short: from the foetal arms that almost protrude to the battlements that are mere stumps, this passage indicates incompleteness, an inability to productively engage the sensorial. As if influenced by Insel's inability to "finish," Mrs. Jones' observation itself stops short, and the dash serves as a "vaguely phallic reminder" of Insel's sensory deficiency.

Using the rhetoric of male modernists against itself, Loy suggests that, if "Creative processes find parallels in sexual function," then fearing the body and sensuality renders men impotent on both fronts (Armstrong 134). Through repeated use of "consummation," Loy nods to the problem of "finishing" that plagues Insel and male modernists alike (*I* 104). Loy casts Insel as both unfinished and unable to finish. Mrs. Jones repeatedly refers to him as "embryonic" and "increate" and his incomplete physicality fascinates and mystifies her (*I* 123; 8, 123; 55, 69, 104). Additionally, Mrs. Jones notes that Insel "*never* paints," that painting is "work he no longer seemed able to do," but which she encourages him to continue: "'You must *paint those pictures,*'" she urges (123-4). Loy herself paints Insel's inability in sexual terms, equating artistic ability with sexual ability. She declares, "[Insel's] conceptions were like seeds fallen upon an iron girder.... The visions emitted by the organism of this truly congenital surrealist were only a wasted pollen" (45). In a novel rife with references to spermatozoa, Insel's "seeds" and "pollen" serve as yet another symbol of wasted masculine and creative fluid. Insel, Loy emphasizes, can neither produce nor reproduce.⁹⁶ Indeed, he appears both a failed father and a failed technology—the projector-like visions he emits, like the seeds he expels, only add to his stockpile of waste. By evoking the phallic, hard "iron girder"—an impenetrable machinal/masculine ideal which proves useless in the creative process—Loy further emasculates

⁹⁶ Here, Loy perhaps responds to Wyndham Lewis's assertion that "man produces and woman reproduces" (Armstrong 109).

Insel and undercuts male modernist reverence of technology. Technology, without the sensual body, renders Insel creatively impotent.

This impotence is most notable in the setting in which Mrs. Jones first encounters *die Irma*, which reeks of sexual and creative feebleness. Mrs. Jones observes that Insel “hung over *die Irma* like a tall insect and outside the window in the rotten rose of an asphyxiated sunset the skeleton phallus of the Eiffel Tower reared in the distance as slim as himself” (I 110-111). Just as Insel hangs over his painting, “asphyxiated” hangs over these lines, drawing attention to the stunted environment in which Insel works and the suffocated body that informs (or fails to inform) his aesthetic. Loy suggests that when nature, in the form of the rose/body, rots, culture, in the form of the Eiffel Tower/art, follows suit. Just as Insel sheds his humanity and becomes no more than mere insect, the Eiffel tower loses its wonder and becomes no more than a skeletal shell of itself. Male creative power, as represented by the phallic tower, wanes, as does the figure of Insel, who appears “slim” and insubstantial. Loy attributes Insel’s insubstantiality to sensual deprivation: a sort of sensory impotence that infects both his life and his art.

Sight and Sensory Impotence

Sensory impotence, Loy submits, results from channeling too much creative fluid into a single sense, in Insel’s case, the visual.⁹⁷ Through the visual, Loy connects Insel to the Surrealists, and critiques their single-sense devotion. As a visual specimen, Insel is, as Mrs. Jones notes, “organically surreal”: he would be “*worth* a little money to a surrealist” (108). He embodies the separation of the visual and the rational that the Surrealists lauded: they valued

⁹⁷ Linking sexual energy and sensual energy, Classen notes that, in premodern times, “The brain, the male organs of generation, and the eyes were all held to make use of seminal fluid in their operations. Women, it was believed, also had a kind of seminal fluid, but one that was weaker than men’s and that resulted in a correspondingly weaker sense of sight and a weaker intellect” (Classen 76).

seeing for seeing's sake and did not equate sight with truth.⁹⁸ However, though Surrealists set out to “disenchant sight,” as Martin Jay suggests, their efforts to dethrone the so-called “noblest of senses” often reified sight's centrality (211).⁹⁹ Sight is certainly central to Insel's perception, often to an obsessive degree. Insel has an addictive personality (Richard Oelze himself was a suspected addict), and sight functions as his drug of choice.¹⁰⁰ Insel possesses a “secretive in-looking twinkle” that preoccupies him endlessly (*I* 109). This urge to look within (not without) manifests as a narcissistic visuality on which Loy lengthily elaborates:

Suddenly it dawned upon me that one thing about this man that made him so different to other people was that contrary to our outrunning holding-up-of-the-mirror self-consciousness, his was constantly turning its back on the world and tiptoe with expectancy, peeping inquisitively into its own mischievous eyes. Or, in some cerebral acrobatic recoil, that being who is, in us, both outlooker and window, in him, astonishingly, was craning back to look *in* at the *out*looking window of himself, as if there were something he might forget, some treasure as to whose lovely existence he wished to remain assured, some lovely illusion inside him, he *must* re-see to insure its continued projection. (109)

⁹⁸ Increasingly, Sara Danius notes, “notions of seeing [were] no longer necessarily linked to categories of knowledge” and seeing for seeing's sake became a popular modernist practice (Danius 19).

⁹⁹ For instance, some Surrealists continue to hierarchize and segment sensation, in favor of sight. We see this, for example, in Andre Breton's notorious distaste for music, as well as his claim that “auditive images...are inferior to visual images” (Jay 244). “So may night continue to fall upon the orchestra,” Breton writes, “and may I...be left with open or closed eyes, in broad daylight, to my silent contemplation” (qtd. in Jay 244).

¹⁰⁰ Carolyn Burke references Oelze's rumored drug addiction, and Sarah Hayden notes that, while Loy “shies away from the suggestion of...morphine addiction” in *Insel*, “the narrator of the “Visitation” unshrinkingly salutes the revenant as ‘my drug addict’” (*BM* 381; Hayden xxii). For more on the elision of addiction and drug use in *Insel*, see Hayden, xxix.

Insel does not see like others; in fact, he cares little about seeing others. By emphasizing the inner and outer gaze, Loy creates barriers between Insel and the world, on which Insel “was constantly turning its back” and refusing to engage. Insel’s inward looking speaks to the “Surrealist’s refusal to identify ‘image’ with a mental representation of an external object, a thing in the world, a mimetic sensation. [Image] referred instead to the revelation of an internal state, a psychological truth hidden to conscious deliberation” (Jay 240).¹⁰¹ This refusal can be read as another way to disengage from and protect against the material, the feminine, and the sensual. Considering the link between seminal economies and visual economies, Insel’s desire to “peep inquisitively into [his] own mischievous eyes” appears not only self-involved, but autoerotic. His “visual acrobatics” are further reflected in Loy’s acrobatic language. Bending back on itself, Loy’s prose communicates a masculine anxiety about sight and man’s place as seer. By looking “*in* at the *out*looking window of himself” Insel “re-sees” himself in the position of the looker and maintains the “illusion” of masculine visual power.¹⁰²

Despite obvious links between sight and power, Surrealists persisted in idealizing the innocence of sight, a notion with which Loy finds fault. Martin Jay notes that Surrealists “sought to recover the virginal sight, the *jamais vu*, that would be the uncanny complement of *déjà vu*” (237). Jay goes on to say that “If the Surrealists radically defied visual conventions, they did so, at least initially, in the hope of restoring the Edenic purity of the ‘innocent eye’ ... By violently disturbing the corrupted, habitual vision of everyday life, the visionary wonder of childhood, so they believed, might be recaptured” (243-244). Jay’s description of the Surrealist visual agenda suggests a purification of both the visual and the feminine: a sensual transformation likened to

¹⁰¹ What “Mary Ann Caws has called an ‘inscape’ rather than an ‘outlook’” (Jay 240).

¹⁰² For more on the function of the window in Surrealist works see Jay, pp. 245-6.

sexual abluion. Insel employs the Edenic, child-like vision touted by the Surrealists, but Loy conceives of such seeing as *childish* and overly simplistic. After listening to Insel fantasize about “the joy of *watching* [her daughter] evolve,” Mrs. Jones “realized there was nothing, nothing, in all the world elementary enough to serve as an object for such simplified observation as [Insel’s]. Everything must henceforth for him drowse in an impotence of arrested development” (*I* 123). Here, Loy critiques the “joy of watching” as immature, shallow, and unproductive. Such seeing, like that the Surrealists promoted, “arrests development” by looking backward to the past for sensory inspiration. Such backward-looking does not inspire new ways of seeing, but impedes them, a point Loy emphasizes through language that connotes ineffectuality—namely “drowse” and “impotence.” By equating such “simplified observation” with male impotence, Loy genders vision: by exposing the inadequacies of such seeing, she short-circuits the male visual fantasy.

Mrs. Jones’s words best express Loy’s distaste for the visual practices common to modernism. “For years,” Mrs. Jones laments, “I had been submitted to the tedium of the imaginative living among races conceiving no final outlet for their dynamism but destruction, forced to inertia by the rush of intellect in the wrong direction” (*I* 165). Through Insel, Loy illustrates the consequences of misdirected thinking and the destruction that results. Insel, both obsessively inward looking and obsessed with idealized notions of seeing, is blinded by his fixation on the visual, to the detriment of those around him. Sitting outside the Lutetia hotel with Mrs. Jones, Insel becomes something of an idle flâneur:

“I can see right into these people,” [Insel] asserted, indicating the crowd gathered around the Hotel. “I know exactly what they are; I know what they do.” And that was all. As if satisfied by his sense of insight, he needed not to perceive anything specifically, his mind

exposed these people as brightly illuminated “whats.” A reaction he accepted for entire comprehension. (*I* 44)

“And that was all,” arguably the shortest sentence in the novel, echoes Insel’s own short-sightedness. Contrary to Insel’s “satisfied,” smug assertion otherwise, Loy’s dismissive tone suggests that he gains no new insight or comprehension through seeing. In this respect, Loy again connects vision with impotence. Insel lazily “accepts” a sort of seeing that Mrs. Jones finds not only ridiculous, but restrictive. His brand of seeing is both limited and limiting: it violates by “exposing” people and dehumanizes by deeming them mere “whats”. Instead of “seeing into” Insel sees through, as if the people he observes are invisible or unworthy —as if “he needed not to perceive anything specifically.” However, Mrs. Jones, via Loy, sees through Insel’s visual posturing, characterizing it not only as an empty practice and a failed attempt at seeing, but a damaging form of sensual restraint.

Insel’s own writing, which he attempts when he fails at painting, suffers due to his devotion to the visual. The few lines he writes reflect his single-sense agenda: “My sister and I walked along the road. Coming to the town gate we gave it a good thump...All of the townsfolk came out of the gate, swarming about us to look” (125). Mrs. Jones responds to Insel’s writing with little surprise, noting that “As ever, with Insel, ‘to look’ was a deadlock, he had written no more” (125). Vision here dead-ends perception. It blunts and impairs in a way that Mrs. Jones critiques as overly-simplistic and unproductive. By positing sight alone as an insufficient sensory modality, *Insel* represents Loy’s “aesthetic of the ‘inconceivable’—of what cannot be fully visualized about the subject,” as Walter claims. However, in so doing, the novel also foregrounds

other ways of conceiving that surpass the visual and single-sense perception (Walter 670).¹⁰³ Loy suggests that there is more to be written, and other, more sensually convergent ways of writing.

Loy's Integrationist Approach

Loy's approach to technology, the body, and the senses invokes and implodes that of the Futurists, Surrealists, and many of her male contemporaries. In contrast to Insel's writing, and his limited view of perception and sensation, Mrs. Jones's writing is markedly complex and multisensual. However, it is also notably scientific. Indeed, *Insel* itself acts as an extended "scientific" observation of Insel by Mrs. Jones.¹⁰⁴ Combining scientific language with sensual language, Loy challenges assumptions about women's senses and embodied observation, which contributed to an ever-growing dependency on scientific technologies and machines. As scientific technologies became more sophisticated, the role of the human body in the laboratory dwindled. In the aptly titled "The Death of the Sensuous Chemist: the 'New' Chemistry and the Transformation of Sensuous Technology," Lissa L. Roberts explains that from the late eighteenth century onward, scientists began to think of the human sensorium as untrustworthy, even obstructive. Roberts notes moments when "the presence of chemists' bodies were deemed a downright nuisance" (117).¹⁰⁵ By extension, women's bodies, commonly associated with the lower senses, were a particular nuisance since, "In the 'new' chemistry, taste and smell virtually

¹⁰³ Christina Walter suggests that "*Insel* embraces the embodied limits of the senses figured in the modern image's opacity—rather than seeking to 'overthrow' those limits, or to create an 'intertransparency of word and image,' as [Tyrus] Miller has argued" (684). Walter points to Loy's belief in the "fundamental opacity [of] the embodied subject," a visual limit Loy champions because, in remaining opaque and unknown, the embodied subject cannot be locked into sexist, racist, or homophobic categories (680).

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Gaedtke notes a similar observational relationship between Mrs. Jones and Insel. Loy's novel, he suggests, functions as a "case study," where Mrs. Jones acts as analyst and Insel as analysand (152).

¹⁰⁵ Here, Robert points to the work of Antoine Lavoisier, often referred to as the father of modern chemistry. Lavoisier "advised his readers to keep their hands off the vessels that held test-substances, lest their body heat alter experimental circumstances" (117)

disappeared as formal media of chemical analysis” (123).¹⁰⁶ The body, scientists proclaimed, interfered with the intellect, and women’s bodies, ever-inclined to touch, taste, and smell their surroundings, were deemed especially cumbersome.

Not only were their perceptive aparati deemed more flawed than men’s, but women’s very presence in the laboratory signified a breach of a theretofore male-dominated, public space and, in this way, their struggle mirrors those of modernist women writers. In an effort to discourage women from taking up space in the laboratory, the media often vilified female scientists.¹⁰⁷ As public figures, they were sexualized and subject to scorn: as Colbey Emmerson Reid describes it, “the public manifestation of [women’s] mental life became a sign of sexual impropriety” (Reid 306). Loy herself was no stranger to such claims. By making the female body public in her poetry, and by being a public female body, Loy incurred a backlash of criticism. Critics, for instance, lambasted her poem “Songs to Joannes,” for its lewd references to the “mucous-membrane” and the female orgasm (*BM* 19).¹⁰⁸ Loy’s audience was flabbergasted by

¹⁰⁶ Roberts further explains that “Touching and hearing were likewise largely sidelined. The importance of the sense of sight increased as regards the visual reading of the results produced by laboratory instruments (such as thermometers) but decreased with respect to the role of direct visual evidence (such as changes in color)... The vision of nature thereby promoted was in fact a careful construction. The use of precision instruments, mathematical calculation and public discourse of scientific rationality yielded (and was dependent on) a world of standardized, measurable quantities” (123).

¹⁰⁷ Marie Curie, for instance, was one of the most ridiculed and renowned woman scientists of her time. While the Nobel committee recognized Curie for the second time, this time for discovering radium, French newspapers vilified her as a licentious adulteress, a foreigner who “systematically destroyed” the home of an honest Frenchwoman (Reid 305). Loy celebrates Curie and her discoveries in the poem “Gertrude Stein.” For more on Curie in relation to Loy, see Colbey Emmerson Reid, “Glamour and the ‘Fashionable Mind.’”

¹⁰⁸ Lucia Re notes that “Loy was repeatedly censored by critics, including the influential Amy Lowell, who threatened to withdraw support from *Others* because of ‘Love Songs’” (808). Loy’s editor, Alfred Kreymborg, aptly summarizes public taste for Loy’s writing, which critics found radical both in content and form: “[Loy’s] clinical frankness [and] sardonic conclusions, wedded to a madly elliptical style scornful of regular grammar, syntax, and punctuation ...drove our critics into furious despair... The utter nonchalance in revealing the secrets of sex was denounced as nothing less than lewd... To reduce eroticism to the sty was an outrage, and to do so without verbs, sentence structure...[was] even more offensive” (qtd. in Re 806).

her explicitness. They cast her language not as anatomically correct and scientific, but as pornographic. Echoing the sentiment of Alfred Kreymborg, Loy's long-time editor, Loy's readership seemed to ask, "[I]f she could dress like a lady, why couldn't she write like one?" (Conover xvi). As the public struggled to maintain the mutually exclusive categories of masculine intellect and feminine body, female intellectuals from different disciplines were similarly exiled. Reid notes that, "To protect their virtue, [female] intellectuals would have to retreat to the study, a figurative closet designed to narrow the scope of the mind, abandoning the body and its encounters with others" (306). Loy however, refuses the closet. Instead of abandoning the body, she "inaugurates a poetics of self-abandonment [that contrasts] the rigid protection of bodily integrity characteristic of Futurism," and a masculine outlook (Armstrong 118-9). The body, Loy suggests, contains its own intellect—one that is worth exploring—one to which we should look, listen, taste, smell, and touch.

In *Insel*, Loy both utilizes and examines the entire embodied sensorium—nothing is off the table in her sensory laboratory. Mrs. Jones assumes the persona of a sensual scientist or anthropologist and, inverting "the Surrealist tendency to view women as [their] passive muses," Mrs. Jones takes Insel as her object of sensual study (Arnold 174). She remarks that "The casual accident of chance threw me a dope-fiend—guinea-pig for experiment—in research on the *spirit*" (I 165).¹⁰⁹ This spirit, however, manifests materially, via what Loy refers to as "the fourth dimension."¹¹⁰ In the fourth dimension, "matter exists outside of normative spatial and temporal parameters" and, in turn, lends itself to non-normative sensual study (Zelazo 59). While

¹⁰⁹ From Chapter XLI in "Visitation."

¹¹⁰ For more on the fourth dimension and the influences of Christian Science and New Thought on Loy's work, see Lara Vetter, *Modernist Writings and Religio-scientific Discourse H.D., Loy, and Toomer*.

laboratory research of the time adopted a hands-off approach, leaning more firmly on technology for collection and calculation, Mrs. Jones's methods are notably tactile. Curious about the "aura that enveloped [Insel] with an extra external sensibility," Mrs. Jones carries out a series of experiments using touch as the instrument and object of study:

To investigate, I tapped him lightly on the arm in drawing his attention—and actually in a tenuous way I did feel my hand pass through 'something'...the effect on Insel was unforeseeable—jerking his face over his shoulder, he twitched away from my fingers with the acid sneer of a wounded feline...Later I repeated the gesture, but as if my hand in its first contact had got coated with the psychic exudence it would seem there was no longer any hurt in it. He was calm under my touch (*I* 46).

Repeating her tests and noting their effects, Mrs. Jones appears a proper scientist, thoroughly investigating Insel's response to sensation. Touch, arguably the most feminine of senses and often the most maligned, is central to Mrs. Jones's methodology.¹¹¹ Physical contact alters her relationship to Insel, allowing for familiarity and empathy. Loy's hand serves as conduit, a sort of technology that intercepts and communicates.¹¹² Her hand also acts as a conduit between the body and the mind, through which Loy turns the intangible, tangible. Her hand is "coated" in matter from Insel's mind—his "psychic exudence"—which is no longer merely cerebral, but concrete and felt. Such unexpected amalgamations "signal new forms of sensitivity" and illustrate new modes of sense perception (Gaedtke 156).¹¹³

¹¹¹ For more on touch and gender see Classen, *The Book of Touch*, esp. "Women's Touch," pp. 203-239.

¹¹² Here, we can see the influence of Henri Bergson, his ideas about the body as "conductor," and his call to "think matter" (qtd. in Zelazo 55, 61).

¹¹³ Gaedtke suggests that Loy's interest in "new sensitives" corresponds to those of Frederic Myers, Henri Bergson's "occasional colleague" (155). Myers found "evidence of psychological abilities yet to come" in schizophrenics, hysterics, and others deemed mentally ill. "What was generally regarded as mental illness," Gaedtke writes, "was,

Such innovative, radical sensory practices call for an equally radical language. Loy creates a sensuo-scientific prose all her own by blending the so-called softness of feminine sensation and sensual language with the so-called aggressiveness of masculine scientific thought and technical language. Suzanne Zelazo remarks that “Loy’s technical language requires readers to enlist multiple senses to comprehend what initially appears impenetrable...For Loy, it is from in-between sensual registrars that meaning emerges” (58). This in-between space counters exclusionary, masculine parameters and evokes “a language that is so multiple in its points of entry...that it affects a kind of felt-sense rather than merely an exclusive and singular signification” (Zelazo 58). Signification, therefore, is less valuable than the *process* of signifying, the various sensual means at one’s disposal and the sensory combinations that can result.¹¹⁴ Loy highlights these sensual combinations in her various observations of Insel. For instance, Mrs. Jones comments that “This very word, *Entwicklung*, was so much Insel’s word; its sound seemed to me onomatopoeic of his intellectual graph. For my alien ear it had a turn of the ridiculous as though a vast process had got twisted in a knot of tiny twigs, haply to unravel and root, and branch against the heavens” (123). Loy’s reference to Mrs. Jones’s “alien ear” speaks less to her grasp of foreign language and more to her foreign way of listening. Here, Loy combines the visual graph of a scientist or engineer with the specialized, “alien ear” of a poet, who not only listens to sounds anew, but finds new ways to represent those sounds. The aural and visual merge, as Loy translates the sound of “*Entwicklung*” into an image, a “graph” that

for Meyers, evidence of new mental faculties...which were to be encouraged and fostered through proper scientific means, rather than stigmatized as failure of self-control or as ‘feminine weakness’” (155-156).

¹¹⁴ One might think of these sensory combinations in terms of collage, itself an inter-sensory, “texturing” device (Re 809). For more on collage in Loy’s visual arts see Zelazo, “‘Altered Observation of Modern Eyes’: Mina Loy’s Collages, and Multisensual Aesthetics.” For more on collage in Loy’s poetry, see Carolyn Burke, “The New Poetry and the New Woman” and Stephen Joyce, “‘Make the World Your Salon’: Poetry and Community at the Arensberg Apartment.”

charts sonicity visually. Sound and vision also manifest as touch—the tactile quality of knotting, unraveling, rooting, and branching out through which sensory experience, ultimately, multiplies. The rhizomatic image illustrates Loy’s “multisensual aesthetics” wherein “language...an arboreal, fixed, and thereby truncated medium, becomes instead imminent possibility” (Zelazo 57).¹¹⁵ Loy accesses language, here the word “*Entwicklung*,” through her body—through an unfolding process of sensual understanding—and, in so doing, reclaims the body and its senses as valuable sources of intellect.

Instead of burying the body and the senses under the weight of technology, Loy employs technology to highlight the body’s capaciousness and to transform seemingly mundane sensory experiences. Her expansive “multisensual aesthetic,” as Zelazo calls it, can be seen as “a response to the technological innovations of modernity and the increasing mechanization of [modern] experience” (49). Zelazo explains that Loy’s multisensuality, “At one and the same time...attempts to hold on to the body in the face of the machine, but also uses the machine as a body, expanding the limits of normative sensual experience” (49). Throughout *Insel*, Loy asks us to take stock of so-called “normal” sensual experiences that we might otherwise take for granted. Modernism itself asks us to take stock of, and revalue, the ordinary. According to Loy, “Modernism says: Why not each one of us, scholar or bricklayer, pleasurably realize all that is impressing itself upon our subconscious the thousand odds and ends which make up your sensory [sic] every day life?” (“Gertrude Stein” 244).¹¹⁶ Mrs. Jones observes everyday occurrences when

¹¹⁵ “Emphasizing at once a profound interconnectedness and disparate multiplicity,” Zelazo contends, “the figure of the rhizome and its associated concepts comprise an apt critical apparatus for theorizing the sensual multiplicity with which Loy was engaged” (50). For a continued discussion of the rhizome and Loy’s collage, see Zelazo, pp. 54-66. For more on the rhizome see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

¹¹⁶ Loy goes on to question, “Would not life be lovelier if you were constantly overjoyed by the sublimely pure concavity of your wash bowls? The tubular dynamics of your cigarette?” (“Gertrude Stein” 244). “Modernism,” she proffers, “has democratized the subject matter of *la belle maitere* of art; through cubism the newspaper has assumed

she watches Insel leave her apartment, observing, “He shut the door, an act I have heard an authoress describe as so banal it is unfit for publication. But shutting the door, like all automatism we take for granted, is stupendous in its implications” (*I* 32). The “act” to which Mrs. Jones draws our attention has a mechanic, routine feel, but Loy suggests that the authoress who overlooks it also risks becoming mechanized and desensitized. With her perception on autopilot, she risks becoming an automaton herself. Mrs. Jones is wary of this automatism and evokes the machine to interrogate her sensory surroundings, to register the “stupendous...implications” of the everyday. “When Insel shut the door,” Loy writes, “infinitesimal currents ran out of him into the atmosphere, as if he were growing soft invisible fur that...Even before he came into one’s presence, one received a draughty intimation of his frosty approach” (32-33). Mrs. Jones perceives Insel’s “infinitesimal currents” by herself becoming a sort of sensory technology—not a sighted technology upon which modern science so readily depended, but a tactile technology that can feel the invisible. Like a weather barometer or a seismograph, Mrs. Jones senses the atmospheric changes Insel effects—the draughts and frost that accompany him. She acts as both the scientist *and* the scientific instrument. In framing the body as a technology, Loy opens a subversive sensorium that invites new identifications between human and machine.

Sensory Violence

Eyes, Sight, and Violence

an aesthetic quality, through Cezanne a plate has become more than something to put an apple upon, Brancusi has given an evangelistic import to eggs, and Gertrude Stein has given us the Word, in and for itself” (“Gertrude Stein” 244).

By technologizing the female body as a way to expand the sensorium, Loy reacts against the use of technology to discipline the senses and commit sensory violence. Male modernists often employed technology to violent ends, using it to denigrate sensory perception and sensory organs. Martin Jay notes a violent tendency toward vision in the “interwar era,” in general, and among the Surrealists, in specific, for whom the eye became “a target of mutilation and scorn, or a vehicle of its own violence” (209, 260). While men do violence against the eye, women become the object of the eye’s violence. In *Insel*, as in H.D.’s *HERmione*, sight figures as a palpable threat, with haptic ramifications. Insel’s eyes do the forceful work of hands. Mrs. Jones describes them as stabbing, sapping, and violently mixing: they “churn [her]... into the colorless vapors of his creation,” tossing her about while robbing her of colorful vitality (*I* 39). Through sight, Insel has his way with Mrs. Jones. Loy situates his creative act as a violent male gaze that vaporizes Mrs. Jones as he “creates” her. Loy emphasizes Insel’s visual penetration in technologically-inflected language: “Our lake of peace was draining as Insel gathered himself together for some voluntary magnetic onslaught... Shafts from his eyes became so penetrating I could feel myself dissolve to a transparent target, they pierced me, and traveling to the further side, stared through my back on their return to his irises” (72). Here, Loy envisions sight as a form of technologically-derived power—a magnetic force that man wields against woman. Boomerang-like, Insel’s eyes slice through Mrs. Jones: she becomes the “target” of premeditated visual and tangible violence. Her resulting dissolution and feelings of transparency communicate trauma, the subject who disappears as the result of a violent sensual attack.

Often, as in the example above, Loy likens Insel’s sight to invasive machines and visual technologies. In so doing, Loy illustrates the fear that, in deferring to technologies, we lose not only our sensuality, but our humanity. Insel represents this loss, and often appears as a mere

sensual instrument. While Mrs. Jones looks to technology for perceptual play, but retains her embodiment and her humanity, Insel's turn to technology overwhelms his body and his capacity for empathy. For instance, Mrs. Jones notes that Insel's "petrified eyes drill" into walls and into people (*I* 48). In this short phrase, Loy emphasizes the fossilization of damaging acts of visual perception and of Insel's participation in a long-standing tradition of men whose eyes bore through things and people. Mechanomorphic and unfeeling, Insel's sight also nods to a newer, no less penetrating technology, "the mechanical eye" of the X-ray (Darius 74).¹¹⁷ Loy nods to Insel's X-ray vision on the first page of the novel, when Mrs. Jones remarks that she, mistakenly, "supposed [Insel] could not see" the "sturdy legs" of one of her models who had "already dressed for the street" (*I* 3). Insel's X-ray vision persists even in the alternate ending "Visitation" where Loy again notes that "[Insel] has X-ray eyes" (*I* 164). Insel's adoption of the X-ray genders technology and renders it threatening, as seen in Mrs. Jones's recollection:

We sat around the Dôme and Insel x-rayed. All the girls, as they giggled along the Boulevard, he disrobed—more precisely, he could not see that they were dressed. As if on an expedition for collecting ivory, he *handed* me their variously molded thighs—weighed them with an indescribable sensitivity of touch. (137)¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Throughout the novel, Loy associates Insel with other damaging visual technologies that cause "disintegration." For instance, in likening the experience of Insel to that of movie-going, Mrs. Jones observes that "Within range of the crystalline of his eyes become so brightly brittle, again I experienced the profound relief of the acute celerity rhythm that perpetually disintegrated me as I got out of watching a film in slow motion" (*I* 45).

¹¹⁸ Mrs. Jones's reaction to Insel's X-raying differs from Hans Castorp's reaction to being X-rayed in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*. Sara Darius notes the "noninvasive penetration of Castorp's interior," noting that he "'had not felt anything at all during the penetration'" (80). Castorp's nonreaction illustrates the role gender plays in one's experience of technology. Woman, with her history of visual objectification, reacts negatively to X-ray vision, whereas man emerges slightly disoriented, but largely unscarred. For more on technology's role in doctor-patient gender dynamics, see Gaedtke 150-151.

Mrs. Jones's comment that Insel "could not see" the women's clothing suggests blindness—an inability or an unwillingness to see the girls' humanity, another rendering of humans as mere "whats" (44). Loy implicates touch in this erasure, emphasizing Insel's hands as instruments that enable destructive vision. Likened to a butcher and a poacher, Insel's tactile vision severs women into pieces, weighs them to identify the most valuable parts, and discards the rest—just as a poacher would discard an elephant for all but its tusks. Insel's precision and the admiring tone with which Mrs. Jones describes it, makes the violence he commits all the more cruel and unusual. The role of the hands in Insel's careful visual measurement cannot be understated, nor can the role of touch in enacting sensory violence. To better understand Insel's violent touch, we must first turn to a significant organ of touch, the hand.

Hands, Touch, and Violence

If the hand serves as "the *best* example of what characterizes the *human being*, at the top of an ontological hierarchy—for attaining, taking [*prendre*], comprehending, analyzing, knowing," as Derrida suggests, Insel's hand does not prove promising (qtd. in Garrington 30). Through his hands, Insel resists touch, the most proximate of the senses and that which may be said to most closely "entangle [man] in the world" (qtd. in Henning 26).¹¹⁹ For Loy, the hands are also wrapped up in art, and touch is a centerpiece of her embodied aesthetic. For modernists, Garrington submits, "the hand is the ultimate indicator of contemporary civilization, which sees its power wane, set aside by scientific and technological discovery" (Garrington 30).¹²⁰ Through

¹¹⁹ Susan Buck Morss, invoking Kant, goes on to say that "Kant's transcendental subject purges himself of the senses which endanger autonomy not only because they unavoidably entangle him in the world, but specifically, because they make him passive....instead of active" (qtd. in Henning 26).

¹²⁰ Garrington contends that, despite modernist preoccupations with the hand, this is also the period in which the 'rule of thumb', the attempt to know – mathematically, geometrically, scientifically – using the touch or shape of the hand, is being most conspicuously outmoded" (34). She attributes this change to the advent of technologies such as the X-ray and the telephone, which "use the hands as ancillary devices." While it is debatable that the hand is "the"

a study of Insel's hands, Loy comments on this waning power. Her critique reads as a backhanded response to Futurist and Vorticists, whose love of technology threatened to render touch obsolete. Loy invests Insel's hands with both evolutionary potential and an unrealized and already-waning power. Contemplating Insel's hands, Mrs. Jones observes,

Out of this atavistic base his fingers grew into the new sensibility of a younger generation, in his case excessive; his fingers clung together like a kind of pulpoid antennae, seemingly inert in the superfine sensibility, being aquiver with such miniscule vibrations they scarcely needed to move—fingers almost alarmingly fresh and pink for extremities of that bloodless carcass, the idle digits of some pampered daughter; and their fresh tips huddled together in collective instinct to more and more microscopically focus his infinitesimal touch. (118)

Here again, Insel's hands and fingers, like the man himself, linger in an "alarming" state of embryotic pre-formation. His hands have the air of an amphibian—they are a pulpy mass more akin to a webbed foot or the yet-unseparated, webbed fingers of a human fetus, than a fully-formed human hand. His fingers, the "almost alarmingly fresh" fingers of a not-yet-newborn, "cling" together protectively. The hands demand further protection because they are inexperienced and virginal—the yet unused, "idle digits of some pampered daughter." Loy's feminization of Insel's hands reads as an affront to his hyper-masculinity. Because of their feminization and lack of use, his hands possess an "atavistic" quality that lends them a "superfine," childlike "sensibility." While this childlike sensibility gestures toward perceptual potential, ultimately it is a potential that goes unrealized. Through Insel's hands, which are both

icon of modern civilization in modernist writing, Garrington nonetheless rightly highlights its metaphorical and literal importance in conceptualizing the technological shift at play in this cultural moment.

inhibited and curious, Loy gestures toward the untapped sensory potential contained in this particular sense organ. In so doing, she suggests the revolutionary power of touch, but illustrates the ways in which this power lies dormant.

While Insel's hands appear "aquiver" with sensory potential and budding ability, he wards off touch in an effort to ward off the feminine. Insel's touch, sometimes nurturing and sometimes harmful, illustrates this struggle. His touch at times "re-galvanizes" Mrs. Jones as when he "laid a fluttering hand on [her] shoulder—[and] the torture in [her] body ceased" (57). Other times, Insel's touch unsettles Mrs. Jones, the feel of his arm like a "dried branch across [her] shoulder" (153-4). However, to touch or to be touched by Insel is rare. Mrs. Jones remarks that Insel "warned off contact less he crumble": "excruciation... [,] in him [,] took the place of a sense of touch" (*I* 45, 70). His aversion to touch suggests a closed system— what Michelle Henning refers to as "the closing-down of the senses," a masculine response to (feminine) sensation "associated with being sense-dead and self-contained" (Henning 26).¹²¹ Insel's lifeless, "dried branch" of an arm and his "constricted fingers" appear both sense-dead and self-contained, as do further characterizations of his hands (39): "Insel...had fearsome hands, narrow, and pallid like his face, with a hard, square ossification towards the base of the back, and then so tapering as if compressed in driving an instrument against some great resistance" (118). Here, Insel's hands take the offensive: they are frightening and weapon-like in their "driving" force. Their "ossification," "tapering," and "compression"—what Mrs. Jones later refers to as their "cruel difficulty of coming apart"—suggest masculine sensual posturing, a means of protecting against feminine "passiveness" and "susceptibility" (*I* 118, qtd. in Henning 26). Ultimately,

¹²¹ This, of course, contrasts the so-called feminine approach to sensation, which is marked by "an openness and responsiveness...and lack of control" (Henning 26).

Insel's inflexible hand mirrors his reductive worldview—his unwillingness to know the people and things around him—and accounts for his callous sensory interactions.

In turning against touch, Insel often turns touch against women. As noted, Insel has troubled relationships with women: he curses his former-lover-turned-lesbian as well as the “Negress” prostitutes he frequents, and this denigration often turns violent. During Insel's scuffle with the prostitutes to whom he owes money, Mrs. Jones describes an “apologetic sacrifice” wherein Insel “hurl[ed] off the negresses” and “beat one of them up” (69). Here, sex, power, and violence go hand-in-hand. Insel refuses to acknowledge the rights of the women with whom he scuffles, and he further denies their agency by refusing them money. When addressing the reader, Mrs. Jones condemns Insel's bigotry, comparing him to the brutal slave owner in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (70). However, when addressing Insel, she is far less condemnatory of the violence he commits. Again, Mrs. Jones glosses over the physicality of the abuse Insel inflicts, casting it in banal language, as if “beating one of them up” is an everyday, un-noteworthy occurrence. Mrs. Jones proffers a similar, blasé attitude toward sexual violence, suggesting that Insel has “an approach of continent rape” (72). The implication is that abstaining from sexual violence is applause-worthy—that violating women is a right Insel generously denies himself. The playful tone Mrs. Jones uses to discuss physical and sexual violence against women—from “teasing” Insel about his woman-trouble to jokingly nicknaming him “*macrusallo*” (a play on *maquereau*, meaning pimp, and *salaud*, meaning bastard)—paradoxically makes Insel more threatening (71). His aggressions are dismissed as mere flirtations, and his touch becomes all the more suspect.

Insel's "approach of continent rape" further manifests through invasive forms of touch. When Mrs. Jones dons her new red coat, for instance, Insel picks it apart, bit by bit, against her will. Mrs. Jones explains,

The cloth of my coat, a *fantasie*, was sewn with lacquered red setae—wisps, scarcely attached, which caught the light, and all through the evening unusual manifestations of consciousness occurring outside the Lutetia were punctuated by Insel's staccato spoliation of that hairy cloth. He could not desist. Like an adult elf insanely delousing a mortal, whenever I laughingly reprimanded him for ruining my coat, with an acrid cluck of refutation he would show me what he had instantly plucked from the cloth — it was always a *white* hair— He did not trouble to contradict me — the evidence was clinching— But in the end the side of my coat sitting next to him was bare of all its fancy setae. (39-40)

Language of violation permeates this passage. Insel's "spoliation" of Mrs. Jones's yonic "hairy cloth" signals an act of desecration akin to rape. The "evidence" of the crime, Mrs. Jones suggests, is "clinching": by removing the wisps of setae—the stiff, bristle-like hairs of her coat—Insel forcefully removes the protective layer that covers Mrs. Jones, effectively laying her "bare." Setae are not just hairs, but sensory organs that enable sensation or locomotion in nonhumans (like spiders and earthworms), and when Insel depletes Mrs. Jones of her setae, he further divests her of sensory agency. Likened to a chicken after slaughter, Mrs. Jones is "plucked" at and picked apart. Insel's fingers strike at her with percussive persistency, and their disruptive, staccato quality denote a disconnected, dehumanizing touch. Insel himself appears inhuman here, clucking like a chicken and "delousing" like an elf. Though delousing might otherwise imply care, here it implies an obsessive cleansing and forced refashioning. Insel

removes white hairs—symbolic of Mrs. Jones’s age—and he shows Mrs. Jones his spoils as if gloating. Forcefully reminding Mrs. Jones of her spoiled youth, Insel happily un-hairs her, plucking her down to a pre-pubescent hairlessness, which, again, functions as a critique of her womanly maturity. In this way, he not only tactilely but visually inflicts harm. He rids Mrs. Jones of the ability to fashion herself—to assert her own visual agency—and instead fashions her to his liking, thereby claiming that power for himself. This removal, then, is both literal and metaphoric: Insel not only destroys the “fantasie” of Mrs. Jones’s coat, but the fantasy of woman’s control. Cloaking the event in metaphor, Mrs. Jones’s tries to distance herself from the trauma of Insel’s touch. She uneasily, “laughingly reprimands” Insel, thereby gaining emotional distance from the shocking act. Loy further communicates shock and distance through the dash. Dashes cut through the final lines, serving as a reminder of tactile violence. Dashes also cordon off the crime scene, emphasizing Mrs. Jones’s final acknowledgement that “in the end” Insel has violated her, the pile of setae at his side proof of his plunder.

Mouth, Taste, and Violence

As with earlier depictions of sensory violence, sensations do not stand alone: by describing Insel as “delousing,” Loy connects him to parasitic acts of eating and violence committed through taste. Taste and Insel’s appetite structure much of the story, and Loy introduces both Insel the character and *Insel* the book through the sensory site of the mouth. In the opening lines Loy writes, “The first I heard of Insel was the story of a madman, a more or less surrealist painter, who, although he had nothing to eat, was hoping to sell a picture to buy a set of false teeth. He wanted, he said, to go to the brothel but feared to disgust a prostitute with a mouthful of roots” (3). Here, the mouth figures as a contested site of power, where art, consumption, and sexuality converge. Insel displays power through his ability to buy teeth just as he can buy sex and women. However, the mouth also figures as a site of anxiety about power, a

public, sexualized site of Insel's masculinity. He frets over it, worrying what women will think of him and his mouthful of impotent "roots." To compensate for his insecurity, Insel aggressively pursues women, exhibiting an alarming "taste" and insatiable desire for the opposite sex. Women become mere foodstuff upon which the clochard parasitically feeds.

In *Insel*, Loy inverts the parasitic structure she outlines in her "Feminist Manifesto." In the latter, Loy writes of women's dependence on men and the limited choices available to them. As "conditions are at present constituted," Loy writes, "you have the choice between **Parasitism**, & **Prostitution**—or **Negation**" (*The Lost Lunar* 154). To survive in the world, women must live off men, either through marriage or sex work, or deny men and, in so doing, deny themselves societal recognition. In *Insel* women do not rely on men for their survival; instead, Insel lives off and feeds on women.¹²² Loy depicts this feeding quite literally. Like his "vampiric" art, Insel depends on others for food and energy (*I* 82). As mentioned, Insel is near-starving, and many of his encounters with Mrs. Jones involve food. Not only does Mrs. Jones frequently buy Insel dinner and feed him—lifting the fork to his mouth when he is too weak to do so himself—but she herself becomes food-like in Insel's presence. She refers to herself as "his beefsteak," a slab of meat that Insel possesses and to which he "prays"—but also upon which he preys (69, 45). Such praying/preying suggests a consumer-like worship. Under Insel's worshipful eye, Mrs. Jones transforms: "Suddenly, I felt myself sag; become so spineless, so raw—. I, a red island with its shores of suet" (45). Here, Mrs. Jones experiences a sagging, "spineless" weakness, a "raw" nakedness, and an island-like isolation through which she becomes food for Insel's consumption and fuel for his fantasy. Certainly, the more meaty Mrs. Jones becomes, the more

¹²² What might be called a mutually-parasitic relationship exists between Insel and the prostitutes he frequents. Loy describes them as "a parasitic formation, a double starfish whose radial extremities projected and retracted rapidly at dynamic angles" (*I* 59).

disembodied Insel appears. As Ayers puts it, “The opposition is distinct...between the immateriality of Insel and the indissoluble material definiteness of the narrator” (233).

Loy employs further food metaphors to illustrate the consumption of the female body for so-called masculine ends. Mrs. Jones relays an anecdote about Fifi, a young girl whom she briefly befriended but cannot forget. Fifi, Jones explains, was mentally and physically impaired, a “half-wit angel...rigid as bygone queens in her orthopedic corset” (*I* 128-9). Suffering from a spinal defect that makes her stiff and inflexible, Fifi envies the duck because “*Il dort dans son dos* [it sleeps on its back]” (130). The relationship between Fifi and fowl further entwines when, after undergoing surgery to correct her “crookedness,” “Fifi died most uncomfortably, lying very much like a trussed duck, only on her tummy—her leg being bent up behind her for the grafting and bound to her back—screaming in a nursing home until she had no more breaths” (130). Caught under the scalpel of male imposition, Fifi becomes a spectacle, a perverse body served on a platter for visual consumption. Loy makes the reader complicit in this consumption, crafting a subject-object relationship between a human and her food that shocks and horrifies. In so doing, Loy positions Fifi as a vulnerable and powerless victim of sensory violence. By likening Fifi to a “trussed duck,” Loy not only highlights her less-than-humane treatment, but effectively renders Fifi a dinner dish. Hers is a sacrificial body, one that died on the altar of surgical intervention and technological improvement. Like Mrs. Jones who is so often made meaty, Loy offers up Fifi as food for thought.

Against vulnerable, disposable female bodies, the male mouth becomes a menace. Insel’s mouth, in particular, is an inescapable source of sensual violence: an always-threatening, ever-consuming sensory faculty. Loy likens Insel’s mouth to a consumerist machine that never sleeps.

It works, ceaselessly and inexplicably, with inhuman regularity. Upon waking Insel one morning, Mrs. Jones confronts his mouth as one would a monster:

With the unforeseen ugliness opening up suddenly emerging hippopotami *the gums* in their hideous defenselessness *observed* me — an obscene enjoyment of ill-will pleaded his clamped lids. His teeth had not decayed. They were *worn down*. *Der Totenkopf* [the death's head] hung in my tract of vision like the last of *Alice in Wonderland's* Cheshire cat. Getting in touch with Insel was the whole itinerary of Good and Evil. (94)

The rapid-fire pace of Loy's nearly punctuation-less syntax communicates the terror Mrs. Jones feels. Insel features as what the Surrealist painter Paul Nougé referred to as a "bewildering object" (qtd. in Jay 238). Such objects, Andre Breton contended, "*bewilder sensation*" through "the systematic derangement of all the senses" (qtd. in Jay 238). Loy achieves this bewilderment through organoleptic disorganization of Insel's sensory faculties — his "clamped lids" gain the mouth's ability to grimace in "ill-will, just as his mouth perversely gains the eyes' ability to see"¹²³ Insel's clamped lids suggest a blind consumerism that in itself is nightmarish. However, the bulk of the violence in this scene comes from the gum's observatory powers: Loy shifts the male gaze to the mouth. Rather than threatening consumption, Insel's toothless mouth threatens brazen grotesquerie, one that looks back at the horrified viewer. Mrs. Jones is appalled that Insel's teeth have not "decayed" from lack of hygiene as one might expect, but are "*worn down*" as if from ravenous grinding or gnashing. Likewise, the sonic persistency with which Loy crafts this passage wears down the ear: word pairs like "unforeseen" and "obscene," "observed" and "emerging," and "ill-will" confuse sounds and meanings, disorienting the reader as Insel disorients Mrs. Jones. The

¹²³ For further discussion of sensory derangement and organoleptic disorganization, see Chapter Three, especially the entitled La Trobe and Sensory Suspension (Undoing the Spell of Sense-Making).

confluence of sensations in this passage suggests that “getting in touch with Insel” not only runs “the whole itinerary of good and evil”, but the gamut of sensation.¹²⁴

The threat of Insel’s gazing gums quickly morphs into a real and palpable danger that of dissolution. Insel has an adverse effect on Mrs. Jones, causing in her the sensation of disintegration—the feeling of being broken apart and “reduced to fragments” (“disintegrate” 1a.).¹²⁵ Just as (presumably male) doctors dismantle Fifi’s body, Mrs. Jones “dematerializes” via contact with Insel (128). Unlike Insel, who “wards off contact,” Mrs. Jones has been in too close contact with him and is too intimately affected by him. As if contagious, “Insel, whose illness was dissolution,” passes his dissolving disease to Mrs. Jones (107). She describes the experience of this dissolution, relaying that one night,

as I sat calmly at work in my hotel bedroom, I unexpectedly disintegrated. My body, which had hitherto made upon itself the impression of a compact mass, springing a multiplicity of rifts, changed to a fractional covering I can only compare to the spines of a porcupine; or rather vibrant streamers on which my density in plastic undulation was being carried away—perhaps into infinity. (127)

No longer a definite, solid substance, Mrs. Jones’s body begins to melt and drift away from her. Just as Insel springs leaks, she springs “rifts” from which her materiality seems to seep.

¹²⁴ My reading of sensual confluence between the eye and mouth diverges from David Ayers’s reading, which suggests that “The eye and the mouth are repeatedly opposed” in *Insel* (233). Ayers read the following short passage from Insel as evidence of this opposition: “the tiny fireworks he let off in his eyes when offered a ham sandwich” (*I* 19). I, however, see the eye and mouth working in tandem here, a cross-modal illustration of consumptive desire. Loy often describes Insel’s obsession with food in terms that are as visually-stimulating as taste-invoking, suggesting the confluence of sight and taste and positing them both as threatening, consumptive sensory modalities. This confluence dismantles ideas about the separation of the senses and renders the masculine, “distant” sense of sight just as bodily as the feminine, “proximate” sense of taste.

¹²⁵ Before telling her own story of disintegration, Mrs. Jones reflects that “All this was comparable to an incident that occurred when I made friends with a little girl...” and proceeds to tell Fifi’s tale (*I* 129).

Animalistically protective of that seepage, Loy adopts the “fractional covering” of the porcupine. The hair-like setae of which Insel robs Mrs. Jones returns here in the form of quills, morphing Mrs. Jones to an animal-like, defensive state. New sensations accompany this devolution: Mrs. Jones’s body feels “vibrant” and alive, changing and charged. Electrified, Mrs. Jones feels her body undulate and stream, as if on the waves of electric currents. Closer to the life force—what Loy refers to in “Notes on Metaphysics as “electrolife”—Jones is paradoxically closer to death.¹²⁶ Her language reflects the liminal state her body occupies. Like the interrupting phrase “—perhaps into infinity” body and language hang in the balance.

The assault on Jones’s body and senses attests to the strength of the forces against which she battles. Jones relays a frightening experience of “incredible dematerialization” (128). “When climbing slowly up the hill to the station to buy a newspaper,” she explains, “I was cleft in half. Like the witch’s cat when cut apart running in opposite directions, suddenly my left leg began to dance off on its own. Thoroughly frightened at this bisectional automatism, I somehow hopped to the fence on my right and clung to it in an absurd discouragement” (128). Here, Loy shows how a binary logic of halves and right/left, high/low oppositions generates fracture. Jones feels torn in “opposite directions” by a body become bisectional and disunified. Like “the witch’s cat cut apart,” she undergoes a sort of vivisection. As if her body is at the mercy of an experimenter’s whim, Jones struggles to assert her own will. She reclaims that agency through the hand. Touch, a so-called lower sensory modality, here serves a higher power, saving Jones from disintegration. While Insel’s hand is unused and useless, Jones’s grasp is strong and stabilizing. She holds onto her integrated self in the face of destructive forces. To restore

¹²⁶ Sandeep Parmar describes Loy’s “electrolife” as “an essential, universal current that connects the mortal body to the creator by means of conduction” (71).

balance, Jones strives for unity. She fights against disintegration and for an integrationist aesthetics that does not deal in binaries, but in unified sensory multiplicities.

Fruitful Integration and Fertile Sensory Ground

Loy combats disintegration with integration, a participatory, sensory-rich aesthetics that blends bodies. Loy's "integrationist tendencies" are apparent in her desire to make contact with Insel, which allows for contact among the senses as well (Zelazo 58). In the words of Re, "The true futurist (r)evolution for Loy resides not in the transcendence of sexuality through mechanized man, but in the transformation of sexual codes to liberate both man and woman by ending the false opposition of feminine body vs. masculine mind" (813). These oppositions are put to rest when Insel sleeps. After nursing Insel to sleep, Jones sits watching him nap when she receives "an invitation to wholly exist in a region imposing a supine inhabitation" (188). This invitation, sent psychically by Insel, leads to a moment of shared sensory experience. It is important to note that Insel consents to this communion. While Insel's incursions into other people's materiality are often uninvited and intrusive, Mrs. Jones enters Insel's mind at his beckoning. Acting as participant-observer, Mrs. Jones "participat[es] in the ebullient calm behind Insel's eyelids, where cerebral rays...were intercepted by resonant images audible to the eye, visible to the ear; where even ultimate distance was brought within reach, tangible as a caress" (189). Here, Loy collapses the distance between herself and Insel, the barriers between inner and outer, and the space among the senses. Loy grants hearing to the ear and vision to the eye, loosening otherwise stringent categories and broadening sensory capabilities. The senses, like Mrs. Jones herself, are participatory. This participatory capacity, however, seems only available when Insel is asleep—when he lets his guard down and grants synaesthetic possibility. The unruly subconscious, freed from social restraints, becomes a fertile breeding ground for

sensation. Behind Insel's closed eyes, where the hegemony of vision is temporarily stilled, Mrs. Jones notes an "ebullient calm"—the possibility for a bubbling up or boiling over of sensuality that Insel rejects when awake.¹²⁷ The sensual, synaesthetic "outburst," then, remains the realm of the subconscious and the feminine, a capacious sensuality that the masculinized, social consciousness too often refuses.

While male modernist rhetoric excludes and stifles, Loy's language and writing includes and births new sensory forms. In claiming the fertile sensory territory of synaesthesia for women, Loy "affirms the power of feminine difference" (Zelazo 63). The final exchange between Insel and Mrs. Jones illustrates this difference, which Loy characterizes as a choice between death and life. Insel, "passionately in love with Death" often repeats, '*Sterben—man muss.*' [Die—one must]" (I 55). Mrs. Jones, however, counters Insel's morbid mantra with one of her own. She recalls, "'*Sehen Sie, Insel,*' I explained. '*Man muss reif sein—One must be ripe.*' I felt Insel crack as if he had been *shot* alert. 'Could she possibly mean it,' I could '*hear*' him asking himself... 'Here is a woman with whom there is absolutely *nothing* to be done'" (153). Loy's assertion that "one must be ripe" suggests that one must be ready to bear fruit; one must be fertile; one must be feminine. Here, she establishes herself and the word as weapons that "crack" or otherwise threaten walls of resistance. If she is "a woman with whom there is absolutely nothing to be done," it is because she refuses to be done away with—just as she frustrates Insel, she commits to continuing to frustrate social and sensory norms.

"choked by a robot!" no more

¹²⁷ Loy suggests that men's energies and "ebullitions" are directed toward destruction, not creation. In the essay, "Psycho Democracy," she envisions a better society wherein "man has the conceptual power to create a substitute for war, having the same stimulus to action as the hazard of death, the same spur to renaissance [sic] as devastation... [where] his mentality will evolve new forms of expressive action to inspire him to such ebullitions of enthusiasm as does the call to arms" (19).

Mrs. Jones expresses a desire to “Forget all form I am familiar with, evoking a chaos...that at last the feminine brain might achieve an act of creation,” and *Insel* is evidence of Loy’s achievement (*I* 20). In revaluing the feminine brain, Loy re-appropriates the masculine rhetoric that associates femininity with chaos. Chaos, she suggests, has the power to deconstruct— “the aim and technique of modernist art,” according to Loy’s friend and colleague Gertrude Stein—and make way for new, feminist forms and intelligibilities (“The New Poetry” 51). *Insel* is a chaotic, unruly text in part because it does not sit still—in it, the senses do not stay put, nor does Loy. Together, they cross divides and encourage new acts of sensing and creating. Through her sensually-liberated art, Loy wrestles power, both technological and social, from men. Like Mrs. Jones, she defies male sensory imposition: “Unlike Fifi,” Jones/Loy affirms, “I could get out” (*I* 131).

Loy shares her struggle, and her victory, not only with Fifi, but with womankind, as evidenced by her exclamation: “All the air wheezed in my exploding ears as a last breath, ‘—suffering—suffering—suffering—*choked by a robot!*’ This was not all that suffocated me—myriads upon myriads of distraught women were being strangled in my esophagus” (*I* 134). Loy and her sisters suffer at the hands of a mechanized, masculine society that attempts to smother them, depriving them of voice. Through *Insel*, Loy releases “myriads of women” by undoing the masculine stranglehold on the sensorium. Loy further combats erasure of the female body by exposing the ways in which technology was commonly masculinized and weaponized against women. Under misogynist influences, technology barricades bodies and bolsters divisions—it restricts, separates, and dis-integrates sensations and sensing bodies. In Loy’s work, however, technology serves feminist, inclusive ends by encouraging expansive sensory practices. In these subversive technological tendencies and her so-called deviant sensuality, Loy finds herself in

good company. Virginia Woolf, writing on the verge of WWII, channels destructive technologies to deconstruct and revalue sensory practices and the too-often-devalued bodies from which they come.

Chapter 3

“...A zoom severed it”: Sensory Interruption in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*

“Are machines the devil, or do they introduce a discord...Ding dong, ding...by means of which we reach the final...Ding dong...” (*Between the Acts* 136, ellipses original).¹²⁸ So ponders one of the “old cronies” in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*. Interruptions like the dinging of the bell appear frequently in Woolf’s final novel, which was itself interrupted and not quite finished at the time of her death in 1941.¹²⁹ In this bit of dialogue, Woolf voices a modernist concern about disruptive machines, a concern that became more pressing as suspicions regarding modern technologies, like the warplane and the radio, intensified during WWII. The ever-growing body of technology—ranging from the telephone to the gramophone to the motorcar—interfered with life as usual.¹³⁰ Such interferences were often sensory, as in the aural “ding dong” of the clock bells that sounds in the passage above. While it may be tempting to dismiss such interruptions as mere nuisance, emblematic of an all-too-common modernist dissonance, Woolf advises differently. In *Between the Acts* Woolf draws attention to the productive potential of technological and sensual disruption and posits such disruption as a source of sensory liberation.

¹²⁸ Hereafter abbreviated *BA*.

¹²⁹ Leonard Woolf’s note at the beginning of *Between the Acts* verifies that “the MS of this book had been completed, but had not been finally revised for the printer, at the time of Virginia Woolf’s death” (2). In the edition from which I work, Leonard Woolf added italics to distinguish the narrative from the pageant. For an edition of the novel based on the final typescript as Woolf herself left it, see *Between the Acts: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Mark Hussey.

¹³⁰ Ann Martin, responding to the same passage from *BA* that opens this chapter, suggests that “The interrupted, incomplete, overheard question...leaves unanswered technology’s state in Woolf’s own writings for a modern machine age” and reflects “the balance between unwelcome intrusions and unanticipated openings that that so many modernists address through the mechanized elements” of their writing (1).

By exploring the sensory dimensions of the various interruptions Woolf stages, this chapter highlights the ways in which Woolf features subversive technologies, deviant sensory characters, and the new, often-nonsensical sensations of modernity to advocate for alternative sensory practices.

Sensory practices include the various ways in which we respond to and “make sense of” sensations: the way, for instance, we register touch on our skin and recoil or relax when we encounter abrasive or gentle tactile sensations. Over time, sensory practices become sensory habits, which we enact automatically, without much thought or consideration.¹³¹ These habits are reinforced by a given society, and social norms dictate which sensory practices are acceptable and which are not. Society also fosters a hierarchy of sensory practices in the ways it delimits what senses are worthy of notice. In this way, sensory practices are performative: they are socially supported and socially constructed, and they vary from society to society. There are times, however, when these practices can be productively interrupted.

Sensation, in its raw, unprocessed form—before we make sense of it—is itself interruptive, in part because of what Davide Panagia calls its “unrepresentability” (2). Indeed, the act of describing sensation—detailing smell, taste, and so on—often relies on metaphor, not direct representation. Definitions of sensation itself are equally elusive. Brian Massumi, for instance, refers to sensation as “a kind of zero-degree of thought-perception” marked by a “constitutive vagueness”; “it is the direct registering of potential” (Massumi 97). This potential is pre-performative in that it suggests the possibility of limitless reactions to sensory input. It is “a sheerness of experience, as yet un-extended into analytically ordered, predictably reproducible,

¹³¹ I further discuss sensory habits and how they are reinforced through what Jacques Rancière calls “consensus,” in the Introduction.

possible action” (Massumi 97). In this way, sensation is similar to affect, which “arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon” (1).¹³²

Much of the action of *Between the Acts* occurs in an affective, “in-between” space—a space between the acts of sensing and sense-making. These acts are performative, a quality Woolf highlights through the performance that takes center stage in her novel. As the novel begins, auteurs, actors, and audience members gather to watch the annual charitable play, and so the act of sense-making begins. However, by featuring various sensual and technological interruptions in and around the play, Woolf prompts characters and readers alike to dwell in the space “between the acts” of sensory performativity. The sensory theater that she highlights is inspired by another theater, that of war.¹³³ In war time, where so much seems to make so little sense, abiding with seemingly nonsensical sensations can be unnerving and painful. In this disorienting atmosphere, Woolf’s characters exhibit a tendency to categorize, rationalize, or otherwise “make sense” of sensation. However, dwelling in “in-between” or affective states prevents us from blindly repeating sensory habits; it creates a distance from which we can reflect on our daily sensory performances and our responses to sensory stimuli. By attending to these

¹³² Affect is a term particularly useful for theorizing the liminal spaces that exist between categories, where much of Woolf’s critical work takes place. If we think of affect at its most simplistic, as mere emotion, an affective turn seems especially fitting for a novel that questions, “Did the plot matter?” And answers, “Don’t bother about the plot; the plot’s nothing...The plot was only there to beget emotion” (*BA* 63). While affect does denote emotion, its nuanced meaning is more complex and more useful in reading *Between the Acts*. According to Gregg and Seigworth, “Affect marks a body’s belonging to a world of encounters or a world’s belonging to a body of encounters but also, in non-belonging, through all those far sadder (de)compositions of mutual in-compossibilities. Always there are ambiguous or ‘mixed’ encounters that impinge and extrude for worse and for better, but (most usually) in-between” (2). Woolf herself spoke of such encounters and “in-compossibilities,” or what she refers to as those “things that seem incompatible,” in “A Letter to a Young Poet” where she advised, “Let your rhythmical sense wind itself in and out among men and women, omnibuses, sparrows—whatever comes along the street—until it has strung them together in one harmonious whole. That perhaps is your task—to find the relation between things that seem incompatible yet have a mysterious affinity...to re-think human life...” (192).

¹³³ In a diary entry on July 11, 1939, for instance, Woolf writes “Over all hangs war of course. A kind of perceptible but anonymous friction. Dantzig. The Poles vibrating in my room. Everything uncertain.” (*D5*: 225).

affective states, Woolf harnesses the destabilizing potential of sensation to “puncture our received wisdoms and common modes of sensing” and to “interrupt our conventional ways of perceiving the world and giving it value” (Panagia 2).¹³⁴ Such interruptions ask us not to take sensory practices for granted: they are, in the words of Panagia, “political moments because they invite occasions and actions for reconfiguring our associational lives”—for rethinking our automatic responses to sensation (2-3).¹³⁵

Woolf’s desire to re-think sensation may have stemmed from her fear of losing her audience, a concern she voiced while writing *Between the Acts*. In a diary entry on July 24, 1940, Woolf wrote, “All the walls, the protecting & reflecting walls, wear so terribly thin in the war. There’s no standard to write for: no public to echo back” (D5:304). While *Between the Acts* illustrates this fear through its sometimes aloof audience, it also speaks to Woolf’s earlier remarks on the stifling effect audiences can have on writers. In “A Letter to a Young Poet,” for instance, Woolf laments that writers succumb to the expectations of their audience: “As it is of the utmost importance that readers should be amused, writers acquiesce. They dress themselves up. They act their parts” (184). Likewise, in a famously quoted line from “Modern Fiction,” Woolf comments, “If a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it” (106). Weary

¹³⁴ Panagia draws on Jacques Rancière’s theories, as articulated in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*.

¹³⁵ Sensation’s “shimmers” are fleeting: they “transpire within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the miniscule or molecular events of the unnoticed” (Gregg and Seigworth 2). To detect them requires the kind of micro-consciousness Woolf employed in her writing. She conceived of herself as a sort of affective technology—a “weathercock of sensibility”—intent on conducting what Susie Christensen calls, “sensory self-observation,” and her desire to document the “myriad impressions — trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel” is well-noted by critics (1120; “Modern Fiction” 106).

of both change and convention, *Between the Acts* seems to arise from an intersection of emotions—a place between fear and possibility, loss and liberation—where Woolf exercises the freedom for which La Trobe, “a slave to her audience,” hungers. By resisting the urge to make sense for her audience, Woolf flouts conventions, refuses to “act [her] part,” and revels in sensation.

Technology and Sensory Possibility

Woolf herself performed the role of author on a cultural stage where the tragicomedy of mechanized sensory disorientation was hotly debated among the writers of her day. While many of Woolf’s contemporaries saw technology as threatening or counterproductive to their craft, Woolf saw creative potential in new technologies, which prompted new sensations, made possible new sensory relationships, and productively interfered with habitual sensory practices.¹³⁶ Technology, a common source of interruption in the twentieth century, and an increasingly violent one during the war years, provided fodder for rethinking sensual praxis. In “A Letter to a Young Poet” Woolf relays that “There are a thousand voices prophesying despair. Science, they say, has made poetry impossible; there is no poetry in motor cars and wireless” (191). But, Melba Cuddy-Keane notes, “Woolf herself does not endorse these hostile views, and there are other, stronger indications that she connected technological development with a liberating expansion of space” (76). Such space was of particular importance to women, and Makiko Minow-Pinkney reminds us that the “liberating effects of new technologies introduced into the household were perhaps far greater for women than for men” (180). Such technologies

¹³⁶ Tim Armstrong names a number of thinkers and artists—Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Paul Valéry, and Wyndham Lewis, to name a few—who exhibit a “theoretical preoccupation with defence against stimuli” produced by technology (93). They feared neurasthenia and depletion due to energy-sapping technologies and the ever-increasing speed of modernity. War and war technologies only heightened this fear. The Fall 2015/Winter 2016 edition of *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* joins the technological debate as well, asking “To what extent does technology draw the individual into a renewed harmony with an established, traditional, communal order, and to what extent is that accord an enforced and mechanistic orthodoxy?” (Martin 1).

exposed women to sensory experiences and sensations they were once denied. Technologies like the bicycle and the omnibus granted women mobility and, in turn, wider access to the world outside the domestic sphere.

Even those technologies that did not physically transport could sensually transport both men and women. The gramophone, for instance, “allowed high modernists, Eliot and Woolf, to go ‘slumming’ in the intimacy of Woolf’s drawing room” (Scott 103).¹³⁷ By disseminating new sensations across once un-crossable borders—economic, geographic, and otherwise—the gramophone changed how, where, and with whom auditors listened. Bonnie Kime Scott notes Woolf’s concern with not only “the potentially democratizing force of the new availability of music,” in specific, but “the social impact of the new technologies” in general (73). For the most part, Woolf viewed this impact positively¹³⁸. She voiced this positive view in an argument with Harold Nicolson, which she details in a diary entry from 1927: “‘But why not grow, change?’ I said. Also, I said, recalling the aeroplanes that had flown over us, while the portable wireless played dance music on the terrace, ‘can’t you see that nationality is over? All divisions are now rubbed out, or about to be’” (D3: 145).¹³⁹ Though Woolf makes this statement some time before

¹³⁷ Bonnie Kime Scott writes that “Records became social and cultural glue, bonding not only Eliot and Woolf, but a multicultural Atlantic modernism as well” (103). The gramophone, therefore, encourages a “crossing of the great divide” that critics often overlooked (Scott 103). One such critic was Walter Benjamin, whose negative portrayal of technology, Scott notes, “makes surprisingly few gestures toward the egalitarian effect of mechanical reproduction” (103). Critics of Woolf, including her contemporary, Wyndham Lewis, have also “tended to place Woolf in a negative relation to technology and science,” (101). Writing against this grain, Gillian Beer casts Woolf’s relationship to technology and science in a more positive light. See, for instance, Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground: Essays by Gillian Beer*.

¹³⁸ Jane Lewty takes a different stance on Woolf’s view of radio technology, in specific. Lewty observes that the ceaseless sounds of radio may have exacerbated Woolf’s own mental chatter. She insightfully posits that “Woolf may have felt bombarded by a medley of voices compiled not only from the deepest recesses of her mind, but from the intrusive sounds of radio” (163).

¹³⁹ David Howes similarly speaks to the airplane’s influence, noting the ways sensual and perceptual change can provoke social and political change: “Looking down on earth from a plane made the geographic bordered dividing countries seem insignificant—there were no borders in the sky. It was, indeed, hoped by many that ‘with the new

WWII begins, a similarly hopeful tone echoes throughout *Between the Acts*.¹⁴⁰ In her final novel, Woolf channels the disruptive energy of technologies and the war's "recklessness—part good—part bad," to blur social divisions and celebrate sensory diversity (D5: 304).

Sensory Settings in *Between the Acts*

As *Between the Acts* begins, the technologies that will eventually blur those divisions are first appear as threatening actors on the sensory stage of the novel. *Between the Acts* is set in and around Pointz Hall, a country estate inhabited by the Oliver family, which primarily consists of the patriarch, Bartholomew (Bart) Oliver, his widowed sister, Mrs. Lucy "Bossy" Swithin, Bart's son, Giles, Giles' wife, Isabella (Isa), and their two children. As the novel opens, the Olivers are preparing to host the annual play, performed by the local villagers. As the locals trickle onto the estate to watch the play, the narrator communicates suspicion on the part of the gentry for the less-established classes, and emphasizes difference by grouping viewers into various class categories:

Among them...were representatives of our most respected families—the Dyces of Denton; the Wickhams of Owlswick; and so on. Some had been there for centuries, never selling an acre. On the other hand there were newcomers, the Manresa's bringing the old

aerial age will come a new internationalism' as people flew from one country to another, dissolving physical and cultural barriers" (5).

¹⁴⁰ We should keep in mind that many of Woolf's negative comments about technology are made during the war, about technologies of war. Even in these technologies, however, Woolf sometimes found a silver lining. The airplane, for instance, features as a source of imaginative power for Woolf. In a diary entry on April 11th, 1939, Woolf imagines, "But if I had any time—but perhaps next week will be more solitudinous—I should, if it weren't for the war—glide my way up & up in to that exciting layer so rarely lived in: where my mind works so quick it seems asleep; like the aeroplane propellers" (D5: 214). The airplane serves as a muse for rethinking sensation and human perception. We see this again in the essay "Flying Over London," where Woolf meditates on an imagined airplane ride and the various perceptual changes it entails. Her experience is steeped in the sensory: "Down we fell into fleeciness, substance, and colour," Woolf writes. "All the colours of pounded plums and dolphins and blankets and seas and rain clouds crushed together, staining—purple, black, steel, all this soft ripeness seethed about us, and the eye felt as a fish feels when it slips from the rock into the depths of the sea" (170).

up to date, adding bathrooms. And a scatter of odds and ends, like Cobbet of Cobbs Corner, retired, it was understood, on a pension from a tea plantation. Not an asset. He did his own housework and dug in his garden. (51-2)

In opposition to the “most respected families,” outsiders are presented either as amusing spectacle, as in the case of the Manresas with their new-fangled ideas, or as tolerable, but ultimately useless, riff raff, as in the non-essential oddity, Cobbet of Cobbs Corner. These meddlesome “odds and ends” reek of liminality—they are “unattached floating residents” who exemplify what Michael Trasks calls “disorderly movement, a slipping of self from its proper moorings” (22). They are wanderers who have “no proper place” (Trask 18). Their newly gained mobility and perverse desire for class status—a desire which was ever more realizable in the modernist period as old monies and manorial estates declined —interferes with the so-called “natural” order of things. The way in which Isa describes these outsiders, as “uninvited, unexpected, droppers-in” from whom “No escape was possible” and “meeting was inevitable” underscores their undesirable ubiquity. It also communicates a modern awareness that “classes were radically divergent and permanent but at the same time were blending and dissolving with alarming consequences for customary distinctions” (*BA* 26; qtd. in Trask 1).¹⁴¹ The desire to maintain customary distinctions based not only on class, but on gender, sexuality, and nationality became all the more urgent in the face of perceived social disarray.

Technology, Woolf’s narrator suggests, acts as a catalyst for social disarray. Technology not only fosters the uncontrollable, often unpredictable movements of the marginal, but encourages perverse movements in the mainstream. Woolf’s narrator notes that “The building of a car factory and of an aerodrome in the neighbourhood had attracted a number of unattached

¹⁴¹ Referred to hereafter as *BA*.

floating residents,” who came to the village for work (*BA* 52). So-called “attached” residents are drawn away from their regular activities by similar means. Sundays were no longer sacred days, instead, “there were absentees when Mr. Streatfield called his roll call in the church. The motor bike, the motor bus, and the movies—when Mr. Streatfield called his roll call, he laid the blame on them” (52). The motor bike and the motor bus, as technologies of transportation, enabled the civilized set to shirk their civic duties in favor of joy rides, just as they permitted the lower classes to travel and intersperse with the leisure classes. The movies, perhaps the most blameful of all, offered all individuals, regardless of class, an escape from realities and responsibilities. Technology—in the eyes of many of Woolf’s characters, and in the eyes of the contemporary populace they emblemize—distracts and displaces, allowing privileged bodies to make themselves marginal, and granting marginalized bodies unprecedented access to privileged spaces.

Increasingly, modernity’s ever-shifting bodies heterogenized once-homogenized, privileged spaces. While the city is most often considered the modernist zone of heterogeneity par excellence, Woolf also positions the country as a zone of anxious mixtures. For example, outsiders leave an imprint on the visual landscape of the village surrounding Pointz Hall, causing long-established villagers to bemoan ““That hideous new house at Pyes Corner! What an eyesore! And those bungalows—have you seen ‘em?’” (52). Here, changes in the architecture create new sensations that alter not only the view of the countryside, but the sensory experience of rurality itself. City bodies, specifically, threaten to bring perverse city sensations, thereby interfering with the “natural” sensory space of the country estate. When writing of the city, Woolf notes its often-overwhelming sensualism, as she does in “Oxford Street Tide”:

Oxford Street...is a breeding ground, a forcing house of sensation...The mind becomes a glutinous slab that takes impressions and Oxford Street rolls off upon it in a perpetual ribbon of changing sights, sounds and movement. Parcels slap and hit; motor omnibuses graze the kerb; the blare of a whole brass band in full tongue dwindles to a thin reed of sound. Buses, vans, cars, barrows stream past like the fragments of a picture puzzle.

(21) ¹⁴²

Woolf deems Oxford Street a “place of perpetual race and disorder.” Unlike the cacophony of this urban milieu, the rural setting of Pointz Hall, with its beloved Barn, “chuckling” birds, and “empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent” rooms, at first seems to offer a sensory reprieve from such urban sensory excess via “the more stable, allegedly authentic setting of the village and the countryside” (*BA* 1, 26; Edensor 50).¹⁴³ Such sensorially-opposing characterizations of city and country are common of the modernist period, when ‘the countryside was conceived as a privileged setting in which the sensory intrusions of such non-traditional rural dwellers were not welcome’ (52). These non-traditional, polluting bodies took various forms—the religious or class other, the non-white, the queer, the androgynous—and were increasingly denied access to “pure” rural spaces.¹⁴⁴ As Tim Edensor notes, “The rural thus served as a venue from which to

¹⁴² While Woolf celebrates the “higgledy-piggledy...disorder” of the city, others saw the city as a bodily threat. In “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1902), for instance, Georg Simmel “described the ‘protective organ’ and ‘blasé attitude’ needed by the city-dweller to protect against a flood of transient stimuli” (qtd. in Armstrong 92).

¹⁴³ The sensual space of Pointz Hall is not always so idyllic, however. Consider, for instance, the following description, with its aggressive verbs and undertones of gluttony and violence: “[Lucy] has been awakened by the birds. How they sang! Attacking the dawn like so many choir boys attacking an iced cake. Forced to listen, she had stretched for her favourite reading” (*BA* 6). These sensual impositions are natural, not cultural, and may be considered less intrusive as a result, but here Woolf begins to challenge the binaries of city and country, nature and culture.

¹⁴⁴ Such practices peaked in England in the 1980s, when “the ramshackle appearance of new-age travelers and their vehicles...led to stringent rural policing to restore order by banishing those regarded as out of place and offensive to the senses” (Edensor 52).

express judgments about the inferiority of the spaces, practices, and bodies of others according to sensory criteria, where noise, smell, appearances, and textures were key markers of cultural difference” (52). Pointz Hall and its surroundings are the venues from which Woolf’s elite characters observe cultural differences and critique their so-called sensory inferiors.

“Admirable woman, all sensation”: Manresa, Primitivism, and Perception

One of the most prevalent sensory outsiders who enacts the most nettlesome sensory interference at Pointz Hall is Mrs. Manresa, a gaudily-bejeweled Londoner of whom little is known. Gossip suggests she was born in Tasmania, and her questionable origins and Jewish husband underscore her alterity. Woolf characterizes Manresa as earthy and primitive: she is “the wild child” who “squats on the floor” and offends feminine decorum (*BA* 39, 75). Her indecorum is especially obvious in relation to men and women of the higher classes. Unlike the elite and ever lady-like Lucy Swithin, of whom Bart ponders, “Was it that she had no body? Up in the clouds, like an air ball, her mind touched ground now and then with a shock of surprise. There was nothing in her to weight a man like Giles to the earth,” Manresa is solidly grounded and firmly embodied (80). Of her, Bart thinks, “Giles would keep his orbit so long as [Manresa] weighted him to the earth” (82). Such descriptions cast Manresa as a low character—she is low bred and oriented toward the lower realms. She foils Lucy, who has heavenly aspirations, and whose name means light. Where Lucy is aligned with ether and optics, Manresa’s status as “lower than” is further emphasized through her engagement with the lower sensory order, namely the sense of taste.

Women have long been associated with taste. Dating back to Eve and her forbidden fruit-eating, the consuming woman has posed a threat not only to herself, but to society. In the late twelfth century, for instance, Andre le Chepelain contended that ““Woman is such a slave to her

belly that there is nothing she would be ashamed to assent to if she were assured of a fine meal, and no matter what she has, she never has any hope that she can satisfy her appetite when she is hungry” (qtd. in *The Color of Angels* 79). Depictions of the eating woman are equally unflattering in modernity, where woman’s so-called insatiability is a maker of sexual and economic desire. Andrea Adolphi suggests that the figure of the “oversexed, consuming woman...is intimately connected with middle-class fears of being displaced from the socio-economic order through the class mobility that occurred between the world wars” (445). While Manresa’s presence among the gentry shows that she has metaphorically eaten her way up the social food chain, her physical acts of eating are equally transgressive.

Manresa publically indulges in food and drink which, for a woman, is in especially bad taste. Classen explains that “in order to atone for the feminine failing of sinful taste, virtuous women were expected to lead lives of gustatory restraint” (*The Color of Angels* 79). Manresa, however, is and does the opposite. Promptly after her arrival at Pointz Hall she proclaims, “We have our grub” and proceeds to eat not out of necessity and with little enjoyment, like a proper lady, but unapologetically and with gusto (*BA* 27). She is “the first to drink, the first to bite,” and though taste is a characteristically female sense, eating so eagerly in public, and not while confined to the private space of the home, masculinizes her and perverts the sanctity of the “domestic” sensation of taste (71).¹⁴⁵ By using food and taste as a form of personal gratification, as opposed to a way to nurture others, Manresa commits a crime against sensual femininity.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Manresa’s celebration of taste reflects what Classen calls “the diabolic sensorium of the witch” (*The Color of Angels* 79). For more on witches and the perversion of domestic sensation, see Classen, “The Witches Senses: Sensory Ideologies and Transgressive Femininities from the Renaissance to Modernity.” For more on the significance of eating in Woolf’s works, see Lisa Angelella, “The Meat of the Movement: Food and Feminism in Woolf” and Vicki Tromanhauser, “Eating Animals and Becoming Meat in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*.”

¹⁴⁶ In this way, Mrs. Manresa contrasts characters like Jane, the kitchenmaid, and Mrs. Sands, the cook, whose roles as domestic working-class cooks and caretakers are hidden behind closed doors. Mrs. Sands, in a particular is tied to and limited by her position. Her personal desires and opinions go unnoticed, as when the narrator notes that “What it

Femininity, however, seems the least of Manresa's concerns. The narrator comments that she had "given up dealing with her figure and thus gained freedom" (30). Manresa's personal freedom comes at a price to the larger socio-sensory order. Adolphi notes that "her position as a consuming female subject makes her an agent of destabilized potential—one of that feared club of 'man-eaters'" (445). Because she eats like a man, Manresa is encoded as a man-eater, a monstrous female who threatens to consume the male. Through acts of eating that disregard gendered sensory norms, Manresa gnaws at the sensory order and threatens man's place within it.

Manresa further destabilizes the sensory order by ignoring sensory decorum. One way she does this is by violating sensory divides and emphasizing the intersensory. Intersensory experience—the mingling of sensations, the experience of simultaneously touching and tasting, for instance, or seeing and smelling—interferes with hierarchies that order sensation, giving each sense (and each sensing body) a value. For Manresa, however, sensation is mingled and messy and wonderfully so. Observing Manresa, Woolf's narrator notes that "She looked before she drank. Looking was part of drinking. Why waste sensation, she seemed to ask, why waste a single drop that can be pressed out of this ripe, this melting, this adorable world? Then she drank. And the air around her became threaded with sensation" (*BA* 39). By denying sensual exclusion—by embracing a sort of no-sense-left-behind mentality—Manresa not only reconfigures sensory interactions but alters sensory space, transforming the very atmosphere of Pointz Hall into a buzz of sensation. The resulting environment is one of sensory plurality and equality: the high and low sensory orders collapse as sight, taste, and touch melt together.

mean to Mrs. Sands, when people missed their trains, and she, whatever she might want to do, must wait, by the oven, keeping meat hot, no one knew" (*BA* 25).

The same impulse that drives Manresa to suck the marrow out of sensation earns her associations with sensory excess and indecorum. For instance, Manresa is an overtly visible spectacle: “Her hat, her rings, her finger nails [sic] red as roses, smooth as shells, were there for all to see” (27). She is also an overtly visual spectator—she unabashedly “ogles” Bart and Isa, which is rude behavior for a man, but inexcusable behavior for a woman (29). Her sensual impropriety is further illustrated when, during a conversation about Chinese theater, Manresa “interrupted, *scenting* culture” (97, emphasis mine). Manresa’s disruptive socio-sniffing interrupts the conversation and, in metagesture, the novel’s dialogue. Manresa connects “high” culture and the “low” sensorium, perverting the former and elevating the latter. By responding to sound (Lucy’s voice and the chatter about Chinese theater) with scent, she challenges traditional sensory associations. “Goddess-like, buoyant, abundant, her cornucopia running over,” Manresa is a wealth of sensation who refuses to be contained or controlled (82). Like an invasive species, she disrupts the pastoral with the chaos and disorder of her urban sensory milieu.

Manresa disrupts not only sensory hierarchies, but larger gendered, identarian categories. She is, on one hand, natural and wild, but she is also unnaturally mobile and mechanized—a hybrid sensory force with which others must reckon. Isa’s reaction to Manresa juxtaposes the two women: “Isa was immobile, watching her husband. She could feel the Manresa in his wake” (76). While Isa is fixed and unreactive, Manresa is transient and empowered by motion. She is not quite human but, instead, “the Manresa.” This title befits the dynamism of her character. Because she problematizes gender norms through her masculine behavior, Manresa cannot easily or merely be labeled “woman.” Though, in this instance, Isa feels Manresa in her husband’s wake, more often than not, Manresa is the commanding vessel. She tows Giles along, tugboat like, and he feels “less of an audience more of an actor, going round the Barn in her wake” (74).

Giles is perhaps most susceptible to her will, and their affair is less noteworthy than the way in which Manresa perceives her role in the relationship. Manresa, “woman of action as she was,” pursues Giles: he is her “little boy” and “Taking him in tow, she felt: I am the Queen, he my hero, my sulky hero” (76, 120, 74). In so doing, Manresa inverts the gender power structure. Woolf emphasizes this disruptive movement through kinetic language: the towing action and the tugboat’s wake signal displacement and underscores Manresa’s transgressive nature. Woolf fashions her as a character who gravitates toward movement and away from stasis, and whose transgressive motions cut across normative dictates.

Sound, Embodiment, and Language

In addition to troubling gendered sensory norms, Manresa destabilizes normative understanding of language and sound. Sound studies have gained popularity among Woolf scholars, who are more frequently turning away from the visuality of Woolf’s work, of which scholarship abounds, and tuning into the rhythms, vibrations, musicality, and noisiness of Woolfian soundscapes.¹⁴⁷ While the sensory turn in Woolf scholarship is important, approaching

¹⁴⁷ As Maggie Humm notes, “from 2000, criticism on Woolf and the visual quadrupled in volume” (293). Humm’s “Woolf and the Visual” adds to this stockpile, but gestures toward the synesthetic elements of Woolf’s oeuvre. “Looking, for Woolf,” Humm says, “involves ‘our sensations’ and the ability to see a work as if magnified in a multi-sensory experience. Woolf’s visual field is generously borderless, perceived haptically from the viewpoint of an imaginative narrator” (301). Still, a chapter devoted to the larger sensorium and Woolf’s attention to the lower senses is absent from *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, the edited collection in which Humm’s work appears. Abbie Garrington charts new territory among Woolf scholars by attending to the lower sensorium in *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing*. See esp. Chapter Three: “Virginia Woolf, Haptics, and the Human Hand,”

Scholars are, as mentioned, attending to sound both in Woolf scholarship, specifically, and modernist scholarship, generally. For more on Woolf and sound see Pamela L. Caughie, “Virginia Woolf: Radio, Gramophone, Broadcasting” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf*; Caughie (ed.), *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*; Jane Lewty “Virginia Woolf and the Synapses of Radio” in *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place*; and Adriana Varga, *Virginia Woolf and Music*. For more on modernism and sound see Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts*; Shelley Trower, *Senses of Vibration: A History of the Pleasures and Pain of Sound*. For a pointed discussion of modernism and the radio, see Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle, and Jane Lewty, *Broadcasting Modernism*.

aurality through the sensorium rather than in sensory isolation allows me to articulate a more fully embodied aesthetic. For Woolf, sound is wrapped up in other sensations, what she calls “‘colour-and-sound’ moment[s] in which sound, rhythm, image, and scent were fully interconnected” (Varga 1).¹⁴⁸ An attentiveness to the interconnectivity of Woolf’s sensuous sonics foregrounds what Adriana Varga lauds as the “synesthetic quality Woolf remained interested in exploring . . . throughout her life” (75). Such synaesthesia is apparent in *Between the Acts*, a noisy novel that “hail[s] the reader as an eavesdropping spectator” and asks us to observe not our only listening practices and sensory proclivities, but the ways in which we categorize sound and sensation (Harris 69). During the war, as the sounds of airplanes, explosions, and sirens invaded the everyday, such categorizes became all the more consequential to one’s survival.

Woolf took particular note of the changing soundscape, and she was not alone. Town and city governances attempted to regulate sound in increasingly noisy public spaces. The twentieth century saw the first efforts at noise control with ordinances “prohibiting the excessive ringing of church bells...limiting the practice of bagpipes to certain hours of the week [, and] forbidding the use of whistles to call cabs” (Flint 186). Tim Edensor notes that the management of sensation, “came at a cost to sensory diversity and excitement, producing sterile, over-regulated spaces and unstimulating blandscapes” (Edensor 53). Woolf herself points to a similar “blandscape” fostered by the BBC, who attempted to regulate sound (by forbidding certain accents on air, for instance) and listening practices. “Listening and speaking,” Pamela L. Caughie notes, “became skills propagated through broadcasting schools, radio discussions groups, and how-to manuals advertised in *The Listener* [the journal of BBC]” (Caughie 340). Woolf found such restrictions

¹⁴⁸ From Woolf’s 1939 memoir “A Sketch of the Past.”

troublesome and hoped, instead, to have what she referred to as “an individual, not communal BBC dictated feeling” (D5: 306).¹⁴⁹ In contrast to what Cuddy-Keane calls the “dispassionate, authoritative mode” of the BBC, for whom “spontaneity was considered too dangerous,” Woolf expressed a desire for sensory alterity as a productive alternative to habitual sensory responses (77).

Sensory alterity, Edensor explains, occurs when we enter new environments that emphasize sensory difference and break from the routine of our daily sensing lives (32). Such environments are replete with new sensations that require non-habitual use of our sensory faculties. Tourism is perhaps the most obvious form of sensory alterity, but it can manifest less noticeably, in everyday activities such as entering a crowded place, facing unexpected weather, or confronting surprising smells on the street. In the modernist period, sensory alterity became a desirable alternative to the regulation of sensation.¹⁵⁰ Modernists actively sought moments of difference, both in their everyday lives and through their art. In “A Letter to a Young Poet,” Woolf encourages writers to enact sensory alterity through their characters. She urges,

If you want to satisfy all those senses that rise in a swarm whenever we drop a poem among them—the reason, the imagination, the eyes, the ears, the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet, not to mention a million more that the psychologists have yet to name, you will do well to embark upon a long poem in which people as unlike yourself as possible talk at the tops of their voices. (193)

¹⁴⁹ This is not to say, however, that Woolf’s opinion of the BBC was entirely negative. Caughie points out that many of Woolf’s negative comments about the BBC were made during times of war and that Woolf’s feelings about the broadcast company are more nuanced than critics often imply (Caughie 344-5). For more on Woolf and the BBC see Randi Koppen, “Rambling Round Words: Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Broadcasting”.

¹⁵⁰ For further discussion of sensory regulation in the twentieth-century, see the Introduction.

Woolf's desire for sensory alterity no doubt intensified during the war, as the sights and sounds of battle became increasingly the norm. Ironically, because of the war, everyone was awash in sensual difference. Modernist subjects underwent a sort of involuntary sensory alterity during which the "many disagreeable sensations of war" were forced upon them (D5: 243). In the face of this sonic upheaval, *Between the Acts* asks, how do we differentiate between "natural" and "unnatural" sounds and between sounds that are dangerous and those that are desirable? What sounds do we deem valuable, and which do we dismiss as mere noise?

Manresa's character brings these questions to the forefront, as she often makes sounds that are seemingly nonsensical, and more akin to animal, musical, or technological babble than discernable human language. For instance, Manresa has a "rich fluty voice" with which she not only sings and hums, but produces dramatic sound effects, as she does when mimicking "the noise like a cork being drawn from a ginger-beer bottle. Pop!" (BA 42, 59, 97). Associations with affective sounds abound as the narrator notes the way "the coins in [Manresa's] bead bag jingled," and Bart comments that "You could trust her to crow when the hour struck, like an alarm clock" (120-121). Manresa is undoubtedly noisy, but the sounds she makes are not always sensible—in the examples above they are often associated with seemingly unintelligible animals or objects. Differentiating between pleasant and "unpleasant sounds" Kate Flint suggests, can help us discern amongst Woolf's characters (183). According to Flint, "Woolf's welcoming of noise of various kinds is repeatedly bound up with the desire to acknowledge human connections. Awareness of sound is unwilled; similarly our links with others may not be welcomed, but they are...inescapable. One's response to noise may, therefore, in Woolf's fiction, be read as an index to a character's degree of comfort with that condition" (188). By this logic, Manresa—welcoming not only of various sounds, but of various sensations—figures as

one of the more adaptable and admirable characters in *Between the Acts*. She invites not only the sensical, but the seemingly nonsensical. In so doing, she underscores an important distinction Woolf makes between sound as sensation and sound as a unit of language.

In her use of phatic sensory sounds, Woolf suggests that relying on the logocentrism of language to make meaning ignores the embodied meaning of sensation itself. Panagia notes that by “treat[ing] the utterance as if its sole purpose is to present a cognitive claim” we “overlook the sensoriality of claim making and, especially, the aurality of the utterance” (17).¹⁵¹ Woolf gives new value to aurality through Manresa and her often nonsensical utterances, which distance her from the cognitive, meaning-making properties of language. There are other ways, Woolf submits, to make meaning. Before the play begins, Manresa implies (incorrectly) that Isa is the playwright and then acknowledges her own disinclination for language: “‘I’m sure *she’s* written it, haven’t you Mrs. Giles? For myself,’ Mrs. Manresa continued, ‘speaking plainly, I can’t put two words together. I don’t know how it is—such a chatterbox as I am with my tongue, once I hold a pen—.’ She made a face, screwed her fingers together as if she held a pen in them. But the pen she held thus on the little table absolutely refused to move” (42). At first glance, Manresa’s attempt to produce meaning through writing fails, and the “chatter” she does produce seems inferior in comparison. However, though language falters in this moment, Manresa’s body speaks for her. She conveys meaning by performing a failed performance: by beginning to write and then stalling. The stasis of her the pen contrasts the motility of her tongue and creates a tension between the written word and the language of the body. Manresa uses her

¹⁵¹ Woolf scholars note the difference between aurality and language as well. Melba Cuddy-Keane refers to the “linguistic representation of sound and the linguistic conceptualization of it (sonicity as opposed to semantics)” and Adriana Varga points to “Woolf’s awareness that form can drive articulation/utterance in ways that are significantly different from assertion and explanation” (70; 12).

body as pen: it produces meaning as she performs in silent pantomime and speaks without words. Adolphi suggests that by denying Manresa the power of words, Woolf subsequently denies her cultural capital, an honor that she reserves for Isa, the poet. However, Woolf was often critical of contemporary poets whose work felt disembodied or lacked sensuality. In “A Letter to a Young Poet” Woolf writes, “There is a malcontent in me who complains that it seems to him odd...that these modern poets should write as if they had neither ears nor eyes, neither soles to their feet nor palms to their hands” (192). Woolf values sensation and, in a novel that is rampant with nonsensical sounds—a novel in which, as Hermione Lee notes, “language is in decay,” and in which even Isa acknowledges “The plot was only there to beget emotion”—Manresa’s seeming “lack” merits reevaluation (210, *BA* 63). Embracing new sensory identifications, such as those Manresa embodies, requires resisting the impulse to “make sense” of sensation and, in this case, esteeming sensation above language.¹⁵²

By failing to perform language, Manresa and her “chatter” offer “an alternative to the domination of speech” via the unconventional means of communicating and sensing that Woolf champions (Lee 207). Rasheed Tazudeen notes Woolf’s impulse for non-traditional modes of communication and perception through her privileging of unconscious, animal perception in *Between the Acts*. Tazudeen suggests that Woolf “attunes to the sensuous dimensions of animal being” in order to “imagine a futurity beyond the time of the human, when the absence of human consciousness would not just mark a regression into endless negation, but would allow new

¹⁵² Ralf Hertel identifies a similar resistance to “make sense” of sensation in *The Waves*. He observes that “Woolf and some of her protagonists [Neville, for instance]...attempt to capture ‘the incessant shower of innumerable atoms,’ the sensory impression before it is processed into meaning or abstracted into words” (179). By “reaching for impressions before they are structured...according to masculine logic...Woolf invites [readers] to open up to a feminine perception of the world” (183).

nonhuman forms of sensory experience to thrive” (491, 492).¹⁵³ However, Tazudeen drives too sure of a wedge between the animal (as nonhuman) and Woolf’s humans-as-animals, particularly in the person of Manresa. Woolf does not highlight humans’ departure *from* the animal, but our continuation *through* the animal to the human and the machine.¹⁵⁴ She highlights the “humanimal,” which W.J.T. Mitchell describes as “a hybrid creature...predicated on the refusal of the human/animal binary” (qtd. in Wolfe xiii). Woolf extends this refusal of binaries to the machine as well and conflates the human, animal, and mechanical, a kind of cyborgian humanimal.¹⁵⁵ A departing audience member draws our attention to one such “hybrid creature” when proclaiming, “Nobody seems to know one car from another. That's why I have a mascot, a monkey” (136). The monkey features as an emblem on her car, an identifying marker to distinguish one vehicle from the next. The monkey mascot is especially noteworthy since, as David Kay and Lynda Springate note patriotic mascots were often popular during times of war (8). Here, however, Woolf turns patriotism on its head and reduces the Empire to mere monkey-business. Allusions to the monkey and the primate recur throughout the novel, from Giles offering his wife a banana, to Lucy reading about “prehistoric man...half-human, half ape” (*BA* 145, 148). Through this imagery Woolf playfully suggests that we are not perhaps as evolved as we think—that we are still mere monkeys driving cars—and that we are part of an animal lineage we cannot, and should not, forget. Just as the play within the novel bids its audience take stock of

¹⁵³ For further discussion of animal life in Woolf see Vicki Tromanhauser, “Animal Life and Human Sacrifice in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*” and Adriana Varga’s discussion of “bird-people” in *Virginia Woolf and Music* Chapter Three: “Music, Language, and Moments of Being.”

¹⁵⁴ Darwin’s influence is obvious here, and Woolf was reading his work while writing *Between the Acts*. For instance, in a diary entry on March 24, 1940, Woolf notes that she was “reading about Apes” in *A Naturalist’s Voyage Round the World* (D5: 274).

¹⁵⁵ For more on the cyborg, see Donna Haraway’s pivotal essay “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century.”

their history, Woolf encourages her reading audience to survey its sensory past, to harken back to a more primal, even pre-lingual time before sensation was so highly constrained and constructed.

Manresa, less inclined to use language to make sense of things, revels in sensory interruption, where others falter. Her failure to heed sensory norms serves as an example of how, in the words of Anne Cunningham, “feminine failure can provide us with an affective reorientation,” an unorthodox way of perceiving ourselves and our world” (184).¹⁵⁶ Woolf provides an example of affective reorientation in the oft-noted mirror scene. As the actors gather on stage for the finale, “The Present Time. Ourselves,” they carry with them all manner of reflective materials—tin cans, bedroom candlesticks, old jars, the cheval glass from the rectory—that serve as splintered mirrors that they turn on the audience (*BA* 125). The surprising sensory imposition enacted by the mirrors captures the audience “as [they] are” in an affective, liminal state “before [they’ve] had time to assume...And only, too, in parts...That's what's so distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair” (125). The mirrors interrupt traditional modes of seeing and the audience is left, instead, with “scraps, orts and fragments” of sensation (128).¹⁵⁷ Forced to see differently, the audience feels uncomfortable and intruded upon, all except for Manresa: “All shifted, preened, minced...Even Bart, even Lucy, turned away. All evaded or shaded themselves—save Mrs. Manresa who, facing herself in the glass, used it as a glass; had out her mirror; powdered her nose and moved one curl, disturbed by the breeze, to its place” (126). While this might be easily dismissed as superficial or vulgar behavior, Manresa's acceptance of the sensory invitation others reject shows not only her taste for new sensations, but

¹⁵⁶ Cunningham suggests that “Negative feminism may not construct a ‘better’ feminist paradigm in and of itself, but it does help us ask better questions in the effort to widen the scope of feminist inquiry today” (184).

¹⁵⁷ Compare this to Kristeva’s pre-Mirror Stage infant stage, a stage within which Woolf positions her audience by denying them access to the Symbolic and not allowing them to form wholes.

her ability to reorient herself within an otherwise unnerving affective and semiotic state that emphasizes process and becoming, before language gives shape to sensation and bodies take shape through sense-making acts.

Manresa's alterity proves advantageous: her "wild child" nature frees her from stifling sensory dictates and grants her access to sensory spaces and identifications otherwise denied more "civilized" bodies.¹⁵⁸ Because of, not in spite of, Manresa's disruptive and at times irreverent alterity, she emerges as a productive sensory role model. Where others are caught, Manresa, as the later part of her name suggests, yields.¹⁵⁹ If she seeks to "raze" man, as Adolphi notes, and as the latter part of her name suggests, it is less to destroy him than to disrupt the social and sensory hierarchies on which "man" so fully depends.¹⁶⁰ With this in mind, looking through a sensory lens, the narrator's assessment of Manresa gains new resonance: "Vulgar she was in her gestures, in her whole person, over-sexed, over-dressed...But what a desirable, at least *valuable*, quality it was—for everybody felt, directly she spoke 'She's said it, she's done it, not I,' and could take advantage of the breach of decorum, of the fresh air that blew in, to follow like leaping dolphins in the wake of an ice-breaking vessel" (28-29, emphasis mine). Manresa breaks the ice of tradition, paving the way for new modes of sensing; she crosses sensory thresholds, encouraging others to follow in her wake.

La Trobe and Sensory Suspension (Undoing the Spell of Sense-Making)

¹⁵⁸ The primitive, Tim Armstrong notes, offers an alternative to rigid social and sensual constraints: "If civilization is identified with mechanisms of censorship and with the debilities associated with distance from the natural order then primitivism ostensibly offers a route back to the original and whole self; a vitalist self at one with it sexuality and being freed from modes of censorship imposed by civilization" (141). Manresa, Hermione Lee suggests, "'feels free' because she is in fact the most well-adjusted character in the novel. She can afford to flout conventions, not being threatened by them" (220).

¹⁵⁹ Resa, in Italian, means to "yield" or to "surrender productivity" ("Resa").

¹⁶⁰ Adolphi posits that "Though her name can sound like a punishing allusion to her ability to excite a man to erection, it also has additional connotations. The word 'raze,' a near homonym of the final two syllables of 'Manresa,' indicates demolition" (445).

Another transgressive character who disrupts sense-making is the novel's playwright, Miss La Trobe. Like Manresa, "Very little was actually known about" La Trobe (*BA* 40). Characters question her sexuality since "Rumor said...She had bought a four-roomed cottage and shared it with an actress," and wonder at her nationality, asking, "Where did she spring from? With that name she wasn't presumably pure English" (40). Predicated on difference, La Trobe is "an outcast" and the narrator notes that "Nature had somehow set her apart from her kind" (143). This is, in part, because she deviates from her feminine "nature": "Outwardly she was swarthy, sturdy, and thick set; strode about the fields in a smock frock; sometimes with a cigarette in her mouth; often with a whip in her hand and used rather strong language...perhaps, then, she wasn't altogether a lady?" (40). The inverse of Joyce's "womanly man," La Trobe is a "manly woman" who resembles the stalwart Lady Millicent Bruton. While Lady Bruton dreams of an "imaginary baton such as her grandfathers might have held" with which she "commands battalions," Miss La Trobe "has the look of a commander pacing his deck," "the attitude proper to an Admiral," and "commands...all stage properties" accordingly (*Mrs. Dalloway* 112; *BA* 43). Unnervingly androgynous, La Trobe invites questions not only about gender performance, but about sensory performance.

Like Manresa, La Trobe promotes a feminist sensorium by valuing sensation for sensation's sake and devaluing language. Though a writer, La Trobe seems distrustful of words and often resists the masculine impulse to make sense of sensation. Instead, she praises "Words without meaning—wonderful words" that are more sensual than cognitive (144). These "wonderful words" come to her in a haze of sensation at the end of the novel while, sitting in a bar amidst "the acrid smell of stale beer," La Trobe envisions her next play. In a moment of reverse sense-making, that which was once imbued with meaning diffuses into pure sensation:

She raised her glass to her lips. And drank. And listened. Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud...The cheap clock ticked; smoke obscured the pictures. Smoke became tart on the roof of her mouth. Smoke obscured the earth-coloured jackets. She no longer saw them, yet they upheld her, sitting arms akimbo with her glass before her. There was the high ground at midnight; there the rock; and two scarcely perceptible figures. Suddenly the tree was pelted with starlings. She set down her glass. She heard the first words. (144)

This passage begins and ends with intersensory activity. As La Trobe drinks and listens, taste and sound conjoin to produce words that are more sensual than lingual: they are one-syllable sounds imbued with tactility; they are embodied words that sink and rise and pull La Trobe along with them. Woolf pairs these intersensory sensations with sensory obstructions—from mud to darkness to smoke—that emphasize La Trobe’s inability to sense as usual. Her inability to see is especially noteworthy. Since sight is often associated with cognition and masculinity, by denying La Trobe access to this sense-making faculty, Woolf interrupts masculine modes of sense-making. This interruption makes room for new sensory practices: La Trobe, like the “dumb oxen,” forgoes traditional acts of hearing in order to hear and feel anew; she lets her vision go blurry in order to see what was otherwise invisible; she sinks into the mud of messy, unprocessed sensation and, herein, finds artistic inspiration.

La Trobe’s desire to realize her artistic vision and to influence the sensory experiences of others renders her suspicious and gains her associations with another infamously deviant female figure, the witch. Witches’ deviance is rooted in the sensorium. As Constance Classen notes, witches “defied sensory and social norms by using the feminine senses of touch, taste and smell as media for self-gratification, rather than self-sacrifice, and as avenues for empowerment, rather

than instruments of service” (“The Witches Senses” 71). La Trobe uses sensation similarly, wielding it like a wand in order to alter her audience’s sensory experience. The narrator alerts readers to this misuse of the lower sensorium, as La Trobe enacts sensory manipulation through taste and smell by “brew[ing] emotion” (*BA* 65). Likewise, Lucy Swithin points to La Trobe’s misuse of touch to manipulate her audience. She refers to La Trobe as “not merely a twitcher of individual strings; she was one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world” (105). The re-created world La Trobe conjures is infused with affectivity and, while it may empower her, her aims are not entirely selfish, and she hopes to equally empower her audience, whose sensorium she finds frustratingly limited. Of her audience La Trobe laments that, “Swathed in conventions, they couldn’t see, as she could, that a dish cloth wound round a head in the open looked much richer than real silk” (45). Though this speaks to a lack of mental imagination, it also emphasizes the ways in which sensory conventions and traditional sense-making acts physically limit bodies and foreclose perceptual possibility. La Trobe attempts to strip her audience of these conventions to help them see and sense anew.

La Trobe encourages new sensory acts by interrupting the performance of the play with unexpected sensations. This is most apparent in her plans for “The Present. Ourselves.” In this act, “‘After Vic.,’ [La Trobe] had written, ‘try ten mins. of present time. Swallows, cows, etc.’ She wanted to expose them [her audience], as it were, to douche them, with present-time reality” (122). La Trobe envisions a “natural” state, marked by quaint pastoral sounds, wherein she can rid her audience of sensory pretense and cleanse them of sensory habits. By stopping the performance of the play, La Trobe also hopes to suspend habitual sensory performance. Her intentions for “The Present” are aptly summarized by Ralf Hertel, though his observations

pertain to *The Waves*. It is a liminal state within which “the individual characters are increasingly reduced to themselves. And what does this imply? It means being reduced to perceptions turned into emotions, to the effect of affect” (181). Abuzz with affectivity, La Trobe’s “Present” occupies the temporal space between sensing and sense-making, wherein the playwright douses her audience in sensation and wherein they, in turn, confront their perceptual praxis.

Sound is a key player in La Trobe’s sensual production and, while elsewhere La Trobe purposefully manipulates technological sounds, in “The Present,” the sounds of machines interrupt her sensory agenda, serving as a reminder of the invasive and often-puzzling sounds of modernity. As the audience unwittingly confronts these sounds, La Trobe’s sensory disenchantment turns to affective entrapment. The narrator describes the audience as

Prisoners...all caught and caged...watching a spectacle. Nothing happened. The tick of the machine was maddening...All their nerves were on edge. They sat exposed. The machine ticked. There was no music. The horns of cars on the high road were heard. And the swish of trees. They were neither one thing nor the other; neither Victorians nor themselves. They were suspended, without being, in limbo. Tick, tick, tick went the machine. (120-121)

The identifiable language of “swallows and cows” in La Trobe’s ideal act are replaced by the “tick” of the gramophone and the noise of car horns—the unpredictable, unintelligible sounds of modernity. Such sounds force the audience “to confront the medium—that is, the technical apparatus—divested of its message” and thereby immerses them in the Real of sensation (Pridmore-Brown 414).¹⁶¹ In this amorphous Real, the mooing of the cows, chirping of the

¹⁶¹ Sara Danus makes a similar claim when suggesting that Woolf works to “defamiliarize habitual modes of processing the flux of the real” (18).

sparrows, and ticking of the gramophone create a disturbing admixture, where sounds cannot be easily parsed. “Natural” and “mechanical” blur and, like the audience, become “neither one thing nor the other.” The resulting environment is one of suspension where “nothing happens,” and the audience hangs in-between sensing and sense-making. The sounds they encounter are equally in-between and not-easily-categorized, a point Woolf underscores via the category-obsessed Victorians of the preceding act, which linger in the audience’s memory. Though La Trobe bids her audience dwell in this space of sensory declassification, the play-goers respond negatively to her direction. Their feelings of imprisonment convey what Cuddy-Keane describes as “a new apprehension of sound as sound rather than as a conceptualized or narrative meaning; or more precisely, a heightened focus on sound as aural experience rather than intermediary for a nonaural signified” (90). This apprehension reflects an audience grappling with the sounds of modernity, for which “everything carries effects...including background sounds and the humming of the machinery itself, but not everything *means* something” (Caughie 341).

The urge to make meaning remains, however, and the audience’s discomfort with difficult-to-parse sounds underscores the social impulse to categorize sensation and enact sensory habits—to make sense of things. This urge occurs, Panagia explains, when we encounter a new or unfamiliar sensation that does not “make sense to us” and “we try to make sense of it by fitting it into some kind of context or over-arching life schema” (2). La Trobe recognizes this struggle and her audience’s desire for the familiar, lamenting, “If only she’d a backcloth to hang between the trees—to shut out cows, swallows, present time! But she had nothing. She had forbidden music” (*BA* 122). Unexpected sensations distress an already sensually over-taxed audience. “Reality [is] too strong” La Trobe mutters and, though antithetical to her own sensory agenda, she attempts to mollify the Real by *blocking* sensation and *lessening* sensory potential

and possibility (122). Anything, she implies, would do the trick, even a backcloth, a mere black screen, would direct the audience's senses, allowing them to organize themselves around the act of seeing (an organization which La Trobe later disrupts and diffuses through the splintered mirrors). In short, instead of disrupting habitual modes of sensing by letting her audience dwell in sonic possibility and uncertainty, La Trobe must make sense for her audience, or risk losing their attention altogether.¹⁶²

Music—forbidden because it is too familiar a sound and, therefore, not sonically disruptive—would be an especially effective means of sensual organization. Unlike the aforementioned, unintended sounds to which the audience responds negatively, of which Pridmore-Brown notes, “It is as if their bodies do not know how to move,” music is familiar and reassuring (414). Music intervenes on the awkwardness of “present time” and lulls the audience into aural comfort, bringing order to affective chaos and serving as, what Trina Thompson calls, “a metaphor for and catalyst of harmonious security” (210).¹⁶³ When the music begins, “Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united...all enlisted. The whole population of the mind's immeasurable profundity came flocking...from chaos and cacophony measure” (*BA* 128). Unlike the disorienting affective sounds that mark “present time,” music—composed, constructed, “measured”—contains deliberate, easily identifiable sounds around which La Trobe’s audience can sensually arrange themselves. The audience’s reception of sound is notably passive, however, as are the verbs that connote their movements. The pull of the music is “magnetized,” a sensual conscription for which the audience “enlists” and to which they

¹⁶² La Trobe’s fear of losing her audience was shared by Woolf who, in July 1940 wrote, “All the walls, the protecting & reflecting walls, wear so terribly thin in this war. There’s no standard to write for: no public to echo back,” a sentiment I explore further in the “Woolf: Re-writing and Re-reading Sensation” section of this chapter (D5: 304).

¹⁶³ Elicia Clements makes a similar observation, noting that “in [Woolf’s] two earliest novels, musical sound manifests as a metaphor that signifies human interconnections” (60).

mechanically or passively “flock.” Music then, seems to have the opposite effect of earlier “unintended noises” which “can be viewed as short-circuiting the instantaneous connection among rhythm, emotion, and collective action” (Pridmore-Brown 412).¹⁶⁴ Collective action, with its herd mentality, fosters the mindless, reflexive habituation of those “common sense” practices that Woolf discourages. Unlike the affective, disorderly “tick, tick, tick” of the gramophone, music does not short circuit sensation, but offers the audience a sensory reassurance that “The first note meant a second; the second a third” (BA 128).¹⁶⁵ Music orders time, providing the safety of progression and anticipation. When La Trobe’s audience cannot anticipate what comes next, they respond with anxiety. Music lulls the anxious, over-saturated sensory mind and underscores the audience’s desire for familiar sensations of which they can easily make sense. Though La Trobe tries to expose her audience to sensation, Woolf instead exposes their resistance to sensing differently, and their hesitance to confront sensations that require them to take an active role in sense-making: she highlights their fear and unwillingness to sense anew, in the now. Recognizing her audience’s need for sensory familiarity but wishing to interrupt their passive sensory ingestion, La Trobe continues her sensory dance, leading her audience back and forth from safe sensory territory to less trodden sensory grounds.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ In this way, music “figures as the voice of exclusion and a potentially dangerous manipulation” (Thompson 212).

¹⁶⁵ Early in the novel, Isa finds a similar reassurance in words, suggesting that “The words were like the first peal of a chime of bells. As the first peals, you hear the second; as the second peals, you hear the third. So when Isa heard Mrs. Swithin say: ‘I’ve been nailing the placard on the bard,’ she knew she would say next: ‘For the pageant’” (15-16).

¹⁶⁶ For a nuanced reading of music’s function in *Between the Acts*, see Clements, who argues that “Woolf believed...that listening to others, perhaps even because of differences, is indispensable for a new understanding and method of communal interaction. Moreover, Woolf’s own process of listening to music inspired such thinking, for it is in the course of suspending the assumption of easy signification—as music does—that the apperceptive listener can create effective and political social change” (59).

Thompson suggests that “For Miss La Trobe—as for Woolf—the manipulation of auditory events is crucial to artistic endeavor,” and though La Trobe’s intentions are admirable, Woolf draws attention to the ways in which she manipulates, and subsequently fails to manipulate, her audience’s sensorium (212). After observing “present time,” La Trobe quickly notes that “Something was going wrong with the experiment...Every second they were slipping the noose. Her little game had gone wrong...This is death, death, death, she noted in the margin of her mind; when illusion fails. Unable to lift her hand, she stood facing the audience” (*BA* 122). The noose, though often read as a violent symbol, instead symbolizes La Trobe’s paradoxical attempt to free her audience. By strangling habitual sense-making practices and temporarily suspending sense-making, she grants space for new sensations. She laments that she cannot contain her audience in a sensory bubble and that they escape the forced act of sensing she stages for them. Woolf seems critical of such enforcement since, at the end of the act, witch’s wand becomes director’s baton as La Trobe is “unable to lift her hand” to orchestrate sensation, and the scene ends on a note of impotence.

However, La Trobe’s inability to raise her hand becomes a way for Woolf to show her hand, so to speak, and to expose sense-making as a constructed, socially driven act. She does this by juxtaposing culture, namely La Trobe’s efforts to direct the sensorium, and nature. Shortly after La Trobe succumbs to failure, rain intervenes: ‘the shower fell, sudden, profuse...Hands were raised. Here and there a parasol opened. The rain was sudden and universal’ (*BA* 122-23). Rain, like music, is familiar sensual territory. It shakes La Trobe’s audience from their sensory stasis, prompting them to perform their typical sensory habits—sheltering themselves from it or allowing the rain to touch them. The rain provides sensory relief from the incomprehensible sensations that precede it and, in so doing, vindicates La Trobe who, “wiping away the drops on

her cheeks...sighed, ‘That’s done it,’” (122-123). Though La Trobe wanted to douche her audience in reality—in pure sensation—Laura Marcus notes that “The eruption of reality, the rain show, the ‘douche,’ provides, paradoxically the necessary illusionism” to continue the play (185). The rain does not cleanse La Trobe’s audience of sense-making habits, but re-immerses them in sensory performance. The rain is a welcome distraction, an atmospheric intervention. It releases the audience from the cultural state of sensory liminality the playwright foists upon them. Woolf’s audience, however, sees the rain as a purposefully contrived element Woolf conjures in her own act of sensory witchery. When the narrator comments that “Nature once more had taken her part,” readers are made privy to the rain’s function as an element of theater and of the novel (123). Woolf provides her reader with a behind-the-scenes glimpse of sensory production, where the once “natural” seems not-so-natural. Woolf invokes the rain: it is a performer, another actor, in Woolf’s sensory drama. So, while La Trobe fails to “douche” her audience of their sense-making habits, Woolf successfully deconstructs sensory acts and douses her audience in the Real. Rain exposes the sensory scaffolding upon which sensory habits are often mindlessly enacted and draws attention to the hand that pulls the often-invisible sensory strings.

Woolf’s choice to expose sensory control in miniature speaks to larger concerns about the biopolitics of sensation, an especially prominent threat during the time in which Woolf wrote *Between the Acts*. The manipulation of sound, in specific, became a source of anxiety since Fascist agendas often “emphasi[zed]... acoustic communion” (Pridmore-Brown 411). This led to a mistrust of acoustic technology, a suspicion *Between the Acts* both conveys and quiets. Sound technology, Woolf suggests, is not without humanity, a point Laurel Harris and Melba Cuddy-Keane echo, observing, respectively, that the often-featured gramophone in *Between the*

Acts “operates on a human scale,” and “draws attention to its vulnerable materiality through the ‘chuff, chuff, chuff’ sound it makes in the bushes” (qtd. in Harris 70). In this way, “the machine does approach the human,” and sometimes, quite eerily, emotes (Scott 107). The gramophone, for instance, expresses joy, its “tune...reel[ing] from side to side as if drunk with merriment” (BA 59). Likewise, the gramophone expressed grief: it “moan[s],” “lament[s]” and “wail[s]” (66, 68). In these instances, the gramophone appears more emotive—and more human—than the audience, who mechanically follow its direction “*Dispersed are we*” (68). Both emotive and directive, the gramophone “bears some mysterious relation to the auteur, Miss La Trobe, acting as an extension of herself, more remote than the cyborg in relating the mechanical to the human, but with some of the same revolutionary potential” (Scott 105).

We see this potential in the megaphone, a notoriously threatening sound technology associated with Fascism that Woolf also recovers. La Trobe introduces the megaphone in the final act during which the audience, already shifting uncomfortably under the scrutiny of the splintered mirrors, is subjected to a “megaphonic, anonymous, loud-speaking affirmation,” a voice—presumably La Trobe’s that mysteriously “asserted itself” (BA 127). The audience responds to it much as they respond to other affective sounds, and the narrator “thanks heaven” when “the bray of the infernal megaphone” ends (128). Their reaction mirrors those of modernist thinkers like Walter Benjamin who were critical of the dictatorial megaphone. Fascist leaders manipulated the megaphone and other sound media to promote their cause and “to make the multiple and varied into the controlled, the unified, the rigidly shaped” (Tratner 128). La Trobe, however, diverges from this common use, and encourages similar dissension in her audience. Through the megaphone she urges, “*Let's talk in words of one syllable, without larding, stuffing, or cant. Let's break the rhythm and forget the rhyme. And calmly consider ourselves*” (BA 127,

italics original). La Trobe discourages “the rigidly shaped” limits of Fascism and bids her audience misshape and rip the stuffing from the words that mobilize such prescriptive ways of sensing and being. By bidding her audience consider themselves—to take stock of their sensory habits and make note of the ways they respond to certain sensations—La Trobe breaks the trance of the dictator’s voice that encourages mindless reaction and sensory habituation. In so doing, she recovers the megaphone, and megaphonic aurality, as a source of sensory potential.¹⁶⁷

La Trobe's subversive use of sound maps new sensory territory, not only disrupting common technological associations, but common sensory associations. With its emphasis on breaking and forgetting, La Trobe uses the megaphone to encourage dissensuality and sensory reflection, the latter of which is literalized through the splintered mirrors that accompany the megaphonic voice. Together, the scraps of mirrors and the reconstituted megaphone signify a productively broken sensorium, through which the audience hears and sees differently, thus illustrating Harris’s observation that “The pageant at the heart of *Between the Acts* can be read as an audiovisual apparatus aimed to provide a defamiliarizing recognition in the audience through a reframing of reality” (72). It is a defamiliarization Woolf realizes through the audience’s uncertain response to their reflection, at which they wonder “...Ourselves?” (BA 125, ellipses original). By joining forces between megaphone and mirror, Woolf disrupts organoleptic organization, “the correspondences that bind a sense organ to an act of perception” (Panagia 155). Organoleptic organization occurs when, over time, the repetition of sensory acts solidifies the eyes as organs of sight, the ears as organs of sound, and so on. Panagia is critical of these easy associations and asks, for instance, “What would happen if our senses of skin were

¹⁶⁷ Or, in the words of Bonnie Kime Scott, “In reproducing the master's voice, [La Trobe has] manipulated it” and “been to Fascism and back” (111, 109).

interrupted and we experienced skin as an organ of disfiguration? What if we went even further and stopped thinking organically so that the shape of our bodies was no longer determined by the disposition of our organs?" (7).¹⁶⁸ Woolf answers these questions and enacts this disfiguration through the mirrors, which visually disarrange and fragment bodies, leaving "Here a nose...There a skirt...Then trousers only...Now perhaps a face" (BA 125, ellipses original). Misshapen, the audience is left to grapple with their Cubist reconfiguration, as they see "themselves, not whole by any means" (126). Sound contributes to this fragmentation and acts as the sonic equivalent of the mirrors, reflecting organoleptic disunion aurally. When the megaphonic voice mysteriously issues "from the bushes" it is simultaneously invisible and omnipresent, disembodied and felt—it is the "voix acousmatique" that "insofar as it is not anchored to a specific source, localized in a specific place...functions as a threat that lurks everywhere" (BA 127; Žižek 127).¹⁶⁹ The sound of the megaphone cannot, it seems, be localized in the body either, as the audience grapples with how to listen to the anonymous megaphonic voice. Michael Tratner's observation about the function of the mirrors is true of the megaphone as well: both "suggest that one of the goals of the pageant is to fragment everyday reality so it can be assembled in some new way" (117). One might say that the new assembly resists assembly. By disorganizing bodies, emphasizing disembodiment, and troubling familiar sensory

¹⁶⁸ Organoleptic disorganization challenges overly simplistic correspondences between sensation and sensory faculties, by inviting intersensory responses. Under such disorganizing principles, Panagia suggests, "Skin might stop being a determinate organ of perception and could become a nodule of sensation: my finger touches your arm and you can at once see, hear, and smell my touch" (7).

¹⁶⁹ Žižek goes on to say that the voix acousmatique's "free-floating presence is the all-pervasive presence of the *nonsubjectivized object*." The voix acousmatique is "a shapeless threat...a bodiless...object with which no identification is possible" (127). For more on voix acousmatique, specifically, see Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*. For more on general cinematic techniques in Woolf see Laura Marcus, "Virginia Woolf and the Cinema" in *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period*.

experiences, Woolf, through La Trobe, invites new sensual arrangements, re-embodiment, and alternative ways of processing sensation.

Woolf: Re-writing and Re-reading Sensation

Both La Trobe and Woolf discourage habitual sense-making rituals, and warn against those forces that condone them. Though Fascism is an extreme example of the threat of sensory sterilization and standardization, Woolf draws attention to seemingly benign everyday acts and social institutions that can be equally inhibiting. Religion, Woolf suggests, is one such institution. When, at the end of the play, Reverend Streatfield attempts to discern “what message... [the] pageant was meant to convey,” the narrator protests:

What an intolerable constriction, contraction and reduction to simplified absurdity he was to be sure! Of all incongruous sights a clergyman in the livery of his servitude to the summing up was the most grotesque and entire. He opened his mouth. O Lord, protect and preserve us from words the defilers, from words the impure! What need have we of words to remind us? Must I be Thomas, you Jane? (*BA* 129).

The megaphone unexpectedly releases the audience from the spell of sensory habituation but the Reverend, by attempting to make sense through language, and relying on its overly-simplistic “Thomas and Jane” binaries to do so, threatens to “defile” the experience of pure sensation. Rev. Streatfield is a man of sensory habits and ritual. As a servant of the cloth, he submits to a higher power and his servitude runs averse to Woolf’s challenge to authority. Woolf undercuts his orderly desires stylistically, jumping from Biblical references to children’s books references, from Doubting Thomas to plain Jane.

In contrast to Woolf’s radical sensory agenda, the reverend and the church appear old-fashioned, a point Woolf underscores when noting, ““The profits [from the play]...all go to a

fund for installing electric light in the Church’’ (BA 120). The metaphorical need for light undercuts the authority of Rev. Streatfield and the institution he represents, but the physical need for light positions the Church as a place of sensory deprivation, a place that has, until this point, valued ritual over progress.¹⁷⁰ The Church and its followers preserve sensory traditions, as does Lucy Swithin, the novel’s most religious character when, “For herself, every morning, kneeling, she protected her vision” (139). While Woolf does not appear un-sympathetic to sensory ritual and the desire to protect “the old ways”—to continue to see, smell, and otherwise sense as usual—she simultaneously suggests that these ways are out-moded and ineffectual. Sensory habits, while a comfort, turn a blind eye on an ever-changing sensory world in which the “same old” ways of sensing simply will not do.

Certainly, one cannot read Woolf in the “same old” way, and *Between the Acts* disrupts the formal elements of the novel, even more than Woolf’s previous works. By blending prose, drama, and poetry, Woolf interrupts traditional sense-making processes. Combining the rhythms of prose with the visual and kinetic elements of drama with the aural of poetry makes for a variable and unexpected sensory reading. By disobeying sensory rules, Woolf divests herself of sense-making power. Paradoxically, this move empowers her to create new sensory experiences for her reader. She does this, in part, through aural idiosyncrasy—by inserting unexpected

¹⁷⁰ Panagia suggests that the Church enacts “affinities of sensibility [or] common modes of sensing” that “rest on a tight set of correspondences between organolepsis and perception.” He suggests that “among these common modes of sensing, is a commitment to narratocracy that is an ennobling force in a culture of conviction so intensely rooted in reading scripture. It is not only the case that evangelical Christianity is committed to reading the Bible....it is also the case that the movement, pace, and account of sense making associated with a narratocratic regime of perception comprised the affinities of sensibility that structure the political agenda of the Children of the Book” (122).

sounds in the novel. Taking a note from the gramophone, quite literally, Woolf infuses her prose with new rhythms:

The tune changed; snapped; broke; jagged. Fox-trot, was it? Jazz? [...] What a cackle, a cacophony! Nothing ended. So abrupt. And corrupt. Such an outrage; such an insult; And not plain. Very up to date, all the same. What is her game? To disrupt? Jog and trot? Jerk and smirk? Put the finger to the nose? Squint and pry? Peak and spy? (124)

While La Trobe's audience is suspicious of this "jagged" tune and wonder what hand she had in this mischief, Woolf's audience, jolted by the rhythmic changes in their reading, becomes equally cognizant of Woolf's hand in this disruption.¹⁷¹ She stages a sonically-felt authorial intrusion through the unexpected rhymes, series of interrogatives, abruptness of semi-colons, and short, fragments of sentences, which work to trouble an easy reading and sense-making experience. Woolf's game then, as the above passage suggests, *is* to disrupt, and the unexpected rhythms of her jazz-inspired lines thwart readers' expectations for reading prose. Interrupting prose with meter, Woolf "smash[es] to atoms what was whole," leaving behind sonic fragments of the traditional reading/listening experience (124). Such fragmentation, Thompson says, "is an artistic blessing" since, in musical composition, "the act of fragmentation frees a motive from its initial context to become a different type of building block" (213). In other words, deconstruction paves the way for reconstruction. Freed from the imperative of sense-making, Woolf builds a new cast of sounds through which she de-sensitizes, in order to re-sensitize, the trained ear of her reader.

Woolf's reading audience, in attuning to the revolutionary sensations of *Between the Acts*, becomes complicit in Woolf's dissensuality, themselves enacting alternative sensory

¹⁷¹ We might think of this as Woolf responding to her narrator's claim that "Surely it was time someone invented a new plot, or that the author came out from the bushes..." (BA 146).

practices. Woolf encourages such practices by eliding language and emphasizing sensation.¹⁷² At various times through the novel the phrase “etc. etc.” appears and poses a challenge to traditional acts of reading and sense-making. The following passage—a poem within a play within a novel—already interrupts generic expectations, but Woolf’s use of “etc., etc.” further interrupts the otherwise recognizable rhythm and rhyme pattern of the poetic line:

“Armed against fate,

The valiant Rhoderick,

Bold and blatant,

Firm elatant, etc., etc. (BA 66, italics original)

“Etc., etc.” shifts emphasis from the meaning of language to the sound of language. Woolf dismisses meaning here, as “etc. etc.” renders language unimportant and not worth delineating. In other words, “as opposed to the semantic meaning of what is spoken,” Woolf instead underscores “the process of listening” (Clements 59). The process of listening, Clements posits, has the potential to “change political circumstances.” By “leaving something out” and gesturing toward but not specifying the “extras” or “sundries” to which she refers, Woolf makes space on the page for the unheard, the misheard, and the unsaid (“elision,” “etc.”).¹⁷³ Woolf’s inclusivity applies not only to sounds, but to the people who make them: the so-called unintelligible, the invisible, and the ignored. Making space for once-excluded sensing bodies creates more

¹⁷² Ellipses, for instance, appear frequently in the final pages of the novel, and James Naremore suggests that “‘There is, in fact, no other novel by Mrs. Woolf that uses the ellipses so freely’” (qtd. in Thompson 214).

¹⁷³ Interestingly, in the seventeenth century, “elision of the air” was “formerly assigned as the cause of sound,” as in the following, from 1626 and 1660, respectively: “The Cause given of Sound, that it should be an Elision of the Air (whereby, if they mean anything, they mean Cutting or Dividing, or else an Attenuating of the Air) is but a Terme of Ignorance” and “The Production and Modulation of the Voice by the Elision of the Air.” Another obscure definition of elision as “A breaking (so as to make a gap) by mechanical force” seems even more relevant to Woolf’s work, though the *OED* notes that this definition is “scarcely recognized in English use.”

inclusive sensory circumstances within which divisions among people and the senses increasingly dissolve.

By promoting inclusivity and the intersensory, Woolf undoes sensory segmentation and interferes with sensory hierarchies. Woolf, however, refuses this ranking. Through elision, this time in prose, she rewrites sensory interactions. During a brief intermission between Scenes One and Two of the play, the audience is left to ponder the view around them with the gramophone as accompaniment. The gramophone's tune tells a story of idyllic rurality where "Eve lets down her somber tresses brown and spreads her lucent veil o'er hamlet, spire and mead, etc. etc. And the tune repeated itself once more. The view repeated in its own way what the tune was saying [...] The cows, making a step forward, then standing still, were saying the same thing to perfection" (BA 92). By refusing to fill space with language, other than the gestural "etc.," Woolf opens the way for sensation. "Etc." dismisses the story the gramophone tells and accentuates, instead, the dispersion of sound not only among different sensual actors—the gramophone, the view, and the cows—but among different sensory faculties. Sight and sound enmesh as the view finds its voice and "repeat[s] in its own way"; touch and sound intertwine with the movement of the cows, who "step forward," "stand still," and "say the same thing to perfection"; smell and taste mingle as the "hamlet, spire and mead" evoke the scents of rurality and the flavor of country air. In short, Woolf crafts a holistic sensory moment wherein all sensations play a part. Not only do divisions among senses blur, but so do the boundaries that separate man, technology, nature, and beast. In this way, Cuddy-Keane's observations about Woolf's short story "Kew Garden" ring true for *Between the Acts* as well: "Woolf's auscultation shifts between mechanical and natural noises and discovers a new integrated polytextural music...The garden and the city, the human, natural, and mechanical, are notated together in a comprehensive environmental soundscape" (84). More than just a

soundscape, Woolf's polytextural sensescape does not rest on a sensory hierarchy, nor does it rely on a social order: sight does not undermine touch, just as the technological does not outweigh the natural. The resulting "triple melody" reconfigures the sensorium and provides a fitting example of Woolf's revolutionary, egalitarian sensual aesthetic.

Woolf emphasizes the violence required to enact her revolutionary aims and to shift sensory paradigms. In so doing, with the sounds of war on the horizon, Woolf wages her own war against sensory stagnation and exclusion. After the play ends and everyone disperses, La Trobe begrudgingly gathers her things, convinced that "she hadn't made them see" and that the play was "a failure, another damned failure!" (*BA* 68). Her thoughts, however, are interrupted:

suddenly, the starlings attacked the tree behind which she had hidden. In one flock they pelted it like so many winged stones. The whole tree hummed with the whizz they made, as if each bird plucked a wire. A whizz, a buzz rose from the bird-buzzing, bird-vibrant, bird-blackened tree. The tree became a rhapsody, a quivering cacophony, a whizz and vibrant rapture, branches, leaves, birds syllabbling discordantly life, life, life, life without measure, without stop devouring the tree. (142)

Woolf electrifies the senses sonically through the "whizz" and "buzz" of fricatives, tactilely through the vibratory "hum" of the tree, and visually through the charged imagery of wires alive with energy. Her conflation of electric and natural imagery again cuts across nature/culture dichotomies and interrupts easy distinctions. Distinctions among the senses also fade as Woolf levels the sensory hierarchy and grounds the once-elevated sense of sound. By locating sound—a so-called "higher," masculine sense—in the birds and trees, Woolf brings sensation and sensory agency down to earth, quite literally. Nature exercises its agency by "syllabbling" or consciously articulating its dissent. Such dissent is not without violence, a point Woolf emphasizes through

the aggressive verbs “attack,” “pelt,” and “devour,” and through the series of hyphens that strike the page and the ear with percussive rhythm. The birds themselves are weaponized—“winged stones”—that dive like fighter planes and sound an important alert: the only “natural” sensorium is “vibrant,” inclusive, and ever-changing, and the “ecstasy” of that sensorium lies in the untamed discord of sensual diversity. La Trobe’s perceived “failure” is not a failure at all, but an opportunity to welcome new actors and admixtures to the sensory stage and to embrace the disruptive power of discordant sensuality.

In drawing on the frenetic energy and sensations of war, Woolf attempts to re-appropriate war’s violent nonsensicalness and its violent interruptions. These interruptions, because they provide a break from the usual sensory program, function as sites of sensory potential: they grant readers and characters alike the space to reconsider “what counts as common sense” (Panagia 7). In an effort to expand “what counts,” Woolf stages a sensory intervention in one of the final interruptions of the play. As Rev. Streatfield declares “Each of us who has enjoyed this pageant has still an opp...,” Woolf interrupts him. “The word,” she writes, “was cut in two. A zoom severed it. Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead. *That* was the music. The audience gaped; the audience gazed. Then zoom became drone. The planes had passed. ‘...portunity,’ Mr. Streatfield continued, ‘to make a contribution’” (BA 131). Certainly, the most notable contribution in this scene comes from the airplanes, whose interruption creates an “opp...portunity” to revisit common modes of perception and to reconfigure traditional sensory practices. The unintended noise of the airplanes’ zoom disrupts these practices by cutting through the stale sounds of the Reverend’s speech. Such interruptions were common of the modernist period when, as Jane Lewty describes it, “Acoustic interference was beginning to impede words on the page” (157). While it may be tempting to read such

interference as negative, here, by impeding “words on the page,” technological interruption gestures toward new forms of communication and reinvigorated acts of listening. Such listening anticipates the interruptions, disturbances, and surprises of a modern sensescape. Within this newly expanded sensorium, once-threatening noises transform into unexpected melodies, as evidenced by the narrator’s surprise that “*that*”—the airplanes’ zoom—“was the music.” While we might read this statement as fearful—fearful that the sounds of war planes may one day become as commonplace as music—we might also read Woolf’s words as hopeful. Technology, Woolf suggests, can “sever,” the instantaneous, knee-jerk reaction to enact sensory habits and, in so doing, liberate the modern subject to hear, see, touch, taste, and smell anew.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf illuminates the unpredictable sensory landscape of a country on the brink of war and the sensual disruption that accompanies it. Modernist subjects were often unsure how to respond to the parade of new sounds and sensations that altered the modern sensescape. Woolf’s final novel both reflects and responds to this uncertainty. As she attends to those “bindings and unbindings, becomings and un-becomings, jarring disorientations and rhythmic attunements” of affective sensory moments, Woolf offers an answer to the question that opens this chapter: ““Are machines the devil, or do they introduce a discord...?”” (Gregg and Seigworth 2). Machines, Woolf seems to say, while often used for devilish purposes, are not the devil. Though mechanical and technological discord have the potential to assault and anesthetize the senses, they also have the potential to invigorate our eyes, ears, and noses to new ways of sensing ourselves and others. In so doing, she challenges sensory norms that fuel our impulse to categorize and exclude, to value certain sensations and sensory practices and to denigrate others. By aligning herself with sensory deviants, Woolf elevates alternative sensoriums and taps into their disruptive potential: she cleaves a space between sensing and sense-making, within which

she deposits a new narrative of sensation, one that rattles the sensory structure and leaves us spinning in its wake. Woolf champions various and diverse sensations, sensing bodies, and sensory practices at a time when not only the purification of the races, but the purification of the senses was an ever-looming threat. Imagining this threat, Elizabeth Bowen, Woolf's long-time friend and dissensual sister, offers a glimpse into a world where sensory purification and standardization reign, and where sensual possibility withers.

Chapter 4

Sensory Dystopia: the Sights, Sounds, and Technologies of Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout*

In Elizabeth Bowen's unfinished memoir, *Pictures and Conversations*, she fondly reflects on her first bicycle, what she calls her "first machine," "a glittering brand-new Raleigh" (42). "Now *this* is yours,' Bowen's aunt said when she gifted her niece the bicycle and, from then on, the thirteen-year old was enamored of her new possession (42). "First riding the Raleigh," Bowen recalls, "I dismounted, often, simply to stand and look at it. This, my first machine, had an intrinsic beauty. And it opened for me an era of all but flying, which roads emptily crossing the airy, gold-gorsy Common enhanced. Nothing since has equaled that birdlike freedom (42-43). These themes—of possessing and being liberated by technology—came to permeate Bowen's writing, and her oeuvre shows a fascination with the inner of life of things and the aesthetics of ownership.¹⁷⁴ Certainly, as Bowen herself acquired more machines, her relationship with them became more complicated and less idyllic. By 1967, when Bowen wrote *Eva Trout*, technological change prompted her to again ask, to what extent do we possess our machines, and to what extent do *they* possess *us*?

¹⁷⁴ For various discussion of objects and things in Bowen's oeuvre, see Jacquelyn Rose's "Bizarre Objects: Mary Butts and Elizabeth Bowen" (2000) Elizabeth C. Ingelsby's "'Expressive Objects': Elizabeth Bowen's Narrative Materializes" (2007), Eluned Summers-Bremner's "Dead Letters and Living Things: Historical Ethics in *The House in Paris* and *The Death of the Heart*" (2008), and Patrick W. Moran's "Elizabeth Bowen's Toys and the Imperatives of Play" (2011).

Technology was of particular interest to Bowen. A self-proclaimed fan of the cinema and a long-time contributor to the BBC, Bowen wrote frequently about radio and film.¹⁷⁵ However, like other modernist women writers, her opinions about technology varied. “The age of speed,” she writes, “was not...cordially welcomed in,” neither by Bowen nor many of her contemporaries.¹⁷⁶ Bowen attributes this less than cordial welcome to a society already replete with technologies—steam, electric, and otherwise—“a world which already had cause to regard itself as completely modern” (42).¹⁷⁷ Technological excess became a danger. “Enough was enough,” she proclaimed, “Anything further, one felt, might annoy God” (44). Bowen’s friend and literary executor, Spencer Curtis Brown picks up on the damning tone of her writing and observes that “In [Bowen’s] last two novels she no longer conveyed that there were earth-tremors beneath the feet of her characters; we knew that the earthquake had already come...it was now a world in which the Serpent was already on the advance towards moments of triumph everywhere, over the society of man, the body and the mind” (xxxviii). The triumphant Serpent in *Eva Trout*, Bowen’s final novel, takes the form of audio and visual technologies that threaten humanity and human connections. *Eva Trout* details how technologies like the radio, telephone, and television elevate the senses of sight and sound to the detriment of all other senses, resulting

¹⁷⁵ See Allan Hepburn’s *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews* for an overview of Bowen’s radio and film writing. For more on the climate of the BBC’s Third Programme during Bowen’s tenure there, see Kate Whitehead, *The Third Programme: A Literary History*.

¹⁷⁶ Bowen recalls, “About motor-cars and their offspring motor-bikes there continued, for longer than may be realised now, to be something mythical and phenomenal—even hostile?....Motor-cars, which spawned at a greater rate [than ‘flying machines’], looked at once Martian and caddish. Their colour spectrum and flashing fittings of brass were themselves offensive. The combustion engine, with its splutterings and roarings, was at once disagreeable and enigmatic. (*Pictures* 43)

¹⁷⁷ The age of speed, Bowen writes, “superimposed itself upon an existing age, a state of society, which *had*, already, all it consciously wanted...by now there was suave, trustworthy, comfortable locomotion, rapid enough:trains, steamers. And existence was further enhanced by a host of amenities: telephones, electric light, electric bells, lifts, gramophones, pianolas...[and] occasional moving-picture shows” (*Pictures* 43-44).

in a sensory dystopia. Bowen's characters, like Bowen herself, struggle with and against these technologies and the rapidly "changing scenes" and soundscapes of modernity.

Eva Trout is, as Claire Connolly notes, "a misunderstood novel which confronts contemporary readers with a memory of an in-between space in literary and cultural history" (Connolly 137). A novel known for being difficult, *Eva Trout* straddles the line between modernism and postmodernism. Because of this, the novel often garners critical attention for defying generic conventions. In *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel*, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle famously call *Eva Trout* "awkward, disjunctive, convulsive" (142). Similarly, Neil Corcoran conceives of *Eva Trout* as a "disfiguration," a deformed version of Bowen's earlier works (131). While these scholars invoke bodily metaphors and/or examine the body in *Eva Trout*, they give little attention to the embodied sensorium. Generally, critics who take up issues of language and subjectivity in *Eva Trout* also tend to overlook the sensual aspects of these phenomena.¹⁷⁸ Important exceptions are Maren Linett, whose scholarship draws attention to subjectivity and sensory disability in Bowen's work, and Allan Hepburn, who writes extensively on Bowen, sound, and acoustic technologies. Following Linett and Hepburn, I attempt to bridge the gap among these camps of critical discourse by examining how visual and acoustic technologies change the power dynamics of seeing, speaking, and listening and impact our understanding of self and other. In this chapter, I posit technology as a catalyst for the changing sensescape of *Eva Trout* and the shifting sensory subjectivity with which its characters contend.

¹⁷⁸ Scholars variously respond to questions about language and subjectivity in Bowen's work. In separate articles, Patricia Juliana Smith and Claire Connolly explore the impact of place on the characters in *Eva Trout*; while renée c. hoogland's *Elizabeth Bowen: A Reputation in Writing* and Maud Ellmann's *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page* attend to language, identity, and the psychoanalytic.

Bowen's novel follows Eva Trout, a recently-orphaned ingénue, and opens with the advent of her 25th birthday when the "big heiress" comes into a large inheritance (*Eva Trout* 9).¹⁷⁹ With this money, Eva embarks on a series of adult firsts: she lives alone for the first time, buys her first home, and "adopts" a son. Despite her efforts to live a normal life, Eva seems doomed from birth. As an infant Eva was abandoned by her mother, Cissie, who died shortly thereafter. Willy Trout, Eva's father, was equally negligent. A man of incomparable wealth, Willy travels the world with his lover (presumably the reason Eva's mother left the marriage), Constantine Ormeau, sometimes toting Eva along with them, but often leaving her with strangers. Eva gains some semblance of stability while attending Lumleigh, an all-girls school where she befriends, and becomes smitten with, Iseult Smith, her English teacher. After finishing school, Eva moves in with the newly-married Iseult, and her husband, Eric Arble. While life with the Arbles provides Eva some semblance of home-life, her time there is fleeting, as is her time in the other home-spaces Eva tries and fails to cultivate. Through Eva's shiftlessness, Bowen highlights the transitional quality of her text and of the time and technologies of which she writes.

Technology and Transition: *Changing Scenes*

Technology in *Eva Trout* changes not only what people see—movies, photographs, and the like—but how they see. Technology, specifically the automobile, makes for ever-shifting seeing, where sight does not linger for long on any one thing. Bowen portrays this phenomenon during a meeting between Iseult and Constantine, Eva's guardians. As the two discuss what to do about their unruly ward, they travel from Constantine's office to lunch via motorcar: "Change of scene was, thanks to the chauffeur-driven Daimler, a matter of minutes, glided through smoothly.

¹⁷⁹ Hereafter cited *ET*.

Huge creamy porticoes, lit-up little luxury shops were registered by Iseult. News-flashes from vendors' corners, orchidaceous flashes from florist windows" (33). The smoothness of the Daimler contrasts with the suddenness of the "news-flashes," which Iseult can only passively "register" but not fully process. Seeing is a speedy and distancing act: Iseult cannot stop to smell the roses, but instead experiences them as fleeting "orchidaceous flashes." The automobile is a technology that carries Iseult away from intimate, nuanced sensory experience and immerses her in a visually-oriented, sped-up sensory environment. The automobile-induced "flashes" to which Iseult finds herself subject characterize a society in motion, literally and metaphorically.

Bowen depicts this perpetual motion as perceptual motion. Just as the automobile changed (and continues to change) the way we see, radio changed the way we hear. In an essay on the BBC's "Third Programme" Bowen writes, "My own feeling is that in listening to spoken (or broadcast) speech, we have listened for sense too much and for sound too little... Language can put out a majesty in its sheer sound, even apart from sense: in poetry and, at its greatest, prose, this becomes apparent" (*Listening In* 205). Understanding the technological impacts of which Bowen speaks requires listening differently to her novel and engaging in sensory play. Through slant-like listening, for example, one can recognize the likeness between Iseult and Eric *Arble* and the *arbors* with which Bowen associates them.

Through references to the Arbles and their arbors, Bowen illustrates the way technology changes not only sensescales, but landscapes. Briefly, at the novel's beginning, Bowen grants her readers a rare look at a pre-lapsarian sensorium—an idyllic, multisensual Eden before the technological Fall. Bowen suggests that such spaces are unsustainable in the face of the machine. She underscores the Arbles/arbors, pre-lapsarian connection by titling the first section of *Eva Trout* "Genesis." Genesis brings to mind Eve (or in this case Eva), and the flowering arbors of

Eden or, in this case, Larkins Orchards, as the Arble's home was once known.¹⁸⁰ Larkins Orchards was an Edenic place, the realization of Eric's lifelong dream to be a fruit farmer. Iseult was equally enchanted by the Orchard, as Bowen's description attests: Iseult "never foresaw their marriage, its days and nights, other than as embowered by dazzling acres, blossom a snowy blaze and with honeyed stamens, by sun then moonlight, till came later—fruited boughs bowed, voluptuous, to the ground, gumminess oozing from bloomy plums" (16). This descriptions brings several senses to the fore. "Boughs bow" and blossoms emit a "snowy blaze" that are both tactile and visual. The "ooze" and "gumminess" Bowen describes call to mind different textures and types of touch, while Bowen's "honeyed" prose leaves readers, like Iseult, salivating for want of taste.

Multisensual descriptions like these are uncharacteristic of *Eva Trout* and seem to disappear with the advent of technology. Bowen illustrates this when the machine, in the form of the hay baler, intervenes on natural space, leaving the narrator nostalgic for the sensory- rich past. "Hay-making was at its height," Bowen writes,

a mechanized whirring sounded over the country six days a week—when distant enough, it was in a contemporary way poetic. Restricted by the positions of the orchard, the operation had about it something not only seasonable but tactical, military: summer maneuvers. The cessation at evening brought with it humid silence scented by exacerbated grass-roots and mangled wild-flowers. How sweet, how haunting new-fallen hay smells. Its mauve-bronze living shimmer is but a memory. (*ET* 275)

The multisensory lushness of the orchard is contrasted with the sonic whirr of technology in the field, an extractive mechanics that is important in the ways it contributes to overworking the

¹⁸⁰ For more on the significance of names and naming in Bowen's work see Christensen, pp. 45-49.

land. Eric too, spurred on by an over-eager Iseult, overloads and mismanages Larkins Orchards and is eventually forced to sell the fruit fields. Eric leaves the natural world for a mechanized one, and he becomes foreman of a garage. This shift, from the natural to the mechanical, represents a larger cultural shift with which Bowen's characters continually grapple.

No one experiences this shift more keenly than Eva, the most unsettled of the novel's characters. Throughout the novel, transportation technologies magnify Eva's feelings of disconnection and displacement. Indeed, Eva's relationship with these forms of technology seems vexed from birth when, just two months after Eva is born, her mother dies in a plane crash. Since then, Eva has been perpetually on the move. Eva's father often uproots her, leaving her with unfamiliar people in unfamiliar places. For instance, after forcing Eva from the failed, experimental school that served as a temporary, albeit suspect, home, Willy Trout took his daughter

to Mexico, where they were joined by Constantine; then, business calling him to the Far East, dropped her off with a Baptist missionary family in Hong Kong, reclaimed her, left her in San Francisco with some relations of his chiropodists, caused her to be flown to him in New York, flew her from thence to Hamburg, where he picked her up later and asked her if she'd like to become a kennel-maid, decided it might be better for her to go to Paris and was about to arrange things on those lines when [Eva] said she would like to go to an English boarding school. (55)

This is only one instance of the many frenetic rhythms of Eva's youth, which carry into adulthood. After leaving Larkins at the age of 25, Eva spends a short time in Broadstairs at Cathay, then leaves for America, travels across the country before returning to London, and then leaves London for Paris. Her milieu is the hotel, a transitory space that becomes the closest thing

to home she can manage. Implied in these epic travel lists are the grand machines that magically transport Eva, enabling her constant movement and perpetually severing her connections to places and people.¹⁸¹

Claiming Sensory Space: Acoustic Environments and Sensory Agency

Because Eva does not have a place to call her own she becomes territorial of those spaces she does temporarily claim for herself, and that possessiveness manifests through sensory control. Namely, Eva seeks to control the sounds of the first (and only) house she buys, Cathay. Her noise control efforts call to mind Roland Barthes contention that “the appropriation of space is also a matter of sound: domestic space, that of the house, the apartment—the approximate equivalent of animal territory—is a space of familiar, recognized noises whose ensemble forms a kind of household symphony” (qtd. in Flint 191). Eva, having never had a home of her own, understandably wants to direct that symphony and to manage the music of her house. This becomes apparent in Eva’s emotional reaction to even the most common of household sounds. As Mr. Denge, the realtor from whom Eva purchases Cathay, shows her around the house, he “gave a tug to the [toilet] chain” that throws Eva into a rage: “the resultant roar, cataclysmic, stampeded Eva, who pushed nay fought her way violently past him, shouting: ‘That is enough! Go—go away at once! You take liberties... You make too many noises in my house’” (*ET* 81-82). Eva suffers the sound of the flushing toilet physically, as if being run over by wild animals. To her, the sound of the flushing toilet is itself wild—it is a rogue noise, evidence of the not-yet domestic sensescape that needs taming. The toilet, a site of waste disposal, prompts Eva to dispose of sensory “waste” within her home, through efforts at noise control.

¹⁸¹ Keri Walsh makes a similar observation in her analysis of Bowen’s *To the North* and *The House in Paris*, the latter of which she calls a “melancholia of intervolved transit, exile, homelessness, and displacement” (26). Walsh suggests that Bowen “re-purposes Futurist technique” in these 1930s novels by de-romanticizing technological destruction (21). The same could be said of *Eva Trout*.

Repeatedly, however, Eva's efforts at noise control fail. When Constantine arrives unexpectedly at Cathay, tracking down Eva as is his custom, he violently disturbs the quiet of the house, merely by ringing the doorbell. Bowen describes the all-out sensual assault at length:

Cathay, long untroubled, was appalled by the bell—the stygian service quarters, most affected, went on as though stung by a hornet. Elsewhere the baronial woodwork crepitated; vibration made any electric candles left in their sockets between the antlers appear to flicker, as might the genuine kind. The owner was no less outraged than was her property; halting, she looked down the stairs aggressively. This attack from the bell...it intended never to cease. (*ET* 102)

Cathay's response to the bell mirrors Eva's: both are "appalled" by this unexpected, uninvited sensory visitor. Shockwaves, along with sound waves, ripple throughout the house, which "crepitates" and shudders as if "stung." Sound threatens to overload the sensory circuitry of her home, causing the electric candles to "flicker." It figures as an attacking enemy intruder that Eva must "thwart" and against which she must defend (102). Protective of her home, her first real possession, Eva wants to control the soundscape of her home, but quickly finds that sound is a persistent houseguest.

Eva's desire to dictate the sounds of her home stems from an inability, so-to-speak, to dictate her own aural output. Due to her constant moving, Eva has acquired an odd manner of speaking and "express[es] herself like a displaced person" (*ET* 10). By the time she arrives at Lumleigh at the age of 16, "her outlandish, cement-like conversational style had set," and Eva "was unable to speak—talk, be understood, converse" (10, 62). Until Eva meets her teacher, Iseult (then Miss Smith), she is largely isolated and unaware of her "communication defecit" (10). Iseult, however, does not mince words with Eva: she derides her pupil's speech as

“pompous, unnatural sounding...wooden...deadly...hopeless...shutting-off...misbegotten!” (64). Though Iseult “proposed to tackle Eva’s manner of speaking,” she feared she arrived “too late on the scene” to make a difference (10).¹⁸²

Abandoned by Iseult, just as she improved her speech—or in Eva’s words, just as she “was beginning to be”—Eva turns to technology as teacher (*ET* 203). Fittingly, Iseult, Eva’s former teacher, is the first to encounter this technology, which Eva has begun stockpiling. During her first and only visit to Cathay, Iseult discovers:

Outstanding examples of everything auro-visual on the market this year, 1959, were ranged round the surprised walls: large-screen television set, sonorous-looking radio, radio-gramophone in a teak coffin, other gramophone with attendant stereo cabinets, 16-millimetre projector with screen ready, a recording instrument of BBC proportions, not to be written off as a tape recorder. Other importations: a superb typewriter shared a metal legged table with a cash register worthy to be its mate; and an intercom, whose purposes seemed uncertain, had been installed. (124-125)

A computer, scheduled to arrive the following week, completes Eva’s collection. When Iseult asks Eva why she needs a computer, Eva curtly responds, ““It thinks...That is what you used to tell me to do”” (125).¹⁸³ Maren Linett suggests that Eva’s “defensiveness about the computer also indicates to readers how to understand the ‘purposes’ of the intercom. Eva hopes, in her inchoate way, that the intercom will compensate for her inability to communicate” (“Modes” 271-272).

¹⁸² For a gendered reading of Eva’s lack of language, see Harriet S. Chessman, “Women and Language in the Fiction of Elizabeth Bowen.” Chessman suggests that Eva, and other Bowen characters like her, “represent...unarticulated and inchoate femaleness” and “hint at the larger silence all women share within culture” (71).

¹⁸³ Since Alan Turing’s 1950’s essay “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” which imagines the computer with many of the cognitive and communicative capabilities Eva sought, computer technology was on the mind of the public.

Not just the intercom, but the other technologies in her stockpile serve as prostheses: they can see, hear, and speak for Eva.¹⁸⁴ Through them, Eva seeks cultural capital, intelligibility, and recognition.

In many ways, Bowen conceives of Eva as mechanized, sharing affinities with those technologies on which she relies. Céline Magot comments on this hybridization. Noting the ways Eva resembles her Jaguar automobile, Magot concludes that “Bowen’s ‘mechanical-animal’ creation seems to generate a new form of grotesque representation since it draws from archetypal imagery but adds mechanical elements to it. Eva is all at once a mythological and mythical creature, the futuristic Eve, the becoming-machine” (136).¹⁸⁵ One way Eva enacts this “becoming-machine” is by treating her communication problems as the result of faulty wiring. Here, again, Bowen frames Eva’s dwelling-space as a parallel to or an extension of her body. Eva feels she needs repairing and modernizing, and she enacts this by updating her home. Observing that “Extensive re-wiring was in progress” Iseult comments, “I’m sure...you are right in tackling this. Old, defective wiring can be dangerous” (*ET* 124). Eva responds tersely with, “Not was it only that. It was inadequate” (124). “Dangerous” and “inadequate” are words Eva has heard before: others use similar modifiers to describe her in general and her inability to speak in particular.

Technology not only changes the way Eva sees herself, but the way she hears herself, and the way readers hear Bowen’s novel. If “In the 1930s and 1940s, acoustic effects in novels –

¹⁸⁴ Technology is not an ideal teacher, as Jane Lewty notes of the radio: “In general, habitual radio listening may enfeeble the refined process of finding words for oneself, as interruptions are more readily absorbed” (“Virginia Woolf” 160).

¹⁸⁵ Magot suggestion that Eva is named after “an authentic prosthetic goddess, an American aviation pioneer called Evelyn Trout,” further solidifies Eva’s technological lineage (134).

gramophones, street noise, radios, telephones—follow technological changes” then Bowen’s novel of the late 60s appears even more impacted by these technological changes (“Acoustic Modernism” 153). The correlation among *Eva*, Eva, and technology intensifies through the introduction of an acoustic recording device. Eva selects and activates a recording device from her “line of instruments” (126). “Shall I record us?” Eva asks, to which Iseult emphatically replies, “Not on any account!” But the damage has been done. Eva responds with “It has recorded, ‘Not on any account.’ And now it records me saying, ‘It has recorded, ‘Not on any account’” (126). Through the echo-chamber of this repetition, the recording device changes not only the way Eva hears, but the way *Eva*, the novel, sounds. Through meta-gesture, Bowen links the recording function of the page in the reader’s hand to the recording of the recorder. Hepburn notes a similar effect in Bowen’s *The Little Girls* where “The novel functions as a recording device in which sounds are laid down and replayed” (“Acoustic Modernism” 159). In *Eva Trout*, this replaying stabilizes Eva, while destabilizing the novel. N. Katherine Hayles suggests that in Bowen’s work, as in Becket’s, “Manipulating sound through tape recorders...becomes a way of producing a new kind of subjectivity...[Tape recorders] create a new subject ambiguously located in both the body and the recorder” (94). By capturing Eva’s voice, the recording device stills the transient ingénue in ways no human has. And yet, the recording device moves the prose line, changing its look and feel, creating a techno-prose hybrid. If, as Maud Ellmann says, Eva is “an intruder from the novel of the future,” she brings with her technological sounds that alter the soundscape of the novel of the present (216).

Just as technology infiltrates and transforms the space and sound of the novel, so too does it encroach on Eva’s home space. In and around Cathay, technology stages a take-over. Along with the plethora of technologies Iseult observes, she also notes that “Drums of copper casting

obstructed the hall...portions of the stairway were cut away, leaving oubliettes, over which cables flowed upward towards the gallery” (124). The re-wiring Eva’s new technologies require eat away at her home, leaving cavernous holes and other menacing obstacles. Cables flow or stream upward like an invasive species of vine. Further invasions occur in the living room where “Electronics had driven the old guard, the Circe armchairs, into a huddle in the middle of the floor” (125). Most notable, however, is the way in which technology transforms not only the domestic space, but the outside space. The narrator notes that “Glaring in upon all this, the June sun took on the heightened voltage of studio lighting. All windows were shut” (125). In Eva’s electric world, the sun itself becomes electric. Bowen likens it to a giant light bulb, lighting a photo shoot. Certainly, elements of the scene, and of Eva’s life, feel staged. Patricia Juliana Smith speaks to this staginess, noting that “with an endless supply of money and the technological advances of the late 1950s and early 1960s at her disposal, Eva can literally buy simulacra of paradigms she only superficially comprehends.”¹⁸⁶ Though she turns to technology for comfort and even comradery, it further marginalizes her. Bowen creates an environment of disconnection and insularity: “all windows were shut,” sealing in Eva and shutting out the world.

Radio, Displacement, and Disconnection

While recording devices prompt feelings of displacement and disconnection, so too do transmitting devices. One of Eva’s most contentious technological relationships is with the radio. Eva’s transistor radio makes an appearance early in the novel, as one of her cherished

¹⁸⁶ She continues: “For Eva, simulacra are preferable to empirical reality. Hopelessly stranded between the mental states of childhood and adulthood, Eva cannot assume the role that society expects one of the world’s wealthiest women to lead, in great part because her experience has provided her with no paradigm for normative adulthood, home, or family” (243-4).

possessions and follows Eva to her first home. When Mr. Denge meets Eva at the train station, Bowen makes a point to note that “Her transistor she grasped” (77). Syntactically, Bowen affords the transistor a position of prominence that emphasizes Eva’s fondness for her beloved contraption.¹⁸⁷ The transistor, Eva points out, is unique among other technologies: “*It can be carried from place to place*” (*ET* 126). Its portability signifies radio’s progressiveness and pervasiveness in twentieth-century life, what Cohen et al. call “the unsettling omnipresence” of sound (5).¹⁸⁸

Inundated by radio and sound, Eva emblemizes the twentieth-century listener who is unsure of what she hears or from where it comes. Steven Connor contends that “The question that a radio aesthetics can never for long set aside is that of location. Where is radio?” (65). Taking a cue from Marinetti’s “La Radia” manifesto, Connor determines that “radio is everywhere. Its power is that of delocalization” (65). In *Eva Trout*, such delocalization disorients, even to the point of hallucination. When her schoolmates compare Eva to Joan of Arc, Eva asks, uncertainly, “‘I don’t hear Voices—do I?’” (*ET* 48). For Eva, sound incites uncertainty. The disembodied voices of radio disorient her, causing her to question her own sanity. This discombobulating effect intensifies when Eva, sick with fever, dreams of disembodied voices: “She had heard somebody saying, ‘How is my darling?’—but when? where?...The voice had come in as a door opened—but what door? where?” (*ET* 44). Here, again, Eva experiences acoustic disorientation. She imagines sound as an unplaced-place: a door

¹⁸⁷ “The transistor under the pillow” became a popular phenomenon in the late 50’s as radio-obsessed teens began sleeping with their transistors. As Marc Fisher notes, the invention of the transistor meant not only that Americans could have “A Radio in Every Room,” but that you could have a radio everywhere—school, work, the bathroom, and the beach (66). With the advent of the transistor “radio became part of the background, unseen, even unnoticed, yet omnipresent” (67).

¹⁸⁸ Bowen was privy to the invention of the transistor in 1954 and its mass marketing in the 1960s, when the transistor became more commonplace in cars. Radio was always at the fingertips and sound always at the ear.

without a location. Eva attempts to place that sound, to give it an origin and a destination.

However, like the open door in Eva's dream, sound comes and goes as it pleases. Like Eva, it is placeless, transitory, and rootlessness—a series of rooms, doors, hotels, and houses.

Just as disembodied sound disturbs Eva, so too does it disturb or confuse Bowen's reader. Through free indirect discourse, readers confront, firsthand, the uncanny properties of sound. As Eva lies in bed with fever, already hearing voices, another unidentified voice enters the picture. The voice, seemingly but not certainly the narrator's, silently asks, "What are you doing, Eva, lying in the dark?" To which Eva silently responds, "Lying in the dark" (*ET* 44). This dialogue takes place inside Eva's mind, illustrating Connor's contention that radio's true location is "in the mind of the listener" (65). As readers, we eavesdrop on the interior exchange between narrator and character as if listening to "a programme that can never entirely be meant for one" (Connor 66).¹⁸⁹ Just as the novel is like a recorder, here the novel functions as radio-show host. The novel interviews the character that it narrates into existence, as seen with the repetition "lying in the dark." Bowen positions her readers as outsiders "listening in," much like twentieth-century radio audience. This outside position affords us a view of Eva's everyday experience, and we develop an empathetic ear for her plight. She longs to be heard and to understand what she hears: she hopes for acceptance and connection.

Eva turns to the radio to fill sonic and intimate voids. Notably, in a twist on renée hoogland's reading of maternal voice in *Eva Trout*, the radio itself takes the place of the

¹⁸⁹ Connor explains that "Radio occurs at the coincidence of two asymmetric actions – a broadcast that sends a signal out, with no clear idea of where it will be received, and a reception that always has the sense of an overhearing of an address that is not specifically directed at oneself. Hence, perhaps, the long survival of the phrase – well beyond the 1940's – of the expression 'listening *in* to the radio'" (Connor 65-6, italics mine).

mother.¹⁹⁰ Sick with no one to check on her, Eva's transistor holds vigil by her side.¹⁹¹ "With a gleam like a forehead's" the transistor "stood by her bed" (*ET* 43). Bowen grants the radio human properties and here, again, technology stands-in for human interaction. Sick and alone with her radio, Eva piteously turns to it for comfort, but technology turns against her: "—at a moment, [Eva] was constrained to reach out and touch it. She received a shock: *ice-cold* the thing had become! Angrily ice-cold, colder than anger. Eva drew back her frightened, rejected hand, rolled over and lay on top of it, to console it" (*ET* 43-44). The "shock" Eva feels can be better understood by examining Connor's remark that "The strangeness of radio comes from the fact that contingency is of its essence" (65). While Connor uses contingency to mean that one comes upon the radio "by chance, or even surreptitiously," contingency also brings to mind the sense of touch (66). Eva wishes to be contingent to or touched by her transistor, but, as Connor suggests, the radio's touch is unpredictable. In this instance, the radio is cold, physically and emotionally. Its coldness and lack of bodily contagion underscores its nonorganic state and contrasts Eva's human feverishness. Yet, as with human agency, the radio fends off Eva's touch, just as a mother might smack away a child's hand. The transistor, like Iseult, is a pseudo-maternal presence that rejects Eva. Thus, while radio was thought to bring listeners together—too close together, as some note—Eva's radio further alienates her.¹⁹² It fails to substitute for human contact, a sensory experience Eva continues to seek by herself becoming a mother.

Failures of Transmission: Distortion and Disability

¹⁹⁰ See Hoogland pp. 234-235 and pp. 278-90.

¹⁹¹ David Trotter notes a similar phenomenon in Bowen's *To the North* (1932), where the telephone "stands like a sentinel" beside Cecilia's bed (76).

¹⁹² Stephen Kern notes that film and radio created "a growing sense of unity among people formerly isolated by distance" and that this "proximity...generated anxiety—apprehension that the neighbours were seen as getting a bit too close" (qtd. in Lewty "Virginia Woolf" 149).

Bowen continues to question the relationship between technology and the senses through the figure of Jeremy, Eva's "adopted" son. Just as Eva purchases auro-visual equipment as a way of establishing a home, Eva purchases Jeremy as a way of establishing a family: she acquires him as an infant on the Chicago black market. However, unlike the aural equipment Eva stockpiles, Jeremy is deaf and non-speaking. While Eva believes "there's nothing wrong about Jeremy," others view him as faulty and in need of repair (168). For instance, when Eva takes Jeremy to visit the vicarage where she once spent so much time as a child, they face less than favorable opinions. Henry Dancey abhors that Eva was "sold a pup," and Mr. Dancey views Jeremy with pity. "'Surely Eva,'" Mr. Dancey pleads, "'In these days, and in that progressive country you've been in, something could have been done, has been done: what *is* being done?'" (165, 169). In their eyes, Eva has been swindled: she was sold a defective product that needs fixing.

As Maren Linett notes, Bowen uses Jeremy's disability to amplify Eva's sensory shortcomings—he serves "to shed light on [her] displacement" and "emotional disabilities—but Jeremy also sheds light on other kinds of 'handicaps'" (272).¹⁹³ Notably, Jeremy is not the only handicapped character in *Eva Trout*. Eva herself is considered "partly handicapped" though "in what particular or for what reason she was to be taken to be [handicapped] was not gone into" (*ET* 61).¹⁹⁴ Bowen employs "handicap" variously, to describe not only Jeremy's deafness, but Eva's speech and Mr. Dancey's debilitating allergies. By drawing attention to various sensory impairments, Bowen suggests that disability is more wide-reaching than it may appear. Bowen

¹⁹³ In this way Jeremy functions as a "narrative prosthesis": "a mechanism...that can apply to racial representations as well [, where] the text uses a character with a disability as a sort of crutch to prop up one or more concerns of the narrative" ("Modes" 277 n. 6).

¹⁹⁴ Maud Ellmann gets closest to naming Eva's disability when deeming her "tongue-tied to the point of autism" (204).

asks us to consider our own disabilities through Mr. Dancey, who finds Jeremy's deafness particularly offensive. Mr. Dancey laments, "Crass as sound can be imagine a soundless world?" (*ET* 169). In a seemingly simple question, he summarizes the complex, conflicting relationship modernist subjects had with sound. Though he proclaims sound's indispensability, Mr. Dancey also points to its harshness, positing it as a necessary evil. Bowen asks us to do just as Mr. Dancey advises: to imagine a world without sound and to reconsider our relationships with sound technology. Through Jeremy's disability, she prompts her readers to further consider their own sensory impairments and the role technology plays in enabling and disabling. How, she asks, does technology program us, and what happens when we turn off that (radio) programming? What happens when we turn off sound?

Bowen answers these questions by equating sensory impairment with failed transmission: she understands the former through the latter and, in so doing, proffers a social understanding of disability. Like Jeremy, who cannot speak, and Eva, who cannot speak well, Mr. Dancey also fails to transmit. Bowen discusses Mr. Dancey's "handicap," in great detail (*ET* 23). The amount of description Bowen devotes to Mr. Dancey's physiognomy verges on the comical, especially when the narrator announces that his great "affliction" is hay fever. One day, out of Kleenex, Mr. Dancey

had to repress a sneeze, which cost him an agonizing contortion. At forty-two, he would have been better looking than any of his children were it not for the havoc wrought by his chronic affliction. His alive countenance had seldom a chance to be quite itself; vision, discernment and charity shone from it, but often as though through a blurred pane—inflamed eyelids, sore, swollen nostrils, bloated upper lip. There were few intermissions: when winter relaxed its grip he regularly started to have hay fever. (*ET* 23)

Of all the “convulsive” bodies Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle identify in *Eva Trout*, Mr. Dancey’s is arguably the most tortured (141). Bowen takes great pains to describe an uncontrollable body and its out of control senses. Mr. Dancey’s swollen eyelids nearly blind him, just as his swollen nostrils impair his sense of smell and, one can safely assume, his sense of taste. Interestingly, though Bowen attributes Mr. Dancey’s symptoms to “natural” causes, she ends her description by alluding to cultural phenomenon. The concepts of performativity and “intermission” call to mind the radio dramas with which Bowen was familiar.¹⁹⁵ Bowen, then, conceives of Mr. Dancey’s allergies as a sort of sensory drama, from which he has little reprieve. His allergy-induced sensory overload resembles the sonic/radiophonic overload Bowen and her contemporaries experienced, what Jane Lewty refers to as “the colonization of daily life by radio” (“Virginia Woolf” 150). Certainly, radio might be thought of as a “chronic affliction” from which modern subjects experienced (and continue to experience) “few intermissions” or moments of relief. Overwhelmed by sensory input, Mr. Dancey fails to dictate his own sensory output: his “countenance” cannot be “quite itself,” and he cannot put his best face forward. Like a radio gone haywire, Mr. Dancey’s hay fever renders him a distorted version of himself.

Distortions lead to questions of authenticity. Neil Corcoran reads *Eva Trout* itself as a distorted version of previous novels: it makes “a final return, with a difference, to the material of Elizabeth Bowen’s earlier fictions of childhood: a return in which the relationships...are all now destabilized in a way productive of panic rather than release” (Corcoran 135). Bowen locates this panic, in part, in the relationships among technologies and the senses, which are likewise destabilized and panic-inducing. Throughout the novel, technologically-produced sounds, and technologies that produce sounds, raise suspicions. This is especially true of technologies of

¹⁹⁵ See *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews* for four of Bowen’s “plays for the air.”

transmission, namely the radio and the telephone. After an unexpected phone call from Iseult, for instance, Eva doubts if she had really spoken to her former teacher or “an impersonator”: and wonders, “Had it all been a trick played by the wire? Alone with a voice, shut up with it, you are fooled by what can be its distortedness” (*ET* 213). Eva fears not only that her ear is playing tricks on her, but that technology does too. The novel asks, “Can we trust what we hear? Or does technology feed us misrepresentations, falsehoods, “distortions”?”¹⁹⁶ What Debra Rae Cohen says of the radio rings true of the telephone as well: “sound may be and often is ‘sound effect’” (“Intermediality” 585-6).

Suspicious of these effects, Eva accuses the wire of aural trickery and gives voice to modernist fears of technological manipulation. Anxiety over acoustic technologies were a particular source of anxiety for many twentieth-century listeners, and the radio, in particular, garnered suspicion.¹⁹⁷ Writing of the early radio years, Jeffrey Sconce notes that “The uncanny power of the medium fused with a concern over the power to manipulate the personal and social by external forces” (39).¹⁹⁸ Radio, she continues, “evoked anxieties over distant control and loss of self” (Sconce 40). These anxieties persisted into the late twentieth-century, as Mr. Dancey’s concerns with his voice attest. Due to the severity of his allergies, the narrator explains that “Occupationally, [Mr. Dancey’s] anxiety was his voice, which had taken to varying in volume as

¹⁹⁶ The radio, again, was often thought of distrustfully. The BBC, for example, came under fire during WWI when broadcasters gave false information about England’s progress in the war, saying the British troops were faring better than they were. See Lewty “Virginia Woolf” 156.

¹⁹⁷ Of course, this is not to suggest that this is the *only* view of technology. Of the radio specifically, Debra Rae Cohen et al. note that some modernists (like Futurist F.T. Marinetti) thought of radio as liberating, others as productively unifying, and still others as dangerously homogenizing (5). For more on modernist responses to the radio see Kate Lacey, *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age*.

¹⁹⁸ A shift from external to internal occurred with the founding of the BBC (1922), NBC (1926), and CBS (1927) when radio became more commonplace in the home. Radio infiltrated the home and the minds of its listeners. Lewty calls the BBC an “insistent presence...where unwelcome facts crowd in, irrespective of the mental effort to be selective” (“Virginia Woolf” 159).

unaccountably as though a poltergeist were fiddling with the controls, sometimes coming out with a sudden boom or roar, sometimes fading till off the air" (*ET* 23). By foregrounding Mr. Dancey's allergies, Bowen posits technology as a foreign substance to which Mr. Dancey bodily reacts. She represents his anxiety in radiophonic terms, pointing to the unpredictable and inescapable qualities of that particular technology. Mr. Dancey, a radiogenic figure, uses his voice to "broadcast" sermons, but he exhibits a frustrating lack of control over said broadcasts—and over his body.¹⁹⁹ Bowen describes his body as a rogue acoustic technology, with a powerless operator. Mr. Dancey cannot manipulate his sonic output, soundscape, but finds himself subject to it, involuntarily. The radio pervades and invades: Bowen imagines it as a "poltergeist" or noisy ghost, an invisible force that possesses Mr. Dancey, just as it haunted modern listeners.²⁰⁰ Bowen conceives of sound and radio waves as a presence that cannot be exorcised and over which listeners exercised little power. In this way, Mr. Dancey resembles the modernist radio listener, for whom "listening became an ever more diffuse and involuntary activity" (Connor 68).

Grappling with sound and sound technologies throws Mr. Dancey and Eva into a "technologically mediated crisis of the senses" (Darius 1). Eva's confrontation with the telephone and telephonic sound illustrate this crisis by raising questions not only about the reliability of sound technologies but of human hearing and human being. When Eva ends her call with Iseult, the narrator wonders if "Eva could be an overexcitable ear, so long-lasting having been its desuetude. Might the ear not seem to have registered what it had not?" (*ET* 213). The

¹⁹⁹ Kate Lacey, via Alan Beck, uses radiogenic to refer to texts that "are ideally or specially suited to radio, or that utilize to the maximum the distinctive qualities of radio, or that display an optimum aesthetic use of sound" (93).

²⁰⁰ The reference to poltergeist and the supernatural also alludes to connections between radio and the occult. See Jeffery Sconce, "Wireless Ego: The Pulp Physics of Psychoanalysis" esp. pp. 33-49.

confusing syntax of the second clause echoes Eva's confusion and uncertainty. The telephone (not to mention the person on the other end) incites a crisis of trust: for Eva, the ear no longer serves as a reliable indicator of truth. In her topsy-turvy world, technology displays uncanny human affects, while the human ear appears mechanized, a technologized organ prone to malfunction. Unable to trust her perceptions, Eva's sensory apparatus crumbles and subjectivity, as she knows it, slips. She is left wondering, "[W]hat a slippery fish is identity; and what *is* it besides a slippery fish?" (*ET* 213). Such slippage between "the authentic and the counterfeit" is, Pamela L. Caughie asserts, the "special province of sound technology" (106). Sound and subjectivity have a reciprocal relationship so that as the modern soundscape changed "The very meaning of what it meant to be human changed" (Caughie 105). Eva feels the effects of this change. After Iseult's phone call, she calls humanness into question and asks, "What *is* a person?" (*ET* 213).²⁰¹ Distrustful of sound/sound-produced knowledge, she decides to visit the National Portrait Gallery, with its "echo-deadening acoustics" to find an answer to her question (213). At the Gallery, Eva snubs sound and invests her faith in sight, the other sensory modality that dominates the novel.

"Seeing, Seeing, Seeing": Sight and Sensory Dystopia

Eva attempts to evade the world of sound by engaging exclusively with sight. For the first eight years of Jeremy's life, he and Eva live a "cinematographic existence, with no sound-track" (*ET* 207). Bowen describes this period as "the at-large American years" when "insulated by her fugue and his ignorance that there could be anything other, [Eva and Jeremy] had lorded it in a visual universe" (208). Bowen fashions Eva and Jeremy as escapees, running from the aural

²⁰¹ Elsewhere in Bowen's oeuvre, as David Trotter notes of *To the North*, the telephone is more productive, providing queer or marginalized characters a sense of community (82). Trotter refers to this phenomenon as "a foretaste of telephony's Facebook effect" (72).

world that others attempt to enforce upon them. For Eva, this evasion requires a sort of selective amnesia, wherein she “forgets” that sound—or any of the other senses, for that matter—exist.

Eva’s sensory practices lend nuance to Bennett and Royle’s claim that throughout the novel “Eva has been able to join things—words, thoughts, memories, actions, people—together (156).

Evoking one of the last words of the novel (and of Eva herself), Bennett and Royle remark that “Except during her flowing, phantasmagoric, movie years in America...[Eva] is unable to make sense of events because she is unable to ‘concatenate’” (156; *ET* 301). We can add the senses to the list of things Eva cannot concatenate or link together: within her “fugue” state, she denies multisensuality and opts for a single-sense, ocularcentric sensorium.

As Hermione Lee put it, “the prospects of an entirely ‘visual universe’ is not offered as entirely consolatory” (211). Instead, Bowen paints a picture of a world where vision fosters disconnection and dystopia. Bowen’s narrator explains that mother and son “came to distinguish little between what went on inside and what went on outside diurnal movies, or what was not contained in the television flickering them to sleep” (208). Visual technology consumes Eva and Jeremy’s days, nights, and minds. Another failed teacher, it does not impart knowledge, but leaves its pupils (and its pupils’ pupils, if you will) ignorant, undiscerning, and overtaxed. Bowen nods to the danger of over-ingesting the visual, warning that exclusionary sensory practices lead to social exclusion. During this visual period, Eva and Jeremy are dangerously out of touch.

From large or small screens, illusion overspilled on to all beheld. Society revolved at a distance from them like a ferris [sic] wheel dangling buckets of people. They were their own. Wasted, civilization extended round them as might acres of cannibalized cars. Only they moved. They were within a story to which they imparted the only sense. (*ET* 208)

“The only sense” Eva and Jeremy indulge is vision, and Bowen comments on the danger of this single-sense devotion. Vision and visual technologies insulate and distance them from reality: society, for them, becomes mere spectacle, a visual carnival. The fantastical technology of the Ferris wheel suggests a naiveté and innocence that quickly turns dangerous, and the same can be said of Eva.²⁰² (Smith 228-9). Like “a ferris wheel dangling buckets of people,” Eva leads Jeremy in sensory practices that hang on the edge, just as they hang on the fringes of society. This position, Bowen suggests, is precarious. The fantastical scene culminates in a desolate wasteland, where technology self-destructs and consumes itself. If Eva and Jeremy represent two visual consumers, Bowen asks us to consider the consequences of mass visual consumption. With the help of technology, which aides us in enacting our single-sense agendas, we eat away at our humanity, threaten our civilization.

Incessant seeing undoubtedly threatens Jeremy. From the start, others grant Jeremy a seemingly super-human ability to see. The narrator, for instance, notes Jeremy’s “unearthly perspicacity” or clear-sightedness (172). Likewise, Mr. Dancey, paying reverence to the traditional sensory hierarchy, proclaims that “Sight to me is the thing—the thing above all things. And more seeing eyes than [Jeremy’s] I have seldom seen” (169). Only Iseult recognizes that Jeremy tires of seeing and that he needs non-visual stimulation. Iseult meets Jeremy in as mysterious a way as Eva “adopts” him. Upon returning to England with her eight-year-old son, Eva takes him to Larkins to meet Iseult and Eric. However, she quickly learns that the couple have separated (presumably because Eva lied about being pregnant with Eric’s child), and no longer inhabit the cottage. After learning of Eva’s attempted visit, Iseult makes her own “visit,”

²⁰² Echoing this sentiment, Smith says that “innocence is hardly an unmixed blessing” in Bowen’s work, and that “*Eva Trout* forces us to consider the disastrous outcome that might ensue” if one’s childhood innocence carries over into adulthood (229).

picking up Jeremy one day at his art lesson, without Eva's knowledge or consent. While Eva frets over her son's kidnapping, Iseult takes stock of Jeremy's condition: "I cannot tell you what satiated eyes he had," she confesses, "or how his weariness of seeing, seeing, seeing without knowing, without knowing, without knowing was borne in on me" (273). Seeing and knowing do not correspond here, and Bowen challenges the sensory hierarchy that traditionally equates sight with knowledge. Iseult's repetition reads like a chant, and illustrates Jeremy's visual enchantment, the trance-like state in which he exists. By drawing attention to the damage visual fixation can do, Bowen advocates for other means of knowing and sensing.

Touch and the (un)Touchable

As Linett says, "It is crucial that there is no mention of sign-language in the novel," and Jeremy finds himself in a society that devalues the hand as a medium of communication and touch as a viable sensory modality ("Seeing" 480).²⁰³ Bowen, however, seems to suggest otherwise. Jeremy first expresses himself through his hands via the medium of clay. While Eva house hunts, more to please Henry Dancey than to establish a home for her son, she sends Jeremy to art class, "where a needy sculptress would teach him to model" (199). Jeremy loves working with clay and "would not be parted from it; he gummed up [their suite at] Paley's by bringing lumps of it home wet" (200). Through the tactile, Jeremy finds a way to make his mark. During their brief time together Iseult conceives of Jeremy's hand as an untapped source of power, one that Jeremy knowingly cultivates. "Clay was caking on his fingers," she says, "and he watched it, gathering his forces" (273). Eva later confronts both the force of Jeremy's tactile

²⁰³ Linett, invoking Douglas Baynton, notes that "This absence reflects educational practices at the time Bowen was writing: from the late nineteenth century through the 1970s, the oralist movement dominated educational theory and practice for deaf children; oralism advocated banning signed languages deaf schools and replacing them with training in lip-reading and speech ("Seeing" 480). Abbie Garrington also speaks to the waning power of the hand in other contexts, where it is increasingly "set aside by scientific and technological discovery" (30).

expression and his frustration with “seeing, seeing, seeing” when she sees his latest sculpture.

The narrator relays that,

Jeremy was at work on a head of [Eva]. This was the first view of it: she had not sat to him. It was a large knob, barely representational—only, he had gouged with his two thumbs deep into the slimed clay, making eye-sockets go, almost, right through the cranium. Out of their dark eyes had exuded such non-humanity that Eva had not known where to turn. (209-10)

The eyes feature predominately, showing that Jeremy associates Eva with sight. Jeremy fashions Eva’s eyes as deadly: they threaten death by practically piercing through the skull and they appear already dead, oozing an inhumanity from which Eva recoils.

The near-complete absence of touch in the novel forwards *Eva*’s themes of disconnectedness. The types of touch Bowen does depict are often selfish, emblematic of a society out of touch with one another. Instead of characters touching each other, they narcissistically touch themselves. This is perhaps most obvious in the character of Constantine, who repeatedly touches his own face.²⁰⁴ Touch ironically connotes distance in the following passage, where Constantine addresses Iseult regarding her oversight of Eva: Constantine “raised, then touched, a barely-visible eyebrow. ‘You would not be entirely single-handed. Not quite unaided...But you and *I* should, probably, keep in touch? Closer in touch than hitherto’” (40). This playful moment of touching and not touching is characteristic of Bowen’s novel, in which the closest relationships are largely hands-off. Notably, Eva and Jeremy rarely touch, and when they do Eva finds it an unwelcome change. After Jeremy spends the afternoon with Iseult, for instance, touch becomes compulsory, where it was once unnecessary: “Eva noticed chiefly that

²⁰⁴ Constantine often touches his face, as when “One cheek crinkled, somewhat disreputably—he ran a hand up it lightly” (183), and when he “marveled...rubbing lightly at the site of an eyebrow” (293).

accustomed communications with Jeremy broke down...To get his attention she had to touch him” (239).

It is interesting that Iseult provokes this change in Jeremy, since Iseult herself expresses mixed feelings about touch. While writing in her journal to keep herself company, Iseult ponders, “Shall I go to bed? Touch is everything. Touch is a leech. Go up and lie by a cold pillow, hearing nobody breathing? Better keep on at this, these are words as least” (98). Iseult both desires and fears touch. Want of intimacy keeps her awake at night, and yet she shies away from it, even guards against it, as one would a parasite. Iseult’s fear of touch is most apparent in her relationship with Eva. Not only do the two women not touch, Eva sees her former teacher as untouchable. Eva feels that “something disembodied Miss Smith” (60). “Neither then nor later,” the narrator continues, “did Eva look upon her as beautiful or in any other way clad in physical being. Miss Smith’s *noli me tangere* was unneeded in any physical dealings with Eva—who *could* have touched her?” (60). Godlike, even bodiless, Iseult is out of Eva’s reach. And yet, Eva reaches out to her teacher in the only way Iseult will allow, through words. To Iseult, Eva recites lines from a George Herbert poem she memorizes, lines that express Eva’s desire for contact and further cast Iseult as un-contactable. ““Yet Thou are not so dark, since I know this,”” Eva declares, ““But that my darkness touch thine / And hope, that may teach it to shine”” (65). Eva wants only ““that my darkness touch thine,”” but even the wish for contact drives Iseult away.²⁰⁵ Their relationship, as Eva knew it, ends after this, thereby reifying Eva’s understanding of touch as forbidden sensory territory.

Touch between women, even young girls, seems especially forbidden. Illicit touch is apparent in the one relationship that is largely tactile, that between Eva and her classmate,

²⁰⁵ Patricia Juliana Smith reads this scene as reflective of “lesbian panic,” and of Iseult’s fear of being outed (238).

Elsinore. As Neil Corcoran notes, the exchanges between Eva and Elsinore carry “an emotional authenticity which is hardly ever apparent elsewhere in a novel deeply preoccupied with, and plotted around modes of, the inauthentic” (128).²⁰⁶ Touch signals authenticity and intimacy in a novel where it is otherwise nonexistent. When Elsinore lies comatose in bed after she “walked into the lake” Eva does not leave her side (52). The housemaid who tends to Elsinore warns, “‘*You* must not touch her, Eva’”(53). Eva does, however, touch Elsinore, and the effect is transformational. Bowen writes that “to repose a hand on the blanket covering Elsinore was to know in the palm of the hand a primitive tremor...This deathly yet living stillness, together, of two beings, this unapartness, came to be the requital of all longing” (54). Touch offers Eva a sense of belonging, and Bowen crafts a new word, “unapartness,” to signify this new sensation. Significantly, Bowen also locates this knowing in the palm of the hand, suggesting that touch *is* a productive means of generating knowledge.²⁰⁷ However, this generative sensory experience is fleeting. Shortly hereafter, Elsinore’s mother comes to take her daughter away, and Eva is again denied touch, understanding, and intimacy.

The absence of intimate touch adds to the dystopian aura of *Eva Trout* and its unsustainable society. Tactile abstention features in the novel as when, responding to Elsinore’s nurse, Eva “locked her hands together behind her back, in a token of abstinence” (53).

Abstinence and Eva’s virginity become a topic of discussion much later when, as an adult, Eva

²⁰⁶ Corcoran goes on to say that “The rendering of the one authentic relationship in the novel as homosexual—if, of course, pre-pubic—brings into its foreground the lesbian elements which is often present but partly submerged in the earlier novels” (128). For further queer readings, see Patricia Coughlan, “Women and Desire in the Work of Elizabeth Bowen” and Petra Rau, “Telling it Straight: The Rhetorics of Conversion in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Hotel* and Freud’s *Psychogenesis*.”

²⁰⁷ Indeed, years later when Eva and Elsinore run into each other unexpectedly, Iseult recognizes Eva by her hand even before seeing her face. Bowen writes, “‘Trout,’ said a voice from across the table, a voice so tiny should have been tiny-printed, ‘isn’t that you?’...Eva, in the same tone, said: ‘How did you know?’” To which Elsinore replies, “‘Your hand’” (140-141).

explains that she did not try to have a child naturally because she ““had had disagreeable impressions of love,”” and ““was not anxious to [experiment]”” (247).²⁰⁸ Whether averted to sex or not, characters in the novel have touchless, sexless, or otherwise unproductive (and un-reproductive) relationships. The novel implies that Iseult and Eric, for instance, are no longer physically intimate and were unable to have children when they were. Iseult and Eric join another couple, Dr. and Mme Bonnard, who are also unwillingly childless. Bowen’s emphasis on these childless couples suggests that society will fail to birth a new generation.²⁰⁹ Likewise, artists will fail to birth new art. Iseult admits that, though she tried to write a novel, “It was born dead” (253).²¹⁰ For Bowen art and life are linked and where one falters so too will the other. Marked by miscarriages and missed opportunities, the sensory environment of Bowen’s novel stagnates and leaves little hope for the next generation.

“Seekers—still seeking”

Bowen emphasizes a hopeless future through Eva’s faux marriage to Henry Dancey. In the final pages of the novel, Eva sets about making a scene by staging her wedding, an act that replaces the possibility of true contact and intimate touch with empty spectacle. After asking Henry to “play a role” as her bridegroom, Eva begins planning their feigned pre-wedding party.

²⁰⁸ Maren Linett links Eva’s asexuality with her “handicap” noting that sexuality is often (though not always) denied women with disabilities (“Seeing” 473). For more on disability and sexuality see Linett, *Bodies of Modernism: Physical Disability in Transatlantic Modernist Literature*, esp. Chapter One, “Mobility and Sexuality,” and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, esp. Chapter Two, “Theorizing Disability: Feminist Theory, the Body, and the Disabled Figure.”

²⁰⁹ Of course, those who do parent the new generation, as Eva does Jeremy, are not looked upon favorably either. This unfavorable view may speak to Bowen’s disillusion with the younger generation and the “permissive childrearing techniques that produce[d], in the 1950’s, a crop of spoiled children” (*Listening In* 13). Inappropriate adult-child relationships are certainly one of the darker elements of *Eva Trout* and may be an amplification of what Bowen saw as “the refusal to grow UP”

²¹⁰ Applethwaithe is another failed female artist, though perhaps, as the “apple” in her names suggests, a source of untapped knowledge. Applethwaithe laments that she has ““never been ‘recognized’”...that ““no one has heard of me”” (220). “My work means nothing to the world,” she continues, ““Why, I wonder?...Why has nothing put a stop to the blindness, their blindness, that I am right in the middle of?”” (220). Here again, Bowen features a society that is constantly looking, but unable to see.

She invites Constantine, Iseult, Eric, and even Mr. Denge, to Victoria Station, for a celebratory send-off. There, Eva and Henry will, ostensibly, embark on their new life together. Unbeknownst to the wedding party, Henry plans to exit the train at some point, leaving Eva to continue on alone. And where is Jeremy in all this? He will remain behind in the hands of Dr. and Mme Bonnard, a childless couple who “devoted themselves to cases like [his]” (*ET* 238). Eva has come to the realization that her time with Jeremy has ended, that “The dear game was over, the game was up” (285). However, in one last act of visual imposition, Eva insists to Mme Bonnard, ““I think [Jeremy] should see *I* see he is free of me, and what better way than this to show him?”” (289). So begins a final scene that, like the above passage, exhausts itself with references to seeing.

Bowen’s description of Victoria Station starts with multiple senses—with “odors...fanned by a passage of air” and “a dying-down of reverberations”—but these quickly yield to a fixation on sight (*ET* 289). Various visual verbs overwhelm the final pages of the novel, to an almost comical effect. As Constantine, Jeremy, and Mr. Denge wait for Eva to arrive at the station, Henry comments, ““I haven’t *seen* her for rather more than a week” (291), after which he exclaims ““I think I see—”” before stopping abruptly (292). Constantine, likewise, remarks, ““I have not seen [Eva], one way or another, since her visit to France”” (292), follows up with, ““one regretted seeing her go,”” and asks after Jeremy, saying that “One sees no signs of him” (292-3, 296). Iseult and Eric Arble, recently reunited, appear on the scene in a notably visual (and laughable) manner by “spotting their spotters simultaneously” (291). When Eva does appear, she too is a visual spectacle. She “hove into sight” and “stood tall as a candle, some accident of the light rendering her luminous from top to toe” (294). Eva further draws attention to the eye by asking Constantine, ““My father told me my eyes are like my mother’s—are

they?’” (297). Through repeated references to seeing, Bowen bombards her readers with the visual, just as the modern subject was also bombarded.

All this seeing has a stupefying effect and Bowen crafts a society enthralled by the visual. This is best illustrated via the audience that gathers around Jeremy as he, like his mother, makes a spectacle of himself. While Eva takes center stage, Jeremy hovers off-stage/further down the platform. He is in the care of the recently-hired Mrs. Caliber, whose name cheekily alludes to the drama that ensues. Through a series of less-than-believable plot points, Jeremy manages to get his hands on Iseult’s gun, which she left with Eva’s things at Paley’s without Eva’s knowledge. This is not the first time Jeremy encounters a gun—Iseult gives him a toy gun earlier in the novel—and it is unclear if he knows the difference between the real thing and the toy. The audience Jeremy attracts also cannot differentiate between reality and fantasy. They believe the gun, like the boy himself, is “a stage dummy” (298). “Audience-minded, as are contemporary crowds,” they suspect “A child’s ballet enactment of a *crime passionel*? Or a boy model, advertising something: ‘Little Lord XXX will shoot up the train, if he isn’t given---?’” (299). Inundated by visual culture—from film to advertising—contemporary crowds are, like Jeremy, always “seeing, seeing, seeing, without knowing.” Thus, seeing, like hearing, does not enable: it does not promote clear thinking or provide a clear picture of reality. Paradoxically, sight obscures. Just as Jeremy’s audience is temporarily blind to reality, so too are Bowen’s readers. We eventually see, however, that the gun Jeremy flourishes is real. Bowen makes one last nod to technology’s influence when Jeremy, at sight of Eva...sped like a boy on the screen toward the irradiated figure, waving his weapon in salute” (302). Jeremy’s final salute, an act of the hand, is to pull the gun’s trigger and shoot Eva.

Like the image of Eva's dead body, vision haunts the final pages of Bowen's novel. Bowen depicts this haunting quite literally, through a wandering mass of "seekers" (293). We later learn that these seekers are members of Eva's extended family, whom she invited to her send-off and has not seen in years. Unsure what Eva looks like, they circle the platform, as if in a trance: "On the return, past, drifted the seekers—still seeking, unflaggingly. Was hope dwindling? Mistlike phantoms, the aunts, uncles and cousins in passing by bent phantom eyes upon Eva" (297). Here again, to look is not to know. The drifters do not know Eva by sight, just as the onlookers are not convinced the "mistlike phantoms" are real people. Bowen associates seeing not with realism and reality, but surrealism and fantasy. Looking bears no fruit, and yet the seekers keep seeking. The habitual back and forth of the ghost-like figures implies that they will continue their search, ceaselessly. Eva's extended family will go on haunting the station and being haunted themselves. So too, Bowen suggests, will society. If Eva is akin to Mother Eve, then Bowen implies that we are all her extended family. She asks, are we not all at risk of relentless see(k)ing? Through these figures, Bowen gives her readers a glimpse of their future selves, as mere specters, visually haunting and haunted by the visual.

The final scene in *Eva Trout* does not change as its subtitle, *Changing Scenes*, suggests, but stagnates, as does the sensorium. For all its motion, Bowen depicts a society that stalls: *Eva's* train, literally and metaphorically, does not leave the station. As Sinéad Mooney points out, Bowen's final novel "stops but has no end, not having progressed far beyond Eric Arble's initial verdict on the savagely innocent protagonist: 'Nothing...makes sense...[Eva] makes sense as much as else'" (32; *ET* 19). Mooney associates *Eva* with a comical "meaninglessness or absurdity" that comes from "the pleasure of no longer having to invest our energies in the labour of making sense" (32). *Eva's* absurdity stems from its obsession with sight and sound, a limited

sensorium that also limits possibility. Bowen acknowledges these limitations. She refers to Eva and Jeremy's "cinematographic existence" as a "sublimated monotony [that] cocooned the two of them" (*ET* 207). Jane Lewty makes a similar observation about the BBC, calling it a "mass subliminal persuasion—a nullifying blanket of sound" ("Virginia Woolf" 160). This is a statement Bowen herself could have written and with which she likely would agree. In both cases, visual and aural technologies stifle sensation; they "blanket" and "cocoon" audiences in sensory monotony. The prefix "sub" that appears in both "sublimated" and "subliminal" positions Bowens' characters, and the society of which she writes, "under": under the influence, under the spell, and caught in the undertow of the ever-flowing "age of speed."

In *Eva Trout*, Bowen describes a society whose quest for knowledge—the proverbial apple—cannot be fulfilled by the "privileged" senses of sight and sound alone nor by technologies of transmission. Indeed, these technologies prompt questions that plague Bowen's novel, as they continue to trouble contemporary society. The advent of the digital age ushered in an era of intense uncertainty about how new technologies will impact humans, the senses, and our relationships. We might, then, think not only of Eva, but of the novel itself, with its severed connections and its burden of technology, as "an intruder from the future" (Ellmann 216). *Eva Trout* communicates fears of a technological take-over that have, in many ways, been realized. It exhibits an irony that contemporary readers can appreciate: the more plugged in we are, the less "human" we sometimes feel; the more technologically "connected" we are, the more disconnected we often become. In an era where humans are seemingly inseparable from their technologies, Bowen's novel continues to remind us to be attuned to the way technology both empowers and impairs our senses and our sense of self.

Epilogue

As we move from the twentieth century into the twenty-first, the words of H.D., Mina Loy, Virginia Woolf, and Elizabeth Bowen continue to resonate. Their subversive actions are not so far-removed from those of women today—women who take to the streets, the papers, the polls, and the picket lines to demand that their voices are heard, their bodies are respected, and their experiences are validated. These women continue to be disruptive sensual forces, carrying on the important work of redefining the value of “being, seeing, and saying” (Rancière 139). Technology’s role in feminist movements also continues to evolve and, in the new digital age, women’s relationships with technology have become even more complicated. The long-standing idea that women are ill-equipped to operate machinery or handle technology has led to a present-day shortage of women in STEM professions. Electronic media provides a platform for the denigration of women’s bodies and the devaluation of women’s embodied experience, via smear campaigns on social media, internet trolling, and disparaging “presidential” tweets. Digital technologies, with their alluring screens and enticing touch pads, are changing the way we touch and, in some ways, causing us to lose touch with one another.

However, many of these same technologies have been sources of good. From iPads and computer keyboards, women are reaching out and speaking out, sharing their stories of sensory and sexual violation. Modernist-era technologies still play their part as well: trains, planes, and automobiles transport women to marches, televisions broadcast images of the #MeToo movement, and cameras capture pictures of abuse and retribution. My hope is that as these technologies and sensory experiences continue to evolve, so too does our study of them. *Dissensual Women* acts as prelude to further work in recovering and supporting those lesser-heard voices—of women of color, women of lower socio-economic means, and women of

differing physical abilities. Just as *HERmione* ends with Fayne awaiting her in their “little workroom,” so too do I end with the acknowledgement that there is more work to be done, by women and for women (211). May we continue to expand our “little workrooms” to make more room for different perspectives, bodies, and senses.

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