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Modernism on Air

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Introduction

From its inception Modernism characterized itself, and has been characterized, by its connection to mass culture. Aesthetic autonomy, the Modernist main trait, that theorized art as detached from mass culture, was a strategy that marked out several artistic movements between the nineteenth and twentieth century in Europe.

The discrepancy between art and mass culture was central to artistic debates over Modernism in Great Britain, and offers an interesting case study to be pursued. Britain experienced rapid changes in industrialization and the emerging new media worked as destabilizing forces that emphasized and simultaneously dismantled established class hierarchies. Modernist artists outlined their diversity from mass culture to affirm and explain themselves as a culturally distinct movement. Critics of the period underlined these contrasts to validate and reinforce their status as experts prepared to illustrate an under-informed public

about Modernism's high purpose. However, in recent decades a new generation of critics of British Modernism has distanced itself from artists' and critics' earlier claims of difference from mass culture by depicting Modernism and mass culture as historically related and dialectically interdependent.

But whether critics explain Modernism as separated by a 'Great Divide' from mass culture, they agree that one of the primary conditions for understanding Modernism is its relation with mass culture. As Andreas Huyssen argued in *After the Great Divide* (1986)[1], the notion that Modernism and mass culture arose in hostile opposition to one another has proven "amazingly resilient" in part owing to its close association with two canonical theories of Modernism, those of Theodor Adorno and Clement Greenberg[2].

From this perspective, Modernism embodies the intellectual efforts to outline the work of art as an autonomous realm in the Kantian sense by

[1] A. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Post Modernism*: Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986.

[2] Both Adorno and Greenberg are often taken to be the last ditch defenders of the purity of the Modernist aesthetic, and they have become known since the late 1930s as uncompromising enemies of mass culture because in their view the modern mass culture had become an effective tool of totalitarian domination.

underlining its self-referential, paradoxical, and experimental mechanisms and by abjuring not only a moral purpose for art but even a mimetic or a representational role. While such an art becomes possible historically only with its separation from its traditional moorings in religion and the patronage system, and their replacement by a secularized art market, its practitioners resolutely resist any 'contamination' by mass culture and entertainment.

Although Huyssen offered some qualification to the Adorno-Greenberg model, he accepted the "great divide" between "high" Modernism and "low" mass culture as an accurate historical description of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century world. Where he innovated was in his suggestion that we sharply distinguish between Modernism and avant-gardes such as Futurism, Dadaism, Constructivism, and Surrealism, since, according to the model he appropriated from Peter Bürger[3], Modernism devoted itself to the self-determination of art while the avant-gardes were committed to the aestheticization of life. Such an aestheticization, that is to say the commixture of art and life, undermines the conservative vision of art, which continues to consider art as a

[3] P.Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*: Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984.

transcendent or sacral sphere above mundane things. Avant-gardism breaks down barriers between pure and applied art, captivates mass-cultural elements from advertising and newspapers into art, and insists on performing art in a public sphere where the poetic word spoken aloud aim to encourage action, much like a speech at a political rally.

A growing number of critics has begun to develop convincing alternatives to that starkly Manichaean approach to early twentieth-century cultural history. For example, in an essay on how I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, and T.S. Eliot incorporated mass-cultural techniques like 'shock and sensations' into their critical writing, Alison Pease notes that "the relationship between mass culture and Modernist criticism was more fluid and more complicated than we have yet to recognize"[4] —an observation that may easily be expanded to Modernist writing and other art forms in general. For her part, Melba Cuddy-Keane, in *Virginia Woolf the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere,* addresses the commonly "perceived division

[4] A. Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.166.

between elites and masses"[5] in order to question "essentialist notions about cultural division" and to complicate the neat highbrow-lowbrow dichotomy that she sees operating in much Modernist historiography. Especially in Britain, there remains a lingering critical suspicion that the Modernist artists and writers themselves were unrepentant upper-class aesthetes who sought refuge from the vulgarities of modern mass and popular culture in a rarefied atmosphere of social privilege marked by the uniettered consumption of aesthetic impressions.

Since the beginning of the Modernism Boom during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when biographies of Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf and the explosive interest in the latter sparked by second-wave feminist critics heralded the reemergence of Modernism into both literary-critical and broader cultural consciousness, scholars have typically located the movement in the history of aestheticism, a late-Victorian cultural phenomenon that, until recently, has been perceived as an aesthetic movement as elitist in

[5] M. Cuddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf the Intellectual and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 17-18.

its own way as was, supposedly, its Modernist legacy. As Michael Holroyd writes, Modernism "represents more truly than anything else the culmination and ultimate refinement of the aesthetic movement"[6]. Aestheticist principles, inherited from art for art's sake and decadent Victorian writers like Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, inform, according to him, a great deal of Bloomsbury's cultural productions and political writings.

However, as Avery points out, the members of Bloomsbury were not mere Modernist reincarnations of George Du Maurier's notorious Jellaby Postlethwaite lunching ocularly on “an aesthetic midday meal" of a freshly cut lily in a glass of water or of the Oscar Wilde pilloried in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* as a leader of that "greenery-yallery, Grosvenor Gallery" crowd[7]. Nor, as Holroyd suggests —qualifying his aestheticist genealogy of Bloomsbury— were the Modernist intellectuals simply the progeny and propagators of entrenched Victorian cultural traditions and theories. Rather, as widely connected and politically very deeply engaged early

[6] M. Holroyd, Infuence, *Lytton Strachey and the Bloomsbury Group: His Work, Their Influence*: Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971, p. 53.
[7] T. Avery, *Radio Modernism, Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2006, p. 34.

twentieth-century intellectuals, they were acutely sensitive to the effects of a rapidly changing technocultural landscape upon residual Victorian cultural and ethical ideals, aestheticist and otherwise. In this perspective the Modernist involvement in radio and fashion shows a path of inquiry into Modernist aesthetics, because these authors, thanks to radio and fashion magazines, performed a role as theorists and arbiters of culture working to shape the ethical contours of literary Modernism. To understand the history of Modernism's relationship with mass culture is to analyse the extensive proliferation of new media which influenced those who defined themselves as Modernists.

Mass education caused a deep change in the social and economic relations since the eighteenth and nineteenth century. During the Victorian period high culture stood for literate culture. In the nineteenth century, a vast part of the population, women and the working class, accessed it thanks to several reforms in education. Of course people received a different education according to their social class. While the middle and the upper class kept receiving a classical education based on Christian values, the working class received a

simplified education which invaded every house and factory in form of newspapers, magazines and cheap fiction:

> This stratified educational system prevented the rise of a unified national culture even as economic difference between the classes were slowly eroding.[8]

For example, according to liberals, mass culture meant a dangerous form of social control because it became a dividing line between the social and intellectual elite and everybody else. From 1896 to 1920 the number of books more than doubled and radio became an irreplaceable medium in the following years[9]. According to critics and politicians of 1920s[10], new media could represent a serious menace to the Empire because mass culture could create an uncritical public. There was a susteined anxiety about the consumption of mass culture which could mark the beginning of the end of Literate high culture.

[8] A. Pease, "Modernism and Mass Culture" in *The Cambride Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.198.

[9] See D.Hudson, "Reading" in S. Nowell-Smith, *Edwardian England*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964, p.309.

[10] Osbert Burdett, for example, commented that the printed word was beginning to lose all distinction in newspapers and books that did no more than reflect the illiteracy of the mass of the readers. More recently, Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984), *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *The Rules of Art* (1996)developed the cultural deprivation theory. This theory implies that higher class cultures are superior when compared to working class cultures. Because of this perceived superiority, people from upper and middle classes believe that working class was to blame for the failure of their children in education.

This is the reason why several critics started to employ the terms 'distinction' and 'value' in order to distinguish high culture from low or mass one. It is not a coincidence that those two words constitute the cultural basis of the Great Divide that draws the line between two ways of perceiving culture.

With this premise, the present study will investigate the relationship between Modernism and mass culture. In Chapter I, I will focus on the origins of the 'Great Divide'. I will analyse the intellectual positions of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin whose ideas are at the root of Huyssen's separation of Modernism from mass culture. Then I will take into account I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot, and the Leavises whose works reinforced the idea that Modernism was a self-referential movement with no contacts with mass culture. Moreover, in the final part of Chapter I, I will illustrate Jameson's position who does not accept the Manichean division between Modernism and mass culture but claims that they are dialectically interdependent.

In Chapter II I will discuss the possible points of contact between Modernism and mass culture. For this reason, I will investigate Virginia Woolf's multiple contributions to fashion magazines and radio.

I will analyse the articles that she wrote for *Vogue* and her radio talks at BBC. What I want to demonstrate is not only that one of the most important Modernist figures was involved with new mass media but also that she employed such new channels to promote her ideas and her artistic vision of life and art. In other words, not only Woolf inserted herself into a space that gave her celebrity and notoriety through *Vogue* and the BBC but also she established her authorial identity by informing the reader/listener of her Modernist instances.

Chapter III will be devoted to the search of the possible effects of mass new media on Modernist production. In particular I will focus on the effects of radio on the written word. I will discuss the gradual loss of importance of the eye in favour of the ear in the Modernist fiction. James Joyce and Virginia Woolf's artistic production will be my case study. The last chapter of the present work will investigate the genre of radio plays. I intend to verify how this new medium, radio, becomes an essential tool for the artistic production in the late fifties. Dylan Thomas and Samuel Beckett's early plays will be examined in order to prove the importance of radio.

In conclusion, I want to demonstrate that, through the fil rouge of mass culture in the form of fashion magazines and, above all, radio, not only Modernism is not a self-contained movement with no external references but also its artistic production is influenced by mass new media which becomes fundamental in the page content construction and in the new art of radio play.

CHAPTER I

Modernism and mass culture

1.1 The Great Divide

In 1986, the cultural critic Andreas Huyssen published a collection of essays that analysed the sharp Manichean division between high art and mass culture. He was mainly interested in how the divide played outin the context of Post-Modernist attempts to break down the wall between “High” and “Low”. From his prespective, Huyssen was not interested in the classification of the single work of art but in the discourse behind the categorical distinction between highbrow and lowbrow. In other words, Huyssen focused his attention on the discourse of the Great Divide, trying to understand its origin and validity. According to him, the last decades of the 19th century and the first few years of the 20th, and then the two decades or so following

World War II represented the historical periods in which the Great Divide was highly in force.

Moreover, Huyssen noted that the developments in the arts and criticism, which generated Post-Modernism, did not accept the categorical binary opposition between the traditional categories of "high" and "low" and challenged it. However, word choice was important. Huyssen entitled his collection of essays *After the Great Divide* because he believed that the Great Divide was losing its strenght. Huyssen wrote that Theodor Adorno and Clement Greenberg were the two main figures responsible for the diffusion of the Great Divide theory with its social and political implications:

> The discourse of the Great Divide has been dominant primarily in two periods, first in the last decades of the 19th century and the first few years of the 20th, and then in the two decades or so following World War II. The belief in the Great Divide, with its aesthetic, moral, political implications, is still dominant in the academy today (witness the almost total institutional separation of literary studies, including the new literary theory,

> from mass culture research, or the widespread insistence on excluding ethical or political questions from the discourse on literature and art).[11]

He suggested that both scholars, Adorno and Greenberg, had good reasons at the time to insist on the categorical separation of high art and mass culture. The political purpose behind their ideas was to preserve the dignity and autonomy of art from the totalitarian pressures of fascist mass events, socialist realism, and an increasingly degraded commercial mass culture in the West:

> Adorno, of course, was the theorist par excellence of the Great Divide, that presumably necessary and insurmountable barrier separating high art from popular culture in modern capitalist societies. He developed his theory, which I see as a theory of Modernism, for music, literature, and film in the late 1930s, not coincidentally at the same time that Clement Greenberg articulated similar views to describe the history of Modernist paintingand to envision its future.[12]

[11] A. Huyssen, *After The Great Divide*, p. viii.
[12] Ivi, p. ix.

Huyssen quite clearly maintained, though, that the Adorno-Greenberg project was no longer satisfying and that a new explanatory model was emerging in which Modernism, avantgarde, and mass culture had entered into a “new set of mutual relations and discursive configurations“. He wrote that the boundaries between high art and mass culture had become increasingly blurred. Although Huyssen offered some qualification and corrections to the Adorno-Greenberg model, he accepted the "great divide" between "High" Modernism and "Low" mass culture as an accurate historical description of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century world:

> My argument, however, is that this project has run its course and his being replaced by a new paradigm, the paradigm of postmodern, which is itself as diverse as multifaceted as Modernism had once been before it ossified into dogma. By “new paradigm” I do not mean to suggest that there is a total break or rupture between Modernism and postModernism, but rather that Modernism, avantgarde, and mass culture, have entered into a new set of mutual relations and discursive

> configurations that we call “postmodern” and that is clearly distinct from the paradigm of “high Modernism”.[13]

The fundamental feature of the Great Divide, Huyssen wrote, is the notion of dichotomy whose two polar extremes are the categories of high and low with no possibily of contact between them. Huyssen defined the Great Divide as follows:

> What I am calling The Great Divide is the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture. In my view, this divide is much more important for a theoretical and historical understanding of Modernism and its aftermath than the alleged historical break which, in the eyes of so many critics, separates postModernism from Modernism[14].

The Great Divide was precisely that gap reaching from two opposite positions and its characteristics can be stated as follows, in a more or less random order in which the first item of comparison is better than

[13] Ivi, pp. ix-x.
[14] Ivi, p. viii.

the second one: high culture/mass culture; upper class/lower class; old technology/new technology; masculinity/femininity; institutionalized/non-institutionalized; autonomous/non-autonomous; individuality/masses.

Huyssen analysed the dichotomy masculine-feminine, which he considered to be as one of the fundamental features of the Great Divide:

> One of the founding texts of Modernism, if there ever was one, is Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Emma Bovary, whose temperament was, in the narrator's words, more sentimental than artistic, loved to read romances. In his detached, ironic style, Flaubert describes Emma's reading matter: "They [the novels] were full of love and lovers, persecuted damsels swooning in deserted pavillions, postillions slaughtered at every turn, horses ridden to death on every page".[15]

Huyssen maintains that Flaubert contributed to the association of woman with sentimentality and passivity as opposed to rationality and

[15] A. Huyssen, *After The Great Divide*, p.44.

activity. When he described Madame Bovary to be more sentimental than artistic he favoured the dichotomy between woman as reader of inferior literature as opposed to man who was responsible for the authentic literature:

> Time and again documents from the late 19th century ascribe pejorative feminine characteristics to mass culture – and here by mass culture I mean serialized feuilletton novels, popular and family magazines, the studd of lending libraries, fictional bestsellers and the like -.[16]

Hence, women as readers of pulp literature, which also is being referred to as the false novel, whereas "the true novel by contrast is called severe and pure and is associated with man"[17]. Thus, from the nineteenth century mass culture was ascribed feminine characteristics, which identified women with the masses and consequently as a political threat.

[16] Ivi, p.50.
[17] Ivi, p.46.

In conclusion, the very notion of the Great Divide is related to the discourse of categorical distinctions between high art and mass culture. Every dichotomy is conceived in order to underline that there is a sharp distinction between high and low culture, that the former is more prestigious than the latter, and that while high culture is associated with masculinity, low culture instead is the expression of the feminine universe. As we shall see in the next paragraph, Adorno stressed that mass culture was highly negative and Modernism had to strive in order to preserve its autonomy, while Benjamin tried to highlight the revolutionary potential of mass culture by its new technologies of reproduction even though they were accused of demolishing art. Their theories are fundamental in order to understand when and how the Great Divide was structured as a binary opposition between high Modernism and mass culture.

1.2 The origins of the Great Divide: Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno

In his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Walter Benjamin explored the connection between art and the technological development under capitalism, maintaining that film could be considered the art form for modern times. Film fascinated Benjamin as well as newspapers and photography. In his opinion, they were all expressions of mass communication and specifically the result of the advent of mechanical reproduction which made the reduplication of a piece of art, whether a novel or a painting, possible and, above all, available to a wide audience. Benjamin gave the illuminating example of lithography which was the first step to produce many copies of the same artistic object whose 'clones' reached a vast audience. When lithography was no longer considered to be the fastest method to reduplicate art, the following step in the technological developement was represented by the perfection of photography with the consequent diffusion of illustrated newspapers and then of film.

> For the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction, photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens. Since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech. A film operator shooting a scene in the studio captures the images at the speed of an actor's speech. Just as lithography virtually implied the illustrated newspaper, so did photography foreshadow the sound film.[18]

Benjamin appreciated the potential effect of democratization linked to the new technologies of reproduction because a work of art that once could only be seen by the wealthiest classes in a museum or gallery could be reproduced at little cost and be available to the lower classes. Despite the fact that the mechanical reproduction of a work art could produce benefits, Benjamin underlined the negative effects deriving from mechanization and in particular he claimed that mechanical

[18] W. Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in H. Arendt, *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1970, p.219.

reproduction was potentially destructive because it demolished the uniqueness and authenticity, the so called “aura” as he labeled it, of the work of art:

> One might subsume the eliminated element in the term “aura” and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced.[19]

The value of the work of art, in other words, was no longer connected with its ritualistic cult value, whether magic, religious or secularized like the cult of beauty. Authenticity was no longer a relevant criterion for evaluating artistic production. In photography, for example, it made no sense to ask for the “authentic” print. The effect of the consequent

[19] Ivi, p.220

vanishing of the aura was significant. Benjamin noted that the function of art "instead of being based on ritual begins to be based on another practice—politics"[20]. It followed that art for art's sake was no longer the main principle which generated a work of art. Moreover, art and media began to merge because when the distance between artist and society was nullified, causing the gradual loss of aura, then the distinction between the social roles of artists and educators lost its significance. Benjamin explains:

> By the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value as opposed to an ahistorical cult value, the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental.[21]

Film was the illuminating example of such changes. The nature of art itself was completed, modified and transformed in a dramatic way that ratified the gradual displacement of film from "the realm of the

[20] Ivi, p.224.
[21] Ivi, p.225.

'beautiful semblance' which, so far, had been taken to be the only sphere where art could thrive"[22].

Benjamin declared that the film industry was "trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion promoting spectacles and dubious speculations"[23]. In other words, the industry tried to stimulate and conditionate the interest of the masses creating in them the illusion of free choice and at the same time repressing their legitimate need of being represented in films.

In his essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1944), Theodor Adorno introduces the concept of 'culture industry':

> The ruthless unity in the culture industry is evidence of what will happen in politics. Marked differentiations such as those of A and B films, or of stories in magazines in different price ranges, depend not so much on subject matter as on classifying, organizing, and labeling consumers. Something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are

[22] Ivi, p.230.
[23] Ivi, p.233.

> emphasized and extended. The public is catered for with a hierarchical range of mass-produced products of varying quality, thus advancing the rule of complete quantification. Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type.[24]

Even though Adorno does not provide a specific definition of culture industry, it seems clear that this category does not deal exclusively with entertainment business but it represents how culture is perceived in the era of mass commodification. In other words, culture is produced and sold as a commodity. This seems to be reinforced when Adorno maintains that:

> The culture industry as a whole has moulded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product. All the agents of this process, from the producer to the women's clubs, take good

[24]T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightnment as Mass Deception' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Ed. G. Schmid Noerr, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, p.97.

> care that the simple reproduction of this mental state is not nuanced or extended in any way.[25]

The culture industry, moreover, perpetually makes promises which cannot be respected:

> The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, it draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu. In front of the appetite stimulated by all those brilliant names and images there is finally set no more than a commendation of the depressing everyday world it sought to escape.[26]

According to Adorno, mass art was merely a commodity to be sold, its technique designed solely to manipulate consumers through pre-digested formulas and calculated effects rather than any concern for artistic form or truth content:

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[25] Ivi, p.127.
[26] Ivi, p.139.

> Culture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system.[27]

Art could only resist the false consciousness imposed by the culture industry by declaring its autonomy from all discursive meaning and communication. It had to:

> Insist upon its own ossification without concession to that would-be humanitarianism which it sees through, in all its attractive and alluring guises, as the work of inhumanity. Its truth appears guaranteed more by its denial of any meaning in organized society of which it will have no part — accompanied by its own organized vacuity — than by any capability of positive meaning within itself. Under the present circumstances it is restricted to definitive negation.[28]

[27] Ivi, pp. 120-121.
[28] T. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music,* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973, p. 20.

Instead of being an instrument for changing consciousness, Adorno conceived art as separate from society, a sort of monad that did not communicate with audience:

> communication of the work of art with the external, with the world, to which blissfully or miserably it closes itself off, happens through non-communication. Here then it proves itself fragmented.[29]

In conclusion, the Adorno-Benjamin debate centers on the negative effects produced by mass culture. Benjamin focused on the modes of production of mass culture while Adorno on its goals. In other words, the basic dichotomy in Adorno's analysis of modernism is that between the "autonomous" and the "dependent" art, whereas Benjamin's is that between the "reproducible" modern art and the "unique" traditional art.

[29] T. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, New York: Continuum, 1997, p.15

1.3 The Great Divide: the front line defenders, I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot, the Leavises

The idea of an unbridgeable gap between Modernism and mass culture was highly supported by the earliest Modernist critics. I.A. Richards was one of the most important British critics and founded the 'Cambridge School' in the 1920s. He underlined the decline of culture as a result of the wide propagation of mass culture. According to Richards, mass media made everything they touched mediocre, and only high culture, in particular poetry, could provide an adequate defense to the disintegration of high cultural dogmas provoked by mass culture. Nowadays, Richards keeps writing, there is a rentless process of degradation of language:

> for all kinds of utterances our performances, both as speakers (or writers) and listeners (or readers), are worse than those of persons of similar natural ability, leisure and reflection a few generations ago.[30]

[30] I. A. Richards, Pra*ctical Criticism*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. LTD, 1930, pp. 339-340.

In other words, Richards was convinced that the present days were the clear sign of an inexorable decay after a glorious past and this was highly 'immoral' to him:

> Human conditions and possibilities have altered more in a hundred years than they had in the previous ten thousand, and the next fifty may overwhelm us, unless we can devise a more adaptable morality. We pass as a rule from a chaotic to a better organized state by ways which we know nothing about. Typically through the influence of other minds. Literature and the arts are the chief means by which these influences are diffused. It should be unnecessary to insist upon the degree to which high civilization, in other words, free, varied and unwasteful Me, depends upon them in a numerous society.[31]

A new social and cultural order was replacing the old one and this was not acceptable. I.A. Richards was the first one to introduce the notion

[31] I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. LTD, 1924, pp.56-57.

of resistance which represented the only way to put an effective stop to mass culture and was expanded by the Leavises:

> all the cultures everywhere would be replaced by artifacts–advertisement, pulps, comics, soap opera and screen entertainment, televised or direct–the familiar threat to the new leisure–the leisure from which it seemed, not so very long ago, so much might be hoped. And we must fear that the resistances and defenses our culture puts up at all levels–mass education, popularization, scholarly toil, research and museum-mindedness–will with the best intentions merely join in the attack, destroying the culture from within as the sales and production pressures converge on it from without.[32]

I.A. Richards, as well as F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot maintained that mass culture meant a decline of high culture. They criticized the typical passive attitude of mass culture towards consumption without a proper critical approach. The basic idea that lay behind their criticism was that mass forms of enternainment, such as fiction, radio and films, were increasingly shaping a brainless society, incapable of

[32] I.A. Richards, *Speculative Instruments*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. LTD, 1955, p.160.

making any decision or judgement. In particular, the debate about contemporary mass culture was nourished in many articles published in the journal that F.R. Leavis edited, called *Scrutiny*. Indeed, *Scrutiny* became so important that literary critics talked of the days of the journal as a crucial 'moment' in the development of British critical and cultural life. *Scrutiny'*s main concern was closely linked to the idea that high culture had to be protected from mass culture. On the one hand, Leavis underlined the importance of high literary–intellectual culture and its immanent disinterested pursuit of knowledge, and, on the other, he condemned the commodification of culture and the dehumanizing effects which derived from industrialism. The idea of preserving 'high' culture from the impetuous advance of mass culture forced F.R. Leavis, among the others, to introduce the notion of resistance. Leavis, but also Eliot, underlined the necessity to fight against this sort of suspension of consciousness caused by mass culture. From this perspective, their ideas were drenched with moralism because while their mission was to make people aware of the dangers caused by the commodification of culture, in their opinion, the masses, just like test subjects, were engaged in an unthinking

consumption. In this sense, high culture had moral and didactic purposes because it had to educate the masses. In other words, high-brow Modernist critics tried to counterbalance the worst effects of industrialism by declaring war on it and at the same time arranging a resistance against its effects.

Similarly, the 'problem' or 'decline' of culture was underlined by T.S. Eliot. In his essay, 'The Metaphysical poets' (1921), he wrote that "in the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered"[33]. According to him, the middle class threatened to contaminate the working class with its passive and consumptive habit of mass culture. In his essay on Marie Lloyd, a music-hall entertainer and, in a sense, one of the symbols of the working class, Eliot highlighted the rising menace represented by mass culture:

> With the decay of the music-hall, with the encroachment of the cheap and rapid-breeding cinema, the lower class will tend to drop into the same state of protoplasm as the bourgeoisie. The working man will go to the cinema where his mind is lulled by

[33] T.S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets' in *Selected Essays*, New York: Harcourt Brace jovanovich, 1964, p.264.

> continuous senseless music and continuous action too rapid for the brain to act upon, and will receive, without giving, in that same listless apathy with which the middle and the upper classes regard any entertainment of the nature of art. He will also have lost lost some of his interest in life[34].

Eliot's idea of culture included a wide range of social and recreative activities. For example, his idealization of the working man's interactive aestetic receptivity proves that mass culture mesmerises its audience, and in order to counter this, Eliot stated that in every form of art it was necessary a cooperation between artist and audience, a cooperation based on a mental effort.

F.R. and Queenie Leavis were two of the most influential figures in English twentieth century literary criticism. Nowadays, many critics claim that 'English' as a modern university subject was dignified largely by Leavises' writings. Moreover, they had a significant influence on many generations of teachers and students. As a lecturer at Cambridge University, F.R. Leavis transformed English Studies from a secondary subject, considered far less important than the classics, into

[34] T.S. Eliot, 'Marie Lloyd' in Selected Essays, New York: Harcourt Brace jovanovich, 1964, p.407.

a serious discipline thanks to writings such as *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930) and *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932). From T.S. Eliot he borrowed the concept of 'tradition' which was something very close to the idea of the contemporary literary canon: a body of texts that have been traditionally accepted as the most important and influential in shaping a certain culture. From the literary critic and linguist I.A.Richards he derived the fundamental importance of "the training of sensibility"[35] in order to ensure that such texts could be analysed in detail avoiding misinterpretations. Moreover, just like Richards, Leavis believed that poetry was the most important artistic expression. From this perspective, therefore, Leavis had nothing especially original to say, except, perhaps, his absolute and granitic belief in the importance of English Literature as a serious and autonomous discipline.

It is important to underline the fact that Leavis himself was well aware of the importance of keeping traditions alive. In the pamphlet *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930), he expressed his aversion to a culture dominated by mass-production, the popular press, media and

[35] F.R. Leavis, *How to Teach Reading: a Primer for Ezra Pound,* Cambridge: Minority Press, 1932, p18.

film. Any belief in the "continuities" of society “had been sacrificed in pursuit of the cheapest emotional appeals, appeals the more insidious because they are associated with a compellingly vivid illusion of actual life”[36].

It was vitally necessary to recover:

> The implicit standards that order the finer living of an age, the sense that this is worth more than that, this rather than that is the direction in which to go, that the centre is here rather than there.[37]

For Leavis, tradition was not something dead and buried but it represented the path that human kind had to go down. This notion was expressed in *Culture and Environment*, a teaching primer written in collaboration with Denys Thompson, and published in 1933. Leavis cited the example of George Sturt's *The Wheelwright's Shop*, which depicted a pre-industrial world in which people were treated as

[36] F.R. Leavis, ‘Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture’ in *Education and the University*, London: Chatto Windus, 1948, p.149.
[37] Ivi, pp.1-2.

> Self-respecting individuals besides their hands their brains, imagination, conscience, sense of beauty and fitness - their personalities - were engaged in their work.[38]

Most people lived for their work, and their use of leisure was a direct consequence of it. This vision was in total opposition with the modern industrial world of mass-production, which saw men:

> As a factor necessary to production as 'power' and 'capital' are, and on the same level[39]

While Leavis was conscious that the past was not going to come back, he strongly prescribed the rehabilitation of the continuity of consciousness which kept pre-industrial traditions alive for the memory of the old order must be the chief incitement towards a new, if ever we are to have one[40]

Such an achievement, according to Leavis, could be accomplished through the study of canonical authors such as Shakespeare, Donne, Conrad or D.H.Lawrence. Clearly Leavis's veneration for the pre-industrial community could be explained as nostalgic and sentimental.

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[38] F.R. Leavis, *Culture and Enviroment*, Cambridge: Chatto and Windus, 1933, p.75.
[39] Ivi.
[40] Ivi, p.96.

The alienation that Leavis attributed to industrialism is something present in every culture that has started a process of modernization. However, his stance that literature could provide solutions to the problems of contemporary civilisation continues to be strongly influential.

In 1932 Q. D. Leavis, wife of F.R. Leavis, under the supervision of Richards, published her thesis *Fiction and the Reading Public*, which deepened her professor's theories. She maintained that writers of cheap and mass-produced fiction "work upon and solidify herd prejudice and … debase the emotional currency by touching grossly upon fine issues."[41] According to Queenie Leavis:

> The training of the reader who spends his leisure in cinemas, looking through magazines and newspapers, [and] listening to jazz music, does not merely fail to help him, it prevents him from normal development partly by providing him with a set of habits inimical to mental effort.[42]

[41] Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public,* New York: Russell and Russell, 1965, p. 67.
[42] Ivi, p.114.

The above quotation was a clear statement that mass culture was considered to be responsible for promoting brainless habits of consumption because masses were meant to be passive recipients of a degraded mass culture. In other words, the average consumer of mass culture was seen as a sort of mere receptacle with an endless predisposition to absorb mediocre readings.

Moreover, Q. D. Leavis was seriously worried about the circulation of cheap fiction. Underlining the fact that detective stories and thrillers were sold in mass in the 1930s, she claimed:

> The reading habit is now often a form of drug habit. In suburban side-streets and even village shops it is common to find a stock of worn and greasy novels let out at 2d or 3d a volume; and it is surprising that a clientele drawn from the poorest class can afford to change the books several times a week, or even daily; but so strong is the reading habit that they do.[43]

Not only was Q.D. Leavis showing her personal anxiety of contamination by mass culture but also by the middle class. In other

[43] Ivi, p.7.

words, she condemned the poor quality of the books and, at the same time, those who read them. Her solution to this problem was to educate the lower classes by giving them a sort of literary canon that is to say a group of literary works that 'she' considered the most important of the English literature.

1.4 Fredric Jameson

If we consider Fredric Jameson's much acclaimed essay 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture' (1979) we can see how Jameson dismantles the frozen and manichean positions of the academic debate around the Great Divide:

> The theory of mass culture-or mass audience culture, commercial culture, "popular" culture, the culture industry, as it is variously known- has always tended to define its object against so-called high culture without reflecting on the objective

> status of this opposition. As so often, positions in this field reduce themselves to two mirror-images, and are essentially staged in term of values.[44]

Jameson analyses the advantages and the disadvantages of both positions. According to those scholars who valorize mass culture, we must distinguish, he says, between those works of art which clearly speak to a wider audience, e.g. *The Godfather* or *Jaws*, and those ones which are less accessible such as Henry James' and Wallace Stevens' novels.

On the contrary, critics who underline the primacy of high art, those related to the Frankfurt School, should rethink their position because they maintain that Modernism is completely separate from mass culture, giving emphasis to "the valorization of traditional Modernist high art as the locus of some genuinely critical and subversive, "autonomous" aesthetic production".[45]

Then, Jameson underlines the necessity to replace such sterile debates with a more historical and dialectical approach:

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[44] F. Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture' in *Social Text*, Duhram, 1979, p. 130.
[45] Ivi, p.133.

> It seems to me that we must rethink the opposition high culture/mass culture [...] we read high and mass culture as objectively related and dialectically interdependent phenomena, as twin and inseparable forms of the fission of the aesthetic production under capitalism[46]

Jameson adopts a flexible perspective about Modernism and mass culture in order to demonstrate that they have many aspects in common. For example, he maintains that the theory of reification can be applied to Modernism as well as to mass culture. On the one hand, commodification means the practice under Capitalism where all aspects of human life are rearranged to satisfy the demands of the market. In this sense, all human activity is organized in terms of efficiency and 'sheer means'. On the other hand, the concept of reification gives us a different perspective in terms of consumption. People, he argues , do not buy the object itself, but they also buy the idea, the 'lifestyle' behind that object. In this sense, reification does not only mean the commodification of culture but also the aestheticization of the commodity.

[46] Ivi.

With this premise, far from being diametrically opposite, Modernism and mass culture have many aspects in common. Both are the result of a commodification process and Capitalism but they adopt different strategies :

> only where Modernism tends to handle this material by producing compensatory structures of various kinds, mass culture represses them by the narrative construction of imaginary resolutions and by the projection of an optical illusion of social harmony[47].

Jameson maintains that in order to avoid repetition and commodification, which were the common traits of mass culture :

> Modernisms have been forced, in spite of themselves, and in the very flesh and bone of their form, to respond to the objective reality of repetition itself [...]the kinds of repetition which, from Gertrude Stein to Robbe-Grillet,

[47] Ivi.

> the Modernist project has appropriated and made its own, can be seen as a kind of homeopathic strategy whereby the scandalous and intolerable external irritant is drawn into the aesthetic process itself and thereby systematically worked over, "acted out" and symbolically neutralized.[48]

This, for example, can be seen in the frequent use of discontinuos sentences and fragmentary writing which were typicall of literary Modernism. This means that the independent life force or the immunity to commodification, which Adorno attributed to Modernism, were illusory. Although the Frankfurt School claimed that Modernism was not affected by commodification at all, the Modernist agenda, in fact, was not something which existed autonomously in a sort of Empyrean but it was defined, and dictated, by Capitalism and specifically in terms of reaction to it. Modernism was not the 'natural' expression of capitalism but the 'natural' counteraction to it. In both cases, Modernism defined itself in relation to the economic system which saw

[48] Ivi, p.136.

it growing up. Such a vision was revolutionary because it implied a new definition of Modernism. As a matter of fact, Modernism was not 'the solution' but a 'reaction' to mass culture:

> not only is the commodity the prior form in terms of which alone Modernism can be structurally grasped, but the very terms of its solution-the conception of the Modernist text as the production and the protest of an isolated individual, and the logic of its sign systems as so many private languages ("styles") and private religions are contradictory and make the social or collective realization of its aesthetic project an impossible one.[49]

Both high culture and mass culture evolved under the capitalistic mode of production, thus, according to Jameson, it was of no interest to separate these two phenomena. However, in his essay, Jameson does not provide concrete examples of how single authors and artists 'merged' with mass culture but he has the

[49] Ivi, p.135.

credit to have brought into question well-established certainties. In other words the supposed insuperable boundaries between high art and mass culture had become increasingly blurred.

1.5 Crossing the Great Divide

Recently several critics have rejected the antithesis between Modernism and mass culture stating that the relation between these two cultural phenomena is fluid and dynamic. In the past ten years, critical work on Modernism has transformed the field, making a broad effort to revise and revive Modernism, defending it against charges of elitism, and criticising those who have condemned the Modernist movement for nostalgically seeking to recapture a lost wholeness.

Central to these revival efforts has been a challenge to the alleged separation between Modernism and mass culture and the related division between Modernism and the market. Andreas Huyssen's formulation of "the Great Divide" which describes how Modernism defined itself against mass culture, and Fredric Jameson's assertion that Modernist writing relies on a distinction between high and so-called mass culture"[50] has been challenged by the recent criticism about Modernism[51]. If the growth of Modernism was often marked by nostalgia, by a disdain for mass culture, and by attempts to purify an aesthetic from any taint of commerce, it was also, as the newer critics remind us, marked by novel uses of advertising and marketing strategies and by an embrace of the culture of celebrity[52]. This contraddiction reinforces the idea that Modernism and mass culture were not antithetic phenomena but there was a sort of osmotic relation between them.

[50] F. Jameson, "The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the PostModernism Debate" in *Modernity and Postmodernity*, New York: New German Critique, 1984, p.64.
[51] See, for example, L. Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*; T. Strychacz, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism*; J. X. Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society*; and E. P. Comentale, *Modernism, Cultural Production, and the British Avant-garde*.
[52] See A. Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Scholes rediscusses the sharp division between Modernism and mass culture introducing the notion of "paradoxy" in his work *Paradoxy of Modernism*[53]. He begins by defining this term, a word he evidently coined as a kind of confusion generated by a terminology that seems to make clear distinctions where clear distinctions cannot and should not be made. Scholes' attention is devoted to interrogating four pairs of binary oppositions common in recent literary and art criticism: high/low, old/new, poetry/rhetoric, and hardness/softness (or sentimentalism) oppositions that, Scholes says, often function to suppress or exclude a middle term, forcing many admirable works into the lower half of an invidious distinction.

Similarly in 'The Cultural Economy of Modernism'[54] Lawrence Rainey discusses how a number of high Modernists, who were presumably antagonistic to the free market, particularly Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, often made covert efforts to create an income and wealth through their writing. In the early part of the twentieth century, personal patronage of artists was still actively in practice, but even this patronage was not

[53] R. Scholes, *Paradoxy of Modernism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006.
[54] L. Rainey, 'The Cultural Economy of Modernism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

without its own free market forces. In this sense, the case of Ezra Pound is enlightening. Despite his repudiation of consumer culture, Pound not only participated in the ever growing mass market but also satisfied his personal economic expectations.

Moreover, Rainey describes how Joyce's *Ulysses* was marketed similarly to Pound's limited editions when it appeared in serial form in *The Little Review.* In a similar vein, Eliot chose to have *The Waste Land* published in *Dial* rather than other journals because *Dial* offered him two thousand dollars, money he welcomed at the time, and also because the publication was still considered exclusive. Rainey adds that Eliot's decision to publish *The Waste Land* was:

> based on a shrewd assessment of the interaction between aesthetic value, publicity and money in a market economy[55]

Throughout his essay, Rainey offers clear examples of Modernists' understanding and manipulation of the capitalist marketplace and their own seemingly reluctant, and yet premeditated and inevitable, participation in the economy of writing. It could, in fact, be said that these high Modernists understood the mass market system in order to

[55] Ivi, p.53.

promote their own literary works. However, by way of explanation, Rainey concludes his discussion on the economics of Modernism by writing:

> The Great Depression devastated the fragile economy of Modernism and in absence of the patron-investors who had sustained it during the teens and the twenties, Modernism turned back to the university, welcoming its direct support[56]

In *The Public Face of Modernism* (2000) Mark Morrison rejects the antagonism between Modernism and mass culture maintaining that the Modernist engagement with the commercial mass market was in fact extensive and diverse.

By focusing on the publicity and audience reception of several of the most important magazines of the period, such as *Daily Mail* and *Lady's Home Journal*, Morrison demonstrates that many Modernists saw in mass culture the possibility to collaborate with cheap magazines in order to restore a public function to art.

[56] Ivi, p.62.

Moreover, the author argues that, "contrary to the contamination anxiety theory"[57] formulated by Huyssen, the adoption of promotional culture by young Modernists suggests an optimism about the power of mass market technologies. In other words, to many Modernists, Lewis, Pound, and Joyce among the others, the mass market magazines seemed to represent the possibility of "oppositional space, even of counterpublicity and counterpublics".[58] In this perspective, according to Morrison, the engagement of many Modernists with the public sphere was the way to make their voices and their art prominent in the new mass media.

This means that a growing number of critics and scholars has begun to develop convincing alternatives to the manichean approach proposed by the Great Divide. From this perspective, statements such as "the purpose of the Modernist writings was to exclude newly educated readers and so to preserve the intellectual's seclusion from the mass"[59] become very questionable. As Todd Avery writes in *Radio Modernism,*

[57] M. Morrison, Morrison in *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920*, Madison: The Univerity of Wisconsin Press, 2000, p.5.
[58] Ivi, p.9.
[59] J. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia*, 1880-1930, London: Faber and Faber, 1992, p.7.

Literature, Ethics and the BBC, 1922-1938, the Bloomsbury Group was conventionally labelled as elitist and antidemocratic:

> Especially in Britain, there remains a lingering critical suspicion that the Bloomsbury artists and writers themselves were unrepentant upper-class aestethes who sought refuge from the vulgarities of modern mass and popular culture in a rarified atmosphere of a social privilegemarked by the unfettered consumption of aesthtic impressions[60]

Challeging the common belief that Modernists were in antithesis of mass culture, Avery demonstrates how Woolf, Eliot, Forster, among the others, negotiated their aestetic and artistic statements with radio, the quintessential representation of mass culture in the 1920s. The involvement of many Modernist artists in radio and fashion magazines, as we shall see in the next chapter, proves that the conventional assertion that Modernism was an elitist and antidemocratic movement must be revised.

[60] T. Avery, *Radio Modernism, Literature, Ethics and the BBC, 1922-1938,* Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006, p.34.

CHAPTER II

Radio and Fashion

2.1 A Premise

The history of modernist presence in fashion magazines unveils an interesting complicity with the marketplace which proves that the connection between mass culture and Modernism is more nebulous and more intricate than we have yet to recognize.[61]

In the following pages I shall analyse Virginia Woolf's involvement in radio and fashion magazines. Such a choice is not fortuitous because not only the English writer is considered to be one of the most

[61] See A. Pease,'Modernism and mass culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, Ed. Levenson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.197: "… Whether critics articulate Modernism as separated by a "great divide" from mass culture or as mutually constitutive, they agree that one of the foundational contexts for understanding Modernism is its relationship to mass culture".

important Modernist authors but also the personification of elitism par excellence. It follows that Woolf's supposed elitism represents a challenging case to investigate the link between Modernism and mass culture.

In Chapter I we have seen how Andreas Huyssen formulated the hypothesis of a clear opposition between mass culture and Modernism which defined themselves as two distinct phenomena marked by a mutual exclusion. In other words, Huyssen corroborated the long-standing separation between highbrow and lowbrow, between 'high' Modernism and 'low' mass culture. Neverthless more recently, several critics and scholars have rejected this Manichean sharp division underlining the presence of a dialectial relationship between these two cultural manifestations.

To paraphrase Bakhtin, the discourse, meant as a sequence of words and utterances, is always historically contingent, that is to say positioned within and inseparable from a community and its history[62]. It follows that Modernism and mass culture cannot be considered as two opposite impermeable phenomena but they are dialectically

[62] See M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Essays,* Austin: University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 1986.

interdependent with explicit and implicit effects of the former on the latter and vice versa. With this premise, taking the modernist involvement in fashion magazines into account may be enlightening to better understand how a group of artists and intellectuals negotiated their primary ethical and aesthetic propositions with the rise of mass culture. Magazines such as *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* were 'filter' magazines because they were envisaged and conceived for a social elite[63]. As a result, they were elitist because, even though they were expression of mass-culture and reached a larger audience, they were based upon the idea that fashion was for and by the elite. During the 1920s *Vogue* was a fascinating cultural potpourri: on the one hand it proposed articles on fashion, gardening and homemaking but on the other it contained an increasing number of reviews and weekly features whose content we would today define as "highbrow." Jane Garrity maintains that *Vogue* was a "juxtposition of high and low culture"[64], an important stepping-stone to cross the Great Divide between Modernism and mass culture. Any sharp division, she continues, is nullified by the

[63] David M. Earle in *Re-Covering Modernism* maintains that "filter magazines were ones that adopted an elite mantle, interpreting and defining elite Modernism for a large audience cementing its position in the social hierarchy".
[64] J. Garrity, 'Virginia Woolf, Intellectual Harlotry, and 1920s British Vogue' in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Technology, Mass Culture, and the Arts*, Ed. Pamela L. Caughie, New York: Garland Publishing, 2000, p.188.

fact that *Vogue* saw the participation of many pre-eminent modernist figures, such as Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Clive and Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, and many others "in the selling of high culture" to a female audience willing to improve its rank[65].

2.2 How Should One Read a Magazine

Miss Dorothy Todd became editor of British *Vogue* in 1922. She was an unusual editor, who strongly promoted the new trends in art and literature as well as in fashion. According to Jane Garrity "Todd commisioned several modernist writers and artists to contribute to the magazine in an effort to elevate its status and expand it beyond fashion and beauty"[66]. In other words, through *Vogue* Todd created a link between fashion and literature, between the 'superficial' and the 'intellectual'. For example, while in 1922 *Vogue* was in every aspect a fashion magazine, two years later, under Todd's guidance, it contained articles about Pablo Picasso, Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson and Gertrude Stein. In the december issue of 1924, *Vogue* inaugurated

[65] J. Garrity, 'Virginia Woolf, Intellectual Harlotry, and 1920s British Vogue', p.190.
[66] Ivi, p.190.

a new weekly feature entitled 'We Nominate for the Hall of Fame', where Todd introduced T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry, Aldous Huxley, Wyndham Lewis, and Sigmund Freud amongst numerous others to her readers. Moreover, what is remarkable is that the contributors to *Vogue* were mainly artistic and intellectual figures.

However, who were *Vogue*'s readers? Basically *Vogue* had a female audience. For although it appealed, out of necessity, to a mass market, *Vogue* addressed an elite readership. As Harry Yoxall explains,

> Condé was the first to recognize and proclaim the theory of the 'class magazine'; that is, the magazine with a specialized readership, preferably free spending, which would respond naturally to the advertising of certain kinds of manufacturers and merchants.[67]

Virginia Woolf wrote five articles for *Vogue*, she posed for the magazine, and she never repudiated the decision to take part into it. In 1924 she appeared in the weekly feature 'We Nominate for the Hall of Fame'. She was celebrated with a picture of her wearing one of her mother's

[67] A.W.Yoxall, *A Fashion of Life*, London, Heinemann, 1966, p.79. Condé Montrose Nast was a leading American magazine publisher known for publications such as *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, and *The New Yorker*.

Victorian dress and below the image there was a brief explanation for her nomination, "because she's a daughter of the late Sir Leslie Stephen and is the most brilliant novelist of the younger generation"[68]. The condensation of past and present, tradition and innovation in two sentences. Woolf explained the reason why she started to collaborate with *Vogue* in her diary:

> Did I put down my progress towards Perpetual Immortality [...] I asked Todd £10 for 1000 words: she orders 4 articles at that fee: Harper wishes me (I think) to write an American Browns & Bennetts; & Vogue (via Dadie) is going to take up Mrs Woolf, to boom her: & - & - & - So very likely this time next year I shall be one of those people who are, so father said, in the little circle of London Society which represents the Apostles, I think, on a larger scale. Or does this no longer exist? To know everyone worth knowing. I can just see what he meant; just imagine being in that position – if women can be.[69]

The desire to pursue fame and notoriety is central to Woolf's collaboration with *Vogue* because it was synonym for cultural power. In

[68] *Vogue*, Late May 1924.
[69] W.Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, London: Hogarth Press, 1978, Vol.2, p.319.

other words, Woolf saw in *Vogue* the chance to be legitimated as an influential intellectual figure. A legitimation which did situate her at the same level of the intellectual elite embodied by The Apostles and at the same time give her the prestige of being a recognised artist, beyond restricted groups, and not only the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen.

Moreover, according to Woolf, there was another fundamental reason for collaborating with *Vogue*. Once again we find the answer in her private writings: money. Virginia Woolf was criticized for "descend[ing] from the heights"[70] to "scatter… pearls in Mayfair" but she fiercely defended her choice:

> I've been engaged in a great wrangle with an old American called Pearsall Smith on the ethics of writing articles at high rates for fashion papers like Vogue. He says it demeans one. He says one must write only for the Lit. Supplement and the Nation and Robert Bridges and prestige and posterity and to set a high example. I say Bunkum. Ladies' clothes and aristocrats playing golf don't affect my style; and they would do his a world of good.

[70] J.Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions Modernism and the Radiance of Form*, New York: Cornwell University Press, 2009, p.70.

> Oh these Americans! How they always muddle everything up! What he wants is prestige: what I want, money.[71]

Here we can underline an important aspect of Woolf's involvement in *Vogue*. First of all the economic factor was something important to her, but more than this Woolf seems to imply that *Vogue,* and consequently mass culture, did not represent a menace. In other words she was not worried about losing prestige but, as we have seen, she hoped to acquire it through *Vogue*. In this way Woolf seems to invalidate what Huyssen writes about Modernism:

> The nightmare of being devoured by mass culture through co-option, commodification, and the "wrong" kind of success is the constant fear of the modernist artist, who tries to stake out his territory by fortifying the bounduaries between genuine art and inauthentic mass culture.[72]

[71] V. Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, p.154.

[72] A. Huyssen, *After The Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Post Modernism*: Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986, p.53.

Fame and money then[73]. But I suggest that Woolf's contribution to *Vogue* can also be read from another perspective. In particular I will relate to Todd Avery's analysis of the modernist involvement in the BBC. Even though his work focuses on radio I am strongly convinced that his theoretical framework can be applied to the modernist involvement in fashion magazines too. Avery maintains that:

> The Bloomsbury Group's involvement in radio during the 1920s and 1930s is a key example of how an important collection of modernist intellectuals strove to preserve their deeply held ethical and aesthetic beliefs between the world wars.[74]

In the 1920s radio and fashion magazines were two fundamental tools of mass culture. They were the quintessential representation of mass communication and Virginia Woolf was aware of the opportunities related to these two new media. She certainly desired fame and, as a

[73] This aspect is brilliantly underlined by Jane Garrity: "Because Woolf's objective was to make money by her contributions, she consequently published only a handful of essays in the modernist little magazines of the period. […] For Woolf, making money is both an act of subversion-precisely because she's a woman- and a form of contamination, because it exposes the economic basis of her literary production". J. Garrity, 'Virginia Woolf, Intellectual Harlotry, and 1920s British Vogue', pp. 195-197.

[74] T. Avery, *Radio Modernism, Literature, Ethics and the BBC, 1922-1938*, p.35.

female writer, to be economically independent but, more than this, she utilized *Vogue* for promoting her artistic vision. In this perspective, Woolf's involvement in women magazines paves the way to a line of inquiry into modernist aesthetics, because she negotiated her modernist principles with a non-specialized readership and at the same time she promoted highbrow culture in a mass culture magazine[75]. In other words, I argue that the topics she chose for *Vogue* were not accidental but they were part of Woolf's agenda to introduce herself and her artistic vision to her new readers. In this way, the modernist involvement in fashion magazines can be seen not only from an economic and celebrity point of view but also from a strictly aesthetic perspective. It follows that *Vogue* played a fairly significant role in Modernism's development because it contributed to bring the modernist assumptions to a vast readership who familiarised with a new way of writing, reading, and thinking.

I argue that Woolf was urged by the necessity to introduce her modernist ideas to her new audience following a kind of stopover

[75] She appeared in *Vanity Fair* and she was celebrated as the first woman in English letters. Moreover, Woolf contributed to *Vogue*, as said, and *Good Housekeeping*. She wrote for *Good Housekeeping* 'The Docks of London', 'Oxford Street Tide', 'Great Men's Houses', 'Abbeys and Cathedrals', 'This is the House of Commons', and 'Portrait of a Londoner'.

journey which illustrated the main features of her poetics. She wrote five essays for *Vogue*: 'Indiscretions', 'George Moore', 'The Tale of Genji', 'The Life of John Mytton', and 'A Professor for Life'[76], which on the whole show the same stylistic features that many scholars have underlined in Woolf's essay, such as the subjective point of view, informal tone, unstructured form, brevity, and an accomplished prose style[77].

What is interesting, in fact, is that there is no difference between the articles she published for *Vogue* and those which were written for the academic journals. This point is fundamental because she neither changed her writing style nor she chose 'easy' topics for her non-specialized readership. This is certified by the choice of Leonard Woolf, her literary executor and the repository of her posthumous reputation throughout his life, who decided to publish four articles out of five that she wrote for *Vogue* in *The Collected Essays*. The study of Virginia Woolf's involvement in mass culture, and in particular in *Vogue*, is interesting because it fully discloses the potential of her essays,

[76] The articles were published between 1924-1926.
[77] Garrity maintains that the work she published in *Vogue* was indistinguishable from the kinds of essays she contributed to *The Nation*. See J. Garrity, 'Virginia Woolf, Intellectual Harlotry, and 1920s British Vogue' p.208.

conceived as a literary genre whose function implies the dialogic relation between the author and the reader. "As a pioneer of reader-response theory, Virginia Woolf was extremely interested in the two-way dialogue between readers and writers" [78], Lee states, while Melba Cuddy Keane, as well as Gualtieri and Brosnan, maintain that Woolf's essays have a dialogic tone that stimulated the reader's response[79]. In other words, Virginia Woolf was not imposing her ideas on her readership but she was conversing with her counterpart.

According to Garrity, the articles that Woolf wrote for *Vogue* appear to have little in common because Dorothy Todd gave her free reign[80]. I believe, however, that the selection of topics is not casual but is part of Woolf's strategy to introduce herself and her poetics to her new readers. Indeed from a close reading of her essays it emerges that she converses with the reader about issues which can be considered as milestones of Modernism – issues, that is, that she has repeatedly tackled in her essays and are among her main concerns as a writer:

[78] H. Lee, 'Virginia Woolf's Essays' in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, Ed. S. Roe, S. Sellers, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 91.
[79] M. Cuddy Keane, *Virginia Woolf: The Intellectual and the Public Sphere Technology, Mass Culture, and the Arts*, Ed. Pamela L. Caughie, New York: Garland Publishing, 2007, p. 134.
[80] J. Garrity, 'Virginia Woolf, Intellectual Harlotry, and 1920s British Vogue', p.192.

the process of reading, which "calls for the rarest qualities of imagination, insight, and judgment"[81], and a practice of writing based on the principle of impersonality and the depiction of ordinary experience. From this perspective her essays, on the whole, represent an art manifesto in embryo.

In the first article that she published for *Vogue*, 'Indiscretions' (1924), Virginia Woolf employing an informal tone lists several authors, men and women, who are her favourite readings. The main aim of 'Indiscretions' is not to sensitize *Vogue*'s readership towards female writing (as one would expect, given *Vogue*'s female audience), but to understand why people read books and why they appreciate them. She writes:

> The critic may be able to abstract the essence and feast upon it indisturbed, but for the rest of us in every book there is something – sex, character, temperament – which as in life, rouses affection or repulsion; and, as in life, sways and

[81] V. Woolf, 'How Should One Read a Book', https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c2/chapter22.html

> prejudices; and again, as in life, is hardly to be analised by the reason[82].

This passage is significant because it expresses Woolf's position about the act of reading, a position which can be easily shared by the average reader. We read, Woolf argues, for pleasure, not to reinforce and reassess what critics and scholars say about a book, and we love a book because it gives us emotions. Moreover, in the quotation above, Woolf employs 'we' not only to create a sense of intimacy and complicity with her readers but also to encourage them to express their own opinions. Reading for pleasure, which can be easily associated to the principles of the Bloomsbury Group, who, following G.E. Moore, affirmed the value of aethetic experience, represented a new approach to literature, a position that dismantled the Arnoldian idea that the act of reading was linked to moral and didactic purposes. In 'How Should One Read a Book?'(1932) Woolf expresses again the importance of reading for pleasure:

> Novels, poems, histories, memoirs, valuable books in leather, cheap books in paper - one stops sometimes before them and asks in a

[82] V.Woolf, 'Indiscretions', in *Virginia Woolf Women & Writing*, London: The Women Press, 1979, p.72.

> transient amazement what is the pleasure I get, or the good I create, from passing my eyes up and down these innumerable lines of print? Reading is a very complex art - the hastiest examination of our sensations as a reader will show us that much.[83]

In both cases, 'Indiscretions' and 'How Should One read a Book?', she encouraged the reader to follow his own critical point of view against any form of authority and orthodoxy, without imposing on her audience a universal literary taste. Woolf conceived the idea of pleasure as a fundamental support, if not an essential necessity, for the development of a new way of reading.[84]

Underlining the gratification principle of reading Virginia Woolf looks authoritative but not authoritarian because she demolishes the traditional idea that books must be read because they are intrinsically good or because reading has a moral value. The act of reading is something subjective which produces in us different responses and give us a deep pleasure.

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[83] V. Woolf, 'How Should One Read a Book', https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c2/chapter22.html

[84] Reading for reading's sake is the key point of Avery's examination of Desmond MacCarthy's 'The Art of Reading' in T. Avery, *Radio Modernism Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938,* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, p. 69.

The year 1925 saw Virginia Woolf publish two essays for *Vogue*: 'The Tale of Genji' and 'George Moore'. The first one is a review of the Japanese novel written by Lady Murasaki and translated by Sir Arthur Waley. Woolf commences the essay confronting the situation of English poetry about the year 991, whose most significant production was the line "Summer is icumen in/Lhude sing cuccu", with the exquisite and sophisticated art personified by Lady Murasaki. Once again the ratio behind the selection of such a topic was not fortuitous. I argue that Virginia Woolf employed Lady Murasaki as a literary expedient in order to introduce herself to her new readership. In other words, via Lady Murasaki, who "was sitting down in her silk dress and trousers with pictures before her and the sound of poetry in her ears"[85], Woolf negotiated her artistic beliefs with the new reader, expressing her consonance with Lady Murasaki when she writes that:

Since her book was read aloud, we may imagine an audience; but her listeners must have been sophisticated men and women. They were

[85] V. Woolf, 'The Tale of Genji' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* edited by Andrew McNeillie, Fort Washington, PA: Harvest Books, 1989, Vol.4, p.265.

grown-up people, who needed no feats of streght to rivet their attention; no catastrophe to surprise them.[86]

The above passage seems to imply that there are two kinds of writers, those who want to surprise the reader with continuous plot twists and those who describe ordinary things in order to discover what lies behind. As we know, the aesthetics of the ordinary is central to Virginia Woolf's literary production. The year before that saw Virginia Woolf publish 'The Tale of Genji' she wrote her seminal essay 'Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown' (1924) in which she criticised the excessive attention, if not pedantry, of the Edwardian novel to detail, which prevented the writers from creating believable characters. In other words, she was trying to reform the novel giving room to the aesthetics of the ordinary and its relationship to psychology a salso stated in 'Modern Fiction' where Woolf highlights that the novelist "has to have the courage to say that what interests him is no longer "this" but "that": out of "that" alone must he construct his work. For the moderns "that", the point of

[86] Ivi.

interest, lies very likely in the dark places of psychology".[87] We could apply to Woolf what Chekhov said about his plays:

> In life people don't shoot themselves or fall in love every minute… They spend more time eating, drinking and talking nonsense, and while they are doing it, their lives may be shattered.[88]

A sentiment which is echoed in *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). These novels portray ordinary things and are essentially plotless in the traditional sense, because they take the shape of a 'day in the life' following the thoughts and reactions of a series of distinct characters trapped in their own daily routine. In other words, depicting ordinary experience becomes the channel by which characters are best revealed, an idea, borrowed from psychology, which is at the heart of Woolf 's aesthetics. In conclusion, 'The Tale of Genji' gives Woolf the opportunity to remark the importance of describing things from another perspective while she configures herself as a kind of Lady Murasaki's alter ego, a strategy which is subtle because Woolf shifts the focus from the narcissistic temptation to refer to herself to Lady Murasaki, whose aesthetics of the ordinary was Woolf's own:

[87] Ivi.
[88] In David Magarshack, *Chekhov the Dramatist*, John Lehmhann, London, p.118.

> It was one of those moments when it was natural for a writer to write of ordinary things beautifully, and to say openly to her public. It is the common that is wonderful, and if you let yourselves be put off by extravagance and rant and what is surprising and momentarily impressive you will be cheated of the most profound of pleasures.[89]

In 'George Moore' (1925) Woolf deals with another question which lies at the core of her writing: impersonality. While analysing Moore, who was one of the most influential Anglo-Irish writers and one of the most significant propagators of Naturalism in English literature, she points out the unbreakable affinity of the writer's self with the content of his work. "But are not all novels about the writer's self, we might ask?"[90]. Woolf gives a positive answer but she maintains that "there are degrees"[91]. Indeed she claims that Moore is a good writer but not a genius like Tolstoy because "Mr. Moore is completely lacking in dramatic power"[92]. Whereas Tolstoy's characters are autonomous and have their own personality which is separate from their creator, Moore sketches out heroes and heroines who are not independent but reflect

[89] V. Woolf, 'The Tale of Genji', p.266
[90] V. Woolf, 'George Moore' https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter20.html
[91] Ivi.
[92] Ivi.

his own personality. From this perspective it seems that Woolf is anticipating Bakhtin's theory about polyphony. In the polyphonic novel each voice corresponds to a single character and each voice is distinct and separate from the author's one. This implies that the character is not the object of the author's word but on the contrary he is responsible for it because he is the maker of his own word. In this sense Moore's novels seem to be lacking in polyphony.[93] Once again Woolf introduces a central point of her aesthetics, the claim for impersonality, the demand for the self's reduction. A necessity which Woolf - according to Lee, "one of the most anxious to remove personality from fiction"[94]- always tried to accomplish in her novels and exposed in a number of essays, such as 'On Not Knowing Greek' (1925) and 'Anon'(1940): "Anonymity was a great possession. I gave the early writing an impersonality, a generality.[…]It allowed us to know nothing of the writer: and so to concentrate upon his song".[95]

In other words, Woolf introduces her narrative mode to *Vogue*'s readership, a mode based on the transition from the univocal point of

[93] See M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Other Late Essays,* Austin: University of Texas, 1986.
[94] H. Lee, *Virginia Woolf,* London: Chatto & Windus, 1996, p.17.
[95] Virginia Woolf 'Anon' in B. R. Silver, 'Anon and The Reader: Virginia Woolf's Last Essays' in *Twentieth Century Literature,* New York: Hofstra University, 1979, p.359.

view expressed by a first person narrator to the multiplication of perspectives produces a displacement of narrative in numerous points of view reflected by each character, an effect which is fundamental in Woolf's fiction.

'John Mytton', published in 1926, is a review of the *Memoirs of the Life of John Mytton* written by Nimrod in 1837. The essay is an ironic account of John 'Mad Jack' Mytton, a sportsman and eccentric figure of the nineteenth century. Producing a light and humorous piece that could appeal to the reader, Virginia Woolf highlights Mytton's physical vigour:

His limbs themselves seemed carved from more primitive materials than modern men's. [...] He went shooting in the thinnest silk stockings, he let the rain pelt on his bare skin, he swam rivers, charged gates, crouched naked on the snow, but still his body remained obdurate and upright. [96]

After depicting him in a hyperbolic vein, halfway between epic and a sideshow, she starts to demolish the supposed formidable qualities of

[96] V. Woolf, 'Jack Mytton', https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c2/chapter11.html

this eccentric figure. So, for example, we discover that Mytton was an alcoholist and abused his wives.

Employing an ironic style, Woolf's goal is to criticise the excessive importance given to physical qualities but above all she condemns all those biographies about figures like Mytton, whose life was the triumph of mediocrity. In the *Memoirs of the Life of John Mytton* Nimrod writes that Mytton was better than Nero, Timon of Athens, Napoleon Bonaparte, Byron, and Johnson. It is clear that Woolf did not appreciate the legendary halo. In 'How Should One Read a Book?', in fact, she maintains that biographies are "hybrid books…that serve to restore to us the power of reading real books"[97]. In other words, the objective of her review was to encourage *Vogue*'s readers to read good books. But the question was more complex than this. Are all biographies a form of inferior literature? Lytton Strachey published *Eminent Victorians* in 1918 and *Queen Victoria* in 1921, two works that Woolf appreciated because they were committed to facts. Woolf was aware that facts are the main requisite to write a good biography and she criticised all those biographers who deliberatly ignore them. So her

[97] V. Woolf, 'How Should One Read a Book', https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c2/chapter22.html

objective was not to demonstrate that biography, as a literary genre, had less dignity than fiction and poetry but to teach her readers how to discriminate between good and bad books, whether fiction or not.

In 'A Professor for Life' (1926) Virginia Woolf is polemical with those critics who were primarily professor-specialists and imposed their prescriptive methods on their students-audience. Woolf chooses Walter Raleigh as the epitome of all those professors who spend their time lecturing. An inconvenience already underlined in 'How It Strikes a Contemporary' (1923):

> Men of taste and learning and ability are forever lecturing the young and celebrating the dead. But the too frequent result of their able and industrious pens is a desiccation of the living tissues of literature into a network of little bone.[98]

Woolf ironically underlines that Walter Raleigh keeps lecturing all the time but he never adapts his lectures to his audience, a voiceless audience which includes "city magnates, politicians, school mistresses, soldiers, scientists, mothers of families, country clergymen in

[98] V. Woolf, 'How It Strikes a Contemporary' http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0300031h.html#C20

embryo"[99]. In other words, Woolf employs the same categories of readers described in 'The Common Reader'[100] who "have never opened a book. Many will seldom get a chance of opening a book again"[101]. Lectures are not the most appropriate way to convey love for reading because there is no co-operation between the lecturer and his counterpart. Curiously, already in 'Jack Mytton' Woolf dealt with this question when she wrote that:

> The only criticism worth having at present is that which is spoken, not written — spoken over wine-glasses and coffee-cups late at night, flashed out on the spur of the moment by people passing who have not time to finish their sentences.[102]

An idea expressed by Woolf, and reported by Cuddy-Keane, who, employing a pedagogical approach, maintains that "conversation teaches more effectively than lecturing"[103]. Woolf focuses on the fluid relation between reader and text, stimulating the reader to engage in conversation with the literary work. In this way Woolf's essays offer a

[99] V. Woolf, 'A Professor for Life' in *The Captain's Death Bed*, Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2014, p.86.
[100] Woolf maintains that the common reader is worse educated, and nature has not gifted him so generously.
[101] Ivi.
[102] V. Woolf 'George Moore' https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter20.html
[103] M. Cuddy Keane, *Virginia Woolf: The Intellectual and the Public Sphere Technology, Mass Culture, and the Arts*, p.85.

training in thinking because they function as the occasion for stimulating the reader's mental processes.

It follows that the importance of such an essay as 'A professor for Life' lies in confronting two approaches to talking about books. On the one hand there was, according to Woolf, a sterile literary method which conveyed data in an aseptic way with no possibility of discussing them because it involved a top-down communication. On the other hand, Woolf opposes to this approach a more democratic one because she chooses to write her essays according to the criterion of social proximity and co-operation with the reader. Put differently, Woolf reacts against all prescriptive criticism which was typical of the academics and underlines the importance of reading and coming to one's own conclusions. An idea already expressed in 'Hours in a Library' (1916) when she discriminated between two categories of readers:

> A learned man is a sedentary enthusiast, who searches through books to discover some articular grain of truth upon which he has set his heart. If the passion for reading conquers him, his gains dwindle and vanish beneath his fingers. A reader, on the other

> hand, must check his desire for learning at the outset; if knowledge sticks to him well and good, but to go in pursuit of it, to read on a system, to become a specialist or an authority, is very apt to kill what it suits us to consider the more human passion for pure and disinterested reading.[104]

Despite the fact that she was accused of snobbery and elitism and far from being an ivory tower aesthete, Mrs Woolf was a woman, an artist, and a critic who defended the common reader's right to read what and how he desired.

Far from having little in common, the essays that Virginia Woolf wrote for *Vogue* form a kind of artistic manifesto which contains the main features of Woolf as a Modernist writer: she encouraged her public to develop a critical thinking about books, she underlined that academic authority cannot help the reader discriminate between good and bad works of art. Moreover Woolf highlighted the importance of adopting an impersonal style in writing to tell things from another perspective in order to of illustrate the aesthetics of the ordinary. As a kind of herald of her time Virginia Woolf introduced herself and her cultural

[104] V. Woolf, 'Hours in a Library', in *Granite and Rainbow*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1958: p.16.

statements to the new reader, encouraging him to acknowledge the existence of a common ground between himself and the artist. To this extent from the pages of *Vogue* Virginia Woolf promoted Modernism refusing to dilute or to adapt her beliefs to the new reader.

2.3 Democratic Broadcasters

Many critics have underlined Woolf's peculiar ambivalence towards wireless as a primary means of communication and dissemination. However, her position on radio was essentially political to the extent that she was extremely aware of it as the new cultural medium for shaping public opinion. It follows that not only she well knew the power of the new medium but also she took responsibility for what she was vehiculating via broadcasting. Her duplicity towards radio is underlined, for example, by Susan Sellers who maintains that for Woolf

it became increasingly identified with the patriarchy, the military, specifically the voice of Hitler, but "when Orlando plunges suddenly into the twentieth century the ability to be in England and listen to voices in America reflects the marvellous magic of the modern world".[105] Moreover, Leila Brosnan underlines that Woolf was not only "aware of [radio] power as a means of mass communication" but also "fully cognizant of how her own reputation could be conditioned by being the subject of broadcast and how the medium offered opportunities for disseminating her non-fictional prose"[106].

She broadcast three times in 1927, 1929, and some years later in 1937. Of these only eight minutes of the last one have not been lost. Jane Lewty describes Woolf's voice as "slurred and sulky"[107], while to her nephew Quentin Bell it appeared unrecognizable:

> This record is a very poor one. Her voice is deprived of depth and resonance; it seems altogether too fast and too flat; it is barely recognisable. Her speaking voice was in fact beautiful … and it is

[105] S. Sellers, 'Virginia Woolf and the Public Sphere' in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. S. Sellers, Cambridge: Cambridge Unoversity Press, 2010, p. 239.
[106] L. Brosnan, *Reading Virginia Woolf's Essays and Journalism: Breaking the Surface of Silence*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997, p.164.
[107] J.Lewty, 'Virginia Woolf and the Synapses of Radio' in *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place*, Ed. Anna Snaith and Michael Whitworth, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007, p.150.

> sad that it should not have been immortalised in a more satisfactory manner[108]

We do not know whether Woolf's voice sounded different or not but Bell's words seem to be true because she recorded in her diary "I got my pecker up & read with ease & emotion; was then checked by the obvious fact that my emotion didn't kindle George Barnes".[109] We do not know how her voice sounded in her first broadcast, a project which involved her husband Leonard in a sort of radio debate. Unfortunately there is no trace of this recording. But before trying to analyse the nature of Woolf's involvement in radio in order to enlighten the possible existence of a Modernist connection with the wireless, that is to say thinking about radio as associated to a Modernist project, it is necessary to clarify several aspects connected with Woolf's idea of radio.

Virginia and Leonard Woolf had an idea of broadcasting that did not include the aestheticization and the mythicization of the medium itself. For example, while Arnheim in *Radio* (1936) celebrated the new

[108] Q. Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, (Hogarth Press, London: 1972, Vol. II, p. 200.
[109] V. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Ed. Anne Olivier Bell, London: Penguin, 1977, vol.5, p.83.

medium sharing with his readers its secrets and magic, the Woolfs thought of radio essentially as a tool for shaping public opinion. As pointed out by Cuddy-Keane, they were primarily interested in the social use of radio, enlivening the debate in the 1920s and 1930s which saw radio as a possibile means of propaganda.

Virginia's first broadcast, in collaboration with her husband Leonard, was aired on Friday, 15 July 1927, with the title 'Are too many books published and written?'. They were invited to jot down several notes in the form of a debate between the two of them. As pointed out by Melba Cuddy-Keane, the circumstance that the Woolfs were allowed to choose the topic without any editorial intervention was a sign of respect and esteem. The outcome was a tasty conversation, a radio debate, which was structured in opposite positions and therefore easily accessible to a wide audience.

The topic of 'Are too many books published and written?' was the rise of mass publishing and its consequences for the quality and the reading of books. In this debate, Leonard undertook the role of answering the question with a "yes" and Virginia with a "no", with the specific purpose of arousing the public's interest in the radical

transformations affecting the production of books. Whereas he underlined the negative aspects related to the rise of mass publishing such as the stardardization and trivialization which made books become boots, that is to say commodified objects, Virginia Woolf spoke in favour of an increased access to the means of productions as well as to the final product which, in her opinion, should have been as cheap as a packet of cigarettes, a prophetic forecast ten years ahead of the first Penguin book. Like in a roleplay, Leonard played the part of the catastrophist, arguing that mass production was the epitome of the death of Literature, and Virginia was the optimist because she maintained that an increase in availability did not necessarily mean poor quality if books were read by common people. Moreover, she underlined that beginning with light books readers would choose more demanding readings. A concept which in some way was related to what she wrote in 'Jack Mytton'.

Virginia Woolf's other two broadcasts were solo talks aired respectively in 1929 and 1937. The latter was titled 'A Ramble Round Words' which later became 'Craftsmanship'. The essay was part of a

BBC series called 'Words Fail Me' with the participation of many language experts such as Lloyd James, Allen Ferguson, and Logan Pearsall Smith.

'Craftsmanship' was a sort of invitation to employ language with freedom and trust. She maintained that "words are not useful" and they are "to blame" for the confusion and the misunderstandings they provoke in the world[110]. Words always tell the truth, she argues, but that is because "it is the nature of words to mean many things". Leila Brosnan maintains that there is a political subtext in 'Craftsmanship'. The broadcast was aired just before the coronation of George VI and after the scandal that involved Edward and Mrs Simpson. So in Brosnan's opinion Woolf "renders many of the phrases and allusions in the essay politically charged puns and jibes"[111] for example, when she writes "the less we inquire into the past of our dear Mother English the better it will be for the lady's reputation"[112] or when she states that "royal words mate with

[110] V. Woolf, 'Craftsmanship' in *The Death of The Moth*, https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter24.html
[111] L. Brosnan, *Reading Virginia Woolf's Essays and Journalism: Breaking the Surface of Silence*, p.170.
[112] V. Woolf, 'Craftsmanship'.

commoners"[113]. However, we have no evidence of such an interpretation.

In her essay Woolf highlights the fact that we are in the realm of the polysemic field of words. Words have a multiple number of meanings, interpretations, and understandings. "Words, English words, are full of echoes, of memories, of associations – naturally"[114], Woolf writes. This statement could be aligned with Bakhtin's commentary on words when he maintans that:

> All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and the hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions.[115]

This means that both Woolf and Bakhtin argued that words do not exist in an abstract dimension but in a specific context. This is

[113] Ivi.
[114] Ivi.
[115] M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, p.293.

fascinating because Woolf's reflections anticipated many questions related to pragmatics. Moreover, when she urges the necessity of replacing the English language with the non-verbal one used by the *Michelin Guide*, she is roughly introducing the notion of semiotic language developed by Charles Peirce, who theorized the difference among icons, symbols, and indexes, and whose articles and essays were not published until 1964.

However, there is another perspective, probably subtler, from which 'Craftsmanship' can be read and analysed. I argue that this essay can be read as a reflection on how the mind works with a specific reference to the process of the association of ideas, a process by which representations arise in consciousness as the result of various and multiple external stimuli. This is validated in the following passage:

> When we travel on the Tube, for example, when we wait on the platform for a train, there, hung up in front of us, on an illuminated signboard, are the words "Passing Russell Square." We look at those words; we repeat them; we try to impress that useful fact upon our minds; the next train will pass Russell Square. We say over and over again as we pace, "Passing Russell Square, passing Russell Square."

> And then as we say them, the words shuffle and change, and we find ourselves saying, "Passing away saith the world, passing away. . . . The leaves decay and fall, the vapours weep their burthen to the ground. Man comes. . . . ".[116]

Woolf is not only making a literary reference to Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Tithonus* (1859)[117] but also she is hinting at the mental process of the association of ideas, which she employed in her novels too. Similarly, when Woolf maintains:

> Written up opposite us in the railway carriage are the words: "Do not lean out of the window." At the first reading the useful meaning, the surface meaning, is conveyed; but soon, as we sit looking at the words, they shuffle, they change; and we begin saying, "Windows, yes windows — casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn."[118]

she is, once again, illlustrating the mental process of association while making a reference to Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819)[119].

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[116] V. Woolf, 'Craftsmanship'.
[117] Tennyson's Tithonus starts with the following lines: The woods decay, the woods decay and fall/ The vapours weep their burthen to the ground/Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath.
[118] V.Woolf, 'Craftsmanship'.
[119] Keats writes: casements, opening on the foam/Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Thus, an irrelevant action such as reading a signal or looking out of the window can be the starting point for recording the inner turmoil of feelings and thoughts.

The application of the association of ideas in the novel has an aesthetic significance. First, the association technique extends the scope and the depth the writing expresses and makes it possible for the writers to deal as much as possible with the characters' subjective experience within fairly narrow objective time-space scope. Second, the association technique breaks out the traditional narrative structure. By the help of this technique, the characters may recall old memories at familiar sights and think of another thing or person upon seeing one; the consciousness may shift freely among present, past and future, or from one place to another. During the process of association, objective (chronological) time and psychological time intermingle; past memories, future expectation and the present consciousness exist alternately, the result of which is confusion in space-time and disorder in sequence. Therefore this technique is essential for the writers to depict the real world of the consciousness. In other words, the outer

world and the actual events act only as stimuli and inspirations of the inner world of the characters.

With this premise, Woolf, once again, employed the new medium to illustrate her way of using words. 'Craftsmanship' is Woolf's aesthetic belief in so far as it represents Woolf's vision of the art of writing. To put it differently, the meaning of words is not univocal. Woolf's theory of language and multiple meaning challenges the transparency of language as its primary quality. As Woolf herself explains in 'Craftsmanship', words always "mislead us", "fool us"[120]; they never express "one simple statement but a thousand possibilities". The "useful meaning" of words is not, as the final line of *The Mark on the Wall* (1921) suggests, their "literal meaning", their "surface meaning"[121]. The proper way to use them is by relying on their "power of suggestion which is one of [their] most mysterious properties".

In fact, a close reading of Woolf's novels reveals a deep concern over the limits of language as a semiotic system and a related anxiety over the possibility of never truly communicating with another person, of

[120] V.Woolf, 'Craftsmanship'.
[121] Ivi.

never satisfyingly expressing oneself, of never fully capturing one's experience in words or of attaining stable meaning in them. For example, in *To the Lighthouse* one of the main themes is the « lack of an effective communication between characters and the solitude that falls on their part due to this resignation to nonsignification »[122]. Woolf wrote in her diary : "obviously I grope for words [...] Still I cannot get at what I mean". [123] Words, in her opinion, look clumsy and imprecise. Not only does Woolf suggest here that the implicit dimension of words, the natural vagueness and undecidability of language, comes first; she also applies this kind of indecipherability to her writing style. Semantic uncertainty with its disrupted syntax, ambiguous referents, apparent contradictions, destabilizing contingencies, space-creating ellipses, metaphors, and juxtapositions is the proof that the Modernist artist is incapable of conveying one monolithic meaning.

It is here, in the shared moment of meaning-making between reader and text, and among silences, ambiguities and discontinuities, that Woolf's literary expressions enact the centering thesis evolved from the

[122] M. Makela, 'Virginia Woolf, the Artist and the Limits of Signification' in *Innervate*, http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/documents/innervate/10-11/1011makelawoolf.pdf
[123] V.Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, ed. Leonard Woolf, London: Hogarth Press, 1953, p.75.

new physics as articulated by Heisenberg: that the observer and the observed cooperate in the creation of meaning. [124]

'Beau Brummel' was aired on 20 November 1929, after the nine o' clock news, as the second of a three-part series entitled 'Miniature Biographies'. The other two speakers were Bloomsbury friends, Harold Nicholson and Desmond MacCarthy.

In 1929 McNeillie and Clarke reported that Joe Ackerley (1896–1967)[125], the assistant producer in the Talks Department of the BBC, wrote to Lytton Strachey on 24th September 1929, offering him to speak during a BBC broadcast on the theme of biography:

> We want to give you a talk one evening during the next two months – or not exactly a talk but a reading in a series which we are calling something like "Potted Biographies" – real or imaginary, and to which Virginia Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy and others are contributing. There are no rules to the game of choice – people are

[124] See D. Lindley, *Uncertainty: Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr and the Struggle for the Soul of Science*, New York: Anchor Books, 2008.
[125] A. McNeillie, Andrew, N. Clarke, Appendix IV in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, London: The Hogarth Press, 2011, vol. VI, pp. 617-618.

> choosing just whatever character – real or imaginary – gives them most fun. I am not sure what Virginia‟s choice is, but Desmond is going to write up an imagery biography of Dr. Watson, Sherlock Holmes‟ friend, and someone else [Harold Nicolson] is going to do Lord Byron‟s valet, [William] Fletcher. Will you join the group and give us, for instance, the biography of a real or imaginary minor Victorian? We do hope you will be attracted by this idea, and please do not let yourself be influenced against it by any question of the suitability of your voice.[126]

So far the letter included also Virginia Woolf among the writers invited to contribute to the 'Potted Biography' project. Lytton Strachey did not accept the offer, Harold Nicolson did, and gave his talk on 23rd October 1929, during the first radio broadcast of the series. Desmond MacCarthy gave the 4th of December 1929 talk. *The Radio Times* announced Nicolson's talk, proclaiming that "this is the first of a series of 'Biographies in Brief', specially written by the most distinguished biographers of today."[127]

[126] N. Braybrooke, *The Letters of J. R. Ackerley*, London: Duckworth, 1975, p. 16.
[127] A. McNeillie, Andrew, N. Clarke., *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, p.617.

For the occasion, Woolf wrote 'Dorothy Wordsworth', which was accepted by the BBC and also advertised for the 20th November 1929 to be broadcast, from 9:15 to 9:35, after the 9 o'clock news. At the very last moment, however, Woolf replaced 'Dorothy Wordsworth' with 'Beau Brummel'. Vita Sackville-West, an intimate friend of Hilda Matheson (1888-1940), the Director of Talks at the BBC from 1926 to 1932, received a letter dated 19th November 1929, in which Virginia expressed all her disappointment for the BBC experience and her dislike for Hilda Matheson:

> I shall be glad when my broadcasting and my speaking at Mauron‟s lecture are both over. And, your Hilda – my God what friends you have! – has not proved exactly helpful – but there – I daren‟t say more […]. She affects me as a strong purge, as a hair shirt, as a foggy day, as a cold in the head – which last indeed I believe I am now developing (but its sure to be the nerves) so if you listen in, you‟ll probably hear sneeze, cough, choke. But as, what with Hilda and the B.B.C, my poor little article has been completely ruined (but don‟t whisper a word of this) I‟m not altogether looking forward to 9.20 tomorrow night. Also I

> am billed at 9.15 – Oh dear oh dear what a tumult of things one does one doesnt (sic) want to do![128]

Even though the BBC experience was not pleasing, it is worth noticing that in 1929 radio was deeply interested in biography and in its circulation. Moreover, they identified Strachey, Nicolson, and Woolf as the most eminent representatives of the genre. The whole episode proves not only how prestigious biography had become in those years, but also that the genre was getting increasingly popular thanks to its mass diffusion through radio broadcasts and specific programmes. 'Beau Brummell' could be categorized as a piece of celebrity journalism with many aspect in common with 'Jack Mytton' which Woolf wrote for *Vogue*. In both cases we deal with mediocre figures who have, in Woolf's opinion, achieved fame and success in an inexplicable way. In portraying the persona of Beau Brummell, the dandy par excellence, Woolf introduces her reader to the life of an adventurous man who in the end becomes the caricature of himself.

[128] V. Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. N.Nicholson, J. Trautmann, London: Harvest Book, 1978, vol. IV, p.110.

The dandy was one of the main figures of the nineteenth century and considered to be a herald of Modernism because he was the embodiment of the disenchanted and leisured outsider, something very close, for example, to the first definitions of the Bloomsbury Group[129]. Nevertheless, Woolf employs harsh words to express her aversion to Brummell's lifestyle. Even though Lord Byron defined Brummell the first of the great men of the nineteenth century, Woolf does not share the same vision but she criticizes his actions and his dandyism. For example, she informs us that "he who had played at love all these years and kept so adroitly beyond the range of passion, now made violent advances to girls who were young enough to be his daughters"[130]. In other words, Brummell was not the epitome of exquisite manners and style but a pervert and a "disgusting old man"[131].

Like a number of her predecessors and contemporaries, however, Woolf was also much absorbed with questions concerning the artist's

[129] The 1972 supplement to the most authoritative dictionary of language, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, defined Bloomsbury as a school of writers and aesthetes. Similarly, G. Holbrook Gerzina in 'Bloomsbury and Empire' maintains that "those who portray Bloomsbury as a positive influence on art and culture use the term 'intellectuals'; those who denigrate their impact refer to them as 'dilettantes' or 'aesthetes', G.H. Gerzina 'Bloomsbury and Empire' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. V.Rosner, Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2014, p.112.

[130] V. Woolf, 'Beau Brummell' in *The Common Reader Second Series*, London: Hogarth Press, 1935, p. 154.

[131] Ivi.

relationship to the world. As is often the case in a writer's earliest fiction, Woolf's first novels, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919), address these questions from several perspectives. Both novels deal with young people who are amateurs in the arts or in some intellectual endeavor, or would-be artists or writers who have reached the age where key life decisions must be made—whether to pursue the bar or academic life, as in St. John Hirst's case, or whether to continue one's career as a lawyer or move to the countryside to write, as in the case of Ralph Denham. Unlike other major authors, however, Woolf's engagement with this topic continued throughout her writing career and was amplified in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), *The Waves* (1931), and *Between the Acts* (1941), each of which has as a central character, an aspiring or practicing artist or writer, who must struggle with his/her identity as a creative individual and as a human being, and negotiate his/her relationship to society and the world at large. Why was this topic so important to Woolf and how is it connected with Brummell and dandyism?

A brief survey of Woolf's background and the cultural context in which she reached maturity as a writer reveals a number of factors that may

explain her unusually strong preoccupation with the nature of the artist's relationship to life as well as her aversion to Brummell.

As Woolf's biographers have noted, Sir Leslie Stephen encouraged his daughter to read as much as she could by giving her access to his personal library and by discussing history, biography, and literature with her. According to Katherine Hill, Stephen expected Woolf to become his "literary and intellectual heir," following in his footsteps as an essayist, reviewer and historian[132]. But as a number of biographers and critics has argued, Woolf's adoption of the role of writer had a crucial function in enabling her to negotiate the demands of living and establish an independent identity. Phyllis Rose writes that already as a young girl, Woolf was "training herself to be a writer, finding in writing a happier reality, an alternative to family life"[133] in the boisterous Stephen estate. For Woolf, writing functioned as a vital means of decoding and conjoining the various facets of the self. One evening, in 1930, while she was at Richmond she realised that there was "something very profound about the synthesis of my being: how only

[132]K.C. Hill, 'Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution' in *PMLA*, NeW York: MLA, 1981, p.351.
[133] P.Rose, *Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf*, New York: Oxford UP, 1979, p.59.

writing composes it: how nothing makes a whole unless I am writing"[134].

Given Woolf's status as a daughter who was herself trying to mark her own autonomous identity as a woman and a writer in an intellectually prominent upper middle-class family with direct connections to the world of artists and writers, there is no surprise that she was much concerned with questions of the artist's relationship to social life and the world.

Woolf shared several contact points with a number of other writers of the older generation and, in particular, with Walter Pater.

Woolf's exposure to Walter Pater is thought to have begun with her reading of the first edition of Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*, published in 1887. As Perry Meisel notes, this was the only book by Pater in Woolf's library. Meisel provides a detailed analysis of the influence of Pater and his aesthetic principles on Woolf's writing, particularly on her work as critic and reviewer. For example, he highlights how both Pater and Woolf were concerned with the search for the perfect fusion of form and

[134] V.Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. IV, p. 161.

matter in writing as well as the desire that superfluity be eliminated from the work of art. Moreover Meisel underlines the fact that there is Pater's influence on Woolf's fiction in its concern with the description of her characters' thoughts and sensations. A significant part of Meisel's analysis is devoted to the fact that Woolf embraced Pater's Aestheticism as an effort to distance herself from the patriarchal Victorian tradition which called for a type of novel with a morally edifying purpose. Perhaps, he continues, the most important lesson that Woolf absorbed from Pater regards the extremely important need for an acutely refined receptivity to life, the experiences it offers, and how these observations and experiences can affect one's subjectivity.

Such a vision implied that the artist had to lead an active life among others and therefore rejected, for example, the self-imposed isolation of the artist as promoted by Huysman in *À Rebours* (1884). In other words, Woolf was not a mere aesthete in defiance of the world surrounding her. For example, defending herself and the other « bloomsberries » against the accusation of elitism and snobbery, she wrote in a letter to Benedict Nicolson:

> Apparently you mean by Bloomsbury a set of people who sat of the floor at Bernard Street saying 'more and more I understand nothing of humanity in the mass' and were content with that [...] I never went to school or college. My father spent perhaps £100 on my education. When I was a young woman I tried to share the fruits of very that imperfect education with the working classes by teaching literature at Morley College, and politically by working for the vote. It is true I wrote books and some of those books [...] have sold many thousand copies. That is, I did my best to make them reach a far wider circle than a little private circle of exquisite and cultivated people. Leonard too is Bloomsbury [...]he has spent half his life to prevent the growth of Nazism. Maynard Keynes is Bloomsbury. He wrote the Consequences of the Peace. Lytton was Bloomsbury [...] Duncan was Bloomsbury [...] These are facts about Bloomsbury and they do seem to me to prove that they have done their best to make humanity in the mass appreciate what they knew and saw.[135]

The figure of the dandy was frequently associated to Woolf and her friends. As a rebel and opponent to his century, dominated by "la maree montante de la democratie, qui envahit tout et qui nivelle

[135] V. Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, London: Hogarth Press, 1980, Vol. VI, pp.410-420.

tout"[136], the dandy affirms a new kind of aristocracy. In Foucault's words, "the dandy makes of his body, of his behaviour, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art"[137]. In other words, without mentioning the famous definiton, Foucault seems to suggest that the dandy is, in some respect, the embodiment of the idea of l'art pour l'art, in that he has no social or political function.

As is commonly accepted, the English aesthetes and decadents of the late nineteenth century read Pater assiduously, but also took inspiration from the French Symbolists, exposing the will "to stand apart from the common life and live only in the imagination"[138].

This development of Paterian Aestheticism was accelerated by the great success of the persona of the dandy as introduced by Oscar Wilde and satirized vigorously in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* (1881). Among the Bloomsbury group, E. M. Forster satirized this persona as early as 1908 in his characterization of Cecil Vyse in *A Room with a View*. Woolf

[136] C. Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil and Other Works*, ed. W. Fowlie, New York: Bantam Books, 1964, p.41.
[137] M.Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, New York: Pantheon, 1985, p.41
[138] E. Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930,* New York: Scribner's Sons, 1969, p.32.

herself did not appreciate the worsening of Aestheticism embodied by the dandy. For example, in 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' (1927) she wrote:

> Modern literature, which had grown a little sultry and scented with Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater, revived instantly from her nineteenth-century languor when Samuel Butler and Bernard Shaw began to burn their feathers and apply their salts to her nose. She awoke; she sat up; she sneezed.[139]

Hence, 'Beau Brummell' could be read from this perspective, that is to say, as a text in which Woolf traces in a clear way the perimeter of her vision of art and the engagement of the artist. It is not surprising that Woolf made such an operation given that in her essays she repeatedly underlined the need for artists and writers to live in the real world. For example, in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' Woolf states "your part is to insist that writers shall come down off their plinths and pedestals, and describe beautifully if possible, truthfully at any rate, our Mrs. Brown. . . . for she is, of course, the spirit we live by, life itself"[140]. Similarly, in 'A Letter to a Young Poet' she remarks that the younger generation of

[139] V. Woolf, 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' in *Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf*, New York: Harcourt, 1967, vol. II, p. 223.
[140] V. Woolf, 'Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown', http://www.columbia.edu/~em36/MrBennettAndMrsBrown.pdf

British poets must not live in isolation but among others, “but how are you going to get out, into the world of other people? That is your problem now, if I may hazard a guess—to find the right relationship, now that you know yourself, between the self that you know and the world outside”[141].

Woolf’s aversion to the figure of the aesthete embodied by Brummell, that is to say the idea of life as a work of art, could well indicate her discomfort at being associated with Bloomsbury’s supposed aestheticism, especially during the highly politicized 1930s. This could be one of the reasons why she was so caustic in her second talk for the BBC. If this is true, not only Woolf fulfilled the requirements of the BBC about biography but also she took advantage of the medium, on the one hand to bypass that part of criticism which associated her to Aestheticism and on the other to introduce herself and her artistic principles.

[141] V.Woolf, ‘Letter to a Young Poet’, https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/complete.html#chapter25

2.4 Back Cover

Through *Vogue* and the BBC Woolf inserted herself into a space that gave her celebrity and notoriety. The direct consequence of her involvement in radio and fashion magazines was the establishment of her authorial identity. As we have seen, by focusing on literary questions which informed the reader/listener of her modernist instances, Virginia Woolf built her intellectual persona. While in 1924 she was celebrated with a picture of her wearing one of her mother's Victorian dress, at the end of the 30s she was often depicted with her trademark props: the smoking cigarette, the inkpot and pen, the open book. In these instances the objects with which Woolf was depicted were used as signs that built up an impression of her as a new woman, Modernist writer and intellectual. Her experience with *Vogue* and the BBC not only demonstrates that the Modernist artist cooperates with mass culture but also that he/she takes advantages of it by introducing him or herself to the audience. The change of perspective is impressive because we pass from the egotist figure

of the artist who claims for disdainful self-assertion to the more democratic practice of self-promotion.

The analysis of Woolf's involvement in radio and magazines has shown us that the writer was animated by the desire of making her artistic statements widely acknowledged. Indeed, as I maintained for her essays written for *Vogue*, it is possible to encapsulate all her writings for the BBC as well as for *Vogue* in a sort of artistic Manifesto which illustrates several aspects of her poetics. A brief list of the topics of her articles and talks shows us all those literary aspects that have made Woolf famous: her claim for impersonality, how to read a book, how to deal with personal associations and inner emotions as well as the aesthetics of the ordinary and the difference between an elitist and a democratic approach to literature. It follows that not only Woolf employed radio and press as a form of communication and dissemination but also that she made use of this experience as a sort of complementary place where she could explain and discuss her

vision of art and literature. In addition, her collaboration with radio and magazines not only ratified her literary success but also hastened the process of her transformation into a cultural icon. This means that her policy of cultural and celebrity visibility are strictly connected with her participation in the new media. For example, Brenda Silver[142] states that Woolf has come to stand for the modern woman writer at the end of the 1930s through a combination of literary personas and photographic images. In particular, Silver maintains that this phenomenon, that is to say the conversion of Virginia Woolf into a celebrity, dates from 1937, the same year in which she published *The Years*, delivered her last talk at the BBC, and appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine.

[142] B.R. Silver, *Virginia Woolf Icon*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Figure 1. Virginia Woolf on Time, 12 April 1937.

Moreover, Silver argues that celebrity made her well known to a wide range of people who might never have read her works let alone be aware that a real person named Virginia Woolf had lived. She also identifies her appearance on *Time* (1937) as being the

point when Woolf acquired a type of iconicity which is independent of her academic standing or literary reputation, that is, it can be separated from her value as a writer and from the value of her works. Anyway, it must be specified that even though *Time* magazine contributed to create Woolf's iconic status only in the 60s and 70s she will be rediscovered and reevaluated thanks to the Feminist Movement.

What is worth underlining is the fact that Woolf can be considered as one of the first examples of that culture of celebrity, which emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century, an example that is emblematic because, on the one hand, it demonstrates the intersection between Modernism and mass culture and, on the other, it unveils a collaborative relation between these two phenomena, a relation which produced benefits for both parts.

CHAPTER III

Resounding Echoes

From Greek philosophy to the Enlightenment, sight was the main sense on which many system of thought were based. Traditionally associated with knowledge and rationality[143], sight implies the fact that an individual keeps a distanced, analytical perspective of an object or topic. But is this always the right approach? Can the other senses create different ways of conceiving of and analysing the relationship between the self and the world? In this chapter I will focus on how from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the first thirty years of the twentieth century there is a partial loss of importance of sight and vision in favour of hearing or audition which becomes one of the distinguishing features of Modernism and discloses an innovative way of describing the self and the world through a new set of perceptions. I shall accomplish this by

[143] The ancient Greek employed the verb οἶδα to describe their notion of knowledge. Οἶδα means I see therefore I know.

analysing James Joyce's and Virginia Woolf's fiction. In their novels we can isolate an increasing distrust of vision and a growing predilection for sound and listening. In order to think about why Joyce and Woolf brought sound to the forefront of their art, I shall describe how the new auditory technologies influenced Modernist writing.

3.1 The Aural Turn in Modernist Studies

In recent years the effect of sound and auditory technology on Modernist writing has been analysed by several scholars. In particular many studies have been conducted about the effects of radio on the chronological and physical boundaries of subjectivity.

In his essay 'A Complex Kind of Training: Cities, Technologies and Sound in Jazz-Age Europe', James Donald underlines the fact that the new technologies have played a crucial role in modernity because they have changed oneself's perception:

> Disrupt old habits of perception and selfhood…they reconfigured ways of relating to oneself, to others and to the world.[144]

Donald argues that sound is "a key feature of this modern experience"[145], that is to say "a new dynamic of time, space and presence, the transcendence of distance"[146]. In other words, recalling the studies of several scholars such as Paddy Scannell, David Cardiff, Todd Avery and others[147], Donald maintains that sound creates a new cultural persona, the listener, as the epitome of what he calls "transcendence of distance"[148]. The formation of the listener intersects every kind of social and national boundaries, creating what Donald identifies as "a sense of placelessness of everyday experience"[149]. Thus, Donald remarks that the voice experienced as "pure signal, subjectivity mediated through mass-produced sounds

[144] J. Donald, 'A Complex Kind of Training: Cities, technologies and sound in jazz-age Europe' in *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity*, ed. J. Damousi and D. Deacon, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007, p. 24.
[145] Ivi.
[146] Ivi.
[147] See P. Scannell, D. Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting: Volume One 1922-1939,* London: John Wiley & Sons, 1991.
[148] Ivi.
[149] Ivi, p.25.

and technologies"[150] generates a reality "no longer conceivable in terms of individual human qualities"[151]. In conclusion, the genuine meaning of what it meant to be human was drastically altered as the consequence of what Emily Thompson defines "the soundscape of modernity"[152].

The topic of identity related to the new technologies is central in Johnson's studies. Bruce Johnson argues that "of all sounds, none projected and constructed identities more intensely than the voice"[153]. Just like Thompson, however, Johnson seems to be focused more on the propagation of information than on its power of moulding human identity. Johnson's goes on remarking that "the sound of the voice can never lie"[154], a conclusion that recalls Lisa Gitelman's analysis of sound. In *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines* (1999) she maintains that hearing must be studied from a diachronic perspective because just like the notions of authenticy and realness, hearing and its perception as 'true' or 'false' are

[150] Ivi, p.26.
[151] Ivi, p. 27.
[152] E. Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, Bembo: The Mit Press, 2004.
[153] B. Johnson, 'Voice, Power and Modernity' in *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity*, p. 118.
[154] Ivi.

historical. She, for example, maintains that early recordings were considered to be live broadcastings by common people, in that they were not able to distinguish between live sounds and recorded ones. In the same way, many listeners appreciated the BBC talks in the 1920s and 1930s because they sounded sincere and intimate even though they were scripted and read. In other words, the perception of what was real gradually changed with the emergence of new forms of communication. Gitelman's book can be considered to be among the earliest studies to connect the question of identity formation with new sound technologies. For example, according to Gitelman, many songs "displaced [the] visuality of racial identity"[155], that is to say that first in phonograph recordings and then in radio, an individual could lose his racial features and "sound black"[156] or vice versa. In other words, new sound technologies subverted many categories related to racial authenticity and witnessed the gradual divorce of voice from sight in the sensory construction of identity. The blurring of boundaries between what was considered to be authentic and what was not, real versus realistic, can be ascribed to the realm of

[155] L. Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, p.17.
[156] Ivi.

sound technology. This is the starting point of Wilson's study. In her essay 'Gertrude Stein and radio', Sarah Wilson maintains that audiences were resistant to "actual black voices"[157] on American radio, as the BBC audience was to women's voices and class accents. Wilson, however, goes on to argue, as Gitelman has noted, that radio "had the capacity to problematize the idea of actual black voices"[158] so that the combination of the vocal element with the visual one was "dangerously slippery"[159] because there was not a stable and univocal link between sight and hearing. Although dialect was a distinctive feature of race as well as class in American culture before the appearance of radio, it was radio that rewrote identity boundaries that determined an enduring state of anxiety and nullified the fidelity or fakery of the voice in relation to the speaker. Wilson points out that radio was the main responsible for creating a volatility of "racial positionings" and generating a "confusion of voices and identities supposedly signified by these voices"[160].

[157] S. Wilson, 'Gertrude Stein and Radio' in *Modernism/Modernity*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, April 2004, vol. 11, p. 272.
[158] Ivi.
[159] Ivi, p.274.
[160] Ivi, p.275.

What is important to underline is the fact that sound technology multiplies the percentage of an unsuccessful alignment between the speaker and his voice, an incongruity which is central to Halliday's notion of deceit.

In 'Deceit, desire, and technology' Sam Halliday focuses on the crucial point between sound and adulteration of the self whose main consequence is the creation of a destabilizing "internal nonequivalence"[161], that is, one's ability to conceal oneself. In other words, the "imperative of resembling oneself"[162], Halliday continues, is drastically discouraged by the emergence of new technologies and thus we face the possibility that we could resemble no-one, not even ourselves because

> Personhood passes over into its opposite, as technologies once used to fabricate identities now dissolve their very principle[163].

[161] S. Halliday, 'Deceit, Desire, and Technology' *in Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, April 2001, Vol. 37 Issue 2, p. 145.
[162] Ivi, p.151.
[163] Ivi.

Halliday's analysis shares several points with Donald's one. They both underline the dilution of the link between sound and body, voice and individual. Moreover, like Donald, Halliday suggests that the "liquidation of the person"[164] is the logical consequence, that is the entailment, caused by "the imitative potential of technologies"[165], with the necessary consequence that it is easier "to lie to the ear than to the eye"[166].

Melba Cuddy-Keane approaches the intersection between sound and Modernism from a completely different perspective. In 'Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies, and the New Aurality' she maintains that what she defines "aural sensitivity"[167] was the natural outcome of the emergence of the gramophone and wireless. Cuddy-Keane argues that in the late 1920s and early 1930s there was the gradual formation of an expanded listening audience who rapidly became very great in number because of the advent of broadcasting. Moreover, she introduces the notion of auscultation, a term

[164] Ivi.
[165] Ivi.
[166] Ivi.
[167] M. Cuddy-Keane, 'Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies, and the New Aurality' in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, p.69.

borrowed from medicine, to identify the act of listening. In other words, Cuddy-Keane employs the term auscultation as a substitute for focalization, that is, as a narratological category:

> Narratologists have established a range of terms involving "focalization" to address the question of "who sees?" but there is no comparable terminology for analyzing the aural placement of the listener, for addressing the question "who hears?" I propose the term "auscultation", in its primary, nonmedical sense, as an appropriate term for analyzing the reception of sound in literary texts[168].

Moreover, she maintains that the rapid developments in broadcast technologies caused predictable fears about state control, hegemonic dominance and a passive audience. Woolf adopted, according to Cuddy-Keane, an optimistic position about these developments. For example, in her diary she writes "but why not grow? Change?"[169] and again "can't you see that nationality is over? All divisions are now rubbed out, or about to be"[170]. The importance of Cuddy-Keane's

[168] Ivi, p.71.
[169] V. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. A.O. Bell, A. McNeillie, London: The Hogarth Press, 1979, vol III, p. 145.
[170] Ivi.

studies lies in the fact that she is among the first scholars to treat sound in literature as 'sound' and not as the epitome of a concept or a metaphor which stands for something else:

> Although we are at one remove from sound when we verbalize it, we can neverthless seek a critical vocabulary to analyze the way that sound is represented in such a passage, distinct from the way we analyze how it may function as a trope.[171]

The quotation above echoes what Kahn writes in his introduction to *Wireless Imagination.* Douglas Kahn puts a fundamental question which deals with the development of an analytic tool in Sound Studies: "how can listening be explained when the subject in recent theory has been situated in the web of gaze, mirroring, reflection, the spectacle, and other ocular tropes?"[172]. Once again we face the question of an inadequate 'sonic' vocabulary.

In *The Sound of Shakespeare,* providing an investigation of sound in Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, Folkerth introduces the notion of

[171] M. Cuddy-Keane, 'Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies, and the New Aurality' in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, p. 70.
[172] D. Khan, G. Whitehead, *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-garde*, London, The Mit Press, 1994, p.4.

'acoustemology', that covers "the specific relations between acoustic experiences and epistemologies in the establishment of cultural identity". From this perspective, drama and the theatrical performances seem to be the natural habitat of sound not only because the spoken word represents the main medium of communication but also because of its stage sound effects. Even though Folkerth focuses on a literary period which is temporally distant from Modernism, his approach is particularly interesting because it can be applied to different literary periods. For example, in his introduction, Folkerth explains that:

> The sounds embedded in the texts ask us to assent to the fulness and reality of their temporal and cultural otherness. At the same time, they also express, at various registers of theatrical and linguistic representation, their author's understanding of sound. The primary goals of this book are to find new ways of hearing the sounds that are embedded in these playtexts and to identify the

> various ethical and aesthetic dispositions Shakespeare associates specifically with sound.[173]

In conclusion, the scholarship on the art of recorded and broadcasted sound, is scant at all levels from basic historical research to theoretical frames. Thus, while literary criticism is concerned with sound as a rhetorical figure, the study of the relantionship between sound and literature is open to a full range of investigations such as, for example, the effect of radio and sound on the written word.

[173] W. Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare*, London: Routledge, 2002, p.7.

3.2 The Disenchantment of the Eye

In chapter three of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) Charles Dickens introduces Quilp, his evilest villain:

> The child was closely followed by an elderly man of remarkably hard features and forbidding aspect, and so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant. His black eyes were restless, sly, and cunning; his mouth and chin, bristly with the stubble of a coarse hard beard; and his complexion was one of that kind which never looks clean or wholesome. But what added most to the grotesque expression of his face was a ghastly smile, which, appearing to be the mere result of habit and to have no connection with any mirthful or complacent feeling, constantly revealed the few discoloured fangs that were yet scattered in his mouth, and gave him the aspect of a panting dog. His dress consisted of a large high-crowned hat, a worn dark suit, a pair of capacious shoes, and a dirty white neckerchief sufficiently limp and crumpled to disclose the greater portion of his wiry throat. Such hair as he had was of a grizzled black, cut short and straight upon his

> temples, and hanging in a frowzy fringe about his ears. His hands, which were of a rough, coarse grain, were very dirty; his fingernails were crooked, long, and yellow[174].

This is one of the typical descriptions we can find in Dicken's fiction, a description which is a detailed account based on visual elements. Dickens makes his reader see what his characters see. Moreover, The visual quality of Dickens' fiction was even clearer thanks to George Cattermole's illustrations. Sketches and illustrations were a common feature of the Victorian novel and they had an explicatory function. According to Spear,

> Novelists wrote dramatic scenes intended for illustration literary critics cultivated visual metaphors to describe their work, appreciating literature that made use of portrait, landscape, sketch, touch, graphic delineation, color, light, and shadow[175].

In addition, the Victorian period coincided with the birth of photography which developed throughout the period. While the first

[174] C. Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, London: Penguin Books, 2000, p. 29.
[175] J. Spear, 'The Other Arts: Victorian Visual Culture' in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. P. Brantlinger and W.B. Thesing, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p.191.

part of the nineteenth centuty saw the development of the daguerreotype process, the second part celebrated photography with the first exhibition dedicated to it in 1893. In *Realist Vision* Peter Brooks suggests how Victorian literature was attached to the visual, "to looking at things, registering the presence through sight"[176]. Brooks claims that literature makes sight dominant in order to understand and relate to the world.

In her study on visual culture and Victorian fiction, 'Seeing is believing?:Visuality and Victorian Fiction', Kate Flint maintains that photographs and images became so crucial that "Victorians were continually being invited to look, to engage in the active interpretation of what they saw"[177]. In other words, the Victorian period was characterized by a preeminence of sight over the other senses.

On the other hand, from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the first one of the twentieth century we witness a gradual technological development connected with the ear. From the

[176] P. Brooks, *Realist Vision*, Yale: Yale University Press, 2005, p.5.
[177] K. Flint, 'Seeing is believing?:Visuality and Victorian Fiction' in *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. F. O'Gorman, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p.27.

telephone to radio, there was an increasing interest in the auditory technology which influenced Modernism. Of course, sound was not absent in the Victorian literature and it was particularly important in the genre of the industrial novel as stated by John M. Picker, who, in *Victorian Soundscapes*, maintains that this period was marked by sound,

> A period of unprecedented amplification [...] alive with the screech and roar of the railway and the clang of industry, with the babble, bustle, and music of city streets, and with the crackle and squawk of acoustic vibrations on wires and wax[178].

Nevertheless, in the Modernist period sound seems to gain room and a renewed importance. If we make a comparison between Dickens's description from *The Old Curiosity Shop* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), we will notice that the latter contains many references to sound:

> What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton

[178] J. M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p.4.

> into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like a flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave[179].

While the eye has not lost its importance in the Modernist novel, the ear has gained importance in order to guarantee an extensive auditory experience which implemented in some way the visual one. So sound becomes the formal device through which characters evoke past memories or know the world. The sudden importance acquired by the ear could seem inexplicable but we could find an answer in

what Martin Jay has defined as the "crisis of ocular-centrism" which characterises the twentieth century and can be explained as a "deep-seated distrust of the privileging of sight"[180]. Similarly, Jacobs maintains that there was a "crisis of belief in the continuity between seeing and knowing, and a commensurate cognizance of the subjective mediations of embodied visuality"[181].

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[179] V. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91md/
[180] M. Jay, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism' in *Poetics Today*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1988, p.309.
[181] K. Jacobs, *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001, p.19.

Rejecting the equation of knowledge with vision, Steven Connor makes a connection between hearing and literature. He maintains that the self is a "modern auditory I"[182], that is to say, we are inter-connected by sound. Such a statement means that we can hear multiple sounds simultaneously, an operation that implies the "self defined in terms of hearing rather than sight is a self imagined[…] as a membrane; not as a picture, but as a channel through which voices, noises and musics travel"[183]. This definition seems to be enlightening and convincing because it explains why Modernism was so interested in sound. Through sound the new generarion of writers challenged the traditional idea of subjectivity and, by consequence, the traditional way of describing the world.

By analyzing Joyce's works and the last novels of Woolf in the following paragraph, I shall explore how they use sound to unify characters typically separated through vision. My goal is to demonstrate how Joyce, to a lesser extent, and Woolf fragment their narrative and breaks conventions through the representation of

[182] *S. Connor, The Modern Auditory I. Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Roy Porter, New York: Routledge, 1997, pp.206-207.
[183] Ivi.

audition and to point to how they use poetic devices to make them audible.

3.2 James Joyce and the End of the Ocularcentrism

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) is saturated with sound. From the very beginning, the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, shows his interest in the sonic quality of language. From this perspective, he is fascinated by musicality and strives to find it in his writing. For instance, when he decides that he will become an artist, he asks himself:

> Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour? Or was it that, being weak of sight as he was shy of mind, he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of language many coloured and richly storied than from the

> contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose?[184]

Stephen expresses his desire to concentrate on his inner feelings relying on the "rhythmic rise and fall of words", that is to say, their musicality rather than on the exterior world.

Six years later *A portrait*, Joyce wrote *Ulysses* (1922) in which we find again Stephen who is struggling with the limitations of sight. In his monologue he says:

> Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane[185].

This passage is significant because it certifies the limitations imposed by the eye. On the contrary, he decides to reject sight in favour of the ear as the way to perceive reality focusing his attention to the sound produced by his boots, "crush, crack,

[184] J. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4217/4217-h/4217-h.htm*
[185] Ivi.

crick, crick"[186]. What is significant is the fact that instead of "seeing" the signs of the world, Stephen is now "walking through it"[187]. Sound becomes so crucial and permeating that everything is described in auditory terms. For instance, when Stephen walks on the beach, he hears that it "sounds solid"[188]. The absence of sight makes his sensory experience unique. He feels thrilled because even though he is not seeing where he is going he claims that he could walk with closed eyes "into eternity"[189]. The passage from vision to hearing is underlined by his words "now sound begins, you see. I hear"[190]. This line looks particularly important because Joyce plays with words, specifically with the double meaning of 'see' which in this case does not mean knowledge because his character chooses to 'hear'.

[186] Ivi.
[187] Ivi.
[188] Ivi.
[189] Ivi.
[190] Ivi.

In other words, as in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen looks uninterested in vision while hearing becomes gradually relevant.

Even if every episode of *Ulysses* is marked by a large use of sonic elements, music, sounds, noises, we could say that episode eleven, 'Sirens', is the most significant in auditory terms. At the beginning of the story Simon Dedalus enters the Ormond bar, followed by Lenehan, looking for Boylan. The barmaids serve them drinks and discuss the blind piano tuner who tuned the Ormond piano earlier that day. Aside the musical references to the piano, this episode is important because on the one hand it seems to invalidate the equation of 'seeing is knowing' and on the other hand sound seems to become predominant. Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy, the two waitresses, are attracted to "the fellow in the tall silk hat"[191], who strives to look back at them. In this case, sight seems not to accomplish the desired effect, that is to say, to convey a

[191] Ivi.

sense of availability from the man whose behaviour is bad 'read' by the two girls who say "aren't men frightful idiots?"[192]. On the contrary, sound fullfills the room and in a certain way results to be more efficient than vision. Similarly, vision is neutralized when Miss Douce tries to look at herself "in the barmirror"[193], but she cannot because the mirror is not clear while Miss Kennedy attempts to isolate herself and "plug both two ears with little fingers"[194].

Ihde outlines the sound of inner speech, what is usually defined as stream of consciousness in literary studies, as an "almost continuous aspect of self-presence"[195], which can be partially obstructed by sound. Such invasive elements, according to Ihde, cause "the penetration of sound into the very region of the thinking self". It is not a coincidence that the 'Sirens' episode is connoted by sound which invades Bloom's

[192] Ivi.
[193] Ivi.
[194] Ivi.
[195] D. Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007, p.134.

inner monologue. The “jingle jaunty jingle”[196] of the car is scattered along the page and becomes increasingly stronger thanks to other noises, such as pieces of songs, the “clack”[197] of the clock, the “clappyclapclap”[198] of applause, and the “tap”[199] of the blind piano-tuner's cane, which permeate the atmosphere. Bloom hears and sees the “jaunting car”[200] of Blaze, and suddenly the affair between his wife and Blazes comes to his mind. Even if Bloom stops staring at his rival, he cannot escape from the noise produced by the car.

In the last episode of *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom, just like her husband, “let[s] wind go free”[201], that is to say she overlaps her corporeal noises with that of a passing train, “sweeeee theres that train far away pianissimo eeeee one more tsong”[202]. This episode is usually considered one of the most effective examples

[196] J. Joyce, *Ulysses*
[197] Ivi.
[198] Ivi.
[199] Ivi.
[200] Ivi.
[201] Ivi.
[202] Ivi.

of interior monologue. We can say that the auditory quality of Molly's monologue is very relevant Composed with only eight periods, this episode challenges the reader to listen to Molly's inner speech in order to figure out when pauses are needed. Because it takes place entirely in Molly's mind, following the cadences and idiomatic expressions of her inner voice, this episode is perhaps even more aural than the Sirens' one. We are not asked to picture scenes, but to hear Molly as she says "yes"[203] to Bloom. This episode is very challenging for the reader because he must decide when pauses are necessary in order to give the right intonation to the sentence. Not only without punctuation Joyce builds his interior monologues but also the absence of 'visible' graphic signs forces the reader to 'listen' to his own voice while reading the text.

[203] Ivi.

3.4 The Sonic Quality of Virginia Woolf's Fiction

In her novels, Woolf attempts to provide an exhaustive description of subjectivity and sensory experience. Even if her first novels are characterized by the simultaneous presence of sight and hearing, her last works seem to be specifically concerned with sound. According to Melba Cuddy-Keane, *The Waves (*1931), was conceived for radio, which implies the author was interested in new technologies and "suggests how much the novel was to her an aural work"[204]. Indeed, Woolf recorded in her diary "I hope to have kept the sound of the sea and the birds, dawn and garden subconsciously present, doing their work under ground"[205]. Though my analysis will primarily focus on Woolf's last novel, *The Waves*, as literary criticism has shown, is saturated with noise and sound especially what concerns the role played by the chorus.

According to Rishona Zimring, "Woolf uses sound to reveal the limitations of the visual [….] sound counters the hegemony of the

[204] M. Cuddy-Keane, 'Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies, and the New Aurality', p.88.
[205] V. Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, ed. L. Woolf, New York: Harcourt, 1954, p. 165.

image and the gaze, inspiring the literary imagination anew"[206]. This statement seems to be reinforced by what Steven Connor maintains about sight and vision when he declares that "visualism signifies distance, differentiation and domination"[207]. This is particularly evident in *The Years* and *Between the Acts* (1941) in which audition unifies characters while vision divides them. According to Cuddy-Keane, in *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf is interested in the representation of the so called "objet sonore", a phrase coined by Pierre Schaeffer, which means the "listener's attention on the sound itself"[208]. Cuddy-Keane maintains that the "object sonore" functions as a link between the individuals and the world because its objective is to "provide the bridge between the individual and the world; and the fragmented, discontinuous, polytextual music conveys a wholeness, a comprehensiveness, that embraces the communal life

[206] R. Zimring, 'Suggestions of Other Worlds: The Art of Sound in The Years' in *Woolf Studies Annual*, New York: Pace University Press, 2001, p.135.
[207] S. Connor, *The Modern Auditory I. Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, pp.203-204.
[208] M. Cuddy-Keane, 'Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies, and the New Aurality', p.81.

of the universe"[209]. To put it differently, music, sound, and noises establish a link between characters and reality.

This kind of connection is particularly visibile in *Between the Acts*. Whose characters are never at ease when they are object of the gaze. For instance, Isa feels scrutinized when "she felt Dodge's eyes upon her as her lips moved"[210]. Similarly, the fact of observing or being observed is an element of disruption when the audience is watching the spectacle but people start feeling uncom as if they were "caught and caged; prisoners; watching a spectacle"[211], as the act of watching the pageant heightens their sense of alienation. Morever, In bringing out the mirrors and forcing the audience to confront their own theatricality, La Trobe highlights how self-reference has the effect of challenging, in a sudden and drastic manner, the expectations of the audience's world view. However, the audience of the pageant do not like their 'world view' to be challenged, they want to sit back and enjoy a pageant which adheres to the expected formula, one which reinforces their 'world view' and keeps the boundary between

[209] Ivi, p.90.
[210] V.Woolf, *Between The Acts*, http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0301171h.html
[211] Ivi.

themselves and the performance intact. The audience cannot avoid "the inquisitive insulting eye"[212]. Instead of producing harmony, peace and happiness sight engenders feelings of frustration and disorientation. The discomfort caused by the eye finds a counterbalance in the sounds which fulfill the scene. From this perspective, the gramophone plays a crucial role and it can be considered as a unifying element. This is certified by Woolf when she writes that the gramophone ""holds them together, tranced"[213], and the traditional songs played on it are "expressive of some inner harmony"[214]. The defeat of the eye is witnessed by La Trobe's words when she reproaches herself for the 'failure': "She hadn't made them see. It was a failure,another damned failure! As usual. Her vision escaped her"[215].

On the contrary, the character of Lucy Swithin concludes that somewhere an enormous ear must exist which can perceive the harmony in nature, "sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves – all are one. Harmony, if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic

[212] Ivi.
[213] Ivi.
[214] Ivi.
[215] Ivi.

head. And thus…we reach the conclusion that *all* is harmony, could we hear it".

These episodes are significant because they underline that for Woolf sight and vision tend to fragment reality, causing discomfort in the seer/seen while hearing plays the opposite role and it is a factor of peace, integration, and amalgamation.

Virginia Woolf included sounds from the real world in her novels. From this perspective, it could be said that she made use of the art of sound such as sirens, rain, street conversations and so on. With sound recording not only I mean the onomatopoetic sounds such as "chuff" and "tick", which can be found in *Between the Acts*, but also the street cries typical of *The Years*, and the song of the old woman heard in *Mrs Dalloway*. I will demonstrate how the presence of sound recording in Woolf's novels gives her fiction an aural dimension.

With the growing employment of the phonograph and gramophone, invented by Edison in 1877 and improved by Emile Berliner, several artists began to experiment with the art of sound recording in the

early 1900s. The first phonographs were advertised as devices that could record and replay a vast assortment of sounds.

Luigi Russolo, Futurist painter and composer, was among the first ones to employ noises and sounds such as whistles, engines and bells. He created the *intonarumori*, an instrument which replayed sounds in his most signifying performances such as *Awakening of a City* and *Meeting of Automobiles and Airplanes*. Similarly, Tomaso Marinetti incorporated noise and real-world sound into his poetry claiming in his *Futurist Manifesto* (1913) that sound representation "vivifies lyricism with crude and brutal elements of reality". The Italian artist began his manifesto with a list of technological innovations which changed the early twentieth century society:

> People today make use of telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph, the train, the bycicle, the motorcycle, the automobile, the ocean liner, the dirigible, the aeroplane, the cinema, the great newspaper (synthesis of a day in the world's life) without realizing that these

> various means of communication, transportation and information have a decisive influence on their psyches[216].

The mixture of artificial sounds with natural ones, in Marinetti's view, reflected the pervasiveness and influence of sound technology in everyday modern experience.

Woolf's sound recording reflects her recognition of the significance of sound in modern sensibility and experience, and it is one of her many contributions to the development of the Modernist novel. Woolf, in fact, argues that for the modern novel to flourish, writers need to put aside the convention of grand plots and a materialist depiction of reality, and focus on the frequently overlooked details of life, "let us not take for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small"[217]. Woolf's inclusion of sound in her novels serves to accentuate the subtle auditory perceptions which are too often considered to be as background noise. In other words, representing how the senses are affected by experience, even the most ordinary experience, becomes

[216] F. T. Marinetti, *Futurist Manifesto*, http://www.unknown.nu/futurism/destruction.html
[217] V.Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c/chapter13.html

more important than the traditional plot and character development. By presenting sounds in her fiction, Woolf is able to portray her characters' world in a more extensive way. The inclusion of sounds defamiliarises her prose. For instance, the recorded sounds, "tick, tick, tick" and "chuff, chuff, chuff", interspersed throughtout the pageant of *Between the Acts*, are perceived primarily for their sound rather their meaning. They disrupt syntax and fail to signify immediately.

Though Woolf employs the art of sound to the greatest effect in *Between the Acts*, a gradual development in her technique can be traced back to the begininning with her first experimental novel, *Jacob's Room*. For example, when the narrator introduces the character of Mrs Pascoe he says:

> Washing in her little scullery, she may hear the cheap clock on the mantelpiece tick, tick, tick…tick, tick, tick. She is alone in the house[218].

The sound of the clock ticking in this scene gives the narrative a heightened sense of realism, as the reader is presented with the word

[218] V.Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91j/

that represents the sound itself and not with its conceptual description. Moreover, the quotation demonstrates Woolf's idea of sound because hearing the sound of clock within the novel form interrupts the linear narrative of the novel and gives Mrs Pascoe's ordinary experience a poetic quality through the cadence and the repetition of the sound.

In her study of sound and the auditory sensibilities reflected in *Mrs Dalloway*, Melba Cuddy-Keane remarks that Woolf employs "a combination of disparate sounds -human, natural, and mechanical- broadly diffused from different points in space" as well as a "nonhierarchical mixing of voices and noises"[219].

The effect of recorded sounds is exemplified by the persistent gramophone noise repeatedly mixed into the narrative of *Between the Acts.* The "chuff, chuff, chuff" and the "tick, tick, tick" of the gramophone act like a choral refrain in the pageant and the novel itself. These sounds have a twofold effect: they allow the pageant audience to make both personal and communal associations, keeping them momentarily unified in a chorus while allowing

[219] M. Cuddy-Keane, 'Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies, and the New Aurality', p.82.

individual interpretations, and they puctuate the narrative with a consistent aural quality, as the common words “chuff” and “tick” are made poetic through the defamiliarizing chant of the machine. It is also of significance, however, that these gramophone sounds are interspersed with the dialogue and songs of the pageant, as well as the thoughts and comments of the audience, which creates a sense of fragmentation, echo and randomness in the narrative.

CHAPTER IV

Radiogenic Texts

In the last chapter I have analysed the effects of radio on the Modernist written word. In 'Radiogenic Text' I will demonstrate how this new medium, radio, will become an essential tool for artistic production in the late fifties. From the 1930s to the late 1950s, we witness an increasing importance acquired by radio, which becomes one of the favourite instruments to spread and make art. This means that a text is designed and created not for the page but for radio, not for the eye but for the ear. According to Keith Richards, "radio evokes rather than depicts an experience"[220], which means that the radio performance invades the listener's own solitude and recreates the illusion of reality inside the listeners' head through sounds and noises. Radio starts from silence and the author must break it through the use of all those sound effects which are necessary to

[220] K. Richards, *Writing Radio Drama*, Sydney: Currency Press, 1991, p.15.

outline settings, characters, and the plot. In other words, radio becomes a capital opportunity for the experimentalist who wants to explore new aspects and ideas that are impossible to find in live theatre or on the written page.

Radio drama is thus a pale reflection of the legitimate stage, given that stage plays are also to be seen and Radio plays to be heard.

Radio drama developed as a literary genre in the 1930s and challenged the traditional primacy of the written text. This chapter considers the influence of radio on Dylan Thomas's and Samuel Beckett's artistic production. Thomas's famous radio text *Under Milk Wood* confirms that not only radio influenced artists but also invited them to reconsider the literary author's creative role, the text's cohesion and coherence, and the audience's interaction with the work.

There have been multiple attempts to define radio drama as a genre. In other words, does radio drama represent a radical break from both dramatic and literary traditions, or do radio plays merely employ and transfer elements of older genres to a new technological

context? One main strand of radio drama criticism underlines the partial similarity between radio drama and the older literary genres, most notably the novel. Proponents of such views often stress radio plays' resemblance to written-based literary genres by questioning radio drama's potential and its connection with the theatrical stage. Irish poet and BBC Drama producer Donald McWhinnie, who produced Beckett's first two radio plays, wrote in *The Art of Radio* (1959) that "the affinity between stage drama and radio drama is superficial"[221] and instead compared the genre to prose fiction and poetry. He maintained that radio drama looks like "a bridge between poetry or music and reality"[222]. Similarly, in *Radio and Poetry*, Milton Allen Kaplan stated that radio was merging poetry with dramatic art in an innovative way[223], and Arnheim wrote that "poets should emphatically be brought into the wireless studio"[224]. But actually it is the novel that seems to have shown many points in common with the radio play genre. For instance, critics and radio scholars have stressed out these two forms' great flexibility, with the radio play's

[221] D. McWhinnie, *The Art of Radio*, London: Faber and Faber, 1959, p.174.
[222] Ivi, p.34.
[223] M. A. Kaplan, *Radio and Poetry*, New York: Columbia UP, 1949, p.232.
[224] R. Arnheim, *Radio*, Trans. Margaret Ludwig & Herbert Read. London: Faber & Faber, 1936, p. 208.

wide-ranging employment of dialogue, narration, music, and sound effects which all recall the novel's combination of dialogue and heterogenous narrative modes such as first, second, and third person omniscient or limited narration. Moreover, McWhinnie maintains that the novel, like the radio play, "is a free and fluid form" that "may have elements of drama and poetry in it which can effectively be resynthesized in terms of sound alone"[225]. Radio drama's frequent use of narrators, a literary device repeatedly adopted by Thomas, also makes a comparison between novel and radio drama possible. In particular, Ian Rodger focuses on this aspect and asserts that the radio narrator's origins date back to "the novel in the days when novels were written to be read aloud"[226]. As Rodger's comment seems to suggest, the systematic return of the fictional narrator from a written to an oral form meant that there was a permeable boundary between written texts and oral performance. In a survey of classic fiction adapted for radio, Donald A. Low marked the extreme facility with which narrators were adjusted from novels to radio plays and maintained that:

[225] D. McWhinnie, *The Art of Radio*, London: Faber, 1959, pp.173-175.
[226] I. Rodger, *Radio Drama*, London: Macmillan, 1982: p.28.

> Too much can be made of the kinship between literary tradition and print, and of the differences sometimes alleged to amount to incompatibility between the novelist's commitment to writing, and by implication to silent reading, and the medium of sound broadcasting.[227]

As Low notes, not long before radio's invention, several Victorian writers such as Dickens had written novels to be read aloud, that is to say such authors made up for the oral dimension of the novelistic genre. By reproducing literary devices such as narration, radio plays reasserted the early alliance between the novel and oral performance.

Many other critics, however, did not think that radio drama had a connection with the novel and defined it in opposition to older literary genres, an opposition which generated mixed reactions. For instance, poet Cecil Day Lewis expressed his apprehension over radio drama's departure from literary tradition in a 1935 BBC radio talk titled 'The Revolution in Literature'. Discussing how radio and film had begun to change writing, Day Lewis analysed the upcoming effects of television and other electronic media:

[227] D. A. Low, 'Telling the Story: Susan Hill and Dorothy L. Sayers' in *British Radio Drama*, Ed. J. Drakakis, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1981, p. 111.

> When television is perfected—and possibly Mr. Aldous Huxley's "feelies" introduced—they will provide us with an unreality far more unreal or a realism a hundred times more devastating than the most frenzied ambitions of the entertainment writers can rise to. I can even envisage the day when we shall put a book onto a mechanism as now we put on a gramophone record, and the whole thing will be enacted for us. Sitting in our armchairs at home, we shall see and hear and smell the author's characters. But whether this performance could be called "literature," or our share in it "reading," are questions quite beyond my reeling imagination.[228]

While Day Lewis expressed his contrariness to radio and television from a literary author's perspective, professional BBC producers and writers celebrated radio plays as a powerful break from literary tradition. This is the case of Laurence Gilliam, the founding director of the BBC's Features Department, who, according to Whitehead, denominated this new genre "pure radio, a new instrument for the creative writer and producer"[229]. Moreover, Kate Whitehead adds that Gilliam's department prided itself on creating radio features, "a new

[228] C. Day Lewis, *Revolution in Writing*, London: Hogarth Press, 1935, p.15.
[229] L. Gilliam in K. Whitehead, *The Third Programme: A Literary History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p.113.

art form specific to radio and no longer parasitic on preceding literary genres"[230].

4.1 Radio Features

Radio feature has always been difficult to define. We can say that it is a hybrid genre, which combines elements of plays, documentary, and talks, with a persistent use of oral elements. The features genre was developed by the BBC Talks Department in the 1920s and then traditionally associated to drama, mainly because features often recruited the same actors who performed in theatrical works as well as in performing arts. Before the beginning of World War II, at the same time when Dylan Thomas began broadcasting gradually, the BBC created a specific authority, Features and Drama Department. The department was very productive and prompted technical and artistic innovation in the late 1930s. However, dramatic creations aligned themselves with more traditional guide lines proposed by the

[230] Ivi.

director Val Gielgud, who highly promoted dramatic productions based on the adaptation of pre-existing stage plays, and thus limited the possibility of experimenting with plays written specifically for radio[231]. In other words, Gielgud claimed a sharp division between the feature, as a program primarily related to facts, and drama, as the realm of fancy and creative works[232]. In reality, as Lucia Esposito maintains, feature "si qualificava come una forma ibrida, a metà tra il documentario, la narrazione e il dramma"[233]. Indeed, features producers, however, did not accept this sharp division and challenged such differences with works that merged artistic with journalistic approaches. For instance, Douglas Cleverdon, who produced the BBC's posthumous production of *Milk Wood* in 1954, distinguished radio plays from features by associating the former with the formal characteristics of the stage, such as the employment of different scenes, and the latter with radiophonic distinctive traits such as the use of montage to facilitate a less static passage from a scene to another and guarantee a more rapid shift from exteriority to

[231] Ivi, p.111.
[232] Ivi, pp. 11-112.
[233] L. Esposito, *Scene Sonore, I Radiodrammi di Samuel Beckett*, Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2005, p.69.

interiority, that is to say, from external descriptions to the exploration of characters' emotions and feelings.[234] In many cases, however, the distinction between features and plays was merely formal. This is the case of *The Rescue* (1943), written by Edward Sackville-West, which was a reinterpretation of the last pages of *The Odyssey*, and of *The Dark Tower* (1946), whose author, Louis MacNeice, took inspiration from Robert Browning's poem *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* (1855). In both cases these works can hardly be labelled as committed to facts or defined as documentary. These features differed from plays only in their innovative use of music and literary devices such as the interior monologue, that could be better adapted to a radio feature than to a theatrical play. Features received a new impulse in the 1930s when the BBC decided to create a collection of reportages based on the life's conditions of the local communities. The aim was to give a voice to the effects of the early 1930s depression on average English citizens[235]. Harding, together with other BBC local directors, wanted

[234] D. Cleverdon, *The Growth of Milk Wood*, London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1969, p.17.
[235]P. Scannell, 'The Stuff of Radio: Developments in Radio Features and Documentaries before the War' in *Documentary and the Mass Media*. Ed. John Corner, London: Edward Arnold, 1986, pp.1-2.

to accomplish “the task delegated to the regions—of reflecting the life and the variety of the area they served”[236]. Some of the most creative features during the thirties were produced by Bridson, who was recruited by Harding to write for the series *Harry Hopeful*, in which the protagonist was a fictional, working-class character, Harry Hopeful, interviewing real people who described their lives. Harry was interpreted by Frank Nicolls, who made and collected the interviews. Then, he went back to BBC studios and performed those interviews with other actors. In other words, there was a combination of fact and fiction, of reportage and art, of ‘genuine’ speech and script.

This was the cultural horizon in which a young Dylan Thomas approached the new medium. In *Margate—Past and Present* (1946), produced for WOR, a New York radio station, Thomas outlined the guide lines of his future works. *Margate* recalls many of his later works, including *Milk Wood*, in its chronological depiction of a single day. The linear narrative in such features provided a deeper sense of objectivity and truthfulness, which could have been weakened by

[236] Ivi, p.14.

other more artificial approaches. Thomas' contribution to the program *Return Journey* (1947), for example, differs from *Margate* in its less objective depiction of Thomas' hometown of Swansea, following him backward in time, as he imaginatively changed his identity from a radio reporter to a small child playing in a suburban Swansea park. Thus this kind of narration did not seem to be the most appropriate for a documentary which instead privileged a rigid time treatment. In contrast, *Margate*'s chronological structure makes a realistic depiction of the town possible given that it follows the vicissitudes of Rick, a fictional American ex-serviceman who comes back to England to meet his fiancée Molly. The feature begins with Rick on the train to Margate. He shares his impressions as the train approaches the town and as he meets Molly at the station, has lunch with with her parents, and explores the entertainments around the pier. According to Lewis, Dylan Thomas employs dramatic elements "to convey aspects of contemporary English life to foreign listeners"[237] by treating "potentially dramatic scenes as opportunities

[237] P. Lewis, 'The Radio Road to Llarregub' in in *British Radio Drama*, ed. J. Drakakis, Bristol: Western Printing Services, 1981, p.85.

for documentary exposition"[238]. During the train's approach to Margate, for example, Rick has a long interior monologue as a reaction to the unfamiliar sights and smells:

> Washing hanging by the graveyard; muddle of roofs and cranes and trains; a bit of a castle, bridges, ships in the mud; warehouses, chimneys [...] can't smell the sea yet, only smoke and tobacco and scent.[239]

This passage underlines the feature's documentary purpose. Moreover, Thomas merges the aseptic reportage with literary and radiophonic elements as witnessed by the presence of two disembodied narrators, a technique he will employ in *Milk Wood* too:

1ST VOICE. Well, where do we begin? Got to begin somewhere...

2ND VOICE. Begin in a railway carriage.

[*Background train noise*]

1ST VOICE. Is the train moving?

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[238] Ivi, p.86.
[239] D. Thomas, *On the Air with Dylan Thomas: The Broadcasts*, Ed. R. Maud, New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992, p.106.

2ND VOICE. Of course it's moving – are you deaf? The fuming, snorting iron steed with her attendant gallimaufry…

1ST VOICE. …wrong word…

2ND VOICE. …of green gay coaches is racing proudly along the glistening rails, her wreaths of tasselled smoke garlanding the… sorry, it's an electric train.

1ST VOICE. Where's it going?

2ND VOICE. Margate, stupid.[240]

According to Lewis, Thomas writes "radio prose"[241], a sort of combination of prose and poetry to describe a train race in the English countryside. Thomas's humorously antagonistic dual narrators seem to be in conflict in this opening scene and they move between aesthetic and documentary purposes. For instance, the 1st Voice focuses on pleasant sounds produced by wordplays. He makes use of alliteration in "*gr*een *g*ay", "*gl*istening *r*ai*l*s", and "smoke *g*a*rl*anding," before he realises that an electric train does not ejects smoke. In addition, this first dialogue also certifies the artificial

[240] Ivi, p.104.
[241] Ivi, p.78.

nature of the documentary in its opening question of how to begin, which, as Lewis has observed, is present in *Under Milk Wood*'s opening line: "To begin at the beginning"[242]. Such a question demonstrates how even something factual and committed to objectivity like a documentary implies that the author is the only one who can decide when the feature begins and when it ends. What is interesting in this dialogue, however, is not only the certification of the artificial nature of documentary but also its immanent reflection on language. For example, 2nd Voice functions as a sort of reminder when he underlines the presence of sound effects, "are you deaf?"[243]. In other words, 2nd Voice underlines the phatic funcion of language because he is checking if the channel of communication is working. So, even in this case, just like for the how to begin question, we are reminded of the artificial nature of this broadcast. Artificiality seems to be the main goal of this feature given that throughout *Margate* we find actors, carnival barkers and so on. Highly significant is the scene in which Rick and his fiance Molly are confronted with distorting mirrors. This scene is important not only because it

[242] D. Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*, http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0608221.txt
[243] D. Thomas, *On the Air with Dylan Thomas: The Broadcasts*, p.104.

reinforces the idea of the articial nature of reality, and consequently of the whole feature, but also because listeners are required to imagine what is happening without the usual visual stimulus. In other words, listeners 'see' with their ears:

> I'm Humpty Dumpty! [...] I'm spherical, I'm a void—no, I'm not, look at me now, I'm a drainpipe. Hold me, honey, I'm dwindling![244]

In *Margate* Thomas makes use of language as a mediating influence, like the distorting mirrors, that necessarily shapes empirical information, a technique he refined in *Under Milk Wood*.

[244] Ivi, p.115.

4.2 When Hearing Is Seeing: *Under Milk Wood*

What happens when sight is replaced with sound in an artistic work? How do we listeners decode a great amount of data without seeing them? In this paragraph I shall demonstrate how radio texts have changed the perception of a work of art through the massive employment of sound. In the last chapter I have underlined how we have witnessed a gradual process of substitution of vision with sound in Modernism. The progressive end of ocular-centrism, which privileges sight and vision, reaches its most advanced form with radio texts. In other words, given the invisible nature of the medium, radio, which instead is based on audibility, the philosophical tradition of equating sight with knowledge, even the artistic one, happens to be weakened. Just like the Joycean Stephen does, listeners are required to close their eyes and experience the world only through their ears. Auditory perception is crucial in Thomas' *Under Milk Wood.* It describes a day in Llareggub, a fictional place, and presents a heterogenous collection of characters and voices.

Many of such voices belong to dead people such as the five drowned sailors and the dead prostitute, Rosie Probert, who delivers a speech in Captain Cat's memory. Similarly, other two characters, Mr. Ogmore and Mr. Pritchard, pay a visit to Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard, who outlived her two husbands. Moreover, we find disembodied entities such as the Guide-Book. After describing the eccentric dreams of Llareggub's inhabitants and then portraying daytime actions and dialogues of the protagonists until the next night, this play introduces listeners to highly bizarre characters who spend their lives in a very picturesque town. For instance, there is Reverend Eli Jenkins, who blesses each sunrise and sunset with a poem, or Polly Garter, who challenges the traditional moral values by showing her love for her babies whose fathers are numerous, and the lovers Mog Edwards and Myfanwy Price, who never spend time together but communicate only through their daily letters. Though these characters are essential to give the play a more frivolous and lighter effect, their presence is counterbalanced by others who look more aggressive and obscure such as Jack Black, who frequently bursts

into curses and maledictions against "naughty couples"[245] probably because he tries to contain his hidden transgressions, and Mr. and Mrs. Pugh, whose marriage is a sort of mistery given that she always criticizes him and he fantasizes about poisoning her. As Linden Peach has underlined, such characters make *Milk Wood* similar to Thomas's early works because there is a consistent criticism of the conventional morality and hypocrisy that he saw in Welsh Nonconformity[246].

The Guide-Book in *Milk Wood*, whose speech appears at the beginning, seems to be incoherent with the rest of the play:

> VOICE OF A GUIDEBOOK: Less than five hundred souls inhabit the three quaint streets and the few narrow by-lanes and scattered farmsteads that constitute this small, decaying watering-place which may, indeed, be called a 'back-water of life' without disrespect to its natives who possess, to this day, a salty individuality of their own. [...] Though there is little to attract the hillclimber, the healthseeker, the sportsman, or the weekending motorist, the contemplative may, if sufficiently attracted to spare it some leisurely hours, find, in its

[245] D. Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*, http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0608221.txt
[246] L. Peach, *The Prose Writing of Dylan Thomas*, Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1988, p. 103.

> cobbled streets and its little fishing harbour, in its several curious customs, and in the conversation of its local 'characters,' some of that picturesque sense of the past so frequently lacking in towns and villages which have kept more abreast of the times.

Cleverdon, Thomas' editor, deleted the Guide-Book's speech because in his opinion it was "out of key with the narration"[247]. Not only is the Guide-Book's solemn tone in contradiction with the fanciful and unpretentious atmosphere which pervades the rest of the play but its snobbish approach toward Llareggub also creates a caesura between the Guide-Book and the whole text. The Guide-Book has a dismissive tone toward Llareggub which is depicted as a "small, decaying watering-place which may, indeed, be called a 'back water of life'" and only at the end of its speech it adds that "the contemplative may, if sufficiently attracted to spare it some leisurely hours," have recreation in the town's "cobbled streets," "curious customs," and "local characters"[248]. The rest of the play, however, employs a more respectful tone as the characters are not ridiculed and their town gains legendary or biblical features because Thomas describes it as

[247] D. Cleverdon, *The Growth of Milk Wood*, London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1969, p.44.
[248] D. Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*.

"the chosen land"[249]. The clear divergence between the Guide-Book and the rest of the play in presenting characters and settings seems to suggest that there is a discrepancy in the formal stability of the text. For example, we can say that the Guide-Book adopts a distanced position in describing the town, a position which marks a rational approach in 'cutting out' characters and places.

This type of approach at the beginning of the play seems to be very useful because it gives a detailed and realistic account of Llareggub through a series of images and data, an account which seems to be more reliable than that given by the two disembodied narrators. Functioning as a sort of futuristic 'TomTom', a navigation device, the Guide-Book gives the listeners the possibility of figuring out where they are:

> The main street, Coronation Street, consists, for the most part, of humble, two-storied houses many of which attempt to achieve some measure of gaiety by prinking themselves out in crude colours and by the liberal use of pinkwash, though there are remaining a few

[249] Ivi.

> eighteenth-century houses of more pretension, if, on the whole, in a sad state of disrepair[250].

Such a description of the street and buildings from a distanced and photographic perspective is the most objective portrait of the town. Thus, the Guide-Book's introduction seems to be a verbal painting which recalls the strand of travel narrative. From this perspective, Mary Louise Pratt's study can be applied to *Milk Wood*. According to Pratt, travel narrative ratifies the superiority of the "seeing man"[251], who is always an outsider, over the landscape because, by converting the static act of seeing into the dynamic performance of writing, the explorer-writer transforms "native knowledge" Llareggub's inhabitants know well where they live, "into one's own way of codifying and presenting knowledge"[252]. Thus, just like travel narratives do, the Guide-Book stores up all the possible data about the town and then remodulates them according to its cultural values and the narrative form chosen, probably the *Times* travelogue. Dylan Thomas was no stranger to this way of writing given that in his

[250] Ivi.
[251] M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, New York: Routledge, 2008, p.9.
[252] Ivi, p.200.

earlier radio works he had employed such descriptions. For instance, his feature *The Londoner* (1946) seems to be an embryonic version of the Guide-Book because he creates the "Voice of an Expert" who depicts negatively a street in which many workers live describing it as "a grey-bricked street of one hundred houses. Built in 1890. [...] Ugly, inconvenient, and infinitely depressing"[253]. A "Voice of an Old Resident" rejects such a severe response: "No, no. You got it all wrong. It's a nice, lively street"[254]. The rest of the feature then explores the street from the residents' perspective. By the time he wrote *Under Milk Wood*, Thomas had developed new strategies in order to limitate the specific weight of the official experts such as the Guide-Book and the voice for an expert. Instead of counterposing a character against another like in *The Londoner*, Thomas presents two parallel accounts, that of the Guide-Book and then that of Llaregubb's residents. As in a sort of roleplay, we have two opposite descriptions of the town which mark different perspectves from which they are made. For example, in the opening scene this is the way the First Voice introduces the town:

[253] D. Thomas, 'The Londoner', p.76.
[254] Ivi, p. 77.

[Silence.]

FIRST VOICE. [Very softly] To begin at the beginning:

It is Spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the cobblestones silent and the hunched, courters'-and-rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack, fishing boat-bobbing sea.[255]

This incipit recalls the book of *Genesis* when, after a starting silent moment, all things take their distinctive shape and create a nitid landscape in which we can clearly see cobblestones, woods, and sea. This is another verbal painting but unlike the Guide-Book's one the narrator uses adjectives with a less negative connotation, whose visual power seems to be less prevailing. There is no light as witnessed by the sequence of three adjectives which create a climactic progression, "moonless", "starless," and "bible-black".

[255] D. Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*.

Then we have the description of an anthropomorphic wood which is curved and hobble. The initial description ends with a sequence of adjectives which stimulate hearing rather than sight. “Sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack [...]”[256] create a sonic pattern in the listener’s mind where the visual element is not central but cooperates with the auditory one. In other words, listeners are provided with visual and auditory information, something very different from the Guide-Book’s introduction. This passage is fundamental because Dylan Thomas discards, partly, the equation of knowledge with vision – once again οἶδα – employing hearing as a complementary form of perception. Moreover, after several reiterative invitations to listening, we find another description of Llaregubb in which once again the visual element is not dominant but is merged with the auditory one:

> Stand on this hill. This is Llareggub Hill, old as the hills, high, cool, and green, and from this small circle of stones, made not by druids but by Mrs. Beynon’s Billy, you can see all the town below you sleeping in the first of the dawn. You can hear the love-sick

[256] Ivi.

> woodpigeons mooning in bed. A dog barks in his sleep, farmyards away. The town ripples like a lake in the waking haze.[257]

Sound and view are evoked by the sentences “you can see” and “you can hear”. What is remarkable in such a description is the fact that it is not completely realistic but in a certain way it shows aesthetic qualities. For example, from a hill top we can see the green hills as well as the stones and the buildings but it is almost impossible that we can hear pigeons mooning or dogs barking faintly in their sleep. Thus, just like in flights of fancy, our mind leaves the hill top and is imaginatively transported to places that can be heard rather than seen. In this way, vision is implemented by hearing which becomes a necessary tool to decrypt reality. As a consequence, the narrator adopts a perspective which is characterized by an increasing trust in hearing. In fact, the narrator seems to witness the end of ocular-centrism which began with Modernist writing. In addition, the description above reflects what Ong defines as the ‘centering action’ of sound. As he maintains:

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[257] Ivi.

> Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer. [...] I am at the center of my auditory world, which envelops me, establishing me at a kind of core of sensation and existence[258].

One must not simply think that sound is taken for granted in radio plays but must verify how it works in the text and, above all, how descriptions are rendered through it. Dylan Thomas employed sound as a new way of describing things and actions. Whereas visual resources are weakened, sound becomes fundamental because it allows immersion in the story. We plunge into the auditory landscape thanks to the ability of sound to penetrate the inner world of emotions and dreams. In this sense, the First Voice works in this way when it asks listeners to lend an ear, "from where you are you can hear [the] dreams"[259] of the sleeping townspeople. We can maintain that *Milk Wood* undermines seer-seen supremacy in the opening and closing scene of the play where the eye is weakened and

[258] W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London: Routledge, 2002, p.72.
[259] D. Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*.

flanked by the ear. In fact, sight and hearing are merged together as in the following passage which juxtaposes these two senses:

> Only you can hear and see, behind the eyes of sleepers, the movements and countries and mazes and colors and dismays and rainbows and tunes and wishes and flight and fall and despairs and big seas of their dreams[260].

As you can note, sight and hearing come together as certified by the presence of "hear and see" but also "rainbows and tunes". The main consequence of such descriptions is that not only they counterbalance the aseptic and severe description, based on the eye, provided by the Guide-Book but also create a new way of narrating based on the coexistence of sight and hearing which let listeners have a deeper knowledge of Llaregubb than the one the Guide-Book provides.

The disenchantement of the eye with the consequent reinforcement of the ear is also emphasized by characters' depiction. For example, it is significant the role played by Willy Nilly, the local postman, who delivers letters only after opening and reading them. Though *Milk*

[260] Ivi.

Wood shows little dramatic action, Willy Nilly is one of the few characters who hangs around as requested by his job. What is interesting here is the fact that we are informed of his actions by another character, Captain Cat, who is blind but functions as a narrator and informs us of Willy's tasks. Thus, through Captain Cat, we learn that not only Willy Nilly reads the letters but also he recites their content. Moreover, he interacts with their addressees by impersonating the sender:

> WILLY NILLY. Here's a letter for you [...] all the way from Builth Wells. A gentleman wants to study birds and can he have accommodation for two weeks and a bath vegetarian.
>
> MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD. No.
>
> WILLY NILLY (Persuasively). You wouldn't know he was in the house, Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard. He'd be out in the mornings at the bang of dawn with his bag of breadcrumbs and his little telescope...

> MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD. And come home at all hours covered with feathers. I don't want persons in my nice clean rooms breathing all over the chairs.
>
> WILLY NILLY. Cross my heart, he won't breathe.[261]

Willy cannot be described in visual terms because he has not a fixed, univocal identity. He can embody as many characters as those who send a letter to Llaregubb's residents, a number which can be potentially infinite. The only way to 'know' him is by listening to his countless performances which are narrated by another blind character who in this sense is the embodiment of the visual failure as the method to know the world. Moreover, although each of the residents remains isolated in his or her house, by communicating the content of the letters to each characters, Willy Nilly functions as a broadcast network which connects all the residents. In other words, everybody knows everything about the others. For instance, when he delivers a letter to Mog Edwards, he says:

[261] Ivi.

> Very small news. Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard won't have birds in the house, and Mr. Pugh's bought a book on how to do in Mrs. Pugh.[262]

Since each character/listener cannot see the other ones and the places where they live, *Milk Wood* can repeatedly create a sort of auditive connection between them who are separated on the stage but are unified by listening to Willy's news. From this perspective, it is enlightening what Lewis writes about radio:

> It is the nature of radio to establish connections that do not exist in space: such connections are entirely aural and not in the least visual, since they depend on a contiguity of voices, not of speakers.[263]

From this perspective, Willy seems to be a sort of news bullettin and, from a more general point of view, the epitome of radio itself. In other words, Willy embodies Thomas's reflection on the medium itself because the author outlines this character as the connective tissue among the others. Just like radio can potentially establish

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[262] Ivi.
[263] P. Lewis, 'The Radio Road to Llareggub' in *British Radio Drama,* Ed. John Drakakis, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.103.

connections with people separate in space so Willy does. He is the medium which, adopting several identities, everyday reproduces contents depending on those who produce them. Put differently, Willy is a 'neutral' character just like radio, the medium, is. Both Willy and radio must be filled with contents and identities.

Moreover, the constant overlapping of voices is significant also because it can connect people who are spatially distant. This is the case of two characters in *Milk Wood*, Mog Edwards and his lover, Myfanwy Price. They are "happily apart from one another at the top and the sea end of the town"[264]. In other words, they are physically distant from each other but keep in touch through letters. In this way the distance is nullified by their voices and dialogues:

> MISS PRICE. I will knit you a wallet of forget-me-not blue, for the money to be comfy. I will warm your heart by the fire so that you can slip it in under your vest when the shop is closed.

[264] D. Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*.

MR. EDWARDS. Myfanwy, Myfanwy, before the mice gnaw at your bottom drawer will you say

MISS PRICE. Yes, Mog, yes, Mog, yes, yes, yes.[265]

We could say that, therefore, not only voices connect isolated individuals through a traveling character, Willy Nilly, but also delete physical space in the case of the two lovers.

[265] Ivi.

4.3 Samuel Beckett's multifaceted Radio Texts

In a 1957 letter to his publisher, Barney Rosset, Beckett underlined that *All That Fall* (1956) was not a stage play and for this reason theatrical adaptations were not encouraged. He wrote:

> If we can't keep our genres more or less distinct, or extricate them from the confusion that has them where they are, we might as well go home and lie down. *All That Falls* is a specifically radio play, or rather radio text, for voices not bodies. I have already refused to have it "staged" and I cannot think of it in such terms.[266]

The above passage is very significant for several reasons. First of all, Beckett defends the autonomous nature of radio texts and, secondly, he maintains that a radio work cannot be considered as a synonym of a stage play because it is based on "voices not bodies". The contrast between voices and bodies, between radio plays and stage plays, is so obvious as hardly needing to be underlined. What is interesting is the intersection of oral and written elements, of voice

[266] S. Beckett, *Beckett and Death*, ed. S. Barfield, M. Feldman, P. Tew, New York: Continuum, 2009, p.170.

and text. Beckett's interest in the relationship between oral performance and writing may reflect his perception of the changing scenario in the age of broadcasting. The transition from the written, thus seeable, word to the audible one creates an instability in the text because it must be re-imagined and adapted to hearing. In doing so, the changing connection between orality and literacy may have suggested new ways for Beckett to conceptualize the relationship between written texts and performance. Beckett's radio plays were written and broadcast during a period when McLuhan was developing his theories concerning media's influence on consciousness. McLuhan argued that communication technologies modify what he defined as the "sensorium" or a "ratio"[267] of the senses. Individuals in a predominant oral society, for example, might have developed hearing and rely more on sound to interpret reality than people in a literate society would. According to McLuhan, alphabetic writing and especially print had privileged and sharpened the visual sense of literate Westerners, a concept re-affirmed and

[267] M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, Toronto:University Toronto Press, 1962, p.35.

examined in depth by Gabriele Frasca[268] in his study on the oral and written forces which shape literature. In other words, with the development of radio technology, a culture that had long privileged print and the written word and had relied on one sense – sight – was challenged by new technologies and employed other senses, hearing. Such an awakening, McLuhan continues, encouraged twentieth-century artists to translate their artistic beliefs "from one radical mode [...] into another", just as poets and playwrights[269] had done during the Renaissance's translation from oral to print culture. He saw the twentieth century as a time of great alienation and confusion, "the early part of an age for which the meaning of print culture is becoming as alien as the meaning of manuscript culture was to the eighteenth century"[270]. In other words, people, accustomed to the old 'regime' based on print, felt alienated when they found themselves in a society which, thanks to technological developments, de-emphasized the old medium in order to promote the new one.

[268] G. Frasca, *La Letteratura nel Reticolo Mediale*, Roma: Meltemi, 2005.

[269] Ivi, p.73.
[270] Ivi, p.135.

This sense of alienation is very frequent in many of Beckett's radio plays. I will focus on his first radio text *All That Fall* because in this work we find the sense of alienation, created by the sounds of modernity and experienced by the protagonist, as well as the mixture of sound and silence which characterises Beckett's radiophonic poetics.

4.4 *All That Fall*: alienation, sound, and silence

Inspired by the Irish people he knew during his childhood, Beckett wrote *All That Fall*, a sort of mystery tale in which he disseminated humour and pathos. It is the story of Maddy Rooney, a fat woman heading toward Boghill local train station to meet and get her blind husband on his birthday. Along the way, Maddy meets several gentlemen, each heading her way at varying speeds. At the train station she learns that her husband's train has been delayed. When

the train finally arrives, Dan, Maddy's husband, is not able to explain the delay to Maddy's satisfaction. As the couple slowly walk home they remain silent. The silence is broken by Dan tapping his walking stick on the ground, and Maddy's heavy and noisy footsteps. It begins to rain when Jerry, the station boy, catch up to them because Dan has forgotten a mysterious object at the train station. Moreover, Jerry reveals the reason why the train was late: a child had an accident and he was found dead. The story ends with Dan and Maddy disappearing into a tempest of wind and rain while we hear their crosstalks and mutual reproaches.

As if interpreting McLuhan's observations, Beckett's radio plays often portray characters who live in a growing urban enviroment which alienates its inhabitants because of the rapid advances in technology, advances which change the soundscape. In *All That Fall*, for example, such presence of new technologies makes Maddy Rooney feel uncomfortable. During Maddy's walk to the Boghill train station, Maddy's slow and rhythmic footsteps contrast with the sound of modernity embodied by vehicles, such as horse carts, bicycles, and automobiles, which hurtle on the road. Moreover, the

new soundscape seems to be at odds with the protagonist herself whom her husband describes her as "struggling with a dead language"[271]. Beckett portrays characters struggling to communicate effectively and interact with the new sonic scenario characterized by new sounds and new media. From this perspective, words seem to be useless because they cannot describe, thus encapsulate, the new reality and, to a greater extent, their failure seems to certify the great innovation of the new medium, radio, that excels at combining words with sound and music. This ability was underlined by Arnheim who identified the characteristic of radio to merge verbal and musical arts:

> [w]hat hitherto could exist only separately now fits organically together [on radio]: the human being in the corporeal world talks with disembodied spirits, music meets speech on equal terms[272].

In creating *All That Fall*, Beckett employed sound and silence as the leading aural narrative in which one could isolate the main themes of the radio text while at the same time one could perceive a pattern based on soundcentrism which, according to Donald McWhinnie who

[271] S. Beckett, *All That Fall* in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, London: Faber, 1986, p.182.
[272] R. Arnheim, *Radio*, Trans. M.Ludwig & H. Read, London: Faber & Faber, 1936, p.195

produced the first BBC production in 1957, provided "a mixture of realism and poetry, frustration and farce"[273]. *All That Fall* was the first of Beckett's truly musical radio dramas; that is to say, it was a sort of music composition with a prelude, and crescendos and decrescendos. As stated before, even though the verbal elements are important, the innovative aspect of this radio text lies in the fact that they are useless without the manipulation of the soundscape. Beginning with the prelude, Beckett employed a four footstep sequence which is present throughout the radio text and signals Maddy's walk toward the train station. Such a four beat repetead regular pattern is merged with other sounds such as Maddy's shortness of breath which always marks the first and the third footstep. Beckett then employes music that seems to come from an old gramophone whose notes expand from a house as the protagonist passes by, and, once again, the music fades away and is overtaken by the sound of her footsteps. At a later stage but with the same effect, we hear Dan whose voice overlaps and then merges with

[273] D. McWhinnie, *The Art of Radio*, London: Faber and Faber, 1959, p.133.

music, “Poor woman. All alone in that ruinous old house”[274]. After this short comment, the music keeps playing and then the sound of the footsteps is repeated. As the music stops, Maddy Rooney starts to hum to the music that she heard, as she coordinates her humming with the four beat pattern of her feet. This cadence in which voice and footsteps follow the same music pattern – the time signature of 4/4 – sets the pace of the whole play. As I have already underlined, Beckett introduced many sounds in *All That Fall*: horse carts, bicycles, automobiles, the tapping on the ground of Dan’s walking stick, and the sound of steam locomotive arriving at the train station. Similarly to four beat pattern, we can identify here another sonic regular pattern, a crescendo or, employing literary vocabulary, a climax. The sounds of new technologies are arranged in an ascending order from carts to train where the latter annihilates all other sounds and noises with its powerful whistle. Such sounds are important not only because Beckett inserts them in the play in a logical progression of increasing loudness but also because of their potential threat and danger. According to such a progression,

[274] S. Beckett, *All That Fall* in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p.172.

Christy's horse cart is the less noisy but also the less dangerous for Maddy. As the sounds become more intricate and incessant, Maddy feels gradually uncomfortable with Mr Tyler's bicycle bell, and Connolly's van which "passes with thunderous rattles"[275] almost knocking them all over. Finally, Mr. Slocum gives Maddy a ride in his car. She decides to accept and we hear Slocum's difficulty to start the engine and then, underlining the danger of this new technology, we learn that he kills a hen with his car. It follows a conversation between Maddy and Mr Slocum which reproduces all the sounds and noises of the car:

> MR. SLOCUM: [Dreamily.] All morning she went like a dream and now she is dead. That's what you get for a good deed. [Pause.Hopefully.] Perhaps if I were to choke her. [He does so, presses the starter. The engine roars. Roaring to make himself heard.] She was getting too much air! [He throttles down, grinds in his first gear, moves off, changes up in a grinding of gears.]

[275] Ivi, p.175.

> MRS. ROONEY: [In anguish,] Mind the hen! [Scream of brakes. Squawk of hen.] Oh, mother, you have squashed her, drive on, drive on![276]

These sounds and pauses outline the whole play and function as sonic markers in the progression of the whole text. Like a musical composition, sounds and pauses are employed to mark the plot development whereas the peak sound levels and the consequent silences outline the rising and falling of the dramatic action. The soundscape reaches its climax with the sharp sound of the train approaching the station. The whistle blows away each sound in the scene and is contrasted by Dan's tapping of his walking stick. Not only is the whistle the laudest of the sounds employed by Beckett in the play but also signals its dangerousness when Jerry reveals that a child died because of the train.

Silences and pauses in *All That Fall* are important too. Maddy almost stops to listen to the music from a house, and she stops everytime she meets other characters. Pauses are important because they mark the apparent calm just before and after something potentially

[276] Ivi, pp. 178-179.

dangerous to Maddy is about to happen. For example, we have a pause – stop – after Maddy is frightened by Tyler's bell bicycle or before of Slocum's car. From this perspective, every rising of the dramatic action is always counterbalanced by the subsequent falling of it.

Similarly, silences are very meaningful in the radio play. According to what Alan Beck writes about radio:

> Silence is full of signification and replicates, for the listener, the position of the audience in the performance venue. It is part of what I call 'listening to the listening.'…Radio has a fear of stasis, of a silence that could almost signify death.[277]

We can adopt Beck's theory for the analysis of Beckett's radio text. Dan's silence about the real cause of the train delay as well as Maddy's weak attempt to receive an answer from her husband seem to show their reluctance to confront themselves with the tragic element of the story, the accidental death of the child. When Jerry tells them that a child fell out of the carriage, Maddy and Dan are

[277] A. Beck, 'The Death of Radio? An Essay in Radio-Philosophy for the Digital Age', http://www.savoyhill.co.uk/deathofradio/index.html

paralyzed by the silence. Beckett is telling us that when a child dies so tragically words are useless. This is the reason why he adopts the strategy of silence to describe the deep desperation that the characters are suddenly forced to confront with. The dramatic force of words is deactivated in favour of silence and sounds. In order to describe Mr and Mrs Rooney's emotional state Beckett employs another climactic sequence where the growing anguish of the protagonists is marked by music and then by onomatopoeic sounds, and finally by words. The rising of the dramatic action reaches its acme with the employment of Schubert's musical piece entitled *Death and the Maiden*. The rapid crescendo of this piece at the end of the drama underlines the theme of death around which all the action revolves. At this point, we can ask ourselves why Beckett uses an anticlimactic pattern. Why do words come after music? As I have written above, words in *All That Fall* are not able to decode reality, they cannot explain what is happening. This is the reason why the final dialogue between Jerry and the Rooneys looks grotesque and absurd. In other words, no joke intended, if one is not able to explain with words his/her own life since everything seems to be dangerous

because of the rapid advances in technology which have produced a sense of alienation in the individuals, now how can one explain death caused by technology itself? The result is a feeling of anguish anticipated by Schubert's music and accomplished by the final dialogue:

MRS ROONEY: What was it, Jerry?

JERRY: It was a little child, Ma'am.

[MR ROONEY groans.]

MRS ROONEY: What do you mean, it was a little child?

JERRY: It was a child fell out of the carriage, Ma'am. [Pause.] On to the

line, Ma'am. [Pause.] Under the wheels, Ma'am. [Silen

ce. JERRY runs off. His steps die away. Tempest of wind

and rain. It abates. They move on. Dragging steps, etc.

Tempest of wind and rain.][278]

[278] S. Beckett, *All That Fall* in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p.199.

Conclusion

The era of literary Modernism coincided with a dramatic expansion of broadcast media throughout Europe, which challenged new artists to engage with new modes of expression and provided them with a global audience for their work. In historicinzing these developments, the present work has explored the encounter between prominent Modernist writers and the new media. Specifically, I have concentrated on—and attempted to problematize—a new approach the Modernist aesthetics: one which attempts to order and sublimate sound. Such an outlook leads us to a double conclusion. On one hand, we can maintain that the relationship between Modernism and the new media is fundamental to dismantle the idea that this artistic movement was self-contained and elitist, and on the other hand, a new aesthetics of writing was developed in those years, something that we could define as 'sonic writing' thanks to the pervasive influence of radio in those years.

Modernist poets, as writers, common readers, and listeners of radio programs, engaged with the sound through a medium that was also

developing new codes and models for conveying and receiving information through sounds and speech. From this perspective, characterized by assemblage and the rendering of distinct and multiple speakers – curiously we use the same word, speakers, to mean the part of a radio where the sound comes out – radio programming shares many elements with the Modernist text that employed fragmented, quoted, collaged, juxtaposed, and stream of consciousness voices.

Modernists wanted their novels to sound out, to be listened to, and they achieved this by including the sounds of everyday life formally in their works and paying particular attention to how their characters were shaped by those sounds. In this context, the formal experiments for which Modernists are so well known, stream of consciousness, fragmented and nonlinear narratives, and poetic prose, all hinge on a shift in sensibility from the eye to the ear. Modernist writers were aware that it was no longer enough to allow a reader to see a picture, to envision a character in a scene. Though Conrad, a forefather of Modernism, attests that the job of the artist is, above all else, "to make you see," he also makes a clear reference

to Walter Pater's famous assertion that "[a]ll art constantly aspires towards the condition of music"[279].

Ultimately, Conrad stated that fiction must make an "impression conveyed through the senses," and "aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music which is the art of arts"[280]. Steven Connor[281], convincingly argues that a new auditory sense of self is reflected in the literature of the twentieth century writers like Marinetti, Woolf, Joyce, and Samuel Beckett. These writers often include representations of sound technologies in their work, and consistently depict characters listening to sound. In particular, these descriptions of sounds in Woolf's novels are very instructive: they ask readers to be attentive to them and to consider the ways in which they are absent-mindedly consumed. By giving a new pre-eminence to sound in the novel, Woolf makes the reader aware of the subtle auditory perceptions that make up daily life, and are often disregarded as mere background noises. Woolf makes her novel 'be' something rather than just

[279] J. Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17731/17731-h/17731-h.htm
[280] Ivi.
[281] Cfr S. Connor, *The Modern Auditory I. Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present.*

'describe' something by presenting sounds of the real world, along with showing how her characters perceive and are influenced by those sounds. Woolf's use of sound not only plays with the inner ear of the reader but also brings the common and the poetic into her prose because not only the common sounds of everyday life imply a connotative meaning that the reader has to decode but also they undermine the common flow of narrative. Woolf herself proposes such a merge when she prophesizes that the novel of the future would "have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose".[282] In other words, if in the nineteenth century there was a connection between photography and literature because both wanted to capture reality as it was, in the twentieth century it is possible to identify a close relation between radio and literary Modernism. Inspired by radio which was based on 'listening', Modernist writers developed new narrative strategies which relied on the ear. Indeed the interior monologue could be 'heard' by the reader as well as Modernist characters were thrown into memories by hearing certain sounds, and engaged with the world around them by

[282] V.Woolf, 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' in *Collected Essays*, New York:Harcourt, vol.II, 1967, p.224.

listening. In other words, while the eye had not lost its importance in the modernist novel, the ear had suddenly joined it to assemble a more complete sensory experience. Aural perception was central to Modernism's poetics. Woolf, and, before her, Joyce describe objects and events in terms of their sound and employ devices such as assonance, alliteration and spatial organization to elicit and encourage aural reception. Moreover, one of the main features of Woolf's novels is her personal mode of visual perception which stands between opacity and transparency and, consequently, the eye in her works is never crucial to decode reality. Expressing a fundamental visual indeterminacy in her perception of reality, Woolf seems to reinforce the idea that other senses, in particular hearing, are necessary to grasp it. This means that the loss of determinacy and clarity expressed in vague and blurred vision not only affects her characters' ways of seeing but narrative at large. The uncertainty of perception highlights the provisional character of reality that cannot be encompassed by a single conceptual view but it is rather made of echoes and sounds, and leads to a dispersal of perspectives and

meanings, releases chains of associations, and enables the reader to establish connections between them.

In conclusion, Modernist literature aspired to the cultural effects of music by rethinking how language relates to other musical and non-musical kinds of sound. In this way, the presence of sound in literature defamiliarizes the prose of the novel. As sounds are mediated through literary language, the reader's attention is drawn to the texture and acoustics of the words themselves by creating a cadence and a rhythmic progression which is layered into the narrative. As we have seen, this is particular evident in *All that Fall*.

The impact of radio technology on literature was fundamental for other reasons too. Auditory technologies generated the so called radio text. This process was fully accomplished by Thomas's and Beckett's radio dramas. Here, sound became central. The famous phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan, "the medium is the message"[283] could be used as the subtext that perfectly explains what Thomas and Beckett had in mind. Meaning that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, Mcluhan maintains that there is a

[283] M. McLuhan, 'The Medium Is the Message', http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/mcluhan.mediummessage.pdf

symbiotic relationship between the medium and its content by which the former influences the way the latter is perceived. This means that not only radio texts became a sort of 'national theatre' because they could be listened to by everybody but that their structure was extensively conditioned by the medium itself. That is to say, Modernist radio dramatists created their own radiogenic aesthetics. In other words, radio offered a middle space between the public stage and the private page. For example, despite the fact that *Under Milk Wood* was adapted many times for stage, cinema and television, Dylan Thomas underlined that his radio text was created specifically for radio. This was not a snobbish remark. The unity of this radio text is based upon the fact that all the voices are in harmony and depend on the radio structure and its capability to talk across distances and establish connections based on sonic and aural contiguity rather than physical contact. That is to say Thomas collects, transcribes, and condenses voices coming 'from somewhere not seen'.

Moreover, radio functioned to transform the notion of spatiality. It could cover great distances and connect people. Thomas employed

this feature to build his character Willy, who is a sort of news bullettin and, from a more general point of view, the epitome of radio itself. In other words, Willy embodies Thomas's reflection on the medium itself because the author employs this character as the connective tissue among the others. Just like radio can potentially establish connections with people separate in space so Willy does. He is the medium which, adopting several identities, everyday expresses contents according to those who produce them. Put differently, Willy is a 'neutral' character just like radio, the medium is. Both Willy and radio must be filled with contents and identities.

Moreover, the constant overlapping of voices is significant also because it can connect people who are spatially distant. This is the case of Mog Edwards and Myfanwy Price who live far from each other from each other but communicate through letters.

In conclusion, the relationship between radio and Modernism was mutual and ambivalent. Radio gave Modernist artists the chance to promote their own aesthetic ideas and works and at the same time there was a deep impact of radio on the written page. In a historical moment in which, due to political causes and scientific discoveries,

the crisis of the belief in the continuity between seeing and knowing caused Modernists to develop an 'internal gaze', a gaze that brought value to their work by affirming that only the Modernist writer could see a hidden inner truth, which was not debased through the limitations of the human eye, it was quite natural that alternative forms of perceptions were reconsidered and developed. If sight was unreliable then the only chance to 'see' truth was to close eyes and listen to it.

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