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“Beautiful Colored, Musical Things”:
Metaphors and Strategies for Interartistic Exchange in Early European Modernism

by

Polina Dimcheva Dimova

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Eric Naiman, Chair
Professor Robert P. Hughes
Professor Barbara Spackman
Professor Michael André Bernstein
Professor Richard Taruskin

Spring 2010

“Beautiful Colored, Musical Things”:
Metaphors and Strategies for Interartistic Exchange in Early European Modernism

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Abstract

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This dissertation investigates the aesthetic, cultural, and scientific context that allowed for the flourishing exchanges among the arts at the European *fin de siècle*. In contrast to standard impressionistic accounts of the Inter-Arts, it foregrounds and examines the time’s immensely popular synaesthetic metaphor, while culturally and formally analyzing interartistic works. This work surveys the diverse and heterogeneous discourses that engage with synaesthesia: the figurative mixing or conflation of sense-impressions, for instance, in the perception of sound as color. It shows that the synaesthetic metaphor, usually treated as a trite Modernist mannerism, not only epitomized the synthetic aspirations of the Modernist arts, but also invigorated the exchanges among the arts at the *fin de siècle* by bridging aesthetic, scientific, and ethical discourses. As a nexus of controversial and fascinating cultural debates, synaesthesia acquired an intricate depth and complex resonance, which this dissertation examines by identifying synaesthetically informed *fin-de-siècle* cultural and scientific concepts (such as electricity and the phonograph) and using them as interpretative tools to analyze three specific interartistic sites of literary, artistic, and musical modernism. Chapter One shows how Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé* overcomes its own language by turning to the senses, generates new extra-verbal life, both sensory and interartistic, and is transposed across the senses and the arts in Aubrey Beardsley’s drawings and Richard Strauss’s opera. In the second chapter, this work examines Aleksandr Skriabin’s synaesthetic symphony “Prometheus” and the Russian Symbolist poetics of mystical and electric light. The final chapter discusses the phenomenological synaesthetics of Rainer Maria Rilke’s middle-period *thing* poems (*Dinggedichte*) and their involvement with the visual arts, by focusing on Rilke’s fascination with Rodin. It then studies the development of Rilke’s synaesthetic theory in his late “Sonnets to Orpheus.” Figured as a synaesthetic and *phono-graphic* translation, Rilke’s poetic act seeks both a primordial and a technologically motivated wholeness of sensory experience. Additionally, this work offers an online companion to the dissertation that makes all the musical examples playable: an important feature of the dissertation is its combining of musicological and literary analysis, as well as visual analysis. “Beautiful Colored, Musical Things” proposes a new way of conceptualizing early interartistic Modernism, by suggesting that the synaesthetic metaphor defines and motivates the interartistic exchanges at the *fin de siècle*. In its critical and methodological goals, this dissertation seeks to foster interdisciplinary exchange, and to overcome the limitations of discipline-bound criticism.

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DEDICATION

To Lydia, Dimo, Biljana, and Niki

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have barely touched upon in my dissertation, namely, those of taste and culinary art. I thank them heartily for their delicious cooking that brought some variety to my simple Bulgarian cuisine. First, I want to express my immense gratitude to Nicholas Proudfoot (guitar and banjo) for his encouragement, care, and optimism, as well as for the exciting food he cooked for me (some old time favorites: pasta pesto, rendang beef, salmon in miso marinade, tarte tatin, fresh berry fruit tart, and various unacceptably twisted versions of *banitsa*, the Bulgarian feta pie). Piotr Gibas, an exquisite chef of French, Chinese, and Polish cuisine, I thank for the most poignant synaesthetic metaphor for both dissertation writing and life in general: “out of the manure came the lily.” To Amanda Buster, a superb pastry chef, I am grateful for making wondrous pies, cookies, and cakes for me, as well as for helping me concoct a last-minute glazing for my dissertation. My I-House friends, who are too many to list here, I thank for sharing some dubious food with me at the International House, while spicing it up with mirth or sarcasms. Special words of thanks are due also to Alyosha Efros (potatoes); Nicole Eaton (tasty dips and spreads but never fish); Sunanda Marella (Indian cuisine); Filippo Marsili (chicken, pasta, and risotto); Sabrina K. Rahman (Easter lunch and dinner and amazing cakes); and Matthew St. Clair (veggie soups).

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I have created two interactive on-line music handouts that are meant primarily for scholars in the humanities who are not musicologists. The examples appear also at the end of the first interlude and the second chapter. To access and play the on-line music handout that accompanies this chapter, go to <<http://www.sibeliuseducation.com/index.php?ses=worksheets.scorch>>. Next, search for "Strauss" or "Scriabin" to retrieve the worksheet you need. To listen to the handout, you will need to download the free plug-in SibeliusScorch. After downloading Scorch, click on the worksheet you need (either "Strauss's "Salome": Disembodied Voices", or "Scriabin's "Prometheus": Sound and Light"). You can now play and listen to the examples to which I refer in the dissertation. All examples are presented on the same handout, but you can pause, fast-forward, or rewind the worksheet to find the relevant example. A thin blue line follows the music, as it plays, and indicates visually on the score which example is being played. All examples are clearly marked by a number, and each has an accompanying text, summarizing or clarifying ideas I discuss here.

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INTRODUCTION

Synaesthesia at the *Fin de Siècle*

In 1890 the International Congress of Physiological Psychology convened in Paris to probe the most fascinating and most challenging psychological phenomenon of the day: *Audition colorée* or Color Hearing. A committee of seven prominent psychologists had set themselves the task of sorting out and standardizing the existing multifarious terminology of this emerging field of inquiry. They aimed to delimit the great variety of terms coined for cross-modal phenomena and agree on a clearer, more accurate vocabulary. Most important, the overarching goal of the Congress was to advance the scientific study and understanding of “color hearing,” which stood *pars pro toto* for the whole range of possibility in the blending of the senses: “Le Congrès émet le voeu qu’il soit procédé à une enquête sur les phénomènes dits d’audition colorée, en prenant ce terme dans le sens le plus general de liaison constante entre les sensations de divers sens (en allemand: Sekundäre Empfindungen, Photismen, Phonismen etc.)”; “The Congress expresses the wish for an investigation to be undertaken into the phenomena collectively known as ‘color hearing’ in the most general sense of this term, which describes the invariable connection among the sensations produced by different senses (in German: Sekundäre Empfindungen, Photismen, Phonismen, etc.).”¹ Indeed the hypotheses and explanations of what we now call synaesthesia proliferated at the turn of the century, as did the terms trying to capture it, all vocabulary evoking its ideological bias. As a term, *Pseudoesthesie* already made cross-modal sensations suspect. Were the sensations labeled pseudo-aesthetic real or delusive? *Sekundäre Empfindungen*, secondary sensations, emphasized the derivative nature of the phenomenon, which seemed to require an original, or primary sensation, let’s say sound, so as to trigger a secondary sensation, let’s say, color. In this way, the response to a physical stimulus would need one sensation as a mediator for the secondary sensation. Part of the problem with synaesthesia arose from the sheer multiplicity and diversity of the sensations cluttered under this umbrella term: sound photisms, light phonisms, taste phonisms, smell photisms; color and form percepts for pain, warmth, touch; color percepts for forms.² The excessive nature of the phenomenon, its semi-illusory status, its associations with hallucinations and hashish-induced sensations made it unverifiable, unclassifiable, impossible to grasp, and impossible to pin down. Possibly, it was a creative figment, based merely on introspective accounts as the only evidence available for synaesthetic inquiry.

¹ Quoted in Friedrich Mahling, *Das Problem der “Audition colorée,”* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1926) 13-14.

² This is Bleuler and Lehmann’s terminology outlined in Mahling 15-16. Eugen Bleuler und Karl Lehmann, *Zwangmässige Lichtempfindungen durch Schall und Verwandte Erscheinungen auf dem Gebiete der andern Sinnesempfindungen* (Leipzig: Fues’s Verlag, 1881).

Two Poems by Charles Baudelaire

A locus classicus of synaesthesia, Charles Baudelaire's sonnet "Correspondences," *Correspondances* (c. 1852-56?) from Flowers of Evil, *Fleurs du Mal* articulates in a poetic form a manifesto of French Symbolism and appears as an obligatory opening piece to most anthologies of symbolism.³ A more interesting curiosity, which is unlikely to be mentioned in critical studies, is that "Correspondences" makes a prominent appearance in both recent and contemporaneous scientific volumes on synaesthesia such as Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings (1997) or Friedrich Mahling's comprehensive overview of the turn of the century scientific literature on synaesthesia, Das Problem der "Audition colorée" (1926).⁴ While the seminal French Symbolist and synaesthetic poem of the second half of the nineteenth century continues to fascinate readers and scholars alike, engendering a multiplicity of diverging interpretations, it has served since its inception as a case study for the physiological condition of synaesthesia, promising to a host of researchers an insight into synaesthesia's causes and functioning, its scientific explanations or its pseudo-scientific nature.

Unlike psychoanalytic case studies, synaesthesia case studies did not analyze the psyche of the "I" as a battleground for the unconscious and the conscious; they did not look for symptoms and their hidden sources that would be thereby resolved. Rather, at the turn of the century scientists attempted to locate cases of synaesthesia, to catalogue and classify them, and to find an overarching order and regularity that governed the inconsistencies within the studied subjects and their wildly diverging accounts. This cataloguing impulse in recording case studies of synaesthesia in their multifarious, diverging particularities parallels the collector's impulse of the creative artist at the turn-of-the-century.⁵ Given the rarity of synaesthesia and the novelty of such research, synaesthesia also had to be confirmed as a scientific phenomenon. By opening the *fin-de-siècle* scientific discourse on synaesthesia to aesthetics, my dissertation aims to establish synaesthesia's significance for early Modernism and its intellectual climate. My reading of synaesthesia will not limit itself to aesthetic interpretations but will involve ethical and psychological accounts of synaesthesia, as well as engage with science and the technology (1860-1930) in the so-called "heyday of synaesthesia."⁶

Let us now turn to the sonnet "Correspondences," examine it through its multifarious synaesthetic discourses, and tackle the synaesthetic trope and phenomenon through a variety of comparative perspectives:

³ Henri Dorra, ed., Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: U of C Press, 1994) 11.

⁴ See John E. Harrison and Simon Baron Cohen, "Synaesthesia: An Introduction," Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1997) 99-100. See bibliography list in Friedrich Mahling, Das Problem der "Audition colorée" (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1926) 104, 120.

⁵ In most recent studies of synaesthesia, it has been suggested that the varieties of synaesthetic experiences in terms of the particular blending of the two or more senses may in fact have different causes and neural locations. Synaesthesia seems to have emerged as an umbrella term for very different phenomena, for the most part, not yet differentiated or studied in detail. David M. Eagleman, "Hearing Colors, Tasting Shapes: The Behavior, Neuroscience, and Genetics of Synesthesia," Neuroscience Lecture Series, UC Berkeley, April 3, 2010.

⁶ I rely on Cytowic's historicization of synaesthesia, which he writes as a preamble to his recent neuroscientific study of the phenomenon. See also Mahling for a contemporaneous historical-critical account of synaesthesia around 1900. Friedrich Mahling, Das Problem der "Audition colorée" (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1926).

Correspondances

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laisent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
— Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.

Correspondences⁷

Nature is a temple in which living pillars
Sometimes give voice to confused words;
Man passes there through forests of symbols
Which look at him with understanding eyes.

Like prolonged echoes mingling in the distance
In a deep and tenebrous unity,
Vast as the dark of night and as the light of day,
Perfumes, sounds, and colors correspond.

There are perfumes as cool as the flesh of children,
Sweet as oboes, green as meadows
— And others are corrupt, and rich, triumphant,

With power to expand into infinity,
Like amber and incense, musk, benzoin,
That sing the ecstasy of the soul and senses.

To examine the aesthetic theory of synaesthesia and the questions it poses, we need to rehearse the poem's main aesthetic program and points of critical contention that concern synaesthesia. In his poem, Baudelaire formulates a theory of the symbol (in the octet) and a theory of synaesthesia (in the sestet). In the first two quatrains, Baudelaire attempts to recover the original unity of the material and the spiritual world on a vertical plane, by creating a world woven out of mystic Swedenborgian correspondences.⁸ The “profound and tenebrous unity” beyond the phenomenal world of multiplicity is a recovery of these now-lost, unintelligible correspondences. The reclaimed correspondences reunite the wandering man of materialist modernity and spiritual nature, the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the intangible. In

⁷ Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. William Aggeler (Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954).

⁸ For a brief overview of the sources for Baudelaire's “Correspondences,” see Dorra 8-11.

this unison, the forests of symbols can become once again legible and familiar to man. So, the two parts of the symbol, *symbolon* recognize each other again and gather in a synaesthetic unison at the end of the octet: “Perfumes, sounds, and colors correspond.” This vertical unity of the symbol, as a compound of the material and the spiritual, allows man to access anew the mystic speech of the forests of symbols.

The synaesthetic line 8 leads into the two tercets, which seek these correspondences on a horizontal level among the five senses: perfumes evoke the child’s touchable flesh, the oboe’s sound, the sweet taste, and the color and smell of the fresh green plains. At the end of the sonnet, the senses and the soul sing the ecstasy of their merger. Paul de Man has called into question the unison conjured up in Baudelaire’s sonnet, by showing the slippage in line thirteen where the tautological enumeration of “amber, musk, benzoin, and incense” substitutes for the synaesthetic analogy; thus, the totalizing thrust of the poem can be said to disintegrate.⁹

These spatial interpretations of “Correspondences” imply vertical synaesthetic unity and horizontal synaesthetic fragmentation. However, time also figures prominently in the poem by isolating an irretrievably lost past when the relationship between man and nature was unproblematic and nature was legible and transparent to man. Walter Benjamin construes the idea of the correspondences as remembrances, “an experience which seeks to establish itself in crisis-proof form.”¹⁰ Beyond the realm of actual experience, the correspondences ritually recover and preserve the irretrievably lost. Instead of focusing exclusively on the past, we can discern a future-oriented temporal perspective in the poem where the two parts of the *symbolon* are reunited again in the future. In this sense, the synaesthetic echo in the poem resignifies synaesthesia and synaesthetic union by capturing not the original sound, not the past that Proust would seek to recover, not that Benjaminian “something irretrievably lost,” but the echo’s continuing forever-resounding reverberations. Performed by the dark iterations of the French nasal “on” sound: “Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent,” the echo miraculously becomes synaesthetic, as the superimposing sounds multiply in colors, lights, and perfumes only to form a deeper, more powerful unity as the echo gathers strength and approaches from far away, acquiring immense proportions, “Vast as the dark of night and as the light of day” (l. 7). Thus, the synaesthetic echo opens up new possibilities for understanding synaesthesia in the *fin-de-siècle* arts. Synaesthesia in its sensory proliferation creates a future-oriented synaesthetic anticipation of unity predicated on the multiplicity of echoes, colors, sounds, and smells.

Like Baudelaire’s “Correspondences,” the poem “Alpine Horn,” *Al’piiskii rog* from Pilot Stars, *Kormchie zvezdy* (1903) by Viacheslav Ivanov, the prominent theoretician of Russian Symbolism and close associate of Skriabin’s, whom we will encounter in Chapter Two, construes the echo and the reflection as privileged and spiritual. The echo itself is God: “I otzvuk – Bog.”¹¹ Ivanov’s shift of emphasis from God as an origin to God as an echo is unprecedented

⁹ Paul de Man, “Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric,” *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (Columbia University Press, 1984) 250. See also Kevin Newmark’s interpretation of the poem, which draws De Man’s reading to its natural conclusion. Kevin Newmark, “Paul de Man’s History,” in *Reading de Man Reading*, eds. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1989) 125.

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed. and intro., Harry Zohn, trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969/1968) 182.

¹¹ Viacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, eds. D. Ivanov and O. Deschartes, vol. 1 (Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1974) 606.

and seems paradoxical. In its forward future orientation, Russian Symbolist thought also draws attention to what comes after—the echo—by using what has come before, the poem’s intertextual sources among which was, of course, Baudelaire’s “Correspondences.” The echo both translates, “perevodit,” the song of the Alpine horn, the language of earth into the divine language and is the divine *per se*. In this sense, the art of the Symbolist poet is that of echo-translations uncovering the divine in ever-finer approximations. Synaesthetic translation is thus self-perpetuating, striving toward the echo as God and relinquishing the original, the poet, the tool in the process.

Baudelaire’s “Correspondances” clearly partakes in the intertextual resonance of “Alpine Horn.” In his 1910 essay “Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism,” “Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme,” Ivanov exemplifies his idea of realistic Symbolism by quoting the first two quatrains of Baudelaire’s poem. In his translation of the second stanza, he translates “Comme de longs échos” twice, both for readability and for emphasis:

Подобно долгим эхо, которые смешиваются вдалеке и там сливаются в сумрачное единство, пространное как ночь и свет, – **подобно долгим эхо** отвечают одним другом благоухания, и цвета, и звуки.¹²

Like long echoes that mingle in the distance in a dusky union, vast as the night and as the light,—**like long echoes**, fragrances, and colors, and sounds respond to each other.

While Ivanov’s translation embodies the acoustic reverberations of the echo in the repetition of “like long echoes,” “Correspondences” conveys the sense of spatial and temporal remoteness of the original sound from its echo in the syntactic distance between the vehicle of the comparison in the beginning of the quatrain (l. 5) and its referent at the closure of the stanza (l. 8). Still, as in Ivanov’s “Alpine Horn,” where the echo of the song is valorized and identified with God, Baudelaire’s long echoes reveal the divine, the ecstasies of the senses and the spirit, “les transports de l’esprit et des sens.” The superimposition of reverberations causes the unison of fragrances, colors, and sounds.¹³ In this sense, for both Baudelaire and Ivanov the echo is charged with more spiritual significance compared to the original sound that produced the reverberations. The echo triggers not only acoustic reflections but also visual and olfactory ones and brings about their synaesthetic conflation. The echo is thus infinitely richer and more spiritual than the original sound.

Synaesthetic anticipation and synaesthetic futurity underlie my overall argument in this work. As opposed to relying exclusively on synaesthetic unity or synaesthetic fragmentation, I conceptualize synaesthesia as synaesthetic anticipation, as an aesthetic utopia that awaits its realization in the future. As we shall see, synaesthetic metaphors on the level of the artwork become an interartistic strategy for the dissemination of the artwork across the arts on the level of cultural production. So, Oscar Wilde’s densely synaesthetic play *Salomé* awaits its future

¹² Ivanov, SS, vol.2, 547.

¹³ Ivanov’s concepts of realist and idealist art circumscribe, respectively, the Symbolist and the Decadent world. Synaesthesia governs both realist and idealist art, but, while symbolist (realist) synaesthesia points toward a union of the senses (all colors, sounds, and scents meet as one), decadent (idealist) synaesthesia is unmotivated by a spiritual goal; it is subjective and freely associative—as in the closing two tercets of Baudelaire’s “Correspondences”.

transpositions across pictures, music, and dance. In Russian Symbolism, this synaesthetic clustering of the arts prepares and anticipates the apocalyptic transfiguration of reality, formulated in Russian aesthetic theories and Russian religious philosophy. We see this synaesthetic anticipation in Aleksandr Skriabin's late music starting with his synaesthetic symphony "Prometheus," meant to fuse music and colored lights, up to his "Preparatory Act" to be composed out of poetry and music and to develop into a full-blown synaesthetic work: "The Mysterium," which would bring the end of this world. Finally, in Rainer Maria Rilke's work synaesthesia implies the completion of the circle of the five senses, now torn asunder by the abysses of the unperceivable. The fullness of perception is doubly envisioned as attainable with the help of the phonograph, the innovative technological device that promises to grant full synaesthetic experience in a utopian future, as well as in the synaesthetic and interartistic transitions that promise the unity of life and death in Rilke's late poetry, in particular, in his Sonnets to Orpheus, *Die Sonette an Orpheus*.

From the perspective of the history of science, "Correspondences" speaks also to the prevalent scientific paradigm of the time meant to unify the microcosm of man with the macrocosm, and to study the correspondences of psychology and physics in psychophysics, as we see in Baudelaire's symbol bringing back together man and nature, the material and the spiritual parts of the correspondences. The poem also responds to the endeavors of monistic philosophy at the turn of the century by conjoining the body and the soul, "the spirit and the senses." Psychophysics as a trend of the second half of the nineteenth century captivated scientists working with light and the senses, most notably, its founder, the physicist, experimental psychologist, and physician Gustav Fechner (1801-1887), and we can certainly see the resonance of psychophysics in Friedrich Nietzsche's emphasis on the biological body and on psychophysiology in his philosophy of life, *Lebensphilosophie*.¹⁴ The mystical variant of the scientific understanding of synaesthesia at the turn of the century also shows the monism of soul and body, and body and the world. Psychophysics and psychophysiology manifest the characteristic monistic impulses of the time, by conjoining the soul and the material world; the psychic world and the flesh; the sensuous and the occult; and the exterior world and the human body.

Interpreted through the prism of vitalism, vital energy, and the cult of life at the *fin de siècle*, another poem by Baudelaire sheds light on synaesthesia at that time: "A Carrion," *Une Chargone*:¹⁵

Remember now, my love, what piteous thing
We saw in a summer's gracious day :
By the roadside a hideous carcass, quivering
On a clean bed of pebbly clay.

Rappelez-vous l'objet que nous vîmes, mon âme,
Ce beau matin d'été si doux :
Au détour d'un sentier une charogne infâme
Sur un lit semé de cailloux,

Her legs flexed in the air like a courtesan,
Burning and sweating venomously,

Les jambes en l'air, comme une femme lubrique,
Brûlante et suant les poisons,

¹⁴ On psychophysics and the monism of the senses and the spirit at the turn of the century, see Monika Fick, *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele: Der psychophysische Monismus in der Literatur der Jahrhundertwende* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993). On Fechner and psychophysics, see Fick 37-74. On Nietzsche's psycho-physiological *Naturphilosophie*, see Fick 88-93.

¹⁵ Charles Baudelaire, "A Carrion," and "Une Chargone," trans. Allen Tate, *Flowers of Evil*, ed. Marthiel and Jackson Mathews (New York: New Directions Books, 1989 [1955]) 38-39 and 264-65.

Calmly exposed its belly, ironic and wan,
Clamorous with foul ecstasy.

The sun bore down upon the rotteness
As if to roast it with gold fire,
And render back to nature her own largess
A hundredfold of her desire.

Heaven observed the vaunting carcass there
Blooming with the richness of a flower;
And that almighty stink which corpses wear
Choked you with sleepy power !

The flies swarmed on the putrid [belly], then
A black tumbling rout would seethe
Of maggots, thick like a torrent in a glen,
Over those rags that lived and seemed to breathe.

They darted down and rose up like a wave
Or buzzed impetuously as before;
One would have thought the corpse was held a slave,
To living by the life it bore!

This world had [strange] music, its own swift emotion
Like water and the wind running,
Or corn that a winnower in rhythmic motion
Fans with fiery cunning.

All forms receded, as in a dream were still,
Where white visions vaguely start,
From the sketch of a painter's long-neglected idyll
Into a perfect art !

Behind the rocks a restless bitch looked on
Regarding us with jealous eyes,
Waiting to tear from the livid skeleton
her loosed morsel quick with flies.

And even you will come to this foul shame,
This ultimate infection,
Star of my eyes, my being's inner flame,
My angel and my passion !

Yes : such shall you be, O queen of heavenly grace,
Beyond the last sacraments,
When through your bones the flowers and sucking grass,
Weave their rank cerement.

Speak, then, my Beauty, to this dire putrescence,
To the worm that shall kiss your proud estate,
That I have kept the divine form and the essence,
Of my festered loves inviolate !

Ouvrait d'une façon nonchalante et cynique
Son ventre plein d'exhalaisons.

Le soleil rayonnait sur cette pourriture,
Comme afin de la cuire à point,
Et de rendre au centuple à la grande Nature
Tout ce qu'ensemble elle avait joint;

Et le ciel regardait la carcasse superbe
Comme une fleur s'épanouir.
La puanteur était si forte, que sur l'herbe
Vous crûtes vous évanouir.

Les mouches bourdonnaient sur ce ventre putride,
D'où sortaient de noirs bataillons
De larves, qui coulaient comme un épais liquide
Le long de ces vivants haillons.

Tout cela descendait, montait comme une vague
Ou s'élançait en pétillant;
On eût dit que le corps, enflé d'un souffle vague,
Vivait en se multipliant.

Et ce monde rendait une étrange musique,
Comme l'eau courante et le vent,
Ou le grain qu'un vanneur d'un mouvement rythmique
Agite et tourne dans son van.

Les formes s'effaçaient et n'étaient plus qu'un rêve,
Une ébauche lente à venir
Sur la toile oubliée, et que l'artiste achève
Seulement par le souvenir.

Derrière les rochers une chienne inquiète
Nous regardait d'un oeil fâché,
Espionnant le moment de reprendre au squelette
le morceau qu'elle avait lâché.

— Et pourtant vous serez semblable à cette ordure,
À cette horrible infection,
Étoile de mes yeux, soleil de ma nature,
Vous, mon ange et ma passion!

Oui! telle vous serez, ô la reine des grâces,
Après les derniers sacrements,
Quand vous irez, sous l'herbe et les floraisons grasses,
Moisir parmi les ossements.

Alors, ô ma beauté! dites à la vermine
Qui vous mangera de baisers,
Que j'ai gardé la forme et l'essence divine
De mes amours décomposés!

Baudelaire's "Carrion" was held very dear by two of the main protagonists in this dissertation: Oscar Wilde and Rainer Maria Rilke.¹⁶ Rilke's comments on the great value of this "amazing poem" first occur in entry twenty-two of his *Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge* and then appear again in his letter on Cézanne addressed to his wife Clara Rilke (October 19, 1907). Meanwhile, Oscar Wilde engages with the "strange music" emanating from Baudelaire's carcass when his Salomé talks to Jokanaan's severed head, similarly evoking "a strange music." How does the poem shed light on the writers' creative procedures and styles and how does it fit into the framework of synaesthesia?

The poem clearly delineates the cycle of life – death – decomposition – return to life, expressing the indomitable energy of life that overtakes death and decay. On a sweltering sunny day, the lyric "I" and his love encounter a "hideous carcass," the nature of which is never specified. An animal, a human, in any case a formerly living being with legs obscenely splayed, this festering "piteous thing" does not succumb to death. As the flies "swarm" and "tumble" on the putrid body in stanza five, the rags seem to live and breathe, seething of maggots "thick like a torrent in a glen." The process of decomposition gives a new life to the decaying body. Moreover, "One would have thought the corpse was held a slave, / To living by the life it bore!" (l. 30). This vitalist domination of life and the enslavement of death by life evokes both the arts and synaesthesia. Art in the poem (music, dream, visions, poetry) occupies and, in fact, transforms the dead body. The process of decomposition parallels the creative process and the unfolding of art. Ultimately, putrefaction itself seems to embody and reproduce the conflation of the senses, as well as the conflation of the arts, as the carcass blooms:

...with the richness of a flower;
And that almighty stink which corpses wear
Choked you with sleepy power ! (ll.)

This world had [strange] music, its own swift emotion... (l.)

All forms receded, as in a dream were still,
Where white visions vaguely start,
From the sketch of a painter's long-neglected idyll
Into a perfect art ! (ll.)

The malodorous juxtaposition of the richness of the flower's implicit scent and the "almighty stink" of the carcass; the buzz; the "rhythmic motion" of maggots and flies; and the "receding forms" all capture the synaesthetic presence of the carrion through smell, sound, sight, and kinesthesia. The carrion is equated with a work of art, decadent or symbolist, and the poem enacts the process of the artwork's animation. Further, the living carrion transforms through synaesthesia into "a perfect art," which appears intimately linked to putrefaction. The dead body becomes a work of art, but it is an artwork that comes to life, somehow circularly completing the movement from death through art back to life. Here, synaesthesia facilitates the movement of the corpse from death to life and from death to art: its "strange music," the painter's "perfect art," and, ultimately, Baudelaire's poem.

¹⁶ Richard Ellmann, Oscar Wilde's most prominent biographer, mentions the poet's fondness of Baudelaire's "A Carrion." Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988) 218. See also Sherard, *The Real Oscar Wilde*, 251.

The textual and synaesthetic corpse of *Une Chorgone* lives further on in Wilde's *Salomé*, where the play's own "strange music," "une étrange musique" emanates as a memory of Jokanaan from his severed head: "when I looked on thee I heard *a strange music*" [my italics] (35). Baudelaire's "Carrion" has reincarnated in Wilde's play as the gory, synaesthetically informed head of John the Baptist. In my *Salomé* chapter, I show how the play's own textual corpse synaesthetically disseminates across the arts. Finally, the very process of decomposition and transformation implied in "A Carrion" informs Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* where the body of Basil Hallward needs to go through the process of accelerated chemical decomposition.¹⁷ This bio-chemical erasure of the murdered artist renders the portrait of Dorian invulnerable to the moral and biological decay that will otherwise result from the burden of Dorian's sins. With Dorian's murder of the painting as a virtual suicide, Basil the artist comes back to life as a perfect artwork: the picture of Dorian Gray. This entanglement of life, death, decay, and art with a bio-technological resonance underlies Oscar Wilde's work.

While remaining distant from the poem's inherent provocation, ironies, and shock value, Rilke highly apprizes the objectivity of representation and the precision of description in Baudelaire's poem. They show the artist's love beyond choice and selection, thus defining art as a sort of sainthood: "First, artistic perception had to surpass itself to the point of realizing that even something horrible, something that seems no more than disgusting, *is*, and is *valid*, along with everything else that is."¹⁸ The being of things in all their diversity carries an integral validity and worth and ought to be embraced in art. Art's task is to reveal the truth of being. Just like the poet, Cézanne, the painter Rilke admired most at the time, treasured this poem, knew it by heart, and "recited it word for word" late in his life.¹⁹ Rilke was deeply moved to learn this detail of the painter's life and believed that "without this poem, the whole trend toward plainspoken truth which we now seem to recognize in Cézanne could not have started."

For Rilke and for Cézanne, plainspoken truth was the truth of our senses and the fidelity to our sensory perceptions. Cézanne had set himself the goal of becoming "a sensitive recording plate," detailing the very process of seeing, contemplating for hours a single brushstroke so as to render genuine visual perception.²⁰ Inspired by Baudelaire's "Carrion," Rilke similarly recorded the synaesthetic process of the transitions from life to death to art in his "Roman Sarcophagi," *Römische Sarcophage* (1906):

But what prevents us from believing, that...
only for a short time thirst and hatred
and this confusion dwell inside us,

as once in this ornate sarcophagus,
among rings, glasses, ribbons, images of gods,
inside slowly self-consuming garments

Was aber hindert uns zu glauben, daß...
nicht eine kleine Zeit nur Drang und Haß
und dies Verwirrende in uns verweilt,

wie einst in dem verzierten Sarkophag
bei Ringen, Götterbildern, Gläsern, Bändern,
in langsam sich verzehrenden Gewändern

¹⁷ The corpse's transition from life to death back to life parallels the relations between life and art in Wilde, as posited, for instance, in "The Decay of Lying."

¹⁸ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, Clara Rilke, ed., Joel Agee, trans., Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, intro. (New York: North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002/1985) 60.

¹⁹ Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 61.

²⁰ Jonah Lehrer, "Paul Cézanne," *Proust was a Neuroscientist* (Boston, New York: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008 / 2007) 96-119, 102.

a slowly loosened something lay—

ein langsam Aufgelöstes lag -

till it was swallowed by those unknown mouths
that never speak. (Where exists and thinks
a brain that one day will make use of them?) (ll. 1, 3-11)

bis es die unbekannten Munde schluckten,
die niemals reden. (Wo besteht und denkt
ein Hirn, um ihrer einst sich zu bedienen?)²¹ (ll. 1, 3-11)

By reviving the etymology of the Greek word “sarcophagus,” literally, flesh-eater, Rilke focuses on the living “we” through the prism of the decaying human “loosened something,” as it becomes devoured by the maggots as perpetuators of the cycle of life. The decaying flesh is multiply framed by both life and art. More than a reminder of death, this *thing* poem brings to presence an ornate sarcophagus in its paradoxical functioning as a preserver and a consumer of human bodies. The sarcophagus remains still in its visual opulence of “images, glasses, ribbons, images of gods” while living in the animated “self-consuming garments” and the bustle of anonymous mouths—savoring, tasting, processing, but never voicing their gustatory knowledge. Still, in a parenthetical question, Rilke hypothetically posits the existence of a brain that may at some point think and make use of these silent mouths by bringing them to speech. Will it then offer an insight into the being of savoring, swallowing, and digesting a body, or will this process abstract the knowledge of what has been devoured, of the loosening something, of the previously living human being, of the lyric “We”? Will the mouths ever announce the synaesthetic “plainspoken truth” of their gustatory knowledge attained in the process of transition between life and death within the visual artifice of the sarcophagus?

Baudelaire’s “Correspondences” and “A Carrion” reveal the intimate entanglement of the arts and the senses at the turn of the century. The synaesthetic metaphor, as we saw it unify or disintegrate human perception, retrieve or anticipate multi-sensory, full-bodied experience, and mediate among life-death-art, lays the foundation for my present work. My dissertation investigates the overlaps, the juxtapositions, the unity, and the fragmentation of the arts and the senses in early European Modernism. Why did artworks get perpetually transformed and adapted across medial, sensory, or artistic boundaries? What motivated the proliferation of interartistic projects at the *fin de siècle*? These questions inform my quest for an insight into Modernist aesthetic practices.

“Beautiful colored, musical thing,” this is how Oscar Wilde describes his play *Salomé*, evoking its luxurious mixing of sensory modalities and artistic mediums in the Wagnerian tradition of the synthetic total artwork (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). As a Wagnerian artwork, *Salomé* is meant to embody one unified cross-sensory feeling in an interartistic form, expressing it and conveying it to the perceiving subject. Synaesthetic artworks across literature, music, and the visual arts by Oscar Wilde, Aleksandr Skriabin, and Rainer Maria Rilke, among others, speak to and inspire artists across the spectrum of artistic mediums not only because they stimulate all the human senses, but also because they function within a network of discourses centering on synaesthesia—the figurative or physiological blending of the senses. This dissertation bridges and unpacks this seemingly intuitive overlap of the aesthetic and the sensory, of art and perception. Thus, it examines the vibrant interartistic tradition at the European turn of the century, which unfurls in response to Wagner’s music dramas and his aesthetic theories, and to

²¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *New Poems [1907]*, trans. by Edward Snow (New York: North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984) 85 and Rilke, *Werke: KA*, Band 1, 472-73.

the scientific and technological climate, encouraging synaesthetic perception and perpetuating interartistic endeavors.

Contexts

A beloved *fin-de-siècle* metaphor, synaesthesia spurred a great interest in psychology as a physiological condition that mixes, superimposes, or cross-connects sensory modalities—those of vision and hearing, taste and shape, shape and hearing, and so on. By exploring the multifarious discourses that engaged with synaesthesia at the time—the psychological and physiological; the ethical and social; the aesthetic and the mystical; and the technological and the scientific, the following sections reconstruct the historical and intellectual context for interpreting the relations among literature, music, and the visual arts at the turn of the century. Synaesthesia straddles the discourses of degeneration, mysticism, science, and technology; it thus creates a fascinating mesh of interconnections between the arts and the sciences. In the Contexts section of this introduction, we will see how the sciences (theories of synaesthesia, as well as of perception) can illuminate the study of the arts and how individual artistic accounts of synaesthesia or intellectual discourses beyond the scope of science have informed *fin-de-siècle* scientific investigations, for instance, in various psychological studies of synaesthesia that rely on subjective data.

The Heyday of Synaesthesia

The period between 1860-1930 marked the flourishing interest in synaesthesia in the sciences. Between 1881 and 1931, at least seventy-four scientific articles were published on the topic across Europe, compared to the mere seventeen articles published over the next forty years until 1974.²² The preeminent neurobiologist and scholar of synaesthesia Richard Cytowic, M.D. attributes the fascination with synaesthesia at the turn of the twentieth century to the rising interest in the unconscious.²³ With the introduction of B. H. Skinner's Behaviorism in the 1940s, studies in psychology underwent a paradigmatic shift in their focus of scientific inquiry—away from emotion, which depended on the unreliable data of introspection, toward behavior, which could be objectively studied.

At the turn of the century, a plethora of views on the synaesthetic phenomenon were continuously formulated and expressed. Conflicting explanations and hypotheses proliferated. Was synaesthesia a psycho-physiological phenomenon? Did it go back to early childhood

²² For an introduction to the history of synaesthesia in the sciences, see Richard E. Cytowic, M.D., "Theories of Synaesthesia: A Review and a New Proposal," *Synaesthesia: A Union of the Senses* (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 2002) 71-76; John E. Harrison and Simon Baron-Cohen, "Synaesthesia: An Introduction," *Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1997) 3-16; Lawrence E. Marks, "On Colored-Hearing Synesthesia: Cross-Modal Translations of Sensory Dimensions," (1975), eds. Harrison and Barron-Cohen, 49-98. For contemporary surveys of the-turn-of-the-century scientific literature on synaesthesia with an analysis of known case studies, see Friedrich Mahling, *Das Problem der "Audition colorée,"* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1926) and Ferdinand Suarez de Mendoza, *L'audition colorée,* Octave Doin, ed. (Paris: Société d'Éditions Scientifique, 1899). The following paragraph summarizes Mahling's historical account of synaesthesia.

²³ Cytowic 71.

associations and memories that persisted in adult life? Could mysticism and metaphysics contribute to the understanding of the condition? Was the condition a sign of a disturbed mind or disturbed perception (vision)? Abnormality, pathology, mysticism, quantitative analogies between sound waves and light waves, psychophysics, psychophysiology were all co-opted to promote the greater understanding of the one tantalizingly rich, curious, yet inexplicable phenomenon reaching the deepest recesses of human interiority and expanding in the vast uncharted territories of the occult.

*Fin-de-Siècle Scientific Theories of Synaesthesia*²⁴

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the main theory of synaesthesia explained the mixing of sensory modalities as caused by *undifferentiated neuronal activity*. It was believed that the nervous system of the synaesthete is similar to the immature nervous system of infants. Babies' normal syn-kinesis (joined movement) exhibits imprecision of leg, arm, and trunk motions, as, before the maturation of an infant's nervous system, his motor movements are not localized to the muscles that perform the right coordinated motion. Rather, they spill over into various other muscle groups. Due to the overflow of bodily movements before the baby's limbs have reached the necessary dexterity and coordination, infants cannot execute fine tasks. Likewise, it was believed that an imprecision of perception—synaesthesia as a joined perception by all the senses, also resulted from the immaturity of the nervous system. This understanding of synaesthesia as an atavism prevailed at the *fin de siècle* and was labeled the *degeneracy theory of synaesthesia*.²⁵ It suggested to scholars a connection between cross-modal perception and intellectual retardation. However, this theory has not been substantiated with empirical evidence and has been since discredited. It appeared as a reflection, a mere reflex of the intellectual climate during the second half of the nineteenth century, which showed a clear predisposition to diagnosing degeneration at the sight of any difference, as we see in Max Nordau's "Degeneration," *Entartung*. In its use of synaesthesia, Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* engages exactly with the discourses of degeneracy, queerness, and Wagnerism, as they were informed by the *fin-de-siècle* understanding of synaesthesia.²⁶

²⁴ My account of scientific theories of synaesthesia follows Richard E. Cytowic, M.D., "Theories of Synaesthesia: A Review and a New Proposal," *Synaesthesia: A Union of the Senses* (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 2002) 71-76; Friedrich Mahling, *Das Problem der "Audition colorée,"* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1926); and Lawrence E. Marks, "On Colored-Hearing Synesthesia: Cross-Modal Translations of Sensory Dimensions," (1975). I use Cytowic's designations for various theories but also refer to Mahling's conceptualization and classifications of the theories whenever necessary.

²⁵ Bleuler and Lehmann call the understanding of synaesthesia as a pathological phenomenon *degeneracy theory* (Cytowic 71) although, in their foundational work, the authors propose an explanation of synaesthesia based on emotions as the common trigger reverberating across the senses. On Eugen Bleuler and Karl Lehmann, *Zwangmäßige Lichtempfindungen durch Schall und verwandte Erscheinungen auf dem Gebiete der anderen Sinnesempfindungen*, 1881, see Marks 84 and Mahling 39 and 15.

²⁶ The blending of the arts representative of Wagnerism and the blending of the senses in synaesthesia were gendered queer at the turn-of-the-century. For instance, the sexologist Havelock Ellis designated color-hearing as an abnormality similar to sexual inversion. See Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Sexual Inversion*. (Honolulu, Hawaii: UP of the Pacific, 2001) 186-87.

Linkage theories of synaesthesia assumed that the circuitry in the brains of synaesthetes is different from that of non-synaesthetes.²⁷ The notions of “crossed wires, short circuits, or crosstalk” in the brain seemed intuitively to explain synaesthesia and to support the claims of its universal correspondences, of the possibility of fixing a parallel pitch-color scale in color-hearing, for instance. However, synaesthetic experience has been found to be highly subjective over the past century, which is why the premise of such **neural specificity** fails.²⁸ In this sense, the notion of a hard-wired brain that mediates rigidly between a sensory stimulus (for instance, a certain sound frequency) and a synaesthetic percept (for instance, the predictable spectral wavelength of the induced color) loses its grounds, thus subverting any claims to synaesthetic universality.

The belief in the specific synaesthetic correspondences between different nerves or wires in the brain, processing, respectively, visual and auditory percepts seemed to suggest that the frequencies of sound vibrations triggering an auditory percept can predict the spectral wavelengths of synaesthetically induced color (the visual percept). The *fin-de-siècle* imagined a world made of Swedenborgian correspondences, and the physical sciences along with studies of the psyche, the brain, and the inner world were co-opted to reveal these universal correspondences that artists all-too-readily acknowledged. As in the physical world outside (the wave theory of both sound and light), so in the psychological, physiological, and neurological microcosm of man (synaesthetic correspondences). So, Aleksandr Skriabin firmly believed in the mystic universality of synaesthesia, as his later works, from “Prometheus” to “The Mysterium,” relied on the light-sound correspondences the composer saw in his color-hearing, imagined to see, or had devised and then internalized based on Madame Blavatsky’s Secret Doctrine.

Abstraction theories of synaesthesia are theories of emotional, perceptual, or linguistic mediation. They suggest that an abstract element mediates the cross-sensory experience of synaesthesia. By filtering out specific sense elements, a certain abstract emotional, perceptual, or linguistic residue remains that can act as a synaesthetic mediator. For instance, a certain feeling (pleasure) or a certain abstract element that could be perceived by more than one sense (roundness, which can be both seen and felt by touching) were conjectured to be the basis of synaesthetic experience.

So, at the turn of the century, emotions were thought to work as synaesthetic mediators. Works from 1872/1882 (H. Kaiser), 1881 (Bleuler and Lehmann), 1893 (Flournoy), and 1895 (M. W. Calkins) conjectured that emotional coloring and psychological associations were intrinsic to the workings of synaesthesia.²⁹ In this sense, the emotional value of a stimulus is inseparable from its sensory quality, and a pleasurable sensation in one of the senses should automatically trigger pleasurable sensations across the senses: visually pleasing color, mellifluous sound, sweet flavor, fragrant scent, and gentle touch. Further, synaesthesia researchers with a psychological bent suggested that chance associations of simultaneously experienced percepts from the past could be remembered and synaesthetically reproduced in the

²⁷ Cytowic 72-74.

²⁸ The uniqueness of each subject’s synaesthetic experience was recognized still in the latter half of the nineteenth century. See, for instance, Sir Francis Galton, “Colour Associations” in Harrison and Baron-Cohen, eds. 44-48.

²⁹ On early theories of emotional coloring, associative memory, and the psychological aspects of synaesthesia, see Mahling 29-36; Marks 84-85; and Cytowic 74-75.

present. According to this first strain of abstraction theories based on affect or associative memory, perceptions mean without having to resort to language. A sensory stimulus can evoke perceptual and emotional meanings beyond the specific sensory percept. Thus, a certain sensory impression can conjure up melancholy, pleasure, or grief (an emotion) or can bring forth a full-fledged sensory memory that goes beyond the specific olfactory or gustatory percept (remember Marcel Proust's madeleine).

Aristotle's common sense, *sensus communis*, underlies the second strain of abstraction theories of synaesthesia. Aristotle's theory of the common sense provides an explanation for unified experience emerging out of the multifarious impressions coming through the channels of our five separate senses.³⁰ The common sensibles allow for indirect perception by more than one sense; such common sensibles are, for instance, movement, size, length, number, rhythm, and brightness. Thus, some synaesthetic theories argue that such shared qualities mediate synaesthesia. Aristotle further proposes that, only based on a common sense (or particular common sensibles), a discriminating sense can distinguish between qualities perceived by different sense organs, for instance, white (color) and sweet (taste). According to some scholars, if this sense of discrimination fails, different sensory modalities may come to be perceived as synonymous based on the shared qualities in the common senses (for instance, white and sweet in sugar as an edible and visual synaesthetic object). So, the word "orange" as a synaesthetic compound triggers orange color, tactile and visual roundness, citrus scent, and the tangy taste of the fruit. Thanks to the Aristotelian common sense, it was believed we could grasp the orange as a whole synaesthetic thing. Yet, synaesthetic confusion may result if the discriminating sense fails to distinguish among the different modalities. Hypothetically, the color orange may wrongly elicit citrus taste by mixing the senses. Finally, researchers who identify language as a mediator for synaesthetic perception also go back to Aristotle's common sensibles to argue that synaesthesia is an intensified form of metaphoric language.³¹ This interplay between language and the senses that we see in theories of abstract processing of synaesthesia will emerge clearly in the discussion of Rainer Maria Rilke's synaesthetic poetry in Chapter Three, *Rodin, Orpheus and the Phonograph: Rainer Maria Rilke's Poetics of Synaesthetic Translation*. We can read Rilke's and Rodin's fragments as synaesthetic abstractions ("The Archaic Torso of Apollo," "The Walking Man," or "The Inner Voice"), as they conjure up synaesthesia through abstract common-sense qualities like audible, visual, and tactile movement, shape, or roundness.

³⁰ On Aristotle's common sense, common sensibles, or common sensualities conceptualized in *De Anima*, Books II and III, see Cytowic 75-76 on the engagement of synaesthetic research with the common senses, and Cretien van Campen for a history of Aristotle's common sense in view of synaesthesia. Cretien van Campen, *The Hidden Sense: Synaesthesia in Art and Science* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2008) 151-56. In neuroscience, the problem as to how humans create a unified sensory experience out of disparate sensory impressions has not been resolved to date. It is referred to as "the binding problem," and synaesthesia seems to result from hyper-binding. See Cytowic and Eagleman 201-03.

³¹ Note that the language-above-perception hierarchy in these synaesthetic theories contradicts Marks's findings from 1975. See Lawrence E. Marks, "On Colored-Hearing Synesthesia: Cross-Modal Translations of Sensory Dimensions." Cross-modal (or cross-sensory) associations in non-synaesthetes and cross-modal metaphors in language are shown to share in the sensory processes of synaesthesia (Marks, Cytowic). This is to say that linguistic mediation, characteristic of non-synaesthetic perceptual experience, only modulates but does not supersede the perceptual basis of cross-modal sensory experience in non-synaesthetes. In this sense, perception (not language) governs cross-sensory experience not only in synaesthetes but also in non-synaesthetes.

The Future of Synaesthesia: Neuroscience and the Synaesthetic Phenomenon

The instantaneous association of colour with sound characterizes a small percentage of adults, and it appears to be rather common though in an ill-developed degree among children... As my present object is to subordinate details to the general impressions that I wish to convey of the peculiarities of different minds, I will simply remark—First, that the persistence of colour association with sounds is fully remarkable as that of the Number-Form with numbers. Secondly, that the vowel sounds chiefly evoke them. Thirdly, that the seers are invariably most minute in their description of the precise tint and hue of the colour. They are never satisfied for instance, with saying blue, but will take a great deal of trouble to express or to match the particular blue they mean. Fourthly, that no two people agree, or hardly ever do so, as to the colour they associate with the same sound. Lastly, that the tendency is very hereditary...

“In the word ‘Tuesday’, when I think of each letter separately, the consonants are purplish-black, *u* is light dove colour, *e* is emerald green, and *a* is yellow; but when I think of the whole word together, the first part is a light gray-green, and the latter part yellow.” (Miss Stone)³²

Darwin’s cousin Francis Galton (1822-1911) provided one of the first systematic descriptions of synaesthesia in his 1883 essay “Inquiry into Human Faculties and its Developments,” an eclectic, wide-ranging text notorious for its reflections on eugenics. Galton attempts to pinpoint some general traits of synaesthesia based on particular accounts and emphasizes the persistence of synaesthetic correspondences between colors and sounds; the idiosyncrasy and minutely detailed inflections of each individual’s synaesthetic experience, as, for example, in Miss Stone’s light gray-green and yellow Tuesday; and the nature of synaesthesia as a heritable trait that runs in families. Interestingly, this early account of synaesthesia leads us straight to some of the most topical issues in current synaesthesia research: from hereditary conditions (or, in a *fin-de-siècle* fashion, inherited diseases) to the search for a gene for synaesthesia and the patterns behind synaesthetes’ letter-to-color and number-to-color idiosyncratic preferences.³³ Over the past two decades, synaesthesia has been brought back to the attention of neuroscientists and has been conclusively verified as a genuine neuro-physiological phenomenon.

Richard Cytowic has proposed five criteria for diagnosing synaesthesia. First, he emphasizes the involuntary, automatic response to a sensory stimulus (for instance, the violin timbre inducing silver-blue color), which needs to be necessarily elicited by a sensory stimulus.

³² Sir Francis Galton, “Colour Associations” in Harrison and Baron-Cohen, eds., 45. The first part of this quote contains Galton’s observations on synaesthesia while the second part is from a personal account of synaesthesia given by Miss Stone, a head teacher in a high school for girls.

³³ David M. Eagleman’s lab at Baylor College of Medicine, Departments of Neuroscience and Psychiatry works on pulling out the gene for synaesthesia. See <<http://neuro.bcm.edu/eagleman/>>, accessed on April 19, 2010. For readers of this dissertation who may like to check if they are synaesthetic, the Eagleman lab has developed a *standardized battery for synaesthesia* at <synesthete.com>. For grapheme / number-to-color correspondences, Eagleman has suggested a generalized pattern for number-letter clusters of similar colors based on shape attractions in a test focusing on internal consistency and conducted with 3521 synaesthetes. For instance, the cluster (8, B, P) is composed of graphically similar elements, which evoke the same general color in each synaesthete, let’s say, different shades of red. Similarly, the cluster for (F, E, 3) may elicit green. See Cytowic, Richard E., M.D., and David Eagleman, Ph.D. *Wednesday is Indigo Blue: Discovering the Brain of Synesthesia*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2009.

Second, synaesthetic percepts persist over time and are generic in appearance, that is, they are non-complex, simple, elementary shapes, tastes, etc., like blobs of color, flashes of light, geometrical lattices, zigzags, sour taste, or cold touch.³⁴ Cytowic pinpoints the spatially extended perception of synaesthesia, as if on a screen in front of us, or to the right, or above us, etc. In any event, the synaesthetic percept is experienced as being neither in the mind's eyes (in one's imagination), nor in reality. For Cytowic, the emotional and memorable nature of synaesthesia is of utmost importance. He shows that, four, synaesthetic perception acquires an unshakeable validity and reality for those experiencing it due to its emotionality, and that, five, the synaesthetic correspondences remain indelible in the subjects' memory. For instance, a high-pitched shrill sound can evoke in a color-hearing subject a certain invariable color (let's say, intense yellow with a shade of orange) that would vary among different synaesthetes but will remain constant for the particular individual over time.

What causes synaesthesia? There are two main neurological views on how synaesthesia maintains the cross talk between the different senses. Interestingly, in generalized terms they speak to the late nineteenth-century views on the phenomenon. One of the competing views of synaesthesia asserts that cross-sensory talk relies on the concept of hyperconnectivity and results from increased number of connections within the synaesthete's brain (Harrison and Baron-Cohen).³⁵ This view suggests that synaesthetes have increased wiring in the brain. This increased connectivity results from less pruning of the greater number of brain connections during the neonatal period (up to three months). Such pruning of connections (leaving intact only connections choosing the "right" sensory modality) normally occurs in non-synaesthetic humans with the specialization of the different sensory areas in the brain.³⁶ In this way, it is proposed that synaesthetes retain more connections within the brain compared to non-synaesthetes. Like the *fin-de-siècle* linkage theory of synaesthesia, hyperconnectivity in the brain suggests that synaesthetes have different, specially wired circuitry.

The up-and-coming neuroscientist David Eagleman supports the second theory of increased cross talk between the senses. It suggests that synaesthesia results from decreased inhibition in the human brain. In this sense, in a non-synaesthete's brain, excitation by a sensory

³⁴ Interestingly, the generic or simple colored shapes evoked by synaesthesia could potentially give another explanation for the transition from representational to abstract art. Perhaps, abstract art can be thought of as the visual representation of synaesthetic percepts, triggered, let's say, by music. Visual art's striving to become music (the abstract art *par excellence*) finds its most appropriate expression in synaesthetic perception of colored shapes, evoked by music (as an abstract art). Synaesthetic photisms (light spots, blotches, perceived by synaesthetes as outside their minds, appearing in front of the synaesthetic subject) form abstract or generic shapes. These aurally induced photisms are necessarily abstract—often perceived as lightning bolts, intensifications of light, or patches of color. Such sound-associated visual percepts are reminiscent of Aleksandr Scriabin's hand-written indications on the score of "Prometheus," clarifying the ways in which the part for the keyboard of light should be performed, or of Vasily Kandinsky's painterly improvisations and compositions, which corroborate the link between abstract music and abstract painting, or of Kandinsky's dramatic work "Yellow Sound." See Cytowic on simple synaesthesia and photisms, 114-20. See Cytowic 161-68 on synaesthetic perceptions and Klüver forms (these are Klüver's four simple types of patterns in hallucinogenic images).

³⁵ Oliver Sacks is also a proponent of the hypothesis that synaesthesia results from increased wiring of the brain. See Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 2008) 193-94.

³⁶ On neonatal synaesthesia, see Daphne Mauer and Catherine E. Modloch, "Neonatal Synaesthesia: A Reevaluation," *Synesthesia: Perspectives from Cognitive Neuroscience*. Robertson, Lynn C. and Noam Sagiv, eds. (Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 2005) 193-213.

stimulus and inhibition of its impact would strike a balance, enforcing the segregation among different sensory modalities. Meanwhile, in a synaesthete's brain, anomalous decreased inhibition will allow excitation to spill over and excite other sensory modalities in the brain.³⁷

While these two hypotheses suggest that synaesthesia takes place in the neocortex, Richard Cytowic in his monograph on synaesthesia, Synaesthesia: A Union of the Senses, suggests that synaesthesia occurs thanks to cortical suppression, that is, not in the neocortex, but primarily in the limbic system (see below for an explanation of brain structure). The prevalent neurological views of the brain in the twentieth century imagine the brain as a hierarchical, hard-wired structure where intellect governs emotions. The newest evolutionary development of the central nervous system, the neocortex is the seat of rationality, calculation, and language, and man's intellect has been thought to crown the evolution of life. Further, it is believed that the neocortex rules over the evolutionary older limbic system, where emotion and memory reside.

Still, contrary to this hierarchical view of the brain, the limbic system retains its overarching function to calculate valence (value, purpose, and memory) and assign importance to data analyzed by the neocortex. In this way, the function of the neocortex is to provide and process more analytical data so that "the limbic brain can decide questions of valence."³⁸ According to Cytowic, the emotional and memorable qualities of synaesthesia imply that, on its level of operation, synaesthesia is intimately connected with the limbic system, where it acquires its sense of unshakeable reality and its subjective truth-value. Thus, Cytowic has argued that synaesthesia is a limbic phenomenon resulting from the suppression of neocortex.³⁹

Synaesthesia "can perhaps be looked on as a short-hand way of calculating valence and salience, of attaching *meaning* to things."⁴⁰ In this sense, the affective and meaningful aspects of synaesthetic percepts may shed light on the semantics of emotion and what it means to perceive meaning in sensory percepts.⁴¹ For instance, a synaesthete's memory is aided by colors that can

³⁷ As has been suggested about Nordau's Degeneration, degeneracy results from some forms of disinhibition, which is aligned with a weakening of the higher nervous centers and the taking over of the lower nervous centers. See reference to Colin Martindale's "Degeneration, Disinhibition, and Genius" (1971) in Eric T. Calson, "Medicine: Theory and Praxis," Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 137. With the judgmental denunciatory value removed from the term disinhibition, we still encounter "decreased inhibition" as a neuro-physiological term giving an explanation for synaesthesia. This poses serious questions about the models of thinking and concept-generation within both the sciences and the humanities that I hope to explore in the future.

³⁸ Cytowic 11.

³⁹ For a brief summary of Cytowic's evidence for the theory, see Mauer and Modloch 195.

⁴⁰ Cytowic 11.

⁴¹ From the initial question of physiology and function, Cytowic moves to the larger philosophical question of meaning. He shows that, like emotion, synaesthesia can play a prominent role in cognition. We can compare meaning production in language to the synaesthetic generation of meaning. The linguistic relation between signifier (the stimulus as word or sound) and signified (as concept) is much richer semantically and produces multiple connotations and contextual associations. This cognitive level of processing is much more complex and sensually abstract, suggesting a high or neocortical level of information processing. Synaesthesia, on the other hand, generates meaning by mapping a sensory stimulus onto a restricted number of synaesthetic experiences (only a few) on its psychophysical level of operation; the synaesthetic processing is partly invariant and partly contextual. Further, still, if the *linkage theories* of synaesthesia, which presuppose a hard-wired brain of one-to-one neural pathways, were correct, there would be virtually no variability in the stimulus-to-percept associations of a synaesthete. In this sense, synaesthesia would be processed at a low level with one-to-one correspondence between stimulus and response reminiscent of the knee jerk reflex. However, synaesthesia seems to occupy an intermediary position in terms of its

signify people, abstracted from their character or behavior. For synaesthetes, this is a color-shorthand for people with only emotional valence attached to the colored person.⁴² Alternatively, a great series of digits (50,000) may be remembered by the whole landscape of their colors, personalities, or genders, which amount to a synaesthetic emplotment of the digits.⁴³ Additionally, perceiving meaning through the senses resonates with Romantic and early Modernist concepts of unmediated vision or understanding, knowing through sensing, and immediate knowledge in perception. Indeed, synaesthetic signification brings about such immediate, sensory comprehension, as we see in the color encoding of people or color-personality-gender encoding of digits. Again, here we see how scientific and humanistic understanding of perception overlap.

Furthermore, in neurology and neuroscience, synaesthesia has become a methodological battleground straddling the arts and the sciences. Ever since the second half of the nineteenth century, synaesthesia as a condition and scientific phenomenon made necessary references to creativity and the arts. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, accounts of synaesthetic artists, who rely on their cross-sensory experiences in their art, make a mandatory appearance in scientific writing on the phenomenon: to name but a few—David Hockney, Olivier Messiaen, Vladimir Nabokov, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Aleksandr Skriabin with his “Prometheus,” to be studied later in this work. Called “deliberate contrivance”⁴⁴ or “pseudosynaesthesia,”⁴⁵ synaesthesia as a metaphor or artistic procedure can be either diminished or plainly disregarded in the sciences.

Yet, scholars have also taken a different path so as to incorporate synaesthesia and art and reevaluate their relationship. They conjecture and set up experiments to show that synaesthesia underlies metaphorical thinking in general and is common among non-synaesthetes, as well.⁴⁶ Let us, for instance, visualize two shapes: a jagged shape reminiscent of a broken glass fragment and an oval shape with undulating contours. Try to match the sound of the following two graphemes—“bouba” and “kiki”—with the two shapes. I will not give the answer away, as it should be obvious and gratifying as a tacit turn of intuition. Thus, David Eagleman suggests that synaesthesia is not caused by special hard wiring, but is rather a phenomenon latent in all of us. In 1975, Lawrence Mark gave the first experimental evidence for this hypothesis. He shows how high and low pitches (auditory stimuli) map, respectively, onto visual brightness and darkness,

level of operation—between low, direct neural linkage of stimulus and percept and high, neocortical, semantically richer, linguistic level of operation. Cytowic 82-84.

⁴² Information gathered through personal conversations with synaesthetes in Spring 2010.

⁴³ Eagleman, “Hearing Colors, Tasting Shapes: The Behavior, Neuroscience, and Genetics of Synesthesia,” Neuroscience Lecture Series, UC Berkeley, April 3, 2010.

⁴⁴ Cytowic, 2002 and Cytowic and Eagleman, 2009.

⁴⁵ Harrison and Baron-Cohen, 1997.

⁴⁶ Ramachandran and Hubbard and Cytowic discuss the physiological basis of metaphor in synaesthesia and thus contemplate on the relationship between synaesthesia and art. Ramachandran and Hubbard go as far as suggesting the evolution of language from synaesthesia by bringing again into play the non-arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign, as we know it from sound symbolism or onomatopoeia. See V. S. Ramachandran and Edward M. Hubbard, “The Emergence of the Human Mind: Some Clues from Synaesthesia” in Synesthesia: Perspectives from Cognitive Neuroscience, Lynn C. Robertson and Noam Sagiv, eds. (Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 2005) 169-70; 170-73; and 176-83. See also Cytowic, “Synesthesia, Similarity, and Metaphor,” 275-84. By contrast, Harrison and Baron-Cohen describe metaphor as pseudosynaesthesia that only creates confusion in relation to developmental (genuine) synaesthesia. Harrison and Baron-Cohen 8-11.

whereas greater volume as a spatial phenomenon maps onto loudness of sound and low pitch. Thus, in the sciences, synaesthesia occupies an intermediary position between neurology and physiology, on the one hand, and the humanities and the arts, on the other; between objective experiments and functional magnetic imaging, and metaphor.

Finally, synaesthesia cannot be studied without introspective accounts of the experience of synaesthetic perception although phenomenological reports seem to belong outside the scope of hard experimental science, in the tradition of Behaviorism. Still, in terms of understanding perception, some of the most interesting recent work on synaesthesia with far-reaching and innovative conclusions has been done based on phenomenological reports (Ramachandran and Hubbard) or introspective accounts (Cytowic) that were integrated with the techniques of neuroscience and neurophysiology. Ultimately, mere behavioral performance and testing (PET scans, fMRIs, etc.) cannot amount to any real consequences or data, cannot attain validity without being put to the test of phenomenological experience. Conversely, symptoms of mental life, in this case synaesthetic perception, may not be detected during physical examination or testing, but this does not mean that mental life is not real and does not have a physiological basis in the brain. This is why modern neuroscience has to take once again the achievements of nineteenth-century psychophysics seriously. According to the psychophysical axiom of the founder of psychophysics Gustav Fechner, physical stimuli necessarily relate to perceived sensation.⁴⁷ In Eagleman's, Cytowic's, and Ramachandran and Hubbard's views, this need to consider mental life and sensation in experimental studies suggests that the techniques of experimentation should be revised by combining and relying on first-person accounts of self-observation and third-person physical observation (often by a machine eye). Thus, so as to study synaesthesia, subjective experience and objective scientific observations must be integrated in the exploration of mental life.

In the final analysis, the central paradox of synaesthesia at the *fin de siècle* manifests itself in its apparent responding to the time's cultural search for a universal system of correspondences, for a revelation of one all-comprehensible, transparent common language or art (of the future). In contrast, synaesthetes or synaesthetic subjects rely on radical introspection, as synaesthetic perception is unique, utterly individual, and subjective. On the one hand, the idiosyncrasy of synaesthesia and its marked difference from "normal" human perception earned it the label of an atavism and pathology for degeneracy theorists. On the other hand, the individual, subjective truth of sensory correspondences, observed in synaesthesia, became the epitome of universal truth and of mystical revelation at the turn of the century. It was elevated to and acquired the status of supernatural intuition, immediate, irrationally achieved knowledge transcending scientific positivism.

Nonetheless, according to Richard Cytowic neuropsychological theory, synaesthetic experience acquires its truth-value at its level of operation: the limbic system or "the emotional brain." The limbic system lends valence to our experiences and decisions; it tells apart right from wrong; and it strengthens conviction as to the importance and meaning of our experiences and

⁴⁷ Cytowic and Eagleman 17.

decisions.⁴⁸ Thus, the unshakeable sense of validity that the limbic system bestows on synaesthetic experience turns it into a plausible and aesthetically viable model for universality.

Finally, Cytowic's theory of synaesthesia makes an ideological statement about the field of neuroscience and its privileging of neocortex as the brain of rationality and downplaying of the limbic system as the emotional brain:

Besides, neither neocortical nor limbic entities operate in a vacuum; any cognition partakes of each. It is only because of the customary emphasis on logic and reason and the historical neglect of emotion by neuroscience that I emphasize limbic contributions to cognition. But I do not do so with the intent of excluding neocortical elaborations.⁴⁹

While Cytowic's theory remains "controversial,"⁵⁰ its ideological strength and contribution toward the neglected study of emotions and affect in neuroscience is beyond doubt. It participates in the innovative work on previously unexplored mental phenomena, like perception and affect, to which the traditional scientific method and earlier functional imaging techniques could not respond. Similarly, introspection as a humanistic approach to individual psychic states has gained recognition in the sciences thanks, in part, to the study of synaesthesia. Fundamentally, synaesthesia has been shown to underlie the study of metaphorical thinking in neuroscience and in the humanities alike. This phenomenological turn and revival of synaesthesia in the sciences after a fifty-year lacuna period between 1930 and 1980 shows the importance of such innovative exploration of perception. Synaesthesia's comeback also parallels the humanistic emphasis on its relation to emotion, introspection, and metaphor, as we see synaesthesia return to the sciences at the turn of the millennium after its initial upsurge at the *fin de siècle*.

Aesthetics: Wagner, Artistic Synthesis, and Synaesthesia

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) became undoubtedly the most significant, as well as controversial, figure in European art during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century thanks to his aesthetic theories and music practices. His writings and compositions informed and impacted the aesthetic discourse on synaesthesia as a synthesis of the arts and, in its Symbolist appropriations, as a synthesis of the senses. Wagner fascinated European art culture with his interartistic theories of music drama (the artwork of the future) that would synthesize all the arts, and the cult of Wagner and the concept of Wagnerism gained tremendous popularity far beyond the music world. Wagnerism attracted Symbolists and Decadents alike and was variously practiced and expounded on by philosophers (Nietzsche being one of the first), literary figures (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine, to name but a few, and, in Russia, Andrei Belyi, Aleksandr Blok, and V. Ivanov), and artists like Gustave Moreau, Odilon

⁴⁸ Cytowic, "5. Synaesthesia is emotional," "Theories of Synaesthesia: A Review and a New Proposal," *Synaesthesia: A Union of the Senses*, 69.

⁴⁹ Cytowic 156.

⁵⁰ Harrison and Baron-Cohen, "Synaesthesia: A Review of Psychological Theories" in Harrison and Baron-Cohen 113-114.

Redon, and Aubrey Beardsley.⁵¹ The French Symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), who attended the otherwise unsuccessful Paris premiere of Wagner's "Tannhäuser" in 1861, wrote a review, "Richard Wagner and Tannhäuser in Paris," that recast Wagner's music not so much as synthesizing all the arts but as synaesthetically mixing all the senses. He associated Wagner's music with synaesthesia and construed it through Baudelaire's own symbolist poetic manifesto of synaesthesia in "Correspondences." In fact, as we will see shortly, Wagner's aesthetic theories gave ample grounds for synaesthetic linkages among the arts.

According to Wagner, the total artwork of the future would impact the audience on a bodily, sensuous, unspeakably real level to convey its poetic aim and dramatic purpose, while steering clear of the intellect and relying exclusively on "understanding by feeling," *Gefühlsverständnis*. In this sense, the artistic resonance of Wagner's work was seminal for the flourishing of interarts endeavors at the turn of the century, as well as for embodying the arts and bringing into focus their sensuous and synaesthetic qualities. We will see in this section how Wagner's aesthetic theory paralleled the scientific theories of synaesthesia we have discussed thus far in three important ways. First, for Wagner meaning was aesthetically constructed and conveyed through the senses; second, his word-music-gesture semantic constructs acted through emotion—as we have discussed, the emotional factor is essential for the operation of synaesthesia; and, third, Wagner insisted on the memorable quality of the synaesthetic nexus, where synaesthesia enhances memory, as the sciences also confirmed.

In his theoretical writings, Wagner was greatly influenced by Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) and his materialist sensationalism, and his work was thoroughly informed by Romantic aesthetic theories and practices, glorifying art, creating a typically Romantic utopia of mythopoetic synthesis, and emphasizing emotion over the intellect.⁵² Feuerbach, on the other hand, suggested that the human being is embodied in the world, which s/he accessed and understood through the senses; "sensuousness," *Sinnlichkeit*, as we see it also adopted by Wagner, was one of the central and most entangled concepts in Feuerbach's later philosophy. "Sensuousness" implies the immediacy of perception, sensation, and understanding ("the secret of immediate knowledge is sensuousness"); it breaks down the body-mind opposition ("I am a real, sensuous being and indeed, the body in its totality is my ego, my essence (*Wesen*) itself").⁵³ It suggests that not only physical objects, but also mental objects, like feelings and thoughts, are to be taken in by the senses ("we feel not only stones and lumber, flesh and bones; we also feel feelings, in that we press the hands or lips of a feeling being." "Everything is, therefore, sensuously perceptible.") Wagner adopted his exclusive reliance on the senses in the creation of

⁵¹ On Wagnerism in Europe, see Erwin Koppen, "Wagnerism as Concept and Phenomenon" and Günter Metken, "Wagner and the Visual Arts," in Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski, eds., *Wagner Handbook* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 342-53 and 354-372.

⁵² On Wagner's intellectual influences, see Jack M. Stein, *Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1960) 62-63 and 68-69. On Ludwig Feuerbach's sensationalism, see the on-line article by Van A. Harvey, "Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach: 5. The 'New' Philosophy," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. First published Fri Oct 3, 2003; substantive revision Tue Jul 31, 2007, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ludwig-feuerbach/>>. Accessed on June 13, 2009. On Romantic philosophy as a background for Wagner's theories, see also Detlef Kremer, "Ästhetische Konzepte der 'Mythopoetik' um 1800," *Gesamtkunstwerk: Zwischen Synästhesie und Mythos*, hrsg. Hans Günther (Bielefeld, Aisthesis Verlag, 1994).

⁵³ Ludwig Feuerbach, "Principles of the Philosophy of the Future," translated with an introduction by Manfred H. Vogel, *Library of Liberal Arts* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966) 54, 55, 58. All quotes in this and the following sentence are cited in Van A. Harvey.

an intelligible aesthetic reality from Feuerbach's philosophy while the composer's ideas were also bolstered by Romantic art theory.

Wagner's two essays "Art and Revolution," *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849) and "The Artwork of the Future," *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1850) first formulate his concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, "the total work of art," that would combine poetry, music, and dance to serve a common dramatic goal, but only in his "Opera and Drama," *Oper und Drama* (1851), would Wagner elaborate on his idea and theorize in detail the aesthetic and expressive ways in which his artwork of the future can come into existence.⁵⁴ As initially conceived, the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* has both aesthetic and political meaning. On the one hand, it reunites the arts, separated in the course of history, and returns to the synthetic origins of Greek drama where all arts coexisted. Additionally, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is an artwork appealing to the people: made for the people and by the people in a social and political sense. In the latter half of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* has come to mean a synthesis of the art forms, artistic collaboration, and a unified totality of artistic expression.⁵⁵ Most important, the aesthetic and sensory aspects of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* had tremendous repercussions for the art of Early European Modernism.

A major innovation introduced by Wagner to opera was his disposing of the numbers in conventional opera, which were in his views "an arbitrary conglomerate of smaller forms of song... Arias, Duets, Trios, etc., together with choruses and so-called ensemble pieces."⁵⁶ He replaced them instead with his "infinite melody," *unendliche Melodie*.⁵⁷ This endlessly melodious uninterrupted texture was organically woven out of motivic material of reminiscences and presentiments, which are now commonly called *leitmotives* (Wagner never used the term).⁵⁸ In the web of leitmotives, of musical foreboding and remembrance, described in Wagner's aesthetic theory, music remembers and reminds us of emotions, shows us their unfolding into new emotions conditioned by the remembered ones, and reveals through these emotions the motivation of dramatic action. Thus, the music drama becomes not a representation but a direct presentation of a musical (as well as verbal and gestural) reality. Poetic thoughts are coupled

⁵⁴ On Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and its reinterpretations in Wagner's thought from its early conceptualization in 1850-51 to his late Schopenhauer-influenced aesthetic theory, as well as in Wagner's musical-dramatic practice, see Stein, Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts. For a detailed introduction to Wagner's aesthetic theory in conjunction with his music dramas, one can refer to Carl Dahlhaus, Richard Wagner's Music Dramas, trans. by Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979) and Richard Taruskin, "Deeds of Music Made Visible: Wagner," The Oxford History of Western Music, volume 3: The Nineteenth Century, (Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 2005) 479-562.

⁵⁵ On Wagnerism in Europe, see Erwin Koppen, "Wagnerism as Concept and Phenomenon," Wagner Handbook (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 342-53.

⁵⁶ Richard Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," Prose Works, volume 1, trans. by William Ashton Ellis, (New York: Broude Brothers, 1893; reprinted, 1966) 367.

⁵⁷ It has been argued that Wagner's "endless melody" is a musical correlative to the narrative technique of interior monologue in literature and, in fact, contributed to its development. See Koppen 352-53. The symbolist Edouard Dujardin, one of the creators of interior monologue, specifically acknowledged Wagner as his source and inspiration.

⁵⁸ Richard Taruskin differentiates the leitmotives from the main themes in the exposition section of a sonata movement and characterizes them as "far shorter than what is meant by a full-fledged theme,... and some are really atomic particles—a mere turn of phrase (*melismus*), a chord progression, even a single chord or (at their most minimal) a single interval, if played with a characteristic timbre." Taruskin, The Oxford History of Western Music, volume 3, 502.

with music to convey “a definite emotion” in this newly conceived aesthetic world; they make drama real and palpable.

The poetic aim of drama manifests itself in music, as music materializes the poetic thoughts although it does not possess the capacity for thought: “Poetry will... perceive her final ascension into music to be her own, her innermost longing, as soon as she grows aware of a need in music, herself, which poetry alone can still.” This reciprocal reliance of the poetic on the musical, and vice versa, fulfills Wagner’s fundamental idea of “*the emotionalizing of the intellect* (die Gefühlsverwertung des Verstandes)” (208), of becoming “*knowers through the Feeling*” (209), of acquiring “instinctive *knowledge* of a thought made real in Emotion” (330).⁵⁹ Thus, in his critical writings on the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Wagner attempts to establish the logic of feeling over the logic of thought through the arts, as the arts provide a viable alternative to cognition and thinking through emotion and intuition. The Romantic project of his music dramas seeks to find ways to express truthfully the innermost human emotions in their reality, and the senses are the most appropriate organs for perceiving feeling. Only feeling can justify the action, as it needs internal, not external or moral, motivation. Thus, dramatic action is motivated solely by feeling and expressed in recurring motifs that play with and draw on emotionally-charged alliterative, syntactically condensed, and free-rhythm verse.

With his *Gesamtkunstwerk* project and the idea of musical reminiscences and presentiments, Wagner strove to achieve the ultimate precision of expression: “A musical motive (*Motiv*) can produce a definite impression on the Feeling, inciting it to a function akin to Thought, only when the emotion uttered in that motive has been definitely conditioned by a definite object, and proclaimed by a definite individual before our very eyes” (329). Thus, just as the wedding of poetic aim and music makes emotions definite, so do motives make our feelings particular, by being associated with concrete objects and expressed by definite individuals. The aesthetic apperception of leitmotives triggers a process of cognition through feelings rather than thoughts. Impressions, feelings, objects, and individuals are rendered knowable through feeling. They are communicated precisely and meaningfully to the perceiver’s emotions. Still, the exactness and precision of emotion is only possible through the coupling of word-sound-image as carriers of enhanced emotional meaning.

Interestingly, the Symbolists, who appropriated the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* for their project and interpreted its union of the arts as synaesthesia, appealed by contrast to the ambiguity and vagueness that music would afford, as they inhabited the realm of the poetically and musically imprecise, that is, the emotional. On the other hand, Wagner sought to define and make particular emotion and dramatic motivation. We can wonder if this may be a post-Romantic nineteenth-century tendency toward definition and precision, a sort of Scientific Positivism on Wagner’s part. In view of the scientific understanding of synaesthesia, precision and disambiguation underlie the semantic processing of synaesthetic correspondences; for

⁵⁹ Richard Wagner, “Opera and Drama,” *Prose Works*, volume 2, trans. by William Ashton Ellis, (New York: Broude Brothers, 1893; reprinted, 1966). “Im Drama müssen wir *Wissende* werden durch *das Gefühl*.” All page numbers from “Opera and Drama” refer to this edition. For a condensed, carefully selected, and rearranged version of Wagner’s texts, drawing on multiple sources and discussing his major musical and dramatic concepts, for instance, “The Artwork of the Future,” see Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn’s *Wagner on Music and Drama: A Compendium of Richard Wagner’s Prose Works* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc, 1964).

example, in color-hearing, a certain sound means a certain color in a much more straightforward sense, compared to the slippery, elusive linguistic signification in a color-sound metaphor.

In contrast to Symbolist ambiguities and vagueness, the multi-medial construct of word-sound-image is memorable, emotional, and precise both in the scientific explanation of synaesthesia, as we saw earlier, and in Wagner's thought. Thus, Wagner uses the visual metaphor of mirroring to capture the definite, emotional, and memorable correspondence of poetic aim and music:

This kinship of the Tones, however, is musical harmony; and we here have first to take it according to its superficial extension... If we keep in eye at present its aforesaid horizontal extension, we expressly reserve the all-determining attribute of Harmony, in its vertical extension towards its primal base... But that horizontal extension, being the surface of Harmony, is its physiognomy as still discernible by the poet's eye: it is the water-mirror which still reflects upon the poet his own image, while at the same time it presents this image to the view of him whom the poet wanted to address. This image, however, is in truth the poet's realized Aim,—a realisation which can only fall to the lot of the musician, in his turn, when he mounts from the depths, to the surface of the sea of Harmony; and on that surface will be celebrated the glorious marriage of Poetry's begetting Thought with Music's endless power of Birth.

That wave-borne mirror-image is Melody. In it the poet's Thought becomes an instinctively entrancing moment of Feeling; just as Music's emotional-power therein acquires the faculty of definite and convincing utterance, of manifesting itself as a sharp-cut human shape, a plastic Individuality. Melody is the redemption of the poet's endlessly conditioned thought into a deep-felt consciousness of emotion's highest freedom (höchster Gefühlsfreiheit): it is the willed and achieved Unwilful, the conscious and proclaimed Unconscious, the vindicated Necessity of an endless-reaching Content, condensed from its farthest branchings into an utmost definite utterance of Feeling.

If now we take this melody that appeared on the horizontal plane of Harmony, as the mirrored image of the poet's thought, and is ranged in the primordial Tone-clan by adoption into one particular family of that clan—the special Key,—if we take this melody and hold it up against that mother-melody whence Word-speech once was born: then there is evinced the following most weighty difference, which we must here take definitely into view. (“Opera and Drama,” 280-81)

We can read this passage as a metaphor for the relations not only among music, poetry, and imagery in Wagner, but also as an elucidation of the respective roles and functional relationships of harmony and melodic motives in Wagner's music dramas (at least in their theoretical underpinnings). Music's vertical dimension encompasses harmony while its horizontal dimension represents the surface of music, that is, melody. While, at his time, Wagner's leitmotive technique was criticized for taking place solely on the surface of music, the level of endless melody, what drives the development of drama in Wagner's music is the tonal progressions and modulations on the deeper level of harmony.⁶⁰ The horizontal level of music is where music meets poetry; this is the level of leitmotives that rise to the reflective surface of “the sea of harmony.” Wagner defines melody as the “wave-borne mirror-image” of the poet's thought. Music and poetry seem to meet exactly at this visual juncture where, from the sea depths of music, harmony crystallizes in the wave-like melody. There, the “poet's eye” can visually perceive the surface of music, which Wagner describes as “physiognomy.” As melody, music becomes poetically discernible, intelligible, and plastic; in other words, it becomes an image. At the same time, this image forms the surface where music and poetry, melody and the

⁶⁰ On the function of harmony in Wagner in relation to the leitmotivic technique, see Dahlhaus 161; Taruskin 520-28; Stein 73-74.

poet's thought, reflect each other. The intersection of sound, word, and image is also a space of interchange: words bestow definition and clarity to the musical utterance while music liberates speech from thought unto feeling.

Wagner figures this mirror conjunction between poetry and music as a marriage, which brings forth, bears, begets images, children, or feelings. Music has an endless power of birth and bearing; it is a mother and is gendered feminine. On the other hand, "Poetry's begetting Thought" is gendered masculine:

...the instigating ground for melodic motion... can be supplied by nothing but that [Poetic] Aim. Yet what enables this advance, so necessary to the Poet, naturally does not lie in the domain of Word-speech, but quite definitely in that of Music alone. This ownest element of music, Harmony to wit, is merely in so far still governed by the poetic-aim, as it is the other, the womanly element into which this aim pours itself for its own realisation, for its redemption. For this is the bearing element, which takes up the poetic-aim solely as a begetting seed, to shape it into finished semblance by the prescripts of its own, its womanly organism. This organism is a specific, an individual one, and no begetter, but a bearer: it has received from the poet the fertilising seed, but the fruit it forms and ripens by its own individual powers. ("Opera and Drama," 296)

Wagner's organicist language figures the creation of the artwork as a child-conception—by music as a bearer and by poetry as a begetter, or the fertilizing seed, transmitting the poetic aim to music. It is in the "womanly organism" of music, however, where the artwork of the future grows and ripens as a fruit. In this sense, the coupling of word and sound is doubly articulated in Wagner's aesthetics: once as a procreative act, securing the future of multi-medial art and expression, and once as a semantically visceral language of emotions, where all the arts amplify perceptual meaning.

Thus, Wagner tries to recuperate the visceral, unmediated nature of the arts, by appealing directly to the senses to the "eye of hearing" (on the visual level of alliteration, *Stabreim*, as a graphical device) and to "the ear of hearing."⁶¹ The aim of art is to convey and present emotional content and the unspeakable, and this can be achieved only by heightening sensory perception. "The bodily gesture" of the dance and the orchestra in the music drama sensuously appeals to and captivates, respectively, the eye and the ear and thus heightens the pure perception of the "unutterable" in its sheer reality.

Now, the gesture, in its needful message to the eye, delivered precisely That which word-speech was incompetent to express... The eye was thus aroused by the gesture in a way which still lacked its fitting counterpart, of a message to the ear: but this counterpart is needful, for rounding the expression into one completely understandable by Feeling. True that the word-verse, roused into melody, at last dissolves the intellectual-content of the original verbal message into an emotional-content: but in this melody there is not as yet contained that 'moment' of the message to the ear which shall completely answer to the gesture... But now there comes the language of the Orchestra, completely sundered from this Word-speech; and that

⁶¹ Jurij Murasov argues that with the sensuous, synaesthetic quality of the spoken word, Wagner attempts to reclaim the lost orality in the age of print. He suggests that Wagner in his insistence on alliteration in verse relies far more on the graphic and the visual ("*Lust und Leid*," "delight and sorrow") than on the aural and appeals to the conceptually puzzling "eye of the hearing," *das Auge des Gehöres*. In this sense, even music succumbs in the end to literature's rules, as harmonic modulations, or emotional inflections follow what is anagrammatically encoded in the alliterative verse. See Jurij Murasov, "Das Auge des Gehöres," *Gesamtkunstwerk: Zwischen Synästhesie und Mythos*, hrsg. Hans Günther (Bielefeld, Aisthesis Verlag, 1994) 29-54.

tale of Gesture's, which was unutterable in Word-Tone speech, the Orchestra is just as able to impart to the Ear as the gesture itself imparts it to the Eye.

This faculty the Orchestra has won from its accompaniment of the most physical of all gestures, the Dance-gesture, to which such an accompaniment was a necessity dictated by its very essence, to make its message understandable since the gestures of Dance, like Gesture in general, bear much the same relation to the orchestral melody as the word-verse bears to the vocal melody thereby conditioned. So that Gesture and Orchestral-melody, together, first form such a whole, a thing so intelligible in itself, as Word-Tone-melody forms for its part.—Their most physical point of contact, i.e. the point where both—the one in Space, the other in Time: the one to the eye, the other to the ear— displayed themselves as altogether like and mutually conditioned,—Dance-gesture and Orchestra had this common point in Rhythm; and after each departure from it, to this point they must perforce return in order to stay or to become intelligible, for it is it that lays bare their prime affinity. But from this point both Gesture and Orchestra expand, in equal measure, to their respective idiosyncrasies of speaking-power. Just as Gesture reveals to the eye a thing which' she alone can utter, so the Orchestra conveys to the ear a something exactly answering to that revelation, precisely in the same way as Musical Rhythm, at the starting-point of their kinship, explained to the ear the thing revealed to the eye in the most palpable moments of the dance. The setting down of the uplifted foot was the same thing to the eye, as to the ear was the accentuated downbeat of the bar; and thus also the mobile instrumental tone-figure, melodically uniting the down-beats of the bar, is altogether the same thing to the ear, as to the eye is the movement of the feet, or other expressive members of the body, in the intervals between their exchange. (“Opera and Drama,” 318-19)

The dance gesture and the orchestral gesture act, respectively, on the eye and on the ear, in space and in time. “Bodily gesture” expresses the unutterable, yet, the unutterable resides not in the imagination; rather, it has a concrete reality although it cannot be adequately represented by speech. Speech serves communication in which it conveys an object to understanding. Speech does not appeal to the senses but uses them as go-betweens (the ear is roused only to convey information to the intellect). By contrast, bodily gesture transmits inner emotion and expresses feeling. The message is made sensuous and thus appeals to the senses conveying convincingly feeling. So, in Wagner’s view, the purpose of art centers on the expression and communication of feelings while suppressing the intellect. Word-verse, transformed into melody, at last dissolves the intellectual content and turns it into emotional content. The physicality of gestural and musical rhythm, of the visual and the auditory, embodies feelings, makes it palpable, and immediately perceivable in the sea of orchestral harmony and the intensity of dance.

The emphasis on the palpable and the sensuous in Wagner’s aesthetic theory, as well as on the expression of emotions is intimately linked to Wagner’s concept of the “realization” of a music drama on stage:

The central category in Wagner’s aesthetic theory of musical drama is ‘realization.’ A Hegelian by upbringing, Wagner believed that what is interior has to externalize itself, to take on a form if it is not to be void... Wagner spoke of dance, the representation of mankind in its true, physical nature, as the ‘most real’ of all the arts... Thus the combined text of the words and the music on paper does not amount to a self-sufficient, complete creation; only in production, in realization in a theatre, is musical drama completed and fulfilled. The history of a production of a work is the continuing history of the work itself, in all its successive transformations.⁶²

Exactly this aim of making real complicates the staging of Wagner works according to Carl Dahlhaus formulation. Do we consider staging as an inherent part of the artwork, and, if yes, do we allow for historical change in productions (sets, choreography, etc.)? This Dahlhaus

⁶² Dahlhaus 157.

considers untenable because, in his view, a great artwork is “above history.” Or do we adhere to traditionalism in Wagner staging in the Bayreuth tradition where not only words and music, but also staging is considered essential and unalterable part of the Wagner legacy? In my dissertation, I embrace what Dahlhaus rejects by conceptualizing this change through time not so much as production history but as a history of interartistic adaptations. Thus, the artwork acquires the ability to change through time by means of creative, interartistic transformations where words, music, and visuals can be recast by a variety of artists. In Wagner’s words from the penultimate sentence of the conclusion to “Opera and Drama”: “The begetter of the Artwork of the Future is none other than the Artist of the Present, who presages that Life of the Future, and yearns to be contained therein” (376). Whether Wagner sanctions historical change of the artwork or not, he clearly formulates, in organic terms, the idea of artistic anticipation of the artwork of the future where poetry and music, the poet and the composer meet and fulfill their yearning toward one another in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the music drama, or the artwork of the future. The “realization” of the artwork belongs to the future, where the artwork attains a life of its own, medially enriched by the other arts, stimulating and heightening all our senses.

We have seen the Poet driven onward by his yearning for a perfect Emotional-expression, and seen him reach the point where he found his Verse reflected on the mirror of the sea of Harmony, as musical Melody: unto this sea was he compelled to thrust; only the mirror of this sea could shew him the image of his yearning; and this sea he could not create from his own Will...—So neither can the artist prescribe from his own Will, nor summon into being, that Life of the Future which once shall redeem him: for it is the Other, the antithesis of himself, for which he yearns, toward which he is thrust; That which, when brought him from an opposite pole, is for the first time present for him, first takes his semblance up into it, and knowably reflects it back. Yet again, this living ocean of the Future cannot beget that mirror-image by its unaided self: it is a mother-element, which can bear alone what it has first received. This fecundating seed, which in it alone can thrive, is brought in by the Poet, i.e. the Artist of the Present; and this seed is the quintessence of all rarest life-sap, which the Past has gathered up therein, to bring it to the Future as its necessary, its fertilizing germ: for this Future is not thinkable, except as stipulated by the Past.

...the prophetic Artwork of the yearning Artist of the Present [will] once wed itself with the ocean of the Life of the Future.—In that Life of the Future, will this Artwork be what to-day it yearns for but cannot actually be as yet: for that Life of the Future will be entirely what it can be, only through its taking up into its womb this Artwork.

The begetter of the Artwork of the Future is none other than the Artist of the Present, who presages that Life of the Future, and yearns to be contained therein. He who cherishes this longing within the inmost chamber of his powers, he lives already in a better life;—but only One can do this thing:—the Artist. (Conclusion to “Opera and Drama,” 375-76)

Wagner’s envisioning of a future synthesis of the arts based on a synaesthetic idiom of precise emotional content posited the total artwork as a living being to come into existence only in the future. By the double-bind of aesthetic anticipation of the Artwork of the future and the present work of the artist, the poet, and the composer on its conception, Wagner’s aesthetic theory infinitely defers in time the realization of his *Gesamtkunstwerk* project while, at the same time, invigorating artistic efforts aiming to create this aesthetic living being out of the embodied synaesthetic language of the arts.

Psychology and Ethics: Max Nordau's Degeneration

What Baudelaire might have imagined as a return to a primordial synthesis, as the all-pervasive correspondences reclaim their unity through the cross-talk within the human sensorium, psychiatrists condemned as an atavistic reversion, that is, degeneration. The musicality and associative quality of Symbolist poetry was firmly connected with and extended to the physical and metaphorical experience of synaesthesia in its corrupting potential. Max Nordau (1849-1923), a famous journalist, novelist, practicing physician, and cultural critic, was steeped in the positivist climate of the nineteenth century.⁶³ He diagnosed the modern arts and philosophy of the second half of the nineteenth century (Wagner, Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde, the French Symbolist poets, and the Pre-Raphaelites among others) with the condition of degeneration. He relied on the natural sciences to show how the new tendencies in art and thought thwarted and contradicted evolutionary progress. Nordau used physical laws to frame his ideas of the all-pervading moral and psychophysical degeneration he saw in the values, literature, and art of the turn of the century. He diagnosed *fin-de-siècle* culture with degeneration based on his interpretation of psychology in conjunction with its physiological aspects. Ecstasy, the mystical state *par excellence* that Nordau condemned, was “a consequence of the morbid irritability of special brain centers” (64). Nordau studied the ecstatic state as a bridge between the spiritual, the aesthetic, the psychic, and the nervous system in decline. By contrast, Nordau believed that the nineteenth-century positivist and liberalist values of discipline, order, conscious will, rationality, and hard work would encourage the evolutionary development of society and the natural unfurling of the human organism. The individual body and the social body ought to follow the natural laws of evolution and natural selection, and any deviation from the healthy advance of men and society would result in physiological, social, and moral decay. Thus, Nordau’s psychology explained the functioning of the human organism and society as a whole within the framework of the larger physical laws. Within his criticism of industrial society, Nordau emphasizes that “the human organism itself has become fatigued with nervous excitement” because of the plight of modern urban life.⁶⁴ Nordau builds a direct link between the condition of modern life as a cause for the abnormal excitation of the nervous system and the decayed brain centers as seen for instance in the Impressionist art of pure nerve vibrations or in the ambiguity and lack of clarity in Symbolist poetry. For Nordau, the prevailing pessimism, lack of discipline, inattention, and psychic excess were symptoms of the relapse of the arts into a degenerate state.

The sensory and the aesthetic symptoms of degeneracy surface exactly in synaesthesia, fascinating and poorly understood up until our days, and in the conflation and mixing of the arts in Symbolist poetry, Pre-Raphaelite art, and the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*:

Another aesthetic demand of the Symbolists is that the line should, independently of its sense, call forth an intended emotion merely by its sound. A word should produce an effect not through the idea which it embodies, but as a tone, language becoming music... To make use of language as a musical instrument for the production of pure tone effects is the delirious idea of a mystic. We have seen that the Pre-Raphaelites demand of the fine arts that they should not represent the concrete plastically or optically, but should express the abstract, and therefore simply undertake the *rôle* of alphabetic writing. Similarly, the

⁶³ For an introduction to the system of ideas underlying Max Nordau’s *Degeneration*, see George Mosse, “Introduction,” in Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (U of Nebraska P: Lincoln and London, 1968,1993) xiii-xxxvi.

⁶⁴ George Mosse xxi.

Symbolists displace all the natural boundary lines of art, and impose upon the word a task which belongs to musical signs only... the Symbolists greatly degrade the word. In its origin sound is musical. It expresses no definite idea, but only the general emotion of the animal. The crickets fiddle, the nightingales trill, when sexually excited... In proportion as the brain develops in the animal kingdom, and mental life becomes richer, the means of vocal expression are evolved and differentiated... Sound as a means of expressing mental operations, reaches its final perfection in cultivated, grammatically articulated language... To bring the word, pregnant with thought, back to the emotional sound is to renounce all the results of organic development, and to degrade man, rejoicing in the power of speech, to the level of the whirring cricket or the croaking frog. The efforts of the Symbolists, then, result in senseless twaddle, but not in the word-music they intend, for this simply does not exist. No word of any single human language is, as such, musical...⁶⁵

While emotion, art, and the senses degrade man, language crowns the hierarchy of expressive mediums on Nordau's scale. Its articulation, cultivation, and grammar provide the epitome of well-structured, rational, disciplined communication. Language manifests human mental life. Further down the evolutionary ladder, music embodies the unbridled emotion of the animal, particularly, its sexual excitement, as the fiddling of the cricket and the trills of the nightingale suggest. The Symbolists' fault for Nordau lies in their attempt to capture emotion through the musical sound of words. Thus, language is degraded into music; that is, it is reduced to an animal state.

Differentiation is another key concept that comes into Nordau's discourse of progress, discipline, rationality, and order. While language is articulate, music is unclear, sexually evocative. Furthermore, the mixing of the various mediums—language and music with the Symbolists and the visual arts and language with the Pre-Raphaelites, subverts the differentiation of language and its purity. In a seemingly Lessingian vein—but not on aesthetic, but rather on ethic and intellectual grounds—Nordau separates the artistic mediums: words are not music, the plastic arts are not linguistic, nor are they abstract. Having once relapsed into the unclear bundle of aesthetic and animalistic emotion, language falls from the heights of its mental, abstract, rational clarity and becomes impure by being conflated with lesser expressive media, wrought with emotion; it also becomes sexual by overexciting the nerves. In this sense, Nordau completely de-aestheticizes language; its purpose is only to convey thoughts, judgments, and mental cerebrations. Art lies beyond the proper territory of linguistic reflection, contemplation, and evaluation. It is another matter that Nordau has often been accused of graphomania himself, of taking pleasure in manipulating and putting together words in his major work on degeneration.

The fusion of the arts and the aesthetic contamination of language cause inattention and stir man's emotions and sexuality.

Still more cracked is the craze of a sub-^{section of the Symbolists, the} 'Instrumentalists,' whose spokesman is René Ghil. They connect each sound with a definite feeling or colour, and demand that the word should not only awaken musical emotion, but at the same time operate aesthetically in producing a colour-harmony. This mad idea has its origin in a much-quoted sonnet by Arthur Rimbaud, *Les Voyelles (Vowels)*, of which the first line runs as follows:

'A black, e white, i red, u green, o blue.'

Morice declares explicitly... that Rimbaud wished to make one of those silly jokes which imbeciles and idiots are in the habit of perpetrating. Some of his comrades, however, took the sonnet in

⁶⁵ Nordau 138-39.

grim earnest, and deduced from it a theory of art. In his *Traité du Verbe* René Ghil specifies the colour-value, not only of individual vowels, but of musical instruments. ‘Harps establish their supremacy by being white. And violins are blue, often softened by a shimmer of light, to subdue paroxysms.’... ‘In exuberance of ovation, brass instruments are red, flutes yellow, allowing the childlike to proclaim itself astonished at the luminance of the lips. And the organ, synthesis of all simple instruments, bewails deafness of earth and the flesh all in black...’

Wisecracks were, of course, at once to the fore, and set up a quasi-scientific theory of ‘colour-hearing.’ Sounds are said to awaken sensations of colour in many persons. According to some, this was a gift of specially finely organized nervous systems; according to others, it was due to an accidental abnormal connection between the optic and acoustic brain centers by means of nerve filaments. This anatomical explanation is entirely arbitrary, and has not been substantiated by any facts. But colour-hearing itself is by no means confirmed.⁶⁶

Nordau sets out to prove the quasi-scientific theories of synaesthesia as untenable. He does not accept an organic explanation of color-hearing, which would connect synaesthesia to brain function, albeit abnormal. The very concept of color-hearing is implausible, illusory, fictitious, not confirmed. No scientific explanation could be degraded to provide evidence for Nordau’s social diagnosis of degeneration, even less so a scientific suggestion that a synaesthete’s nervous system could be tuned in a finer way compared to that of the normal non-synaesthetes. On the contrary, Nordau resorts to the pathology of the individual unconscious and mental illness to position his ideas on color-hearing: the regression to the chance childhood associations of ideas; the transposition of the senses in Binet’s hysterical patients; and the regression to the undifferentiated state of a mollusk.

Nordau engages with Suarez de Mendoza’s book on color-hearing as the most comprehensive guide on the subject of synaesthesia, collecting all available accounts of its occurrence. Here he offers the French oculist’s definition to the reader: “‘ It is the faculty of associating tones and colours, by which every objective acoustic perception of sufficient intensity, nay, even the memory-image of such a perception, arouses in certain persons a luminous or non-luminous image, which is always the same for the same letters, the same tone of voice or instrument, and the same intensity of pitch or tone’.” Suarez de Mendoza explains color-hearing (*pseudo-photoesthésie*, as he calls it) as stemming from an association of ideas established in one’s youth and realized by a special action of the brain that bears a certain similarity to sense-illusion and hallucination. Nordau whole-heartedly agrees and explicates further:

That it is a question of purely individual associations brought about by the accident of associated ideas, and not of organic co-ordination depending upon definite abnormal nervous connections, is made very probable by the fact that every colour-hearer ascribes a different colour to the same vowel or instrument.⁶⁷

Nordau construes the arbitrary, the accidental, and the purely individual aspects of synaesthesia as stigmata of degeneration in the color-hearing subject. Ultimately, the very transition between poetry, music, and the visual arts, and the scientific study of synaesthesia is naturalized in the text (by the link of causality), which, we can suggest, was naturalized also by the *fin-de-siècle* culture at large. Thus, synaesthesia created a special niche for degeneration: at

⁶⁶ Nordau 139-140.

⁶⁷ Nordau 141.

the intersection of art and science, where art contaminates positivist science which now has to account for chance associations, mental and moral illness, as opposed to healthy art and the healthy nervous system.

The relation between the external world and the organism is originally very simple... Unity of effect corresponds to unity of cause. The lowest animals perceive of the outer world only this, that something in it changes, and, possibly, also, whether this change is marked or slight, sudden or slow. They receive sensations differing quantitatively, but not qualitatively. We know, for example, that the proboscis, or syphon, of the *Pholas Dactylus*, which contracts more or less vigorously and quickly at every excitation, is sensitive to all impressions—light, noise, touch, smell, etc. This mollusc [sic] sees, hears, feels and smells, therefore, with this simple organ; his proboscis is to him at once eye, ear, nose, finger, etc. In the higher animals the protoplasm is differentiated. Nerves, ganglia, brain and sense-apparatus are formed.

Nordau traces the evolutionary development of sense perceptions, starting with the all-feeling, qualitatively indiscriminate proboscis of the mollusk and leading to the senses of vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch in higher animals and man. Man is positioned at the top of the evolutionary ladder, and his sensations have become progressively differentiated. Still, Nordau admits that even “the highest and most differentiated brain” retains “a very distant and a very dim remembrance” of its earlier undifferentiated perception, where sound and space collapse, “‘high’ and ‘deep’ tones”; sound and taste get tangled up, “‘sweet’ voices”; and texture, touch and vision get simultaneously translated into “‘hard’ and ‘soft’ lines.” Nordau diagnoses such method of figurative speech, which mingles different sensory modalities, as mental inertia. More radically, this transposition of the senses is a symptom of hysteria, as seen in Binet’s patients.

In any case, it is an evidence of diseased and debilitated brain activity, if consciousness relinquishes the advantages of the differentiated perception of phenomena, and carelessly confounds the reports conveyed by the particular senses. It is a retrogression to the very beginning of organic development. It is a descent from the height of human perception to the low level of the mollusc [sic]. To raise this combination, transposition and confusion of the perceptions of sound and sight to the rank of a principle of art, to see futurity in this principle, is to designate as progress the return from the consciousness of man to that of the oyster.⁶⁸

Nordau sets a stark contrast between the synaesthetic retrogression as temporal return to the beginnings of human evolution and the artistic belief in synaesthetic futurity. How could mental relapse be confused with artistic evolution? How could an oyster open up the secrets of the future? How could the idiosyncrasies of synaesthesia as a highly subjective phenomenon be relevant to objective, socially organized, rational reality? In fact, this opposition between one objective reality and multiple subjectively-informed interiorities reveals how synaesthesia responds also to the philosophical quests of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Thus, we can see certain parallels between synaesthetic perception as radically different and idiosyncratic subjective experience and Nietzschean philosophy with its radical perspectivalism, which posits reality as a construct of the self and provides no stable, fixed viewpoint, and no truth.⁶⁹ No wonder that Nordau denounced the philosopher as embodying “the quintessence of intellectual and moral degeneration” in “severe mental epidemic... of degeneration and hysteria,” which the figure of Nietzsche epitomized.

⁶⁸ Nordau 142.

⁶⁹ On Nietzschean philosophy and Nordau’s perception of it, see See Steven E. Aschheim, “Max Nordau, Friedrich Nietzsche and Degeneration,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 28, N. 4 (Oct., 1993) 647-48. On Nordau and Nietzsche as diametrically opposite figures sharing some strikingly similarities, see Aschheim 643-657.

The multi-perspectivalism of Nietzschean philosophy with its emphasis on deception and subjectively constructed reality parallels the multiplicity of realities created by synaesthetic experience. This radical subjectivity of synaesthetic perception destabilizes the objective truth of one sensory modality, by enriching it with the inherently artistic superimposition of another sensory modality. In this way, abstracted colors, shapes, or tastes accompany sounds, letters, and words, synaesthetically complicating human perception. For Nordau, what synaesthesia fulfils in subjective experience is similar to what art means for Symbolist artists, Wagnerian art, and Nietzschean philosophy. Synaesthesia shatters the liberal positivist understanding of a shared, common truth and reality, where clear denotation is privileged over association (of sensations, arts, views on reality, and truths) and allows for deception, illusion, and inattention that corrupt stable reality and interfere with clear judgment: “The normal man with his clear mind, logical thought, sound judgment, and strong will sees, where the degenerate only gropes....”⁷⁰ Nordau identifies “seeing” and vision as the sense of rationality and clarity, by drawing on positivism, grounded in enlightenment epistemology, where “groping” or the sense of confused, inarticulate, imprecise touch surfaces as primitive, degenerate, defying the visual clarity of progress.⁷¹

Color-Music: Wallace Rimington’s Color-Organ

At the turn of the century, Alexander Wallace Rimington (1854-1918), an inventor and a professor of fine arts at Queen’s College in London, patented the best-known color-music instrument of the time: his *Colour-Organ* (1893).⁷² Rimington was one of a number of inventors since the sixteenth century who devised a color harpsichord—such as the Jesuit Pierre Louis Bertrand Castel in the sixteenth century and Erasmus Darwin, a proponent of colored music, in the eighteenth century. Rimington gave a number of lectures and experimented with what he called the new art of color music—the art of mobile color, and he had devoted his artistic endeavors to constructing the color-organ on which color music could be performed. He aimed to produce color across the spectrum band in variable intensity and large quantities, to be controlled by the keyboard of a pianoforte.⁷³ The artist-inventor read his first lecture on the subject in 1895, when he also demonstrated his color organ for the first time. Here is how Rimington describes the technical and optical principle on which his color organ is built while showcasing his instrument:

The chief problem, then, that the new art sets itself is to introduce mobility into colour, and with the changefulness, the three great influences of *Time*, *Rhythm*, and *Combination*, slow or rapid and varied. Colour thus is freed from the trammels of form, and dealt with for the sake of its own loveliness.

... to deal in this way with colour we must go to the source of all colour—namely, light. If we take a ray of white light, we have that which contains every colour in nature. Such a ray may be split up into all the colours which compose it, by being passed through a prism and spread out into what is known as the

⁷⁰ Nordau 541.

⁷¹ By contrast, Martin Jay discusses the nineteenth-century positivist reliance on vision as aligned with the sense of touch, as tactile vision guarantees the validity and objectivity of a common reality. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1993).

⁷² On the history of color-organs and on Wallace Rimington’s color instrument in particular, see Kenneth Peacock, “Instruments to Perform Color-Music: Two Centuries of Technological Experimentation,” *Leonardo*, Vol. 21, N. 4 (1988) 397-406.

⁷³ A. Wallace Rimington, *A New Art: “Colour Music”* (A paper read at St. James’ Hall, R.P.E. & co. 1895) 5.

spectrum band... Any tint or shade of colour may be obtained by re-combining in the required proportions the simple colour which you will see in this band.

Here is such a ray produced by the electric arc.

Pass it through a pair of prisms and it is spread out into the spectrum band you see before you.⁷⁴

Rimington's explanation of the conceptual framework and methods to be used for creating the new art of color encompasses some important configurations of turn-of-the-century thought models associated with visuality and their corresponding patterns of current scientific knowledge. These are: the emphasis on color rather than line in art, epistemology, and perception in the second half of the nineteenth century; the reliance on electricity as a technological innovation and the introduction of the electric arc light; and the correspondence between concepts of sound and light based on the then-popular parallel understanding of their propagation—the wave theories of, respectively, sound and light.

First, the renewed interest in color in the nineteenth century was attested in works of physiology and psychology such as Goethe's foundational Theory of Color, *Farbenlehre* (1810) and Augustin Jean Fresnel's development of a wave theory of light in the 1820s. Johannes Müller's, Fechner's, and Hermann von Helmholtz's work with afterimages and binocular vision helped the notion of subjective vision supercede the rectilinear Cartesian and Newtonian understanding of optics where external scientific form and perspective reigned.⁷⁵ These works, rather, gave a body and subjectivity to the distanced, objective sight of the preceding century, which relied on the camera obscura model of seeing; they emphasized not the atemporal, transcendental quality of vision but rather the subjective, corporeal quality of sight as "a flux of sensations in experienced time."⁷⁶ Color thus replaced linear form and rigid, objective perspective in the artistic preoccupations of the second half of the nineteenth century, as the artistic movement of Impressionism makes apparent in its emphasis on fleeting color perceptions and transitory impressions.

Second, Rimington uses the electric arc to produce light while the pair of prisms is meant to spread out white light into the spectrum band, into its constitutive multiplicity of colors. We see here the scientific and technological underpinnings of the color-organ project, which is not simply artistic but also relies on the scientific discoveries and technological innovations of the time, on both natural and artificial electric light. Interestingly, the arts and the sciences at the turn of the century were not at odds, but rather collaborated. Light and electricity mediated between colors and sounds in Rimington's color-organ.

⁷⁴ Rimington 4.

⁷⁵ On the creation of subjective vision in the nineteenth century, connected with the formulation of new scientific theories of light and the invention of innovative technological devices, see Jonathan Crary, Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) 67-136.

⁷⁶ Jay 152. On color and visuality at the turn of the century, see Martin Jay's intellectual history of vision Downcast Eyes, 151-52. On the camera obscura model of observation, which relies on reason, not the senses, and is turned toward the outside world, not toward the inner self, see Crary 25-66. See also Cytowic 7 and 73 for mechanistic explanations of synaesthesia by Newton, Goethe, and Erasmus Darwin.

Third, a musical instrument, a mute pianoforte, is used to evoke colors and thus embodies the *fin-de-siècle* search for universal correspondences. As we have already discussed, on psychological and physiological level, these correspondences are motivated and exemplified by the phenomenon of synaesthesia whereby brain function and psychic processes within the subject capture the aural and visual correspondences. Yet, on the level of material reality and the physical world, Rimington provides a host of “scientific opinions as to the closeness of the analogy between Colour and Music; the Spectrum Band and the Octave” in the appendix to his lecture. Here are some of his examples, testifying to the uniformity of origin of sound and light waves in the objective world.⁷⁷

“Different colours are only produced by the different degrees of rapidity with which the ether vibrations recur, just as the various notes in music depend upon the rapidity of the successions of the vibrations of air.”

“Colours are to the eye what musical tones are to the ear.”

These scientifically substantiated correspondences between sound and light, as it was believed by many in 1895, made it possible for the age-old Lessingian distinction between poetry / music (time) and painting (space) to collapse, as Rimington’s work and invention were meant to show that “time and rhythm” can inform the visual artwork of color, the new art of color-music. Interestingly, in Mahling’s 1926 overview of *fin-de-siècle* theories of synaesthesia, the scientific approach to color-and-sound correspondences as manifesting “parallel vibration frequencies,” “Parallelisierung der Schwingungszahlen,” is ubiquitous though harshly criticized.⁷⁸ By 1926, science had ruled out the physical correspondence of sound and light frequencies as based on the untenable analogy of numbers. Harder to overcome was the lingering aesthetic impulse for making Mystic synaesthetic connections. In any case, scientifically and aesthetically motivated at the turn of the century, color-music embodied the Wagnerian art of synthesis.

In 1912, Rimington published his work as a book, which Aleksandr Skriabin owned and carefully studied, though he rejected Rimington’s underlying ideas as non-sense. As I will show in my chapter on Skriabin, it is not the sciences that made Skriabin as a Wagnerian artist recoil from Rimington’s new scientifically informed art. Rather, I suggest that Skriabin’s mystical inclinations were not met in Rimington’s work. This is why, on the one hand, Skriabin denounced Rimington’s theories but, on the other, he also consulted his work. The composer followed the book because he felt initiated and mystically prepared to access the deeper spiritual significance of Rimington’s technologically aesthetic ideas. The scientific and technological preoccupations of Rimington’s work marvelously captured the fundamental correspondences Skriabin examined, but stayed only at the level of the purely aesthetic, and did not attain the level of the aesthetic theology (or theurgy in Russian terms) that Skriabin had embraced.

⁷⁷ Rimington 13. Interestingly, Rimington resorts to this way of argumentation to a far greater degree in his 1895 lecture, compared to that in his 1912 book on the same subject. See A. Wallace Rimington, *Colour-Music: The Art of Mobile Colour* (London: Hutchinson & co., 1912). The fifteen years that have passed asserted with greater degree of certainty the electromagnetic theory of light, which made some of the tantalizingly easy comparisons between sound and light suspect.

⁷⁸ On synaesthetic theories based on sound- and light-wave correspondences, see Mahling 27-29.

Invitation to Comparison

The methodological goal of this dissertation is three-fold. I focus, respectively, on synaesthesia and the Inter-Arts; synaesthesia, art, and science; and synaesthesia and technology. First, I take a synoptic view of early European Modernism so as to create a dense context within which to explore the relations among the arts and the senses (perception) at the turn of the century. I contextualize synaesthesia so as to show how it defines interartistic Modernism. In the body of this work, I zoom in on specific synaesthetic texts, musical pieces, and visual artworks and analyze them closely, constructing an aesthetic interpretation of synaesthesia as a literary, musical, and artistic procedure at the *fin de siècle*. I employ the figure of synaesthesia as an interpretative tool for analyzing the early Modernist Inter-Arts.⁷⁹

Second, by working with synaesthesia—the locus where the arts and the senses meet and unite—I implicitly put pressure on the Lessingian concept of the separation of the arts and question the notion of the fundamental difference among visual, musical, and verbal signs, as well as the belief that the specific arts should inhabit only the dimension of time or space.⁸⁰ Likewise, my invocation of scientific research both at the turn of the century and at present probes and questions the inevitable epistemological separation of the arts and the sciences in the current academic environment. In this sense, a book-length study of synaesthesia at the *fin de siècle* both in the humanities and the sciences is called for, as it brings to the fore an important historical moment when art and science met.⁸¹

⁷⁹ In his discussion of the comparative arts in Modernism in his *Untwisting the Serpent*, Daniel Albright has provided inspiration for my current work. The “synaesthetic figure” in my work is akin to Albright’s figures of consonance and figures of dissonance among the arts—respectively, the Marsyan, as pursuing one aesthetic and expressive goal and the unity of meaning and the Apollonian, as the cool, objective, mathematical approach to the arts where no amount of disparity can intercontaminate the arts. Albright’s fascinating yet eclectic medley of figures of consonance and dissonance—hieroglyph, ideogram, Noh, gestus, loop, or cube—urged me to look beyond his creative but heterogeneous figures for a unifying trope of Modernism. In this sense, I have found inspiring Martin Jay’s enticingly rich and comprehensive study of vision, which takes both a synoptic view and an intimate close-up on a single mode of perception. Jay’s study provided a model I could emulate in my study of a single figure cutting across the arts and the sciences: the figure of synaesthesia. Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000) and Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*.

⁸⁰ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. by Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1984/1962). We see later instances of artistic purism in the visual arts or music in Irving Babbit’s “The New Laocoon” (1910), Clement Greenberg’s “Towards a Newer Laocoon” (1940) and in Theodore Adorno’s philosophy of music. See Albright 10-18. Finally, W. J. T. Mitchell’s, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology and Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986 and 1994) have been instrumental in my thinking beyond the mere word-image opposition and in terms of questioning and deconstructing conventional binaries instituted among the arts: space and time; nature and convention; linguistic difference and visual similarity; abstraction and representation; power and subordination; etc.

⁸¹ My reading of *fin-de-siècle* and twenty-first-century science as discourses is informed by Jonathan Crary’s Foucauldian understanding of science as a discourse that posits itself as objective truth (*Techniques of the Observer*). In this sense, my project collects discursive, technological, scientific, cultural, and aesthetic utterances to create not a neat cause-and-effect history of synaesthesia but a genealogy of synaesthesia, as Foucault would have it. See Crary 6. Yet, while Crary would emphasize the social, technological, institutional, in any event, exterior constitution of the subject, who does not exist prior to this external molding, I would insist on the agency of artistic imagination in appropriating and refashioning science and technology at the turn of the century. In this sense, electricity is reshaped and nuanced in view of mysticism and Russian religious philosophy in Scriabin’s musical

Currently, both scientific articles and books on synaesthesia and critical essay collections on the senses make a great effort to separate the artistic (figurative, metaphorical, linguistic) manifestations of synaesthesia and the scientific data and studies on the subject. This attempt to avoid contaminating culture with science and show how culture, in fact, informs science—or else scientifically distinguish between cases of authentic synaesthesia and quasi-synaesthesia or pseudo-synaesthesia—tries to cover up a relentless, productive battle between art and science. Though occasioned by attempts to analyze and differentiate, to establish categories for appropriate reading, to classify scientifically or critically, this struggle is, in fact, ideological. The confrontation between art and science was not typical of the nineteenth century; if anything, the arts were co-opting the sciences and the interchange between these two realms of knowledge was one of the most productive in Modernism.⁸²

Third, in my work, I follow Sara Danius’s invitation in her Senses of Modernism to study Modernist lyric poetry through the prism of technology and perception.⁸³ In her book, Danius works with high Modernist narratives (Mann, Proust, and Joyce) to show the intimate relation of aesthetics and technology in Modernism. She questions and dispels the foundational, self-perpetuating Modernist myth of the split between high art, on the one hand, and technology and the sciences, on the other. Danius suggests that technology could no longer remain outside the scope of art, as it defined Modernist experience. To put it in the words of the father of media theory Marshall McLuhan, we can say that at the turn of the nineteenth century media were already becoming “the extensions of our senses.” Yet, technology carried all the negative connotations of instrumentality, inauthentic experience, and rationalization. This is why both Modernists and their interpreters focus on aesthetic Modernism as a reaction against technological modernity.⁸⁴ At best, modernity provides the context and background for Modernism, but is never allowed to shape or constitute Modernist experience and aesthetics. Danius opposes this external interpretation of modernity’s relation to literary Modernism (prosthesis) and argues for the internal, constitutive relationship between historical modernity and aesthetic Modernism (aesthesia).⁸⁵

thought. Such aesthetic back-and-forth is essential for my understanding of literature, music, and the arts, as I attempt to balance out the purely external formation of artistic production.

⁸² My study of synaesthesia cuts to the core of this debate between the arts and the sciences, as the concept and condition of synaesthesia powerfully engages both fields of epistemological inquiry. I show how the sciences can illuminate the study of the arts and how individual artistic accounts of synaesthesia or intellectual discourses beyond the scope of science informed *fin-de-siècle* scientific investigations. Therefore, the sections of my introduction discuss various perspectives on synaesthesia, thus building a concise intellectual history of synaesthesia, as well as reviewing current approaches to synaesthesia and the Inter-Arts from the sciences, media studies, and interpretative criticism. In the end, it has been instructive to look at examples of recent critical or scientific purism (David Howes, ed., Empire of the Senses: The Sensuous Culture Reader (2005), or Baron-Cohen and Harrison (1997) on Synaesthesia), as well as at some instances of a methodological openness to cooperation between the arts and the sciences (Martin Jay’s intellectual history of vision, and the monograph on synaesthesia by Richard Cytowic, who considers subjective accounts of synaesthesia in his case studies. He thus works against the scientific method, which relies purely on empirical data and disregards subjective experience.)

⁸³ Sara Danius, The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics (Ithaca & London: Cornell UP, 2002) 2.

⁸⁴ On the anti-technological bias of Modernism, see Danius 1-24 and 25-54.

⁸⁵ Danius 9-11.

In this dissertation, I recognize and explore the integral relationship between Modernism and technology and the sciences. At the same time, I trace not only how Modernist artists perceptually, perhaps even unselfconsciously, internalize or absorb technology and its effects but also how Modernism appropriates, similarly unintentionally, technology to achieve its own synaesthetic goals and solve its own aesthetic and metaphysical problems concerning the unification of a fragmented universe and fragmented perception. With the concept of aesthetic appropriation of technology in mind, I see the figure of synaesthesia not merely as a Modernist reaction to modernity and its scientific and technological separation of the senses (according to the Modernist myth of the split between high art and technology), but also as a Modernist aesthetic project, sought after and achievable by means of the sciences and technology. The Russian Symbolists' synaesthetic writing of electricity (in Skriabin, Bal'mont, Gippius, etc.) and Rilke's poetic invocation of the phonograph in terms of his theory of synaesthesia demonstrate the technologically transformative function of the Modernist figure of synaesthesia, that is, synaesthesia is entrusted with the aesthetic co-opting of technology and the sciences. So, I take Danius's argument about art, technology, and the technologically inflected senses (the senses in crisis) a step further by positioning synaesthetic perception at the productive center where technology and aesthetics meet. Thus, synaesthesia reigns supreme in aesthetics, technology, and the sciences of the time and is aided by them.

In Chapter One, *Decadent Senses: The Dissemination of Oscar Wilde's "Salomé" Across the Arts*, I look into ways in which the decadent senses compromise, exhaust, and dominate language in a typically synaesthetic discourse of degeneracy where life, death, and art intermingle. I seek ways in which language in the play transmutes into music, visual art, and dance. While language's communicative potential is exhausted in Wilde's text, voice and gaze prevail. Embodied in the play's leitmotivic structure, musical language reduces voices to timbre and words to sheer sound while the visual persists in desirous gazes and vividly descriptive similes. Propelled by synaesthesia, the play's sensory expansion murders language as the tragedy's medium proper, empties out its essence, and catalyzes Salome's further transformations into Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations and Richard Strauss's opera. In this sense, Wilde's *Salomé* not only self-consciously embodies and reflects on the synaesthetic and interartistic Salome tradition from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to the *Fin de Siècle*, but also participates in a synaesthetic Modernist project by promoting its own aesthetic transformations across the arts.

In Chapter Two, *The Poet of Fire: Aleksandr Skriabin's Synaesthetic Symphony "Prometheus" and the Russian Symbolist Poetics of Light*, I discuss the synaesthetically informed metaphors of light, fire, and the Sun in Russian Symbolism and follow their scientific, technological, and cultural resonance in the novel experience of electric light in Russia. In its metaphysical and apocalyptic ambitions, Skriabin's symphonic *Poem of Fire, Prometheus* aims to transport humanity to a higher realm of being. According to the Russian Symbolist aesthetic theories, the arts ought to transform the world, and Skriabin's *Prometheus* allegedly initiates this mystical transfiguration of reality. Experimenting with harmonic invariance to convey this more real dimension of existence, Skriabin's symphony attempts to achieve mystical merger through its synaesthetic conflation of the arts in the use of orchestra, piano, mixed choir, as well as an organ of colors and lights. In this sense, it has been customary to associate the spiritual quests of the Symbolists with the synthesis of the arts and the senses in various Symbolist interartistic and

synaesthetic projects. Yet, Skriabin's conception and design of a keyboard of twelve electric light bulbs for his *Prometheus* belies the purely mystical alignment of Symbolist music, poetry, synaesthetic experience, and spirituality.

The chapter investigates how Skriabin's mystic sonorities and his language of colored lights square with the peculiar Symbolist engagement with scientific notions of electricity and light at the Russian *fin de siècle*. I study the harmonic synaesthetics of Aleksandr Skriabin's symphony *Prometheus*—which also includes an enigmatic musically notated part for an electric organ of lights (*clavier à luce*), along with Symbolist texts concerning light and electricity and the synaesthetic poetry of fire and light by Skriabin's close associates Konstantin Bal'mont and Viacheslav Ivanov. Thus, the chapter investigates the Russian Symbolist fascination with synaesthetically informed metaphors of light, fire, and electric light, as they promoted the conflation of the Russian Symbolist arts. Instead of confining the Symbolist projects to mystical notions of divine light, I reconstruct the mystical-scientific discourse of the Russian *fin de siècle*, within which Symbolist artworks functioned and which allowed Skriabin to imagine Promethean fire as electric light in his synaesthetic symphony. The Russian Symbolists' synaesthetic and interartistic strivings reflected their fascination with mystic transfiguration, as well as with the sciences and technology: with divine light and with electric light.

Chapter Three, *Rodin, Orpheus and the Phonograph: Rainer Maria Rilke's Poetics of Synaesthetic Translation*, examines Rainer Maria Rilke's lyric translations of visual and musical objects and squares his interartistic Orphic poetic practice with his theory of synaesthesia. I suggest that Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* attempt to overcome the separation of the senses established by nineteenth century science, a sensory separation figured and encoded in Orpheus's dismembered, yet perceiving flesh. Thus, Orpheus becomes a figure anticipating sensory regeneration and synaesthetic wholeness of experience by unifying all the arts and the senses, just as it mediates between life and death. Rilke's essay "Primal Sound" portrays the synaesthetic poetic act as a phonographic translation, suggesting that visual traces in nature can be technologically translated into musical sounds. Thus, the phonographic poetic act translates among the arts, the senses, and the stages of life and death. Rilke's synaesthetic theory resonates both with the Orphic myth and mysticism in his poetry and with current scientific and technological discoveries. Rilke's poetry anticipates future interartistic and synaesthetic completion across the arts by seeking a primordially Orphic, yet technologically motivated, phonographic wholeness of sensory experience.

Ultimately, my dissertation savors the interdisciplinary richness of synaesthesia as a discursive formation and subjective experience, as well as marvels at the interactions among the arts at the *fin de siècle*. This work treasures above all the creative and imaginative nature of critical endeavor and follows the curious turns of a neglected sensory oddity at the time of its flourish. Close synaesthetic readings of literary, musical, and visual texts are embedded in compact cultural contexts informed by synaesthesia, contemporary science and technology. The reader is invited to partake of this intellectual and aesthetic journey into the uncharted territories of subjective multi-sensory perception while phenomenologically experiencing poetry, music, and light.

CHAPTER ONE

Decadent Senses:

The Dissemination of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* Across the Arts

The Vicissitudes of Photography

In a 1987 article on Oscar Wilde, the French newspaper "Le Monde" published a photograph of the playwright, dressed up and posing as his femme fatale heroine Salome (Fig. 1). The picture appeared in Richard Ellmann's 1987 biography, captioned as follows: "Wilde in costume as Salome. (*Collection Guillot de Saix, H. Roger Viollet, Paris*)."

In the following decade, the photograph titillated the imagination of gender critics, opening up a myriad of interpretative possibilities by alerting them to Wilde's transvestite tendencies. Marjorie Garber proposes that Salome's dance should be construed as a transvestite dance: "the dancer is neither male nor female, but rather, transvestitic—that is the essence of the dance itself."¹ Though exposing the fetishistic tendencies of Garber's reading, Megan Becker-Leckrone herself lovingly describes the photo in an apposition she could not resist interpolating: "—a self-consciously staged photograph of Wilde in drag, on bended knee, reaching toward a dummy head on a platter."² After situating Wilde's Salome "within Paterian tradition... [as] a male transvestite," Even Richard Dellamora, who is quick to put forward his argument about *Salomé* as "a significant document in the history of a specifically female sexuality," continues to deal with the picture.³ Only after making a concession to it and describing it in detail, can he build his argument, "despite the fact that Ellmann in his recent biography includes a semi-nude photograph of Wilde dressed as Salomé and reaching for the decapitated head of John." The picture seems to possess an enormous argumentative value. An image, an indexical sign, and an existential trace of historical truth, the photograph proves its insurmountable power.

Not convinced of Wilde's alleged transvestism, Merlin Holland joined forces with the German scholar Horst Schroeder to demystify the photograph.⁴ Merlin Holland, Wilde's grandson and co-editor of his complete letters, who is also gratefully acknowledged in Ellmann's biography, was lucky to be presented with a counter-photograph of Alice Guszalewicz, the Hungarian soprano who sang Salome in Cologne in 1906/07 (Fig. 2), six years after Wilde's death in Paris. Her jewelry and garment appear identical to those in the Wilde-in-drag picture.⁵

¹ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Harper, 1992) 342.

² Megan Becker-Leckrone, "Salome©: The Fetishization of a Textual Corpus," *New Literary History*, 26.2 (Spring 1995) 253.

³ Richard Dellamora, "Traversing the Feminine in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*," *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourses: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, Ed. Thaïs E. Morgan (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 1990) 247, 248.

⁴ Horst Schroeder drew attention to the misreading of the Wilde picture by presenting four other pictures of Alice Guszalewicz as Salome in his *Alice in Wildeland* (Braunschweig: privately printed, 1994). See also Ian Small, *Oscar Wilde: Recent Research* (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2000) 27-28.

⁵ Steven Morris, "Importance of not being Salome," *The Guardian*, Monday July 17, 2000. I follow Morris's account of the photograph affair.

Penguin, the publisher of Ellmann's authoritative biography, is now considering omitting the image misidentified as that of Wilde in future editions. Thus, Becker-Leckrone is completely justified to point out the series of "mystifications" informing the Salome myth, although, in this case, the critic herself was caught up in them.

This new attribution of the photograph suggests that its identification, and our recognition of Wilde in the picture, was over-determined. Salome's professed virility, male homosexuality, and Paterism, her identification as Wilde's protagonist in the play had sedimented in the critical consciousness over the years. Practices of cross-dressing in various productions, most notably Lindsay Kemp's all-male 1977 production and Ken Russel's film "Salome's Last Dance" (1987), made it possible for us to envision a Wilde in drag.⁶ Elaine Showalter, also fascinated with the picture of Wilde as Salome "in a wig and jeweled costume, slave bracelets around his arms," realizes that the photo is veiled in mystery. Still, though raising questions, she never doubts its authenticity; rather, she keeps weaving out its story by further asking rhetorically, "At what private theatricals did Wilde decide 'Salomé, ç'est moi'?"⁷ Critics wistfully desired this image of Wilde, and their fantasy finally produced it.

The new interpretation of the photograph gives us a curious insight into what critics have overemphasized, namely, Wilde's homosexuality, and what they have neglected, namely, his play's involvement with the other arts. An all-too-vulnerable photograph urges us to sober up and shift our critical focus away from Wilde's gay flamboyance toward his *Salomé's* transformations on the stage, in the theater and in the opera houses, as well as in drawings.

Over the span of this chapter, I trace the internal logic of the play's synaesthetic principles, its interweaving of vision, voice, and dance, as motivating and, in fact, necessitating *Salomé's* dissemination across the arts. In this way, I attempt to disentangle the late Victorian and decadent conflation of homosexuality, Wagnerism, the total artwork, and synaesthesia. Furthermore, I draw attention to the interartistic transformations of Wilde's play in Beardsley's pictures, on the stage, in Strauss's music, and in dance. I also play with questions such as how Wilde's personality can prefigure the stage appearance of a Salome soprano, and how Wilde's play can anticipate its future interartistic elaborations.⁸

I underscore the interartistic drive that has propelled the Salome tradition over the centuries. I argue that the synaesthetic potential of the Salome myth fulfills itself in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* where the legend's interartistic strivings reach their pinnacle. Thus, I doubly situate Wilde's play. On the one hand, I interpret it as self-consciously looking back on its

⁶ For a discussion of all-male or gender-ambiguous performances of "Salome," see Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy. Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990) 167-68. About Kemp's production in particular, see William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: Salome* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 1996) 98-105.

⁷ Showalter 156.

⁸ Ian Small, who calls the picture "the most extraordinary error in Ellmann's biography," points out that Schroeder does not mention the further implications of this error, which show "the protean ability of Wilde's life to assume any form that the biographer thinks appropriate." Small 27-28. I will suggest and pursue exactly this adaptive and transformative potential not only of Wilde's personality but also of his Salome in the hands of interpreters and artistic appropriators.

multifarious interartistic sources, whereas, on the other, I construe it as looking forward to or aesthetically anticipating its future artistic interpretations.

The Legend of Salome Across the Mediums

Through the ages, the Salome legend has captured the imagination of Medieval, Renaissance, and *fin-de-siècle* visual artists, poets and composers, and has thus produced a rich, intricately layered, and resonant history of interartistic endeavors. The compressed accounts of John the Baptist's death in the Scriptures lay the foundations of the myth, but some theories trace back the origins of the story to earlier Roman sources.⁹ Cicero, Plutarch, and Seneca all recount the story of a certain consul Flamininus's infamous dismissal from the Roman senate during the second century before Christ. Seduced by a boy or a courtesan, depending on the version, the consul decrees the beheading of a prisoner under condemnation. The dance appears as the means of seduction in later versions, whereas the pleasure at the sight of death motivates the request. The story thrived as an exercise in rhetoric due to its vivid narrative and startling turns.

The flourishes of verbal art, however, are entirely pared down in the two Biblical accounts of the story in Matthew (14:1-13) and Mark (6:14-29). An unnamed Judaic princess dances for king Herod, the husband of the princess's mother Herodias, who was previously married to Herod's brother Philip. The dance pleases Herod, and he offers Herodias's daughter anything she wishes as a recompense for the dance. Upon her mother's advice, she demands the head of John the Baptist, who has previously emphasized the unlawfulness of Herod and Herodias's marriage, thus offending Herodias.

The narrative is sparse and austere, lacking in sensory detail. If anything, the story creates an aural frame, as in both biblical accounts, Herod hears about Jesus and the miracles he performs and mistakenly takes him for his precursor, John the Baptist. The interpolation emerges as a memory in Herod's mind upon his hearing of Jesus, and Jesus' hearing of Herod's beheading of John the Baptist, in turn, closes the framed narrative.¹⁰ In this aural frame, sound and hearing are also associated with the Word.

Still, the story appears to retain some emblematic vividness, enough for the artistic imagination to be kindled, filling in the gaps over the centuries. The artists' eyes were mesmerized by the supple figure of Herodias's daughter, dancing for the head of John the Baptist at her mother's prompting, and they could not resist casting a glance at the severed head in a silver charger. The bare mention of the dance triggered the music, the rhythms, and the gestures in the artistic imagination. Thus, the artistic production evolving from the Biblical accounts arose out of a lack that would be perpetually elaborated upon to the point of repletion and, in fact, surfeit.

⁹ In my account of the history of the Salome myth, I follow Helen Grace Zagona, The Legend of Salome and the Principle of Art for Art's Sake (Geneve: Librairie E. Droz, 1960) 13-22.

¹⁰ Françoise Meltzer offers an excellent discussion of the framing techniques at work in the biblical stories, as well as those in Huysmans's À Rebours. Françoise Meltzer, "Salome and the Dance of Writing," Salome and the Dance of Writing: Portraits of Mimesis in Literature (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) 13-46.

The biblical account depicts the nameless princess not yet as a seductress but as a docile girl, observing the instructions of her mother. In the histories of Flavius Josephus, who names Salome for the first time, Salome and her mother are in no way associated with John the Baptist's death. Only after the fourth century A.D. did Salome's vilification commence with the growing veneration of St. John. His spirituality was thus contrasted with the carnality Salome came to embody. Thus, Salome and her dance were denounced as evil. The opposition between the spirit and the flesh informed also the first artistic depictions of Salome that appeared on the tympanums of cathedrals, on stained glass windows, and on the pages of illuminated manuscripts during the Middle Ages.

Gradually, the accent on Salome's notoriety faded away, as the Renaissance painters began to emphasize Salome's idealized beauty. Italian, Flemish, and German artists created a rich iconographic tradition of Salome paintings. Humanist paintings of Salome portray the graceful, dignified princess dancing before Herod at his opulent feast, or, alternatively, she gazes pensively at St. John's head. Following earlier Medieval renditions of St. John's Martyrdom, many Renaissance Salome representations preserve the narrative entirety of the myth by combining into one painting, fresco, or panel a number of plot elements such as the feast, the dance, the beheading, and the presentation of the Baptist's head to Herodias (Fig. 3).

The legend of Salome lost its significance over the next few centuries only to be revived by Heinrich Heine, himself drawing on popular German folk tradition, in his unfinished long poem "Atta Troll" (1841). Heine's own French translation of 1847 marked the beginning of the new growing interest in Salome in nineteenth-century France. Mallarmé then portrayed her as a solipsistic virgin in "Hérodiade." His dramatic poem was begun in 1864 but was never completed, though the *Scène* was published in 1869. Gustave Moreau staged Salome's dance against an opulent, exotic backdrop in his painting "Salome Dances before Herod" (Fig. 4) and his water-color "The Apparition," both presented at the 1876 Paris Salon. Flaubert's archaeological, historico-artistic recreation of the myth appeared as "Hérodiade" in his "Trois Contes" within months of the 1876 Salon exhibition of Moreau's paintings. "Hérodiade" was perhaps directly inspired by them, as well as by an image of Salome dancing on her hands that Flaubert saw in his youth on the tympanum of the Rouen Cathedral. Jules Massenet's opera "Hérodiade" based on Flaubert's "Hérodiade" was performed for the first time in Brussels in 1881. Interestingly, rarely mentioned in literary criticism at least, this example of the *fin-de-siècle* Salome production portrays Salome sympathetically. She loves Jokanaan for whose beheading she is not responsible, and he, too, professes his love for Salome. In fact, the princess commits suicide after John the Baptist's death. Huysmans's "À Rebours" (1884) captures the bejeweled Salome in luxurious, erotically charged ekphrases of Moreau's paintings. Huysmans calls her "the symbolic incarnation of undying Lust, the Goddess of immortal Hysteria," an "accursed Beauty" and a "monstrous Beast."¹¹ In turn, Jules Laforgue parodies Salome and the French obsession with her in his "Six Moral Tales" (1886-87). In Laforgue's treatment, Salome's passion leads to her inadvertent death. After fervently kissing the lifeless head to no effect, she tries to dispose of the gory thing by casting it into the sea. Unwittingly, she slips, topples down a cliff into the sea and dies, mutilated by the rocks, as well as by her jewels, of which Laforgue does not fail to remind us. This vibrant tradition inspired Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, on which

¹¹ J.-K. Huysmans, *Against Nature* (*À Rebours*), trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959) 65.

Richard Strauss's opera was based. One scholar painstakingly counted 2,789 French poetic treatments of the motif during its Post-Romantic flourish.¹²

The *Fin-de-Siècle* Salome Tradition and the Critics

How can we account for the proliferation of interarts endeavors, illustrating, re-interpreting, parodying, or simply re-creating Salome at the turn of the twentieth century? The resurgence of the Salome myth in *fin-de-siècle* literature, visual arts, and music has produced a tremendous body of critical writing, which traces influences and intertextual connections in various representations of the irresistible femme fatale. While much scholarly work strives to cross disciplinary boundaries by discussing the decadent incarnations of Salome in more than one medium, *intermediality*¹³ as an issue in itself has been eclipsed by psychoanalysis, feminism, sexuality, gender and queer studies as a focus of investigation.¹⁴ This critical preoccupation, of course, reflects well the content of the myth of the femme fatale or dragon lady Salome, as she was construed by decadents and symbolists at the turn of the nineteenth century. However, it also suggests that critical discourse itself has gendered intermediality feminine and, later on, queer. Rather than reading Salome's various embodiments across the arts as a mere symptom of a *fin-de-siècle* obsession revealing male anxieties about female sexuality or enacting a masculine wish-fulfillment, as many critics have done,¹⁵ I will try to disentangle the discourse of gender from the discourse of intermediality. I propose that intermediality merits attention and demands explanation in itself. Thus, I will construct an argument about intermediality as such, by reversing the focus of Salome criticism from gender issues to the issues of intermedial translation, mirroring the dynamics of the famous Wilde-in-drag picture.

¹² Cited in Rita Severi, "Oscar Wilde, La Femme Fatale and the Salomé Myth," Proceedings of the Xth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, eds. Anna Balakian and James J. Wilhelm (New York: Garland, 1985) 458.

¹³ I will occasionally use the term *intermediality* as a shorthand for the relations among interarts endeavors and the processes that inform these relations. I opt for "intermediality" and "intermedial" rather than "intertextuality" and "intertextual" so as not to give preponderance to text over the visual arts, music, and dance as mediums. Peter Wagner defines "intermediality" as the intertextual use of one medium (for instance, painting or music) in the realm of another medium (for instance, poetry or drama). Peter Wagner, ed., Icons, Texts, Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality (Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter, 1996). The term *intermedium*, and hence *intermediality*, goes back to the theoretical essays of the fluxus artist Dick Higgins in the 1960s. More recently in the 1990s, the term intermediality has established itself in German criticism as *Intermedialität*.

¹⁴ Lawrence Kramer approaches the "Salome complex" by using feminist criticism while his other goal in his article is to find common methodological space for literary criticism and musicology. Thus, his interdisciplinary project is enabled by his feminist examination of Salome. Lawrence Kramer, "Culture and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex," *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 2.3 (Nov. 1990) 269-94. Brad Bucknell suggests that various representations of Salome rely on the interaction of visual and verbal signs so as to make Salome available to the male gaze of the reader, the viewer, and the writer. In this vein, Bucknell carefully traces the interplay of words and images in the biblical Salome sources, Huysmans's "À Rebour," Moreau's paintings, and Wilde's play but always interprets them as simply misogynistic. Brad Bucknell, "On 'Seeing' Salome," *ELH*, 60.2 (Summer 1993) 503-26.

¹⁵ See Mario Praz about Salome as the embodiment of the Eternal Feminine Evil, Mario Praz The Romantic Agony, Trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1970) 304-19; Dijkstra 376-401 about the misogynistic subtext of this *fin-de-siècle* myth, Bram Dijkstra, Idols of Perversity. Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de Siècle Culture (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 396-98; or Kramer 279-81 about the vindication of the male artist against Salome as an artist figure.

First, I want to draw attention to the interchange among the arts and the senses that characterized the *fin-de-siècle*. Walter Pater's adoption and re-formulation of the German Romantic idea of *Anders-streben*, the artistic impulse to transmute into another art, complements well the prevalent Wagnerian idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a synthesis of the arts, which was interpreted by the French Symbolist poets as a synthesis of the senses. This sensory and artistic synthesis emerges prominently in the Symbolist and Decadent most treasured trope of synaesthesia, the mixing of sense-impressions, for instance, in the perception of sound as color. Thus, the early modernist artists inexorably followed the logic of synaesthesia by transforming works of arts across medial boundaries. Finally, translation, as a copy across linguistic boundaries, becomes a metaphor for such medial cross-overs. In this sense, Pater talks about the "untranslatable charm" of each of the arts in his *Renaissance*. Yet, he suggests that "in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art, by what German critics term an *Anders-streben*—a partial alienation from its own limitations..." (134-35). Thus, Lessing's conception of the limits of the arts is overridden by the partial distancing of an art form from its own medium. By implication, this alienation is figured as "translation," or as going beyond the "untranslatable" in each art.

In this sense, Gustave Moreau composed his paintings as music in the Wagnerian style.¹⁶ Huysmans's *À Rebours*, in turn, consists of endless lists and catalogues of the senses and sense perceptions, synaesthetically conflating colors, sounds, tastes, and perfumes. We need only think of Des Esseintes' mouth organ, which uses liquors with their particular flavors to recreate the sounds of particular symphonic instruments for his palette. Furthermore, Huysmans's ekphrastic descriptions of Moreau's "Salome Dancing Before Herod" (Fig. 4) and "The Apparition" fuse the visual and the verbal. Oscar Wilde suggests in his interartistically entitled essay "Pen, Pencil, and Poison: A Study in Green" that "the arts borrow, not from life, but from each other."¹⁷ In his essay "The Artist as Critic," we find Gilbert at the piano, eager to play for Ernest a fantasy by Dvorák, who "writes passionate, curiously coloured things."¹⁸ Gilbert discusses, among other things, music and the prevalence of the ear over the eye. Finally, Wilde believes that the stage is "the meeting place of all the arts"; we can think of it as anticipating the "total theater," which "strives to orchestrate sound, light, movement, costumes and décor, speech, music, and dance, blending visual and aural effects to create one whole and indivisible staged entity."¹⁹ Thus, we can account for the dissemination of Salome across the arts by using *fin-de-siècle* synaesthesia and intermediality as an interpretative lens of reading. Further, an understanding of time's tendency to confuse and conflate the arts and the senses can allow us to construe and inflect interartistically the criticism of the textual Salome tradition.

To explain the persistent literary reincarnations of Salome, Megan Becker-Leckrone draws on the idea of midrash as a Biblical interpretative practice, which destabilizes any origin of the Salome story.²⁰ In Becker-Leckrone's feminist terms, the absence of an origin and the

¹⁶ Praz 304.

¹⁷ Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic: The Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Random House, 1969) 330.

¹⁸ Wilde, *The Artist as Critic: The Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, 343.

¹⁹ Tydeman and Price 3.

²⁰ Becker-Leckrone 239-60. Becker-Leckrone proposes that both decadent literary and current critical practices fetishize the character and the text of Salome by construing it as woman. She suggests that the fetishization of Salome parallels the fetishization of the Salome© textual corpus, as there is no original text of Salome to go back to.

diversified sources for Salome's legend have allowed for the literary fetishization of Salome. In intermedial terms, however, the lack of a stable or authoritative origin amounts to the proliferation of interartistic Salomes. By extending Becker-Leckrone's text-based argument to the visual arts and music, we can see intermediality as self-perpetuating; once embarked upon, it cannot be contained.

Due to disciplinary constraints scholars, like Becker-Leckrone, have tended to suppress at least one of the mediums across which Salome spread (music, painting, or dance), thus reducing the sensory and medial fullness of reincarnation that Salome has undergone.²¹ The excellent studies of Mario Praz, Bram Dijkstra, and Elaine Showalter refer to various artistic representations of Salome across mediums (excluding music). Curiously, their presentations consist mostly of countless examples of Salomes under the rubrics, respectively, of feminine evil, misogyny, or the veiled woman as a female impersonator.²² These lists need to alert us to a certain creative impulse in Decadence that ties together the verbal, the visual, and the musical in a fundamental way. Indeed, Dijkstra recognizes in his painstaking archaeological research of the second half of the nineteenth century "a veritable iconography of misogyny."²³ While he powerfully presents the misogynistic implications of the *fin-de-siècle* representations of women, his characterization of his findings as an "iconography" remains obscured, though intensely interesting, in its conflation of painting and writing. In fact, Praz, Dijkstra, and Showalter uncritically cross and collapse the boundaries between the arts in their Salome interpretations. So not only are scholarly accounts often oblivious of at least one of the mediums associated with the Salome motif at the turn of the century, but they also tend to drift unproblematically from one medium to another without recognizing the crucial moment of interartistic boundary crossings.

The porousness of interartistic boundaries at the turn of the century enables both artistic and critical leaps. Interestingly, the critical practices of listing and boundary crossings parallel and mimic one salient feature of decadent style: that of cataloguing. This decadent practice often implies a similar collapse of boundaries, systems, and binaries. Primarily interested in the decadent subversion of the law of sexual difference that defines woman as the negation of man, Barbara Spackman sees a parallel in the compounding of sense and gender systems, respectively, in synaesthesia and sexual difference or aberration in Huysmans's *À Rebours*.²⁴ Spackman shows how decadent practice contaminates the law of absolute difference by relying on the law of sexual and synaesthetic diversity. The conflations and superimpositions of various orders of colors, sounds, and genders destabilize binary systems based on negation. In Spackman's view,

²¹ For instance, Brad Bucknell often remains oblivious to the musical dimensions of Salome's re-figurations. Although he occasionally invokes the musical dimension of the myth, sound is always masterfully superceded by the verbal and the visual, which are the primary focus of Bucknell's discussion. Alternatively, David Wayne Thomas's focus on "verbal musicality" confines him to the musical qualities of the text and thus prevents him from seeing its visual dimensions. David Wayne Thomas, "The "Strange Music" of Salome: Oscar Wilde's Rhetoric of Verbal Musicality," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 30.1 (Mar 2000) 15-38. ProQuest. Columbia University. Oct. 18 2006 <proquest.umi.com/pqdweb>. An exception to the rule of scholarly neglect of one medium in favor of another is Tydeman and Price's stage history of Salome *Wilde: Salome*, which, however, does not analyze the intermedial processes informing the Salome tradition. See Tydeman and Price.

²² See Praz 304-19, Dijkstra 376-401, and Showalter 145-68.

²³ Dijkstra viii.

²⁴ Barbara Spackman, "Interversions," *Perennial Decay*, eds. Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 1999) 35-49.

diversity can be represented by systems like lists and catalogues that do not rely on negation, on positive terms and negative terms, on defining one term by negating the other. In Huysmans, this diversity can be seen in tints of colors, as well as in sexual diversity allowing for androgyny, hermaphroditism, or homosexuality that would otherwise be called monstrosities. In this sense, decadents play with a multiplicity of senses, arts, gender identifications, and languages, thus subverting artistic limitations, gender norms, and social conventions.

Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* seems to exemplify this free transfer among senses, arts, genders, and languages. In Wilde's play, we witness this diversity most clearly in the text's synaesthetic structure and net of desires and in its curious fate as a French text written by an Irishman on its journey back to English. Later on, Beardsley's drawings translate Wilde's synaesthetic play into unexpectedly varying sexual desires, mobile gender and character representations, and physical aberrations. Thus, Beardsley's figures range from a fetus with unsuccessfully concealed monstrous erection to an effeminate page not aroused by a gorgeous Herodias in "Enter Herodias" (Fig. 5), or from autoerotically occupied figures to artistic Pierrots, whose human identity is defined by a mask in "The Toilette of Salome — II" (Fig. 6). This mapping out of the play's multiplicity of senses onto a multiplicity of genders and human forms can be interpreted as one of Beardsley's strategies for translating Wilde's synaesthetically defined drama into Beardsley's sexually experimental pictures.

Finally, the scholarly and tropological listing and cataloguing curiously parallels the very cultural accumulation of Salome interpretations while Wilde's play self-consciously seems to embody this iconographic tradition of listing and cataloguing.²⁵ Indeed, as Robert Ross reminds us of a critic's pronouncement, "'Salomé' is only a catalogue"; it is like an "auction".²⁶

Its sources are obvious; particularly Flaubert and Maeterlinck, in whose peculiar and original style it is an essay. A critic, for whom I have greater regard than many of his contemporaries, says that "Salomé" is only a catalogue; but a catalogue can be intensely dramatic, as we know when the performance takes place at Christie's; few plays are more exciting than an auction in King Street when the stars are fighting *for* Sisera.²⁷

The catalogue metaphor captures the decadent obsession with listing and verbal collections of disparate eclectic elements. Simultaneously, it underscores the commodification of artworks, which aesthetes rebel against and are reluctant to acknowledge although they themselves engage in it. Wilde calls this auction-like, collector's spirit of decadent catalogues, this connoisseurship of things beautiful "aesthetic eclecticism" in his "Artist as Critic." To push the metaphors further in the direction of visuality, we can see the rewritings of Salome at the turn of the nineteenth century as the building of an *icono-graphic* tradition. Thus, the nineteenth-century Salomes continue the Medieval and Renaissance iconographic traditions; they bring together image, word, and sound.

²⁵ In her discussion of Huysmans's *À Rebours*, Rita Felski proposes the appropriateness of the catalogue as a metaphor for its decadent style. She notes that despite the text's "avowed disdain for the commercial, [the style] is reminiscent of nothing other than the lavish prose of a consumer catalogue." Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995) 100.

²⁶ Robert Ross, "A Note on Salomé" from the 1930 edition of *Salomé* published by John Lane, Bodley Head, London, 1930. Reprinted in Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde, *Salomé* (New York: Dover, 1967) xvii.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The Importance of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* for the Salome Tradition

How can we explain the popularity of Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé*, which has served as the basis for numerous interartistic transpositions of the myth? What complicates this question is the judgments of inferior quality almost universally pronounced on Wilde's play.²⁸ As an interesting foil to this disparaging attitude toward the play come the commendations of various art projects inspired by Wilde's *Salomé*. While Wilde's play is deemed trite, derivative, and banal, Beardsley's drawings are considered innovative and daring. In his correspondence with Richard Strauss, Romain Rolland also laments the composer's choice of source for his opera: "Oscar Wilde's *Salome* was not worthy of you...: you transcend your subject, but you can't make one forget it."²⁹ The artist Lovis Corinth and the sculptor Max Kruse, the set designers for Max Reinhardt's production of Wilde's *Salomé*, which inspired Richard Strauss's opera, are also thought to have surpassed the raw material that Wilde's play provided; they seemed to be "the real stars, their talents wasted on an inferior play."³⁰ Yet, can there be a law of artistic exchange governing the artistic ferment stirred by Wilde's play in particular? Given the badness of the play, what can explain the artistic excitement and creativity it provoked other than its implicit sensationalism and scandal?

I propose that the repeated representations of Salome function within the iconographic or intermedial memory of the Salome tradition. This is why the repetitive structure of Wilde's *Salomé* reflects most saliently this tradition of infinite copies, imitations, and repetitions. Thus, the sense of foreboding and déjà vu evoked by the compulsive repetitions in Wilde's play: "Something terrible can happen!", is amplified by repetition on the level of tradition. The tradition remembers the story of Saint John's decollation; although we know about its tragic end, we will experience it again. This perhaps motivates also Wilde's decision to make Herod give his unconditional promise to Salome before she dances.³¹ This decision, much lamented by critics of the play,³² reveals Wilde's awareness of a tradition in which Herod has experienced the dance infinitely many times. The promise is given because of Herod's remembrance of Salome's previous dances and not because Herod was subdued by Salome's irresistible, erotically titillating performance in the play itself.

Furthermore, the verbal repetitions in the play curiously encapsulate Salome's inherent intermediality looking backward to the Salome tradition, as well as anticipating its new manifestations. The persistent verbal snippets "look," "voice," "see," "hear," and "dance" recur

²⁸ Mario Praz is uncompromising in his survey of the *fin-de-siècle* Salome tradition; in his search for originality, he completely dismisses Wilde's play: "Yet, as generally happens with specious second-hand works, it was precisely Wilde's Salome that became popular." Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1970) 316. Philippe Jullian calls Wilde's "Salomé" "one of the most famous and one of the worst of his works." Philippe Jullian, *Oscar Wilde*, trans. Violet Wyndham (New York: The Viking P, 1969) 247. About the adverse criticism of the play, see also Nicholas Joost and Franklin E. Court, "Salomé, the Moon, and Oscar Wilde's Aesthetics," *Papers on Language and Literature*, Volume 8, Supplement (Fall 1972): 109f.

²⁹ Quoted in Tydeman and Price 127.

³⁰ Tydeman and Price 33.

³¹ Of course, Herod's promise to give Salome anything she might desire if she dances for him reinforces the sense of Salome's psychological motivation to dance. She dances with the clear purpose in mind to obtain the head of John the Baptist so as to kiss it, or so at least the reversed biblical order of promise and dance suggests.

³² Tydeman and Price mention the critics' dissatisfaction with Wilde's depriving "the dance of its main motive, namely the seduction of Herod," 9.

more than twenty times each within the taut, compact structure of the text to conjoin the synaesthetic and interartistic impulses behind the play. Thus, the repetitions in the text reveal its heightened self-consciousness, as Wilde's *Salomé* knows of its previous intermedial beings. It also knows of itself as an iconographic exemplum, as a precious item in a list.

Additionally, Wilde claims that in its "recurring phrases" his play is bound together "like a piece of music."³³ Wilde's lyrical text bifurcates, straddling both the visual, in its obsession with reflections, and the musical, in its "recurring *motifs*." As David Wayne Thomas nicely suggests, Wilde's *Salomé* is not only about reflections but is also a reflection on reflections; it is "a text about that very distinction, about the slippage between a logic and a metalogic."³⁴ However, unlike Thomas, who is locked in Lessingean strictures against the possibility of transfer among the arts, I suggest that Wilde's *Salomé*, in fact, demands and necessitates the traversing of his play across the mediums. Thus, *Salomé* is not simply about the implicit failure of verbal music, the inherent precariousness and slippage in the figuring of figuration, as Thomas would have it. In its persistent self-reflections and reiterations, the play asserts the possibility of transcending its own medium, as the play's future transformations in pictures, music, dance, and film more than testify. In this sense, Mario Praz is wrong in his judgment on Wilde's *Salomé*, claiming that the most popular and, by implication, worst texts remain in cultural memory. In fact, by reflecting on the vast iconographic Salome tradition, Wilde's text is, if nothing else, the paradigmatic text of Salome.

Production History of Wilde's *Salomé*

The production history of Wilde's play is punctuated by synaesthetic and intermedial elements. Suffice it to mention Wilde's conception of the banned first performance of *Salomé*, in which Sarah Bernhardt was supposed to play Salome in 1892. Wilde suggested that the orchestra be replaced with perfumes to correspond to each new emotion in the play.³⁵ Charles Ricketts did the stage designs for another thwarted staging nine months later in Paris.³⁶ The discussions of the sets and costumes revolved around the different colors the characters would be assigned: the sky was to be rich turquoise green or violet, the Jews were to be in yellow while Herod and Herodias got the blood-red or purple. Salome was wavering between the silver, the green and the golden. The thwarted Sarah Bernhardt and Ricketts productions, as well as the French edition and subsequent English translation of the book emphasize the synaesthetic, the pictorial, the textural, and the aesthetic qualities of the play.³⁷ Thus, though the biblical account is sparse on sensuous detail as mentioned already, Wilde's play, together with the vast iconographic and literary Salome tradition, elaborates on the sensory gaps. So, in Wilde's play, gazing, implied in the painterly tradition, dance, and voice, as suggested by the biblical account where voice and hearing predominate, take over. This is a troubled space to occupy for a drama often described

³³ Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, eds. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000) 874.

³⁴ Thomas 21.

³⁵ Ellmann 372.

³⁶ Horst Schroeder, *Additions and Corrections to Richard Ellmann's Oscar Wilde*, second edition, revised and enlarged (Braunschweig: privately printed, 2002) 128. See also Ellmann 372.

³⁷ For an excellent study of Wilde's *Salomé* in its decorated book form see Nicholas Frankel, *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000).

by critics as unperformable while Wilde himself thought of it as opening up new artistic horizons for the stage.³⁸ How do we reconcile the musical and the pictorial dimensions of the play, its provocative stagings in the twentieth century, its February 1893 French edition bound in “Tyrian purple” wrappers with lettering of “tired silver,”³⁹ and the Beardsley pictured February 1894 English translation, the ordinary edition bound in coarse-grained blue canvass while the luxury edition was rendered in green silk?⁴⁰

Ada Levenson’s reminiscences of the literary practices of the 1890s provide us with a telling anecdote about Wilde’s aesthetic motivations concerning his play’s artistic status:

There was more margin; margin in every sense of the word was in demand, and I remember looking at the poems of John Gray (then considered the incomparable poet of the age), when I saw the tiniest rivulets of text meandering through the very largest meadow of margin, I suggested to Oscar Wilde that he should go a step further than these minor poets; he should publish a book all margin; full of beautiful unwritten thoughts, and have this blank volume bound in some Nile-green skin powdered with gilt nenuphars and smoothed with hard ivory, decorated with gold by Ricketts and printed on Japanese paper, each volume must be a collector’s piece, a numbered one of a limited “first” (and last) edition: “very rare.” He approved.

“It shall be dedicated to you, and the unwritten text illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley. There must be five hundred signed copies for particular friends, six for the general public, and one for America.”⁴¹

Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé* is indeed the book and the play all margin. The text vanishes beckoning the alluring and pleasing surface of a rare collector’s piece, inviting pictures, and defiantly subverting its textual origins. The images, the music, the texture, and the scents informing Wilde’s concept of his play suggest that his *Salomé* is not interested in its textuality; it deliberately undermines it and thus transcends it.

The story and image of Salome had preoccupied Wilde’s mind for a long time before he actually wrote the play in a night, as Wilde’s self-created legend goes, in a blank notebook, conveniently waiting for the play to be written. After Wilde had been writing uninterruptedly for a long time, he took a break by going to the Grand Café where he asked the leader of a gypsy band to play music in harmony with his current thoughts about a woman dancing bare-foot in the blood of a man she had desired, but could not have and, therefore, had slain. The orchestra

³⁸ Wilde, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, 874. Wilde claims that his *Salomé* “enlarg[es] [the] artistic horizons [of the stage].” I suggest that his use of the dramatic medium indeed facilitates his play’s forward artistic movement and aesthetic anticipation of future Salome endeavors. Western thinkers, among them Hegel, Wagner, and Emil Staiger, have long described Drama as the medium of the future. Furthermore, the Salome myth before Wilde had always existed in an interpolated state, within the aural frame of Herod’s recollections in the Bible, tangibly framed in paintings, and in its ekphrastic confinement of a verbalized image in Huysmans’s *À Rebours*. I believe that Wilde’s *Salomé* effectively dissolves and transcends the boundaries of its initial interpolated status. Thus, by recounting Salome in the dramatic medium, Wilde allows for the coexistence of all realms of perception on the stage. In this sense, the sensory impulses underlying the play, as well as its dramatic medium open up the possibilities for the play’s dissemination across the arts, as I argue in this chapter, especially in the section “Vision and Voice,” as well as in the interlude following the chapter.

³⁹ Wilde, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, 555.

⁴⁰ Wilde, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, 578.

⁴¹ Quoted in Frankel 1.

played some “wild and terrible music” that frightened and silenced the guests of the café.⁴² It will be inaccurate to say that this musical, spur-of-the-moment creative stimulus simply influenced Wilde in his creative process; in fact, Wilde consciously sought the music as a further creative incentive. Similarly, according to Richard Ellmann, Wilde was well familiar with the iconography of Salome in Western Art, but Rubens, Leonardo, Dürer, Ghirlandaio, van Thulden, and Regnault’s attempts at rendering her seemed unsatisfactory to him. Only the Salome of Gustave Moreau satisfied him, and he often quoted Huysmans passages on Salome from À Rebours. Wilde was also eager to visit the Prado so as to view Stanzioni’s and Titian’s paintings of Salome while Bernardo (Bernardino) Luini’s rendition also became important for Wilde’s conception of Salome.⁴³ Wilde was further inspired for his Salome after a visit to the Moulin Rouge where he saw a Rumanian acrobat dance on her hands just like Salome does in Flaubert’s story “Hérodias.” Wilde declared, “I want [Salome] to dance on her hands, as in Flaubert’s story.”⁴⁴ According to the testimony of his friends, Wilde also seemed to want the actress playing his Salome to be an accomplished dancer.⁴⁵

Still, when it comes to Oscar Wilde’s knowledge of the iconographic tradition of Salome, posited so persuasively by Richard Ellmann, we can also ask some questions. Wilde looked forward to seeing Stanzione’s Salome at the Prado, as Gomez Carrillo recalls.⁴⁶ Yet, if we look through the Prado Collection, we will realize that Stanzione never actually portrayed Salome. Did Wilde’s friend misremember his conversation with the poet, or, what is more likely, did Wilde assume that Massimo Stanzione’s “Beheading of Saint John the Baptist” is also a representation of Salome?⁴⁷ How many of the paintings, frescoes, or panels has Wilde actually seen? I want to suggest that, despite Wilde’s deep interest in the arts, his imagination in this case was kindled not only by the Ruskinian visually-aesthetic experience—Ruskin’s lectures on art, which Wilde attended, were constantly punctuated by the visual imperative: “Look!”, but also by a large catalogue of titles. This conflation of reading and seeing is also fundamentally Ruskinian in nature.⁴⁸

Similarly, we do not know for sure if Wilde ever saw his favorite representations of Salome, those of Moreau, other than in Huysmans’s ekphrastic descriptions. Charles Bernheimer casts some doubts about this, as Wilde was not in Paris in 1876 or 1878 when Moreau’s paintings were exhibited.⁴⁹ Following Whistler’s criticism of Wilde’s limited knowledge of the arts, Ian Fletcher also emphasizes Wilde’s dependence on literature rather than art in his rendition of Salome.⁵⁰ Still, we do know that Moreau’s “Apparition” was exhibited at the

⁴² Ellmann 344. (From Vincent O’Sullivan, *Aspects of Wilde*, London, 1936, 33).

⁴³ Ellmann 342.

⁴⁴ Ellmann 343.

⁴⁵ Tydeman and Price 13.

⁴⁶ E. H. Mikhail, ed. *Oscar Wilde, Interviews and Recollections*, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1979) 192.

⁴⁷ Influenced by Guido Reni’s idealized elegance, figural grace, and ivory hues in representing young women’s flesh, the seventeenth-century Nepalese painter Massimo Stanzione could have been the perfect artist to portray Salome; yet, he never did. On Stanzione, see “Massimo Stanzione,” Grove Art Online, Oxford University Press, 2006. JSTOR. November 8, 2006. <<http://www.groveart.com>>.

⁴⁸ See Helsinger, *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder*.

⁴⁹ Charles Bernheimer, “Visions of Salome.” *Decadent Subjects* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002) 213.

⁵⁰ Ian Fletcher, *Aubrey Beardsley* (Boston: Twayne Publisher, 1987) 63.

opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 and that Wilde wrote an art review for the exhibit.⁵¹ He did not mention Moreau's painting at that time, but as an aspiring art critic he most probably saw it. Later on, he could have also consulted a reproduction of the painting, which appeared in the magazine *L'Art* in 1879.⁵² Within months of the Grosvenor Gallery opening in 1877, Wilde would finally meet Walter Pater, who would soon after present him with a copy of Flaubert's newly published "Trois Contes," the third tale of which was "Hérodiade."

During his trip to Italy in June 1875, soon after his first mention of John the Baptist,⁵³ Oscar Wilde could have seen a number of mosaics and frescos of Herod's feast and the dancing Salome within the cycle of Saint John the Baptist's life. Wilde's letters from Florence and Milan do not mention any images of Salome, but the enchanted Wilde enthusiastically writes about his visit to Venice and the mosaics of San Marco, two of which represent Salome.⁵⁴ These representations were previously mentioned in John Ruskin's work, who had inspired Wilde in his Oxford lectures in the Michaelmas term in 1874, just a year before Wilde's Italian trip. Similarly, although silent about any Salome images, Wilde's letter from Florence is followed by days of "busy traveling and sight-seeing" (9) when he does not write. He leaves Florence "with much regret on Saturday night" five days after he sends his first letter from Italy, on Tuesday, June 15, 1875. We can only conjecture as to what other exciting artistic experiences filled Wilde's days of silence in Florence, but his letters testify that the most treasured experiences on his trip were visiting galleries and churches. Thus, the writer could have seen Domenico Ghirlandaio's fresco of Salome in Santa Maria Novella (Fig. 3), later criticized by him in a conversation with Gomez Carrillo as incomplete. In Florence, Wilde could have also visited the Peruzzi Chapel, Santa Croce where one of the earliest Renaissance depictions of the subject is to be seen—that of Oscar Wilde's beloved Giotto (Feast of Herod, 1320).

Thus, the sensory richness of the Salome tradition, Wilde's preliminary aesthetic explorations for and interartistic conception of the play, and his *Salomé's* synaesthetic organization determine the transition from the play's intermedial reflection back on the Salome tradition to its aesthetic anticipation of future intermedial translations of Salome.

Translation and Intermediality

Both culturally and textually, the Salome motif seems to be tangled up in translation. The translation of Heine's "Atta Troll" into French by the poet himself, as mentioned earlier, is considered to have commenced the obsessive recapturing of Salomé/Hérodiade in the second half of the nineteenth century in France. According to Oscar Wilde's own account, *Salomé* was written initially in French although there are three different versions of its origin, one of which claims that Wilde wrote the play in English and translated it in French only thereafter.⁵⁵ The title

⁵¹ Tomoko Sato, "Salomé: The Legacy of Oscar Wilde," *Oscar Wilde and the Art of His Time*, eds. Tomoko Sato and Lionel Lambourne (London: Barbican Centre, 2000) 62. About the Grosvenor's Gallery Opening see also Ellmann 78-81.

⁵² Sato and Lambourne, eds., "Catalogue," *Oscar Wilde and the Art of His Time*, 111.

⁵³ Ellmann 40.

⁵⁴ Wilde, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, 5-13.

⁵⁵ Christa Satzinger, *French Influences on Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray and Salome*, 1994.

itself pays tribute to the French in its spelling of *Salomé* with *accent aigu*. Derrick Puffett appropriately summarizes the linguistic complications stemming from Wilde's play in his discussion of Richard Strauss's opera: "That *Salomé* was originally written in French is, for Peter Conrad, 'the first oddity of Wilde's play', evoking parallels as diverse as Beckford (*Vathek*) and Beckett... Any attempt to impose linguistic consistency on a work involving a character called Jochanaan—the German version of an English transliteration of the Hebrew form of the name of a character in a German opera based on a play written in French by an Irishman—is probably doomed from the outset."⁵⁶ Similarly, we have to keep in mind that *Salomé* was translated into English by Sir Alfred Douglas but only after Oscar Wilde revised the text heavily. Furthermore, Aubrey Beardsley, who illustrated the first English edition of *Salomé*, desired to translate the play more than to "picture" it. Richard Strauss used Hedwig Lachmann's translation from the French, the one used in Max Reinhardt's production of the play. Anton Lindner had also sent his translation of the play to Strauss, but eventually the composer opted for Lachmann's translation as the basis for his libretto.

I pose the question: can we trace a relation between this linguistic inconsistency of translation and the interartistic dispersal of the play? How do we proceed from the play's actual translation from French into English, or from English into French, to intermedial translation? Or, in fact, what allows us to see such a dependence? Why did Wilde's creative mind, conditioned by his literary mastery of his native English language, venture into the foreign French and only then journey back into the English? In an interview in the *Pall Mall Budget* (XL, 30 June 1892), Wilde plays with a number of intermedial metaphors to recognize the interartistic resonance that his trans-linguistic play achieves (or at least Wilde believes *Salomé* achieves).⁵⁷

I have one instrument that I know that I can command, and that is the English Language. There was another instrument to which I had listened all my life, and I wanted once to touch this new instrument to see whether I could make any beautiful thing out of it. The play was written in Paris some six months ago, where I read it to some young poets, who admired it immensely. Of course there are modes of expression that a Frenchman of letters would not have used, but they give a certain relief or colour to the play. A great deal of the curious effect that Maeterlinck produces comes from the fact that he, a Flamand by race, writes in an alien language. The same thing is true of Rossetti who, though he wrote in English, was essentially Latin in temperament.

The defamiliarization of the verbal creative process seems similarly to parallel the medial defamiliarization of the play. By writing *Salomé* in French, Wilde appears to be touching a "new instrument," and we can further infer—a musical instrument. His writing in French lends the play "a certain relief or colour," visual aspects that, Wilde suggests, would be impossible for a Frenchman to capture, not at least in this same way. The typical *fin-de-siècle* intermedial metaphoricity is here transposed onto language, implying the kinship between the crossing of medial and linguistic boundaries. Wilde traces back this figuratively intermedial translation of the creative self into a new language to a line of predecessors, who were (or became) intimately connected with the other arts, as well: Maeterlinck, whose lyric drama "La Princesse Maleine"

⁵⁶ Derrick Puffett, *Salome*, ed. Derrick Puffett, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 9. To complicate the matter, Ellmann actually maintains that Wilde borrows Flaubert's use in French of the Greek for St. John's name, Iokanaan. Ellmann 84.

⁵⁷ "Pall Mall Budget" (London), XL (30 June 1892) 947. Quoted from E. H. Mikhail, ed., *Oscar Wilde, Interviews and Recollections*, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1979) 188. In the second line from the bottom of the quote, I use Ellmann's replacement or interpretation of "grace," which appears in Mikhail's reprint, as "race." Ellmann 372-73.

(1889) influenced Wilde's *Salomé* in its "repetitious, incantatory... cadences," and the Pre-Raphaelite poet-painter, Dante Gabriel Rossetti.⁵⁸

Similarly, the great debate among French artists as to whether Wilde's French was good enough for him to have written the play in French paradoxically converges in its assumptions and only diverges in its conclusions about the effectiveness of Wilde's French. Ransome deems Wilde's French child-like, while Gide claims Wilde spoke French "admirably."⁵⁹ Gide continues to reflect on, psychologize, and re-invent Wilde's thought processes by suggesting that Wilde "pretended" to look for words with the intention of making his listeners wait. Gide interprets Wilde's almost imperceptible accent in French as a deliberately retained sound inflection, which was to give Wilde's words "a new and strange aspect." Felix Paul Grewe also recounts his impressions that Wilde took up the foreigner's disguise when he wanted to make his audience wait for his words. Interestingly, the dramatic effect of Wilde's performance of his foreignness results again in an intermedial metaphor. The word he finds is in fact a difficult French word, which would challenge even native speakers of French. According to Grewe, this newly-found French word struggling and fumbling its way out of the Englishman's mind resembles a statue emerging from the relief of his speech: "ein Wort, das er wie eine Statue hinausstellte aus dem Relief seiner Rede."⁶⁰

The complicated materialization of Wilde's French word, deliberate or not, gives grounds for romanticized synaesthetic interpretations of its coming into being. Thus, in their intermediality, Wilde's translated words metaphorically endorse the possibility for transfer between language and the arts while, at the same time, embodying in their own right the aesthetics of artistic synthesis. In Wilde's case, linguistic translation parallels closely interartistic experimentation.

Interestingly, just like Wilde's play, translation in general has been perceived as a degraded look back at the original. Nevertheless, while linguistic translation has often been viewed as a derivative, mechanistic process, critics have also regarded translation positively, as an artistic act. In "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin suggests that translation perpetuates the life of the original and secures its afterlife.⁶¹ The original relies on the living translation so as to transcend its own historical death. In Benjamin's analysis, translation is positively charged while the original recedes. By valorizing translation, Benjamin suggests that, in its "translatability" (that is, in its aesthetic aptness for translation), the original looks forward to its future translations.

Continuing this line of thought focusing on translation as aesthetic transformation, Jacques Derrida conceives of translation as relinquishing the materiality of the original and reinstating a new materiality in a creative act, which is poetry: "The materiality of a word cannot be translated or carried over into another language. Materiality is precisely that which translation

⁵⁸ See Tydeman and Price 4-6, where Maeterlinck's "Princesse Maleine" is described in musical and visual terms. Debussy's opera based on Maeterlinck's play "Pelléas et Mélisande" was finished in 1895 but performed only in 1902.

⁵⁹ In Ransome, quoted in Satzinger 207.

⁶⁰ In Lück, quoted in Satzinger 208.

⁶¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *Illuminations*, 69-82.

relinquishes. To relinquish materiality: such is the driving force of translation. And when that materiality is reinstated, translation becomes poetry.”⁶² So, translation does not communicate a message and does not rely on signifieds. Rather, it poetically transforms signifiers. Translation is an art. Its creativity allows for a forward aesthetic perspective in the act of translation, for the creative afterlife of an artwork in Benjamin’s terms. Thus, the original in its translatability anticipates its future aesthetic interpretations.

I propose that the materiality of language can also transmute into the materiality of painting, music, and dance, just as we saw Wilde’s French words become music, colors, and statues. The act of intermedial translation becomes art, to invoke Derrida. In the next section, as well as in the Interlude to follow, we shall examine in detail the synaesthetic texture of Wilde’s *Salomé* as constituting the play’s artistic translatability that allowed it to disseminate across the arts.

Vision and Voice in *Salomé*

At first sight, Wilde’s *Salomé* is structured neatly around two pairs of oppositions: that of the idolatrous eye and the iconoclastic and iconophobic voice and that of the material and spiritual worlds.⁶³ The eye seems to be bound exclusively to the material realm of sense-perceptions and the body while the prophetic voice seems to transcend the material and access the spiritual realm:

Eye Versus Ear (Voice) Material Versus Spiritual (Body/Senses Versus Soul)

The characters who belong to the corrupted Oriental court are obsessed with gazing, a gazing that generates and perpetuates desire. Hypnotized by his compulsive gazing, Narraboth opens the play with a statement prompted by his sighting of the princess: “How beautiful is the princess Salome to-night!”⁶⁴ The young Syrian’s infatuated exclamation is followed by an urgent imperative: “Look at the moon.” The Page of Herodias, in his homoerotic desire for the young Syrian, attempts to divert Narraboth’s fixed gaze, but unsuccessfully. Although Narraboth looks at the moon, he is able to see only Salome in the moon, which to him looks “like a little princess.” Narraboth’s similes internalize his visual desire, and, now, not his gaze but his language pursues and fixates on Salome. The vicious circle of visual desires keeps haunting the

⁶² Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1978) 210.

⁶³ The opposition of sight and sound, as aligned with that of matter and mind, informs Bram Dijkstra’s reading of Wilde’s “Salome.” Yet, to serve his discussion of misogyny in *fin-de-siècle* representations of Salome, he concentrates solely on the figures of Salome (the flesh), Jokanaan (the spirit), and Herod, as torn between body and soul. Thus, Dijkstra’s account misses the intricacies of the exchange between voice and vision in “Salome,” as we shall see, despite his sensitivity to the pictorial and verbal dimensions of Salome’s iconographic tradition. Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity. Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 396-98.

⁶⁴ Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, drawings by Aubrey Beardsley (Boston: Branden, 1996). All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

play until the end. We need only mention Herod's ocularcentric infatuation with Salome, as he looks at her "with his mole's **eyes** under his shaking **eyelids**" (5). Herod further attempts to deflect Salome's determination to possess the head of Jokanaan by offering her topazes "yellow as are the **eyes** of tigers, ... pink as the **eyes** of a wood-pigeon, and green ... as the **eyes** of cats," as well as "onyxes like the **eyeballs** of a dead woman." (32) Thus, the **eye** itself as the organ of sight becomes an obsession recurring compulsively in the text. Finally, Salome's own obsession with Jokanaan emerges visually in the play: "I would but **look** at him, this strange prophet." (8)

At the other end of the **eye—ear** opposition stands Jokanaan. The Hebraic prohibition against graven images resounds through all his speeches. In one of his most iconoclastic prophetic outbursts, he verbally abuses the woman who succumbs to her visual lust:

Where is she who saw the images of men painted on the walls, even the images of the Chaldeans painted with colors, and gave herself up unto the lust of her eyes... (9)

Jokanaan condemns eye-sight, the visual art of painting, and the sacrilegious image-making as idol-making in their naturalized relation to sensual lust. Lust is defined as essentially visual, the lust of the eyes. The apparently obscure referent, the abstract "she" whom Jokanaan invokes, remains incomprehensible to the soldiers in the court. Either due to courtly decorum or genuine lack of understanding, the young Syrian tries to dispel Salome's suspicions that Jokanaan condemns her mother in his speeches. Salome and Herodias, however, are not deceived; they see through the abstractness of the feminine third-person singular pronoun, tracing back the imaginary genealogy of visual lust: woman—Herodias—Salome.

Yet if we look at another of the proclamations of Jokanaan's voice, the opposition vision/voice becomes tangled up: "The **eyes** of the blind shall **see** the day, and the **ears** of the **deaf** shall be opened." Here vision and hearing both exist in a spiritual dimension. A new opposition develops: that of seeing and mere looking. I would claim that this is a Platonic opposition implying a double vision, that of the inner eye of the intellect, perceiving the truth, and that of the deceptive senses apprehending only the shadow-world of illusions.⁶⁵ If the alignment of these two pairs of oppositions, the eye and the ear, as well as the material and the spiritual, is now unsettled, we have to ask whether the concept of voice in the play undergoes a similar splitting.

When Salome is first overcome by desire for Jokanaan, she figures her fascination with Jokanaan in aural terms. In fact, we first encounter Jokanaan in the auditory realm, as a disembodied "Voice":

The Voice of Jokanaan: Rejoice not, O Land of Palestine, because the rod of him who smote thee is broken. For from the seed of the serpent will come a basilisk, and that which is born of it shall devour the birds.

Salome: What a strange voice! I would speak with him. (7)

⁶⁵ On double vision in Plato's dialogues and the distinction between the deceptive sense-perception of sight and the inner eye of the mind or intellect see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1993) 26-27.

Salome reads or misreads the exuberantly allegorical prophecies of John the Baptist as the elocutions of “a strange voice.” She reduces the figurative import of his words to a timbre, a strange tone of voice. This desire for the voice turns, on the spur of the moment, into a desire for verbal communication, for “speak[ing].” The mysterious quality of the voice blends with what may seem an obscure or hackneyed prophecy and necessitates Salome’s further exploration.⁶⁶ Certainly, Jokanaan’s prophecies perplex the rest of the court members in a similar manner: “What is he talking of? // We can never tell. Sometimes he says things that fright one, but it is impossible to understand what he says.” (4) The prophetic words of Jokanaan prove unintelligible and disintegrate into gibberish in the perception of the other characters. His voice is figured as sheer aural presence, lacking in meaning: “He is always saying ridiculous things.”

Thus, we witness how voice in “Salome” splits into physical timbre and spiritual message. Salome further equates this corrupted, material function of the prophetic voice in the text not with meaningful words but with music: “Speak again, Jokanaan. Thy **voice** is as **music** to mine **ear**.” (10) In this sense, the voice that Salome perceives is sheer tone, timbre, music, with no meaning. Because the voice is emptied out of meaning in the perception of the characters, words are confused with music and act merely in sensuous, musical terms. So, the perception of voice as music without any intellectual or spiritual meaning is the material side of the voice, which is coupled with looking and gazing in the text.

Interestingly, the musical and auditory simile Salome uses to describe her perception of John the Baptist’s voice has undergone a curious transformation from the original French, in which she intones: “Ta voix m'enivre.” The princess is “drunk” on Jokanaan’s voice. Radical, yet poetically motivated, the act of translation has performed simultaneously a linguistic and a synaesthetic leap. The ecstasy of intoxication transmutes into the ravishing sounds of music, and we know from the German Romantics and Nietzsche that the conflation of drunkenness and music is appropriate. The murky fate of the actual translation into English attributed in various degrees to Sir Alfred Douglas and Wilde does not allow us to identify precisely which of the two took the liberty of translating intoxicating taste into exhilarating sound. Still, the creative departure from the original gives us a reason to believe the change was made by the author in accordance with his own aesthetic philosophy of translation as synaesthesia. In this sense, I suggest that, in addition to performing Wilde’s synaesthetic translation, the English version also bears the seal of authorial self-consciousness and thus deliberately chooses music and ear as the appropriately intoxicating art and sense for Salome’s ravishing experience of voice as sensuous sound, bereft of meaning.

Now we can see our initial oppositions of eye and ear in a new light, as we have realigned the modes of perception in Wilde’s *Salomé*:

⁶⁶ Here we stumble upon an interpretative problem: do we take Jokanaan’s timbre to be irresistible or do we believe that Salome confuses Christian allegory with the voice that utters it? In the former case, the voice becomes an element in the play that cannot be pinned down. It transcends the play and eludes it, demanding its future enactment on the stage or in the opera. This interpretation can certainly gesture toward the future interartistic transformations of the play. In the latter case, we find the alignment between voice and spirituality collapse in the ways in which the Oriental court perceives the voice. Both readings seem to support the logic of interartistic dissemination, the one demanding the materialization of the voice, the other emphasizing the physical sense of hearing and the synaesthetic, and hence interartistic, potential of the play.

Material		Spiritual
Music	Voice	Words
Looking/Gazing	Vision	Seeing

To enhance the implications of vision and voice in *Salomé*, I will discuss briefly the phenomenology of voice and vision in Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The musical quality of the voice is also foregrounded in *Dorian Gray* where Lord Henry’s tone of voice, its musicality, exercise the decisive influence on Dorian in his corruption. Harry’s early speech about influences and temptations, figured as musical, (158-59) “touch[es] some secret chord that [has] never been touched before, but that [Dorian] felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses.” (160)⁶⁷

Music had stirred him [Dorian] like that. **Music** had troubled him many times. But **music** was not articulate. It was not a new world, but rather another chaos, that it created in us. Words! Mere words! How terrible they were!... They seemed to have to be able to give plastic form to formless things, and to have a **music** of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute (160)

And how charming [Dorian] had been at dinner the night before, as with startled eyes and lips parted in frightened pleasure he had sat opposite to him at the club, the red candle shades staining to a richer rose the wakening wonder of his face. Talking to him was like playing upon an exquisite **violin**. He answered to every touch and thrill of the **bow**. ... There was something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence. No other activity was like it. To project one's soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one's own intellectual views echoed back to one with all the added **music** of passion and youth... (179)

This passage is fascinating not only in its figuring of rhetoric and persuasion, of words as music but also in the invasive act of the voice entering the body of another subject as influence.⁶⁸ Influence empties out the body of a subject, making it an object to be possessed. Furthermore, this act is not innocuous; the subject who exerts its influence is also “enthralled.” The fetters of influence enslave in both directions. Here I want to go back to *Salomé* where vision plays a similar function. The male gaze (Herod’s, Narraboth’s, and so on) is active and powerful, but the power dynamic is completely reversed when the gazer is also enthralled and hypnotized in his gazing.

The voice of Jokanaan impacts the world around him, but it also becomes the agent of his own demise. The power of his voice can be most clearly seen in Salome’s claim that Jokanaan “didst take [her] virginity” from her. The physical act of penetration by exactly this voice is implied here. The bondage between subject and object of the gaze and the voice deny access to transcendence in the play. Both voice and gaze become bound to the sensual, the physical, the material.

What is the function of language and words here? Language is entirely corrupted in the play, turned into music. As Wilde himself said, he wanted the play to be a ballad in its repetitive

⁶⁷ Oscar Wilde, “The Picture of Dorian Gray,” *The Portable Oscar Wilde*, eds. Richard Aldington and Stanley Weintraub (New York: Penguin Books, 1981). All subsequent quotations are from this edition. All emphases are mine.

⁶⁸ We can think here of influence also in terms of literary or artistic tradition, a sort of iconography. Thus, this influence can be creative as well as intermedial.

structure while the “recurring phrases of *Salomé*...bind it together like a piece of music with recurring motifs.”⁶⁹ Bernheimer suggests that the word in the play is foregrounded.⁷⁰ This might be so, but it is foregrounded only to experience its own demise. It is emptied out of meaning to be occupied by the eye and the ear, by music and painting. The disembodied voice of Jokanaan, first resounding off-stage from the cistern and then literally severed from the body cannot overpower any more. The word (or Word) is reified. What I want to argue is that music and the sensualized word as music, gaze, look, and vision become so overpowering in the play that the word loses its meaning, killed by the senses, and music and painting therefore take over the next transformations of Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé* in Aubrey Beardsley’s illustrations to the play and in Richard Strauss’ opera. The play becomes transformed into the other mediums in what I want to call the decadent procedure of reviving, animating a dead thing, a dead language and thus engendering new extra-verbal life. This decadent process of interartistic translation keeps unfolding in Beardsley’s illustrations. His “Black Cape” (Fig. 7) emerges as such a new organism, a “beautiful but irrelevant” substitution for a censored drawing; it erases the Salome story completely by transforming it into a fashion fantasy. Additionally, Beardsley’s “Climax” (Fig. 8) presents an allegorical instance of death into life where the dripping blood of Jokanaan’s severed head generates a flower in the foreground. Similarly, Strauss’s “Dance of the Seven Veils” is a kitschy, exoticizing pastiche of previous themes in the opera, a sort of a Baudelairean festering corpse, which does not fit within the musical logic of the rest of the opera. The dance was composed in a rush only a number of months after the completion of the opera itself. In the Interlude that follows this chapter, I will suggest that it does away with Strauss’s music. By transmuting into dance, the opera seeks its future realizations into rhythmical, expressive movement.⁷¹

Finally, in Wilde’s play we witness the decay of the word, that is, what Oscar Wilde had called earlier the “decay of lying.” Herod gives a binding promise to fulfill Salome’s wish if she obliges him by dancing for him. After the dance of the seven veils, when Herod hears Salome’s inexorable wish to be presented with Jokanaan’s head on a silver platter, he does not dare to violate his promise despite his compunctions and misgivings. However, what contemporary speech act theorists would call in this case the power of language is dramatized in the play and figured in Wilde’s typically paradoxical terms as the opposite of powerful language and imaginative fiction, that is, as the decay of lying, the decay of the aesthetic (aestheticized) word.⁷² The inflexibility and rigidity of the word renders it weak. Furthermore, in *Salomé*, the word is waning in the incommunicability of its language, which persists throughout the play in the infinite chain of similes, which fail to reach, represent, or construct a referent.⁷³ Thus, the senses followed by the arts kill and resurrect the word. Although critics have often condemned the play as bad, I suggest that we see in it the word performing its own death.

⁶⁹ Wilde, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* 874.

⁷⁰ Bernheimer 123.

⁷¹ By leaving the dance for a post-composition stage, Strauss seems to excise it from the texture of the opera.

⁷² Bucknell talks about the inversion of the word in the play as the empowerment of Salome’s word. That is, Herod’s word and promise are turned back on themselves by Salome’s cruel request. Bucknell 505.

⁷³ Linda Saladin, “Wilde’s *Salome*: Language of Desire and Aesthetic Distance.” *Fetishism and the Femme Fatale: Gender, Power, and Reflexive Discourse* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).

Thus, instead of construing Herod's outraged exhortation "Kill that woman!" as a virulent misogynistic pronouncement in Dijkstra's vein, I interpret it as an appeal for transformation. As Wilde postulates in "The Ballad of Reading Goal" "each man kills the thing he loves." Here I do not mean just Herod but also Wilde as the artist of Salome, who associates tightly art and criminality, or "Pen, Pencil, and Poison." This murderous yet transformative impulse of Wilde's aesthetic views surfaces also in his parable of the artist. By destroying the everlasting bronze image of sorrow, an image he fashioned himself, the artist forges anew the evanescent moment of joy. Similarly, André Gide remembers that in Wilde's views "in order to know an essence, one must eliminate it... Each thing is made up only of its emptiness..."⁷⁴ Thus, to reveal itself, art needs to kill its essence and become a surface, a mask, or a veil. The arts imitate each other so as to create the illusion of another art, which is their way of murdering their essence so as to become themselves.⁷⁵

We can interpret the violent plot of murders in Wilde's *Salomé* as the self-reflexivity of the text, which is conscious of its renunciation of the word for the other sensory and artistic realms, for the other arts. Thus, *Salomé* is a text that does not want to be one. It transcends itself by wishing to be music. The text itself keeps emphasizing that which is beyond its words: the non-existent referent, Jokanaan's voice, which is not contained by the play, as well as the dance, which takes over the play. That is how a parenthetical stage direction ([SALOMÉ *dances the dance of the seven veils*]) comes to hold a sway on the *fin-de-siècle* imagination, as it decides the fate of the characters in the play. If we see this as a battle between the verbal and the non-verbal, as dance, gesture, rhythm, and music, the dance clearly wins.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, I propose a transformative model based on the senses to explain the dissemination of Salome, in particular Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, across the arts. I argue that Wilde's play stages a battle between language and the senses, which results in the decay or crumbling of language and the emancipation of the senses. While language's communicative potential is exhausted, vision and music prevail. Embodied in the play's leitmotivic structure, musical language reduces voices to timbre and words to sheer sound while the visual persists in desirous gazes and vividly descriptive similes.

Propelled by synaesthesia, translation, iconographic and listing devices, the play's sensory expansion murders language as the tragedy's medium proper, empties out its essence, and catalyzes Salome's further transformations into Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations and Richard Strauss' opera. In this sense, Wilde's *Salomé* not only self-consciously embodies and reflects on the synaesthetic and interartistic impulses behind the Salome tradition but also participates in a typically Modernist project by promoting its own aesthetic transformations across the arts.

⁷⁴ Jullian 239.

⁷⁵ Interestingly, in a discussion of Derrida's aside on translation mentioned earlier, Lawrence Venuti suggests that translation is a violent, aggressive act; it murders the original. Just as Wilde's play stages its own demise in my argument, in Venuti's terms, the original experiences its death while the translation lives on. In this sense, translation is a creative, future-oriented, though murderous act. Lawrence Venuti, Guest Lecture for Lydia Liu's seminar "Critical Translation Theory," Columbia University, Spring 2007.

By drawing on Walter Benjamin's discussion of translation in "The Task of the Translator," I conceptualize this transcending of the play's medium as a translation securing the artwork's life and "afterlife," as we shall see in the following Interlude.⁷⁶ I adopt this positive, forward perspective of Benjamin's reading of translation to revise the critics' predominantly retrospective quest for sources and origins in the case of Wilde's *Salomé*. Playing with decadent and Benjaminian notions of life, death, and "afterlife," the chapter delineates the decadent procedure of murdering and then reviving a dead language by engendering new extra-verbal, sensory life. Thus, the intermedial artwork appears as a new organism sprouting off from the textual corpse of the questionable, in Wilde's case, original.

⁷⁶ Interestingly, Benjamin's discussion of pure language in "The Task of the Translator" very much resembles Baudelaire's idea of synaesthesia in "Correspondences." Thus, pure language seems to be grounded in the conflation of languages "into one true language," as "the languages themselves, ... reconciled in their mode of signification, harmonize." In the same paragraph, Benjamin talks about the "echo of the original" in translation, as well as about "the language forest." Baudelaire's poem certainly hovers in the background of Benjamin's text, especially given the fact the Benjamin's essay was a preface to his translation of Baudelaire's "Tableaux Parisiens," (a section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*). Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 76-77. This idea of the complementariness of a multiplicity of languages, as well as a multiplicity of senses underlies my discussion of intermediality as translation.

INTERLUDE

Decadent Senses:

The Visual and Musical Afterlife of *Salomé*

Wilde kills off Salome, as his play murders the Word and presents us with its severed head on a silver platter, conjuring up a synaesthetic swirl of the crimson of its now-silent mouth, the whiff of incense, the bitter taste of blood, and the sexually charged bite of its fleshy lips. Wilde's synaesthetic image demands that the sensory gaps in the text be visually and musically elaborated. In an interartistic fashion, the senses are to perpetuate the afterlife of the play and disseminate it across the arts. The empty margins of the text are to demand the continuation of Wilde's sensuous self-destructive verbal snippets as ornamental vignettes where meaning is created synaesthetically, not linguistically, whereas the disembodied voice of John the Baptist will strive to become music.

Black-and-White Images

Aubrey Beardsley adopts the sensuousness of Wilde's medium—black ink on white, but revokes its verbal qualities—the expression of consecutive plot or the creation of clear meaning. His drawings do not illustrate the play and reject orderly progression; rather, they appropriate the play for their own aesthetic experimental purposes of synaesthetic gendering, as we have already discussed in Chapter One. Beardsley's pictures are a succession of unrelated images to be gazed upon. The coherence of the illustrations is mainly stylistic, captured in Beardsley's very own Japonist style of representation. Often, the drawings are theatrically framed, recalling Wilde's text's dramatic genre rather than the content of the play. We enter Salome's dressing room or her boudoir, engaging voyeuristically with the images of femininity and multiplicity of perverse sexual preoccupations. Similarly, in "Enter Herodias," Wilde himself, in a fool's outfit, stretches out his arm to introduce his heroine Herodias as a powerful queen and a threatening female, as her regally tall figure dominates the whole length of the drawing, which only barely contains her. The pictorial, the theatrical, and the verbal coexist in Beardsley's own *Gesamtkunstwerk* project.¹

The draftsman's sinuous, sensitive, and confident contours outline vast flat expanses of white emptiness and black plenitude inspired by Japonisme.² His drawings look forward to non-

¹ We should keep in mind that Beardsley was a vehement Wagnerite himself with a great appreciation for Wagner's music and ideas. He produced numerous illustrations on Wagnerian themes, such as "*Siegfried*: Act II"; at least six of his illustrations for Thomas Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" (1893-94) representing Tristan and / or Isolde in a Wagnerian vein; and the six drawings for "Das Rheingold" (1896-97). On Beardsley and Wagnerism, see Emma Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2002).

² On Japonisme in Aubrey Beardsley's *Salomé* drawings, see Klaus Berger, *Japonisme in Western Painting from Whistler to Matisse*, trans. David Britt (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1992) 250-57.

representational art. For instance, the lower left half of Beardsley's "Toilette de Salomé II" is utterly abstract and incomprehensible without its minimal context—Salome's stylized facial features and those of a Pierrot acting as her coiffeur—that allows us to piece together the curves delineating the white and black segments of the drawing as Salome's clothing (Fig. 9). Only through a few continuous sparse black lines against the white paper and the black surface does the drawing suggest the flow of Salome's garment. Likewise, though less radically, Beardsley's replaced first version of "Toilette de Salomé I" (Fig. 6) opts for physical lightness and white color rather than the weightier, more substantial black surface of Salome's attire in the later drawing. The princess is now clad in the white of the paper, the bare outline gesturing only minimally at her nude figure and white dress.

Interestingly, by using black ink on white paper as his mediums, Beardsley preserves and ironically translates the conceptual black-and-white kernel of Wilde's play. Jokanaan's thinking in diametrical positive and negative terms parallels Salome's response to his rejection by inverting her wistful desiring into a negative desire full of loathing. In Beardsley's drawings, however, the logic of thought in polar opposites is visually turned around, as Japonist black-and-white stylization heralds figural abstraction in his illustrations. Thus, in visual representation, Beardsley's use of black and white breaks up the academic stereotypes of the fine arts at the *fin de siècle*. His technique of silhouetting subverts all the painterly injunctions against sharp contrasts in the academic art of the time, as it spurns gradual transitions, nuancing, and molding by flattening out the representational surface. Beardsley's pictures are textually inspired by the black and white medium of Wilde. Yet, the shimmering Byzantine color that Wilde desired for the illustrations, a desire informed by Gustave Moreau's visions of Salome, was never to be realized.³ Wilde's and Beardsley's respective fantasies of Byzantine and Japanese styles catastrophically clash in their imaginings of the diametrically opposed colorful splendor of Byzantine mosaics and color and the line economy of Japanese prints. We cannot reconcile the opulent colors of Moreau's paintings and Huysmans's and Wilde's fantasies of richly sparkling jewels, and Beardsley's modern black-and-white line-block prints, promoting a sparse, monochrome aesthetics. Can Wilde's *Salomé* be pictured without color? Into what does Wildean color transmute? Do we in fact need to reconcile Wilde and Beardsley?⁴ Interestingly, we can claim that only the binding and decoration of the covers for the book's first edition suggest the Byzantine character of Wilde's play. Made out of coarse-textured blue canvas, the wrappers were graced with a rose medallion stamped in gold in the upper part of the cover and ornamented with Beardsley's golden three-candle emblem imprinted on the lower side.⁵

Like the blank margins of Wilde's text, Beardsley's black-and-white drawings create voids of meaning and open up a space for the viewer's imagination and desire, enabling the

³ Still, Ian Fletcher shows that Beardsley's drawings follow Moreau's Byzantine style and that Moreau's Salome paintings were one of his sources. See Ian Fletcher, *Aubrey Beardsley* (Boston: Twayne Publisher, 1987) 63-66.

⁴ Both early and contemporary critics of Wilde's and Beardsley's "Salome" seem to agree that Beardsley's drawings do not illustrate the text. They challenge it, caricature it, parody it, and so on but never harmonize with it. For a discussion of Wilde's own relationship to his Byzantine sources, see Rothstein's comment on the Byzantine character of the play in Weintraub 57. About the two traditional and some more recent arguments on the creative collaboration between Beardsley and Wilde, see Fletcher 57-63.

⁵ For a reproduction of the cover, see Calloway 70.

continuation of the drawings across the senses and the arts.⁶ In fact, even Beardsley's creative process points at the necessity for continuation, for mechanical reproduction. The original drawings were specifically made to be reproduced by the process of photographic line-block printing and could not compare in their less-than-perfect pencil line inking to the gracefulness of the reproductions, which far eclipse the originals.⁷ So, Beardsley's original drawings look forward to their reproductions, where the originals attain their "full vitality."⁸ Ultimately, Wilde's play, too, becomes transformed into Beardsley's drawings in a decadent procedure of bringing back to life a dead language through its flourishing senses and thus engendering new visual life.⁹ This decadent process of interartistic translation keeps unfolding in Beardsley's illustrations. His "Black Cape" (Fig. 7) emerges as such a new organism, a "beautiful but irrelevant" substitution for a censored drawing. It erases the Salome story completely by transforming it into a fashion fantasy. Additionally, Beardsley's "Climax" (Fig. 8) presents an allegorical instance of death into life where the dripping blood of Jokanaan's severed head generates a flower in the foreground.

The Wings of Death

Marcus Behmer (1879-1958), a Beardsley-inspired draftsman most famous for his illustrations for the German edition of *Salomé*, is an often forgotten name in the mediation between Oscar Wilde's play and Richard Strauss's opera. Hedwig Lachmann's German translation of *Salomé*, on which Strauss based his libretto, was illustrated like the English book.¹⁰ However, the drawings were done not by Beardsley, as one might expect, but by Marcus Behmer. Thus, Behmer brought forth another interartistic translation of the play, which was culturally motivated by its German context.¹¹ Behmer's drawings for *Salomé* were deemed derivative, as they openly marvel at and rely on Beardsley's Japanese representations, but they also convey a German Expressionist sensibility to the drawings by blending more angular, rougher lines and segments with *Jugendstil* vegetative ornaments and animal motifs. Less audacious than Beardsley's drawings, Behmer's illustrations remain largely representational and do, in fact, illustrate the text, unlike Beardsley's theatrical and voyeuristic Japanese fantasies.

⁶ On the necessary process of artistic transformation in modernity, of the aesthetic death of old things and their modernist resurrection in Pater and Wilde, see Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth-Century Culture of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000) 227-62. For instance, "[Beardsley] certainly has captured two particularly Paterian circumstances, the fascination of mortality in a world of excess, and the manner in which death marks not a complete end, but a transformation into a new beginning." Siegel 262.

⁷ On the line-block technology that Beardsley used (called by Frankel block-line technology) and on various commentators noting the better quality of the reproductions of Beardsley's drawings, see Frankel 66-67.

⁸ Clive Ashwin, "Graphic Imagery, 1837-1902: A Victorian Revolution," *Art History* 1 (1978). Cited in Frankel 67.

⁹ We can extend the metaphor of murder and death by considering Wilde's pronouncement that "in literature it is always necessary to kill one's father," thus commenting on his stylistic and thematic theft from Flaubert, figured as a murder. Similarly, this killing and overkilling of one's artistic father may represent the relationship between Beardsley's drawings and Wilde's text. Just as the word performs its own death in Wilde's text, the drawings seem to continue this murderous process by overpowering the text. See Fletcher 59-60, 62.

¹⁰ Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, trans. Hedwig Lachmann, illust. Marcus Behmer (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1903).

¹¹ On Marcus Behmer, see Edouard Roditi, "Marcus Behmer, a Master of Art Nouveau," *Arts in Society*, vol. 7 (Madison: U of Wisconsin Extension Division, 1970) 268-75.

The last drawing for the Behmer-illustrated book, that of Herod attempting to hide away from the deceptions of vision, comes perhaps the closest to Beardsley's barely representational style (Fig. 10). It self-reflexively captures Beardsley's creative influences on the German illustrator while Behmer flaunts his appropriation of Beardsley's aesthetics and playfully suggests that he may in fact be Beardsley. Here, reminiscent of the vast uninterrupted black and white surfaces representing Salome's dress in Beardsley, a white triangular segment depicts Herod's cloak, taking up most of the drawing surface. It is decorated only with a large circular dotted ornament, made out of smaller similarly circular patterns, in the lower half of the gown; it reminds us of Beardsley's roses and circular dotted patterns in "The Eyes of Herod." We should note Behmer's signature print-letter B, which appears in all the drawings (for instance, at the top right corner of Fig. 11). By using his initial as a signature, Behmer traces a verbal connection to his predecessor and illustrator of Wilde's *Salomé* through their common initial. Only in Behmer's last drawing the B seems to disappear. We can perhaps see it in the clouds that resemble elaborate hand-written Bs (especially, the one on the right side of Herod) or perhaps we can uncover the deceptive self-conscious signature in the truncated, two-thorn motif in the lower right corner, which recalls Beardsley's three-candle signature in the Salome drawings.

Behmer's last drawing thematizes disguise as a survival-technique advocated by Herod at the end of the play.¹² Herod's face eludes our glance, hidden in his headgear's plumage. Initially, the face is hard to detect. What we do see immediately is a frontal view of the king's cloak, decorated with a jewelry chain with a rosette, hanging over a puffy mantel with a suspended long tassel. The jewelry creates a slightly off-center axis as if splitting the frontal view of the king. Yet, once we see Herod's face, we realize that he has turned his back on us in the drawing, his face rendered in profile. Furthermore, we can register two profiles facing in opposite direction: Herod's heavily wrinkled profile, facing left, and a counterfeit profile made out of Herod's regal hat and its feathers, facing right. We can perceive it as a female profile: a pale unwrinkled face with a thin elongated nose, delicate chin, black strongly outlined eyelashes triply-edged, reminiscent of the Behmer's thorny and war-like motifs.

To represent Herod's attempts to hide himself and his refusal to look at the end of the play, Behmer takes up disguising and concealing as a pictorial techniques in his drawing. Thus, the illustrator mixes productively deceptive frontal and back views of Herod, as well as allows for the ambiguous identification of the black and the white surfaces. We can further ask: Does the blackened moon show through the clouds as a white patch, or is the white segment a part of the clouds? Where is Herod's face and which profile should we focus on? Where is Behmer's signature? Is the illustration somehow Beardsley's, both paying homage to the illustrator and appropriating his style? What are the initials on the Beardslean stalks?

While altering and cutting Lachmann's translation for his *Salome* libretto, Richard Strauss must have been exposed daily to Behmer's drawings. One of the illustrations focuses our attention on a motif from Wilde, which Beardsley never represented: the Angel of Death, which became a part of Strauss's opera (Fig. 11). In Marcus Behmer's illustration, the wind of death is made visually concrete and palpable, subverting the ungraspable shudder conveyed by sound in the opera and canceling out the vague ominous auditory suggestions in Herod's and Jokanaan's

¹² While Richard Strauss did not include the complete last speech of Herod, the subtle references to masking appear on the musical level in the opera.

consciousness (inner hearing) in Wilde's play. Portrayed as a black-feathered skeleton of a bird with an enormous canine skull with bared teeth and one long ferocious fang, Behmer's image is caught up in the specificity of visual representation that renders it weak or, more precisely, grotesque. Perhaps, this pictorial Angel of Death is horrific, as it does shock us at first sight; yet, by being pinned down and framed in a picture, even if represented as greater than the Moon, it loses its frightening, supernatural power. It becomes a bit laughable or ridiculous: "lächerlich," just as the allegorical flourishes of John the Baptist disintegrate into gibberish in the soldiers' perception of the precursor's prophecies. Tantalized by Behmer's drawing and Wilde's cues in the play, Strauss focuses not on what the visual artist can render—the visible winged skeleton as an allegory of death, a version of the grim reaper—but rather on the ineffable musical wind of death offered to our hearing. Thus, Strauss produces perhaps the most successful tone-painting in the opera: "Es ist kalt hier," which fills one of the sensory gaps in Wilde's text, as well as remedies the insufficiencies of the Death Angel's image.

In the play, other than Jokanaan, only Herod hears the wings of death as a furious wind raging in his mind. He is thus locked up in his solipsistic delusions. Meanwhile, in Strauss's opera, we become privy to the characters' musical interiorities, as much to the obsessions and otherworldly hearing of Herod, which provoke a visceral reaction in us, making our hairs stand on end, as to Herodias's completely separate space of realism, articulated by a brief, straightforward, uncomplicated, calm tonal resolution in E minor: "Ich höre nichts"; "I hear nothing" (fig. 166-167). Herod swirls in the frenzy of accelerating ascending and descending rapid chromatic lines: sixteenth runs in the strings against eighths in the flutes, that is, the upper *winds* with their chilling well-articulated sound. The chromatic rustle intensifies with a crescendo to the portentous announcement of Jochanaan's orchestral motif, which underlies "the beat of vast wings," "das Rauschen von mächtigen Flügeln." Seeking resolution, a dissonant, fully diminished seventh chord (presumably, diminished Eb leading to Herodias's E minor response) follows, and Herodias answers monosyllabically: BBEE, against a static E minor triad, which brings the last tortured but fading chromatically ascending gust of wind in the first violins to an end with Herodias's conclusive E, "nichts"; "nothing." Then all is silent. (See and hear Example 1.)¹³ *Salome's* music encompasses everyone's interiority, and, as subjectivity is externalized musically as orchestral sound, musical influence by sheer acoustic presence takes effect. Note that Jochanaan does not want to look at Salome and does not want to be touched by her. Yet, he cannot avoid hearing her powerful voice that touches him by sheer proximity with its physical resonance, so, he has to retreat to his cistern.

¹³ I have created an interactive on-line music handout that is meant primarily for scholars in the humanities who are not musicologists. The examples appear also at the end of the chapter. To access and play the on-line music handout that accompanies this chapter, go to <<http://www.sibeliuseducation.com/index.php?ses=worksheets.scorch>>. Next, search for "Strauss" to retrieve the worksheet. To listen to the handout, you will need to download the free plug-in SibeliusScorch. After downloading Scorch, click on the worksheet "Strauss's "Salome": Disembodied Voices" to open the file. You can now play and listen to the examples to which I refer in this chapter. All examples are presented on the same handout, but you can pause, fast-forward, or rewind the worksheet to find the relevant example. A thin blue line follows the music, as it plays, and indicates visually on the score which example is being played. All examples are clearly marked by a number 1-4, and each has an accompanying text, summarizing or clarifying ideas I discuss here.

The Voice

After being initiated with a lethal kiss into the mystery of love and the mystery of death at the end of Wilde's play, Salome gradually vanishes from sight. Herod orders that the stars and the moon be hidden. "A great cloud crosses the moon and conceals it completely. The stage becomes quite dark" (36). Salome as a visual presence transforms into a sheer vocal presence, into "The Voice of Salome." In her last lines, Salome relinquishes her sensuous appearance and adopts Jokanaan's essence of a disembodied voice. The shields of the soldiers cover and crush the princess of Judea. The word is dead and the image is dead at the end of this tragedy, but the voice perseveres and continues to resound, as if music emanated from Salome herself, as Hofmannsthal's/Strauss's Elektra would have it.

Taking up Wilde's clues about voice and vision in the play, Richard Strauss's opera *Salome* (1905), the play's most (in)famous interartistic adaptation, envoices the characters and translates spiritual word and sensuous voice into a musical idiom. On the one hand, Strauss's Jochanaan inhabits the spiritual edifice of Western tonal music—the diatonic, pure, heroic tonal area of C (we need only imagine the white keys of the piano) with its overarching scheme of tonal development and resolution. Indeed, only as Jochanaan's voice first enters 6 measures before fig. 12, singing off stage from his cistern, do we arrive at a perfect authentic cadence (I64 V I) in C major at fig. 12 that seems to override (or does it?) the chromatic fluctuations and chromatic undulations of the dialogue between Narraboth and the Page in Scene 1. On the other hand, Salome's character is centered around the black-key area of the keyboard: C# minor (and C# major at the climactic end), replete with seductive chromaticisms and tonal colors, proliferating ambiguous and luxuriant harmonic progressions. In other words, the chromatic, dissonant music in *Salome* evokes the musical perversion of the exotic Oriental court and its main heroine. While Jochanaan stands for the Language of Western Music, Salome represents the synaesthetic corruption of music into undulating sensuous tonal colors, as Nordau might have it. Strauss perpetuates Wilde's Jokanaan as a disembodied baritone voice (initially sounding off-stage from his cistern) and the playwright's Salome as the sensual, alluring, embodied voice of the soprano.

Salome further complicates and, in fact, subverts and re-aligns the split between the spiritual Word and the sensuous musical Voice as sheer timbre that we saw in Wilde's play. One orchestral motif, which seems to conjure up Jochanaan's disembodied voice, pervades the score of *Salome* and engages with Jochanaan's "overpowering dark baritone."¹⁴ Associated with the presence and the prophecies of Jochanaan, this seven-note portentous theme delineates an

¹⁴ In her analysis of the opera, Carolyn Abbate posits the existence of two voices belonging to Jochanaan: Jochanaan's baritone and "Jochanaan's voice-music" as the musical motif suggesting Jochanaan's presence and prophecies. Carolyn Abbate, "Opera; Or, the Envoicing of Women," *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: U of C Press, 1993) 236-52. Still, Abbate claims that Jochanaan's musical motif acts as and represents delusion because of the impossible existence of two Jochanaan bodies projecting a voice—one embodied, the other orchestral, "invisible" and "metaphysical" issuing from "a body hidden somewhere in the musical score" (246). By contrast, I show over the next pages that the splitting of Jochanaan's voice destabilizes the clear-cut distinction between the embodied, sensual voice of the dark baritone as an on-stage presence and the disembodied spiritual voice of Jochanaan's music, as suggesting divinity and transcendence. While music according to Schopenhauer is the highest and purest art form, Jochanaan's double voice keeps slipping into sensuousness and emotionality, responding to Salome's influence in the opera.

ascending six-four chord, elaborated on by three descending fourths: two perfect fourths and one augmented fourth where the ominous, prophetic dissonance is sustained to resolve only after a significant prolongation to its logical perfect fourth elaboration.¹⁵ This motif acquires a spectral presence in the music; initially, it emerges in its full-fledged clear form as an orchestral motif in the cellos and the trombones 7 measure after fig. 61-62, solemnly introducing Jochanaan's first entrance on stage. The motif sounds repeatedly in the brass, winds, and strings and permeates the orchestral texture of the music (hovering briefly even in the "Dance of the Seven Veils" at Z/a in the first trumpet).

The *fortissimo* statement of Jochanaan's orchestral theme inaugurated with a perfect authentic cadence in D major at fig. 68 reveals the spirituality of the motif as disembodied music. Like Jochanaan, his music here speaks from the position and with the voice of higher divine authority, and it has the power rightfully to condemn sin and evil (in this case, those of Herod): "Bid him come forward that he may hear the mighty voice of him who in the desert and in the houses of kings has often [**announced**]"; "Heisst ihn herkommen, auf dass er die Stimme Dessen höre, der in der Wüste und in den Häusern der **Könige gekündet hat**." John the Baptist as the precursor announces the arrival of Jesus Christ, and, accordingly, the music portrays him at the height of his religious and prophetic activities, captured by the associative tonality of D major, by Jochanaan's prophetic motif, and by the perfect authentic cadence (I64 V⁷ I), which symbolizes the divine word of music, that is, the Western Music Canon. Likewise, the second perfect authentic cadence in the opera (fig. 14) emphasizes the spiritual nature of hearing as associated with Jesus. Jochanaan proclaims that, "when he comes, the ears of the deaf shall **be opened**."

At her sight of the prophet, Salome takes up the disembodied voice motif—6 measures after fig. 78, and it underlies Jochanaan's curse of Salome. Arguably, Jochanaan's motif resonates also in Salome's theme "Er ist schrecklich" (fig. 76) which is composed of two sixteenth notes (functioning as grace notes) moving up a major third and returning to and sustaining the initial pitch for a half note. The half note then sinks down a perfect fourth. Like Jochanaan's motif, Salome's motif delineates a six-four chord (this time descending) and contains Jochanaan's signature descending perfect fourth, as if flirtatiously echoing the prophetic music without being able to sustain it (See and hear Example 2). The motif's subtle association with Salome and her appropriation of the true motif itself when she describes Jochanaan's emaciated and chaste body show the entanglement of Salome and Jochanaan's demise, as well as their positive or negative attractions. Eliciting a sense of foreboding and relentless fate, Jochanaan's proleptic motif encapsulates the music drama in its sound, both its past in the reminiscences of previous murders in the Salome plot and interartistic tradition, thus acting in the manner of one of Wilde's incessant repetitions, and as an anticipation of the dramatic development in Strauss's opera. It thus fulfills the Wagnerian leitmotivic promise of music as memory and prophecy.

Yet, is Jochanaan's orchestral motif not sensuous, as a Wagnerian leitmotif should be? While the prophetic motif's main function remains that of Jochanaan's disembodied voice, music already makes this purely austere ascetic theme sensuous, available to our hearing. Thus,

¹⁵ The interval of the augmented fourth is equivalent to a tritone, an extremely dissonant interval on which I will elaborate in the following chapter on Skriabin.

Strauss's orchestral motif for Jochanaan's disembodied voice continues to undermine the diametrical opposition of spirit and body, which Wilde explored by suggesting that Jochanaan's speaking voice is music, timbre, pure sonorousness. Initially, Salome picks up the purely musical motif initiated by the horns 5 measures after 78 and appropriates it with her sensuous soprano voice in Jochanaan's prophetic key D major (78/6-8): "How wasted he is!"; "Wie abgezehrt er ist!". The motif is right for a prophecy and the key is right for a prophecy, yet the prophecy has turned into sensuous music, sung by a seductive soprano voice. As soon as he hears Salome, Jochanaan, audibly disconcerted about her womanhood, adopts his otherwise sublime motif to question who she is, his voice very low in the baritone range, trembling with stifled anger: "Who is this woman who is looking at me"; "Wer ist dies Weib das mich ansieht?". His rejection comes as a visceral reaction distorting Jochanaan's pure disembodied-voice music, as the strings are harping on without direction and warping what would otherwise lead to a majestic conclusion of the Jochanaan music. Salome introduces herself with pure diatonic dignity (in A), but John the Baptist pushes her away acoustically with a shocking, jarringly dissonant augmented chord at *fortissimo* in the brass: "Stand back! Daughter of Babylon"; "Zurück, Tochter Babylons!". The warped version of the motif has brought out the emotional corporeality of Jochanaan's voice, now enveloped in the musical sensuousness of the Oriental court, as dotted diminished triad and then chromatic ascents fuel his indignation (fig. 88). And it is at this moment of righteous anger that Jochanaan and Salome meet in the same tonal space—the exotic space of C# where Jochanaan cadences. Just as the fascinated Salome dotes on Jochanaan's music by singing in its prophetic key of D major, as well as lavishes praise on his body, hair, and mouth, Jochanaan has been violently pushed out of his pure tonal orbit and has landed in Salome's C# sphere of influence. When he touches her musically, Salome responds by arpeggiating a C# major triad with her most significant synaesthetic plea in Wilde's play: "Speak again, Jochanaan, thy voice is like music to my ears!"; "Sprich mehr, Jochanaan, deine Stimme ist wie Musik in meinen Ohren!" (See and hear Example 3.) It is in the sphere of affect and sensuous music where Jochanaan and Salome meet.

Like Wilde's *Salomé*, Richard Strauss's opera thematizes influence, as the characters vacillate between different tonalities, attracted or repelled, in the same net of desires—positive or negative. Self-reflexively, the opera enacts the characters' interactions in terms of power and domination, as different voices enter the spheres of influence of other characters. As we saw, even Jochanaan cannot resist this all-penetrating musical influence. Deeply disturbed by Salome's pleas to touch his body and kiss his mouth, Jochanaan curses her, singing again his own disembodied-voice motif in Salome's C# minor tonality at fig. 137, suggesting that the disembodied voice actually has a body that responds to sensory titillation, albeit negatively. So, whereas Wilde's play is solipsistically informed, created in the character's subjective consciousness, music lays bare the internal desires in transferable tonalities,¹⁶ motivic appropriations, and modified borrowings, as well as in tonal attractions.

In her final monologue, Salome is able to conjoin body and spirit through Jochanaan's orchestral motif, by revealing its synaesthetic resonance.¹⁷ During Salome's final monologue, we

¹⁶ On transferable tonality, influence, and domination in the opera, see Tethys Carpenter, "Tonal and Dramatic Structure" in Puffett 93-106.

¹⁷ While Carolyn Abbate aptly points out that Salome pursues "a utopian quest" to transcend the separation of sound and sight, I disagree with her insistence on the acoustic delusion of the disembodied voice that disables the artistic

witness the unification of disembodied voice and bodily mouth in Jochanaan's spectral visual and musical presences: his head on a silver platter and the pure musical motif of his disembodied voice. Mouth and voice, incense and taste, the colored music image of red fanfares and the taste and color of the pomegranate from Salome's earlier attempts at enticing the prophet converge as a synaesthetic compound after his death: "Thy voice was an incense vessel and when I looked on thee I heard a strange music." Salome reaches a cadential resolution in Jochanaan's prophetic tonality of D major. While she is meditating melodically on the strange "music" of Jochanaan until her line tapers off, Jochanaan's now-embodied voice takes over against a D major backdrop, exuding incense, red as the calls of fanfares, carrying the ethereal sound of the upper winds: English horn, oboes, and, finally, the flutes. Musically cast as a mystic and a seer, Salome is engrossed in contemplation of Jochanaan's head: "Salome in den Anblick von Jochanaan's Haupt versunken." The synaesthetic mystery of the orchestral motif that masquerades as Jochanaan's disembodied voice throughout the opera is finally revealed. The solemn prophetic theme has become synaesthetically embodied. The "strange music" of Baudelaire's "A Carrion" has again fulfilled its synaesthetic potential, now in the sensuous music issuing from the violently severed head, conjured up across the decadent senses.

Thus, "Salome" is an opera about musical, synaesthetic, and interartistic influence, the influences that informed it and the influences that it propagates. While in the play we can talk about visual desire but could only touch upon musical or vocal influence (Jochanaan's penetrating voice that takes Salome's virginity away), in the opera desire is figured as musical influence. Finally, influence on the level of interartistic tradition surfaces as synaesthetic desire to fill in the sensory gaps of the Salome myth, more specifically, of Wilde's play: the rustle of the mighty wings the Death Angel; the figuration and musical rendition of Jochanaan's voice; and the dance of the seven veils.

The Dance

Richard Strauss's "Dance of the Seven Veils" unfolds Wilde's stage direction: "SALOMÉ *dances the dance of the seven veils.*" Both its creation and performance are impossibilities. Initially, Strauss needed to compose the music for the dance without relying on a previously written text that would offer him its program, and some critics have argued that the failure of the dance was due to this lack of textual support.¹⁸ The composer had to imagine and fill in a narrative and a choreographic gap, which he later, in the 1920s, wrote down as an elaborate scenario for the dance. A second problem that the dance creates relates to its performance. The bodies of a soprano with a voice of Isolde and a dancer able to perform the seductive striptease could rarely, if ever, coincide. So, in common operatic practice, productions have often used svelte ballerinas as stand-ins for the dance, especially, in the early days of the opera.¹⁹

attainment of synaesthetic, monistic, decadent union of spirit and body and the conflation of the senses in Salome's final monologue.

¹⁸ Alma Mahler's caustically declares the inferior quality of the dance music. Strauss also emerges as an essentially program composer. Without a program (just a vague and sparse stage direction), he cannot produce good Straussian music for the dance. See Puffett, "Appendix A: Straus's Scenario for the *Dance of the Seven Veils*," 165-67.

¹⁹ On various performances of the dance, see Tydeman and Price 126-130.

The dance takes ten minutes of the short one-act opera. Often deemed kitschy in contemporary responses and in recent criticism that favor the opera's otherwise advanced avant-garde chromatic harmony, this dance is an exoticizing pastiche of previous themes in the opera, and it does not fit within the musical logic of the rest of the work. Rather, it seems to pander to popular taste and the audience's needs for sensation, diversion, and erotic titillation.²⁰ It was composed only a number of months after the completion of the opera itself. By leaving the dance for a post-composition stage, Strauss gives it a distinct status as an artistic assertion that was intended to supplement but threatened to supplant Strauss's music.²¹ The dance can be seen as the new organism that sprouts out of the corpse of the opera. Teeming with profaned, that is, musically unmotivated, snippets from the opera, reminiscent of Baudelaire's maggots, worms, and flies from "Une Chaconne," the dance creates its own "strange music." It is music grounded in rhythm and seductive melismas, intermingling the sonorities of Oriental color and languor to conjure up the exoticized and eroticized East through typical the Western musical conventions.

In the heavily syncopated tumultuous introduction to the dance, the whole orchestra has become percussion, each instrument following different rhythmic cycles and patterns, as if fulfilling the Wagnerian dream of unifying dance/gesture and orchestral sound that speak both to the eye and the ear. The visceral on- and off-beat rhythms of the timpani and the snare drum mean to rouse the passions and are enhanced by the variously punctuated rhythmic texture of the orchestral turmoil (explosive offbeat *sfz*-s in the first violins, the first, and the second bassoon; strong off-beats in the horns; on-beat *sfz*-s in the third bassoon, contrabassoon, and clarinets; and on-beat pizzicatos in second violins, cellos and basses). (See and hear Example 4.) The jingling sound of the tambourine, which has represented dance throughout the opera, has finally come to thrive on its own territory, halfway between music and dance. After the chaotically surging opening has subsided, the sinuous, lascivious sound of the oboe takes over in the main dance theme, chromatically undulating between grace notes. The oboe's melismatic melody seems to elaborate all on one interval: the minor second; its essence is embellishment and tonal color. The opera has become a shimmering dance.

Carlos Saura's "Salome" (2002) is the most important recent contribution to the Salome tradition.²² In Saura's film, dance and music take over, at least for the second half of the movie. The metafictional first half gives us an elaborate insight into the making of the film and the biographies of the dancers. The film is highly self-conscious and plays on and flaunts its knowledge of the Salome iconography, narratives, and music. Early on, we are invited to view numerous Renaissance paintings of Salome. The film shows us into the dressing-rooms of the dancers, as Beardsley's theatrical drawings have lead us into Salome's boudoir, that is, into the dressing room of the irresistible Aida Gomez, the flamenco dancer and actress playing Salome. Herodias wears proudly a peacock crown, whereas the whole flamenco dance is silhouetted

²⁰ Robin Holloway, "Salome: art or kitsch?," in Puffett 145-60. See, in particular, 149-51.

²¹ We should note the history of excerpting of the dance in recordings. This strategy of excerpting parallels the dismemberment, the death, and subsequent revival of Wilde's *Salomé*. Similarly, the final scene has acquired its own life as well, both in recordings and in performance (for instance, in a recent New York Philharmonic production of the Final Scene from *Salome*, Lorin Maazel conducting and Nancy Gustafson as Salome, November 2006). A classic recording of Salome's final monologue is the one made by Ljuba Welitsch (1944).

²² Carlos Saura, dir. *Salome*. Perf. Aída Gómez, Pere Arquillué, Paco Mora, Javier Toca, Carmen Villena. DVD. Homevision, 2006/2002.

against three Japanese screens lit in various tints of orange, again reminding us of Beardsley's obsession with Japanese prints and art during his work on *Salome*.

Similarly, the music clearly plays with the simple opposition of corrupted and pure music that Strauss introduced, though, in a different way. Strauss associates Jokanaan with diatonic music and the pure and heroic key of C, whereas Herod's exotic court revels in chromaticisms and revolves around the key of C#, which we can arguably call a perverted version of the clear tonality of C. Carlos Saura, on the other hand, introduces the cultural distinction between the passionate rhythms of a fiery flamenco resounding and danced in Herod's court against the polyrhythmic unpitched hand-clapping and stomping of the dancers' feet (*zapateado*), and Western religious music, its epitome rendered in a baroque aria for solo alto, which soars as St. John the Baptist appears on stage and summons him to the spiritual world. In fact, this is the music that wrenches away the infatuated John the Baptist, seduced by Salome, from her sensuous caresses. This touching twist in Saura's movie sets it apart from previous retellings of the Salome narrative. As befits dance, Saura's production relies on touch, on the interlocking bodies of Salome and Jokanaan, purposefully forgetting Wilde's John the Baptist and his injunctions against touching. So, Jokanaan does not remain blind to Salome's beauty in the filmed dance but, rather, succumbs to it until he is torn away from the princess, responding to his higher calling. Like previous accounts of the Salome myth, this adaptation eclectically steals from the existing Salome tradition, as well as introduces new incongruous elements into its structure. Suffice it to mention the use of flamenco music to render the myth's dance version. In addition, John the Baptist whirls like a dervish so as to represent physically his spirituality with his circular motion, as well as to convey it symbolically. Finally, John also inhabits the spiritual realm of blue light in the film while the passionate reds and oranges represent the hedonistic world of Salome and Herod's court.

Interestingly, like other "Salomes," Saura's movie remains open-ended. The dance we see in the second half of the film is the dress rehearsal for the actual performance. Thus, Saura's "Salome" still awaits its future opening night, unless we consider the moment of production and the moment of our viewing as disparate: our viewing being the actual performance. In any event, again the movie reveals its self-consciousness about its production and its representations. Ultimately, the blending of touch, dance, music, and lighting in the film capture the synaesthetic, intermedial drive behind Saura's movie and shows how yet another new organism has burgeoned out of the Salome intersrtistic tradition, which Wilde's *Salomé* text self-consciously encapsulates.

Appendix 1: Music Examples

Example 1. Scene 4. "There is a wind," 4 measures before fig. 166-167.
Source: *Salome* Vocal Score.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the opera *Salome*, specifically Scene 4. The score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of music.

The first system is a piano introduction. The right-hand part of the piano is marked *dim.* and *Früheres Zeitmass.* The left-hand part is marked *fp*. The system ends with a double bar line and an asterisk (*).

The second system begins with the vocal line for Herodes. The lyrics are: "sa ge Euch: es weht ein". The piano accompaniment is marked *p* and *accelerando*. The system ends with a double bar line and a *cresc.* marking.

The third system continues the vocal line. The lyrics are: "Wind, und in der Luft". The piano accompaniment is marked *f* and *dim.*. The system ends with a double bar line and a *Ad.* marking.

The fourth system begins with the vocal line for Herodes. The lyrics are: "hör ich et - was, wie das Rau". The piano accompaniment is marked *p*. The system ends with a double bar line and an asterisk (*).

The page number 166 is printed above the fourth system.

sempre accelerando

Herodias: *schen von mächt - gen Flü - geln...*
ing of vast wings.

cresc.

ff *dim.*

Tempo primo
 Früheres Zeitmass.
 Herodias.

Herodias: Ich hö - re nichts
I hear no-thing.

Hört ihr es nicht?
Do you not hear?

Jetzt hö - re ich es
Now I can hear it no

Früheres Zeitmass.

fp

167 *un poco più tranquillo*
 Etwas ruhiger.

Herodias: nicht mehr. A - ber ich ha - be es ge - hört, es
lon - ger. But I did hear it, It

p

Example 2. Scene 2. "Bid him come forward," fig. 67-68 and "He is terrible!" fig. 76.
Source: *Salome* Vocal Score.

36

67 $\text{#}^{\flat}\text{d}$

Joch.
Joch.
in ei-nem Sil-ber-man-tel ster - - ben wird? Heisst ihn
eh-äl die wra-p-pid in a robe of sil - - ver? Bid him

Joch.
Joch.
her - kom-men auf dass er die Stim - - me Des - sen hö - re,
come for-ward that he may hear the migh - ty voice of him

68

Joch.
Joch.
der in der Wü-ste und in den Häusern der Kö - - ni-ge ge - kün - det hat.
who in the de-sert and in the houses of kings has of-ten cried a-loud.

cresc.
mf
ff
fp
cresc.
dim.
pp

76 Salome.

pp
Er ist schrecklich.
He is ter - rible!

Poco più mosso
Etwas bewegter.
pp

Example 3. Scene 2. "Speak again, Jochanaan," fig. 85.
Source: *Salome* Vocal Score.

The image displays a page from a vocal score for the opera *Salome*, featuring figures 85 and 86. The score is written for Jochanaan (Joch.), Salome (Sal.), and piano accompaniment.

Figure 85:

- Joch.:** Er - de er - füllt mit dem Wein / ih - rer Lüs - te, und das Un - / *fil - led the earth with the wine of her in - i - quities, and the cry*
- Salome:** Sprich mehr, Jo - / *Speak again, Jo -*
- Joch.:** - mass ih - rer Sün - - den schreit zu Gott. *molto espr.* / *of her sins is heard by God.*

Figure 86:

- Sal.:** sik - - na - an, dei - ne Stim - - me ist wie Mu - / *mu - ka - - na - an, thy - voice is like sweet*
- Sal.:** in mei - nen Oh - - ren. / *in my ears.*

The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as *sfz*, *fp*, *f*, *p*, and *cresc.* (crescendo). The score is in a key with two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a 2/4 time signature.

Example 4. Opening bars to "The Dance of Salome."
Source: *Salome* Full Score.

202

Salomes Tanz.

Sehr schnell und heftig.

2 Flöten

2 B-Clarinetten

1. 2. Bassen

3 Fagotten

1 Contrabaß

3. 4. Hörn (F)

Pauken

eine kl. Pauke (mit Holztrommel)

Tamburin

kleine Trommel

Viol. I.

Viol. II.

Haratschen.

(1. Paß)

Celli.

(die übrigen.)

Contra-Bässe

Sehr schnell und heftig. (Die Musikanten beginnen einen wilden Tanz.) (Salome noch bewegungslos.)

CHAPTER TWO

The Poet of Fire:

Aleksandr Skriabin's Synaesthetic Symphony "Prometheus" and the Russian Symbolist Poetics of Light

The Russian Symbolist Transfiguration of Reality and Skriabin's Keyboard of Twelve Electric Light Bulbs

The Russian Symbolists inhabited a world informed by intense anticipation of the impending Apocalypse and the end of history.¹ The all-pervasive millennial concerns of the Russian *fin-de-siècle* poets and thinkers were grounded in a long-lasting tradition of apocalyptic presentiments, blending Orthodox theology with science and social theory. The Apocalyptic quests of the Symbolists were anchored in the thought of the Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900), who similarly shared the mystical-scientific aspirations of the latter half of the nineteenth century in Russia and envisioned the end of the world process. According to Solov'ev, the task of art was "the complete incarnation of spiritual fullness" in reality. As an example of the aesthetic transfiguration of matter by light, Solov'ev gives the scientifically motivated evolution of carbon from black coal into scintillating diamond. Yet, before the end of history, we can only witness incomplete aesthetic interpenetrations of matter and light, or "partial anticipations," "flashes of absolute beauty."² Thus, great art "anticipates" and "prepares" the complete unity; yet, its fulfillment belongs to the future.

In joyful expectations of the complete aesthetic interpenetration of spiritual light and matter, which would complete the world process, the Russian Symbolists actively sought ways to transfigure reality. This utopian transfiguration was to be achieved through aesthetic, erotic, and religious means. The fusion of human beings and the arts in a religious act would help overcome the fragmentation of the modern world and the divisions imposed by rationalist thought. Following again Solov'ev, the Symbolists developed the concept of artistic theurgy, or divine action, and emphasized the role of the theurgical artist in the transfiguration of reality.

¹ On Russian modernist apocalyptic thought as informed by Nietzsche and Solov'ev, see Avril Pyman, [A History of Russian Symbolism](#) (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 226-42. On the Russian decadent views of decline and the end of history, which were to ensue any moment in the condensing of history, see Olga Matich, [Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin de Siècle](#) (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2005) 9-10. On the peculiar admixture of positivism and mysticism in the Russian religious philosophy of Vladimir Solov'ev and Nikolai Fedorov and their influence on Russian Symbolism, see Irina Paperno, "Introduction" and "The Meaning of Art: Symbolist Theories," [Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Symbolism](#), eds. Irina Paperno and Joan Grossman (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994) 1-23. On the transfiguration and transformation of reality not merely as mystical renewal but also as social change, see James West, [Russian Symbolists. A Study of Viacheslav Ivanov and of the Russian Symbolist Aesthetic](#) (London: Methuen, 1970) 170-80, and Paperno, op. cit. On the salvation myth, the overcoming of death, and the immortality that were to be achieved in Symbolism, see Irene Masing-Delic, [Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature](#) (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992).

² Vladimir S. Solov'ev, "Obshchii smysl iskusstva," [Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh](#), red. A. Losev, tom 2 (Moskva, "Mysl'," 1988) 398.

The Russian Symbolist artist who epitomized the mystical concerns of Russian Symbolism was Aleksandr Skriabin (1872-1915), an exceptionally gifted pianist and a composer of Wagnerian persuasions, whose style was refined with Chopinesque and French Impressionist sensibilities. Skriabin's megalomaniac conviction that he would create "The Mysterium"—the one theurgic work of art that would transfigure reality and put an end to this world—held a hypnotic sway over the Russian *fin-de-siècle* imagination. Skriabin described his "great final, cataclysmic opus as synthesizing all the arts, loading all senses in a hypnoidal, many-media extravaganza of sound, sight, smell, feel, dance, décor, orchestra, piano, singers, light, sculptures, colors, visions."³ Alternately perceived as a madman and a messiah, Skriabin began his work on the eschatological "Mysterium" in 1909, following his return to Moscow after a long sojourn in Switzerland. Having discovered his synaesthetic color-hearing, Skriabin aspired to compose music out of lights and fires, as well as poetry.⁴ His acquaintance with the Russian Symbolist poets Viacheslav Ivanov, erudite theoretician of Russian Symbolism and multilingual arcane poet, and Konstantin Bal'mont, a musical and lyrically intuitive poet-polyglot, opened to Skriabin the world of poetry.⁵ The three artists were closely associated in the early 1910s.⁶ Until 1915, the year of the composer's death, Ivanov patiently worked with Skriabin on refining his poetic technique and polishing his verses for "The Mysterium."

Skriabin, Bal'mont, and Ivanov shared a fascination with images of light, fire, and the sun. Figured synaesthetically, solar metaphors spread across the arts in Russian Symbolism and promoted interartistic exchanges. Always conflating the visual, poetic, and musical potential of light, synaesthetic images of fire and the sun proliferate in Konstantin Bal'mont's book of poetry "Let Us Be Like the Sun," *Budem kak Solntse* (1903) and Aleksandr Skriabin's symphony "Prometheus: A Poem of Fire," *Prometei: Poema ognia* (1909-1910), which prefigured "The Mysterium."

Aleksandr Skriabin began to work on his symphonic poem "Prometheus: A Poem of Fire" for orchestra, piano, mixed chorus, and a keyboard of colors and lights (*Luce*) in 1909 upon his return to Russia from Lausanne and Brussels. In Brussels, Skriabin had signed a contract with the conductor, publisher, and patron of new Russian music Sergei Kusevitskii for the next five

³ Faubion Bowers, *Skriabin: A Biography*, Vol. II (Mineola, New York: Dover, 1996) 185.

⁴ In its ambition to conflate all the arts and all the senses, Skriabin's "Mysterium" was informed by the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total artwork, in both its French and Russian Symbolist appropriations, respectively, as a synaesthetic work and as a mystical act. On Wagnerism in Europe and on Wagner's reception in Russia, see Erwin Koppen, "Wagnerism as Concept and Phenomenon," *Wagner Handbook* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 342-53 and Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 59-217.

⁵ To be sure, Skriabin had previously written poetry in the early 1900s, notably, the poetic text to the chorus of "The Divine Symphony" (1900), a libretto for an unwritten opera (1900-1903), possibly also looking forward to "The Mysterium," and the poetic program accompanying Skriabin's symphonic "Poem of Ecstasy" (1906). See Aleksandr Skriabin, "Zapisi A. N. Skriabina," *Russkie Propilei*, tom 6, red. M. Gershenzon (Moskva: Izdanie M. i S. Sabashnikovskh, 1919) 122-201. Still, in the 1910s, Skriabin took his poetic work much more seriously by studying versification, reading Russian Symbolist poetry, and seeking Ivanov's help when writing the verses for his apocalyptic project.

⁶ Skriabin met V. Ivanov in January 1909. Ivanov presented him with *Po zvezdam*, a book of essays, including his essays on Wagner and Nietzsche. K. Bal'mont's poetic cycle "Let Us Be Like the Sun," *Budem kak solntse* was a favorite of Skriabin's, much read and marked up in pencil by the composer, even before Skriabin and Bal'mont met in 1913. See Ol'ga Tompakova, *Skriabin i poety Serebriannogo veka: Konstantin Bal'mont* (Moskva: GMS, 1995) 6.

years, the estimated time for the completion of his “Mysterium,” which would fuse all the arts, as well as, allegedly, bring the end of the world. When Scriabin began composing “Prometheus,” he thought he was working on “The Mysterium.”⁷ In Brussels in 1908, Scriabin had befriended and mingled with theosophists, among them the linguist Emile Sigone, with whom he was devising a new synthetic language for “The Mysterium” and the painter Jean Delville, who designed the cover illustration for “Prometheus.”⁸ At that time, Scriabin read voraciously the occult work of Madame Helena P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) and would draw inspiration from her Secret Doctrine until his death in 1915. Scriabin’s encounters with theosophy inspired the Promethean symbolism of “The Poem of Fire,” as well as the composer’s preoccupation with conflating all the arts and collaborating with musicians, artists, and poets toward a mystical transfiguration.

In his interartistic aspirations, Scriabin conceived of a keyboard of lights (*Luce*), which would accompany the glimmering music for “Prometheus” and enhance visually the music’s fiery imagery. He added the enigmatic musically notated part for *Luce* only in the later stages of composition⁹ and continued to refashion his ideas of music illumination for the rest of his life, to which his close friend, biographer, and renowned music critic Leonid Sabaneev attests. Scriabin’s detailed comments on Sabaneev’s copy of the “Prometheus” score further reveal the atmosphere of the piece, giving it a verbal dimension, as well. Scriabin’s comments do not simply rehash the correspondences between lights, colors, and music keys along the circle of fifths, also sketched on the score; instead, they elaborate on the intensification of light, abstract moods, and natural scenes in “Prometheus”: “moon color,” “flashes,” and “thunderbolts”; “lunnyi” tsvet, “bleski,” and “molnii.” The last page of the score describes a veritable Apocalypse: “conflagration engulfs the world; a cataclysm; all in fire”; “pozhar obnimaet mir; kataklizm; vse v ogne.”¹⁰ In this way, Scriabin’s synaesthetic ideas seem to be triply articulated: first musically, then visually in the *Luce* part, and, finally, verbally.

Images of fire, light, and thunderbolts mediate among sounds, words, and visions in “Prometheus.” Yet, the conflation of music, light, and words is anything but synthetic; an aesthetic synthesis would bring about the end of history and the apocalyptic transfiguration of reality. By contrast, in its interartistic impulses, “Prometheus” shows a certain penchant for transformation over time—for what I will term the synaesthetic anticipation of synthesis. Fire and light promised transfiguration in Scriabin’s work but, ultimately, dwelt in the space of intense anticipation of transcendence, as all great art should, according to Solov’ev. This synaesthetic state of approximation haunted Scriabin’s late work, starting with “Prometheus”

⁷ Bowers 200.

⁸ Bowers 187-88, 206-07. You can see Delville’s illustration for “Prometheus” in Figure 13. Framed by a lyre and illuminated by the sun, the image of Prometheus’s face is pierced by the lyre’s strings and by rays of light, bespeaking the interpenetration of matter, light, music, and poetry I will discuss in the following pages.

⁹ Even in the final draft of “Prometheus,” the light organ part was appended later to the score. Galeev i Vanechkina, Poema ognia (Kazan’: Izdatel’stvo Kazan’skogo universiteta, 1981) 61-62.

¹⁰ The quotes reflect Scriabin’s autographs on Leonid L. Sabaneev’s score of “Prometheus,” now held in The Paris National Library (See Fig. 14.). I made my acquaintance with Scriabin’s notes on the score at The Scriabin State Museum, Moscow. Throughout my musicological analysis of “Prometheus” later in this chapter, I rely on my archival work with Scriabin’s pithy hand-written explanations of the score. See also O. Tompakova’s article on the score. Olga Tompakova, “O vnov’ naidennoi partitury ‘Prometeia: Poemy ognia,’” Uchenye zapiski, Vypusk 3 (Moskva: Memorial’nyi Muzei Skriabina, 1993-2005) 43-51.

(1909-1915). According to Skriabin, “Prometheus” already came close to “The Mysterium.”¹¹ Similarly, “The Mysterium” was later to be preceded by a preliminary opus for the final apocalyptic work of art: “The Preparatory Act,” *Predvaritel’noe deistvie*, which left only musical and poetic fragments behind. Both “The Preparatory Act” and “The Mysterium” were argued to be impossible.¹² All of Skriabin’s late work, including “Prometheus,” strove to approximate the condition of the impossible “Mysterium.” Skriabin’s late work created an artistic and mystical utopia, which also looked forward to a technological future in its interartistic and synaesthetic aspirations.

Aleksandr Mozer, one of Skriabin’s closest friends, built a twelve-lamp light-and-color electric organ for “Prometheus,” which is preserved in the Skriabin State Museum in Moscow (See Fig. 12).¹³ Mozer, a chemist by education, was a professor of electrical engineering in Moscow, attuned to incoming electrical innovations. Fascinated with Skriabin’s ideas of music with lights, the scientist Mozer took it upon himself to build an instrument of colorful electrical lights that would fulfill Skriabin’s dreams that “light fill up the whole space and pierce the air down to its atoms.”¹⁴ Skriabin respected his friend Mozer and valued him as a representative of the positivist sciences, with which Skriabin tried to reconcile his mystical philosophy.¹⁵ Mozer’s instrument of lights provided Skriabin with his only chance to experience, albeit in chamber settings, the illuminated “Poem of Fire,” which he played on the piano for his close friends at home, accompanied by his wife on Mozer’s electric instrument.

Mozer’s keyboard of lights bridges spiritual light and artificial lighting, Skriabin’s mysticism and Mozer’s science. Thus, Skriabin’s use of images of fire, light, and the sun invite interpretations crossing from the Russian Symbolist arts into the realm of science and technology.¹⁶ In this way, Skriabin’s “Prometheus” opens up new possibilities for understanding Symbolist interartistic light imagery, as it adopted the structure of electricity and light as turn-of-the-century scientific concepts.

The Mystical-Scientific Discourse on Electricity: The Intersection of Symbolism, Science, and Material Culture

This chapter traces the mystical-scientific discourse on electricity and the material culture of electric lighting, accessible to Skriabin and his close associates in the 1910s. It examines

¹¹ Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skriabine* (Moskva: Muzsektor Gosizdata, 1925) 81. See also Sabaneev 65, where Skriabin imagines the choir in “Prometheus” all dressed in white to convey the sense of the coming “Mysterium.”

¹² On their impossibility, see Simon Morrison, “Skriabin and the Impossible,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 51, N. 2 (Summer, 1998) 283-330.

¹³ See the brief biographical blurb about Mozer in Aleksandr Skriabin, *Pis'ma*, ed. Kashperov (Moscow: “Muzyka,” 2003). Bowers discusses Mozer’s belonging to Skriabin’s most intimate circle of friends who would visit the composer every evening. Bowers 238.

¹⁴ Sabaneev 59. All translations from Sabaneev’s *Reminiscences of Skriabin* are mine.

¹⁵ Sabaneev 52.

¹⁶ By contrast, for an alternative view on the conceptual basis for Bal’mont’s and Skriabin’s thought and a purely literary reading of Bal’mont’s imagery of fire and the Sun as drawing on Nietzschean metaphors, see Ann M. Lane, “Bal’mont and Skriabin: The Artist as Superman,” *Nietzsche in Russia*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986) 195-218.

Symbolist poetry informed by fire and electricity along with Skriabin's electrically synaesthetic "Prometheus." I have two further goals: first, to complement the idea of Symbolist synthesis with the idea of anticipation of merger, as we see it in Solov'ev's concept of art, Skriabin's impossible, anticipatory late music, and the Symbolist figure of synaesthesia as presentiment of synthesis. Second, I challenge the common view that Symbolist images of light and apocalyptic fire were simply appropriated and transposed onto the post-revolutionary discourse on electricity in the twenties.¹⁷ For the Russian Symbolists, electric light was never simply demonic; they did not merely glorify natural light and lament the disenchantment of the sun in urban electric lighting, as is often suggested.¹⁸ In contrast, more than a decade before the Revolution, the Russian Symbolists were already working out ideas of electricity in mystical and scientific terms, creating a discourse that precedes that of "the little light bulbs of Il'ich," "lampochki Il'icha."¹⁹ The myth of fire as embodied in Skriabin's "Prometheus" was reinterpreted as symbolizing the October Revolution, and the symphonic poem was played with electric lights at the revolution's first anniversary in 1918, along with the International. The idea of electric lights fit nicely with the grand scheme of the Symbolist old world overthrown by and transfigured into a new red order where "Electrification plus Soviet power equals Communism," as Lenin would have it. After all, the Symbolists were also waiting for a transfiguration of the world. Imbued with mystical electricity, Skriabin's *Luce*-illuminated "Prometheus" provided the technological link between the Russian Symbolists and the Soviet cult of the electric bulbs.

In its simultaneously magical and everyday incarnations, electric lighting arrived in Moscow in 1883 when the square near the Cathedral of Christ the Savior was illuminated to coincide with Alexander the Third's coronation. On May 15, 1883, the bell tower of Ivan the Great was suddenly immersed in light by thousands of electric flames. Prince Konstantin Nikolaevich, an eye-witness of the event, wrote: "The electric illumination of Ivan the Great created a simply magical effect which has never before been seen - anywhere. 3,500 small Edison lamps traced all the architectural lines, both the domes and the crosses."²⁰ Electric light

¹⁷ For a reading suggesting that the Symbolist solar myth of divine light was adopted to suit the technological everyday uses of electric light in the twenties, see Julia Bekman Chadaga, "Light in Captivity: Spectacular Glass and Soviet Power in the 1920s and 1930s," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 66, N. 1 (Spring, 2007) 82-83.

¹⁸ In his article on urban lighting in Russian Symbolism, Andrei Toporkov traces the Symbolist mythology of electric light as a merely negative, demonic, ghostly, and artificial double of natural light. Andrei L. Toporkov, "Iz mifologii russkogo simvolizma: Gorodskoe osveshchenie," *Blokovskii Sbornik: Uchenye Zapiski*, v. 657 (Tartu, 1985) 101-12.

¹⁹ On the early Soviet cult of the electric bulb and electric light see Chadaga 82-105. Chadaga shows how Lenin's little lamps, "lampochki Il'icha" become a part of the cult of Lenin; he is a god and a source of light, as well as a humble electrician. She traces the ambivalent response to electric light in the works of Zoshchenko, Platonov, and Olesha. In the literature of the twenties, the electric bulb reveals the time's poverty, arouses fear of burning and fire, as it resembles an open flame, or suggests the dying out of the old pre-1917 world in the burning out of the electric bulb while playing with the idea that the electric bulb actually symbolizes the new epoch. The electric bulb can paradoxically both extinguish and glow with an eternal flame. I see the mixing up of old and new world, of cold safe light and burning dangerous fire as pointing back to the Symbolist uses of sun, fire, and electricity as doubles. Of course, in its Soviet appropriation, electricity is emptied of its spiritual potential.

²⁰ Quoted in Natalya Potapova. See Potapova's account of electric street lighting of Moscow in Natalya Potapova, "Moscow lights," *Russian Life*, Vol. 40, N. 8 (August 1997): 28 (3), Expanded Academic ASAP. Gale. UC Berkeley. 17 Nov. 2007. Gale Document Number:A20226733.

<<http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?contentSet=IAC->

[Documents&docType=IAC&type=retrieve&tabID=T003&prodId=EAIM&docId=A20226733&userGroupName=ucberkeley&version=1.0&searchType=BasicSearchForm&source=gale](http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?contentSet=IAC-Documents&docType=IAC&type=retrieve&tabID=T003&prodId=EAIM&docId=A20226733&userGroupName=ucberkeley&version=1.0&searchType=BasicSearchForm&source=gale)>.

enhanced the religious and architectural symbols of Moscow, reinforcing the new tsar's imperial power. The magic of the event fascinated Muscovites, many of whom petitioned to have electric lights installed in their homes. While the city government preferred the less expensive kerosene and gas lamps for street lighting, up until 1910 electric arc lights lit some bridges and squares. By the beginning of 1913, 440 arc lamps and 1,297 of the new filament lamps illuminated Moscow, and most of the central streets and squares had electric lighting.²¹

Pavel Jablochkov, a Russian inventor who made a name for himself in Europe, patented the arc light in Paris in 1876. Soon, Jablochkov's incandescent lights lit the streets and public gardens of Paris and London. In Jablochkov's electric arc lights, known popularly as "Jablochkov's candles," electric current passes between two carbon rods, one negative and one positive, separated by an insulating layer of kaolin china while the carbon electrodes are heated to incandescent white light. The carbon electrodes burn, producing brilliant, intense light best suited for outdoor lighting, a location also appropriate because of the noise the arc light produced. Accounts from the nineteenth century compare arc lighting to a "mysterious new sun."²² The principle of the arc light also follows that of the formation of the lightning in nature, where an electric discharge passes through the ionized air forming an electric arc, combining both light and sound (thunder or noise, in this case).²³ Thus, electricity was intimately connected to fire and the sun at the turn of the century. Electric lighting was figured as natural and was reminiscent of the thunderbolt. As the historian of artificial lighting in the nineteenth century Wolfgang Schivelbusch maintains, "Fire is the origin of artificial light."²⁴

The immediate presence of electric light in the material culture of the turn of the century was amplified by mystical interpretations of electricity. Skriabin was keenly interested in theosophy, and Madame Helena P. Blavatsky's occult writings were often seen on his desk, ready for perusal.²⁵ Blavatsky's Secret Doctrine, the foundational text of theosophy,

²¹ My account of the electric street lighting of Moscow follows Potapova's "Moscow Lights." In my examination of electrical light in *fin-de-siècle* Russia, I depart from Anidita Banerjee's view that electricity at the time belonged to the sphere of fiction and mass media accounts of electrical miracles rather than immediate experience. The protagonists in this chapter, however, were closer to a center of electric light than most people of the time in Russia, who are the majority that Banerjee considers. In Banerjee's argument, the removal of electricity from real-life experience paved the way to the formation of science fiction as a genre in Russian literature positioned between high and low, literary and extra-literary culture. See Anidita Banerjee, The Genesis and Evolution of Science Fiction in Fin de Siècle Russia, 1880—1921, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of California, Los Angeles, 2000) 5-6. Accessed on June 28, 2008, Dissertations & Theses at University of California Database; and Anidita Banerjee, "Electricity: Science Fiction and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Russia," Science Fiction Studies, Volume 30, 2003, 49-71. In Potapova's historical account, Muscovites envisioned and soon experienced, especially in wealthier households, the domestication of electric light.

²² J. Lacassagne and R. Thiers, Nouveau système d'éclairage électrique (Paris and Lyon, 1857) 25. Quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century, trans. Angela Davis (Berkeley: UC Press, 1988) 55.

²³ Interestingly, the Russian word for the electro-atmospheric phenomenon of the lightning bolt, *molniia*, fuses semantically the sound and light of thunder and lightning. Later on in this chapter, we will see both Skriabin and the Russian Symbolist poet Konstantin Bal'mont creatively use the synaesthetic *molniia* to evoke the anticipation of the approaching transfiguration of reality.

²⁴ Schivelbusch 4.

²⁵ Sabaneev 54 and 61. Along with theosophical books, elementary textbooks on philosophy and psychology, Skriabin's rather sparse bookshelf contained popular books on physics, showing his curiosity toward science, and Russian Symbolist verse, Sabaneev 55.

characterized as a synthesis of religion, science, and philosophy in the subtitle, often explains esoteric ideas through the prism of modern science. In an explication of a sacred verse from “The Book of Dzyan,” Blavatsky interprets the following images of light and fire. “STANZA III... 9. LIGHT IS COLD FLAME, AND FLAME IS FIRE, AND THE FIRE PRODUCES HEAT, WHICH YIELDS WATER, THE WATER OF LIFE IN THE GREAT MOTHER (*Chaos*) (*a*)... All these – “Light,” “Flame,” “Hot,” “Cold,” “Fire,” “Heat,” “Water,” and the “water of life” are all, on our plane, the progeny; or as a modern physicist would say, the correlations of ELECTRICITY. Mighty word, and a still mightier symbol! Sacred generator of a no less sacred progeny; of fire — the creator, the preserver and the destroyer; of light — the essence of our divine ancestors; of flame — the Soul of things. Electricity, the ONE Life at the upper rung of Being.”²⁶ In her scientifically inflected interpretation of fire, Blavatsky conjoins electricity, fire, and life. The all-capitalized electricity is a mighty symbol that organizes reality.

In his positivist mysticism, the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov’ev describes electricity as a manifestation of the material world’s permeability by spiritual energy.²⁷ In his essay “The Meaning of Love” (1892-1894), he claims that natural light and its related physical phenomena of electricity, magnetism, and heat in the world body (*mirovoe telo*) manifest the synthetic and spiritual power of love as all-unity (*vseedinstvo*).

Сверх силы всемирного тяготения идеальное всеединство осуществляется духовно-телесным образом в мировом теле посредством света и других сродных явлений (электричество, магнетизм, теплота), которых характер находится в таком явном контрасте со свойствами непроницаемого и косного вещества, что и материалистическая наука принуждена очевидностью признать здесь особого рода полувещественную субстанцию, которая она называет эфиром. Это есть материя невесомая, всепроницаемая и всепроницающая — одним словом, *вещество невещественное*.²⁸

Besides the power of universal gravity, ideal all-unity realizes itself in a bodily-spiritual way in the world body through light, as well as other related phenomena (electricity, magnetism, heat); their character contrasts so manifestly with the qualities of impermeable and inert matter that even materialist science has been compelled to admit the self-evident existence of a peculiar type of semi-material substance that science calls ether. This is weightless matter, all-permeable and all-penetrating—in other words, it is *insubstantial substance*.²⁹

Solov’ev contrasts the impervious, impenetrable medium of matter with the porous, permeable mediums of ether and light. By suffusing and pervading the material world, ether, light, and electricity can penetrate and be penetrated to achieve union in the act of spiritual love. As “insubstantial substance,” ether incarnates the idea of all-unity in the material world. The idea

²⁶ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1, 82. <<http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd1-1-04.htm>>. Solov’ev also perceives free theosophy in its organic synthesis of theology, philosophy, and experimental science as the only true source of holistic knowledge. Solov’ev 175 and 177-78.

²⁷ Viacheslav Ivanov admired Solov’ev’s work and personally knew Solov’ev. Skriabin remained distant to Solov’ev’s thought because of its all-pervasive Orthodoxy. Still, he could have been familiar with Solov’ev’s ideas of unity (*vseedinstvo*) in his early conversations with his close friend Prince Trubetskoi, a student and follower of Solov’ev. Later on, Skriabin looked back at Solov’ev’s work and acknowledges his interest in Solov’ev’s notion of the end of the world (Sabaneev). On the possible influences of Solov’ev’s thought on Skriabin’s aesthetics, see Natal’ia Andreeva, “A.N. Skriabin i XX vek,” *Uchenye zapiski*, Vypusk 5 (Moskva: Memorial’neyi Muzei Skriabina, 2005), 48-53.

²⁸ Solov’ev 542. The italics is Solov’ev’s.

²⁹ The translation is mine.

of Symbolist synthesis then appears not merely as metaphysical fusion but also as gradual interpenetration of matter and spiritual light leading to their complete scientifically motivated integration.³⁰ We can trace back the idea of the interpenetrating matter and light to Russian *fin-de-siècle* understanding of ether as a scientific concept.

The notion of ether, also called luminiferous ether, was scientifically accepted and still viable in the early twentieth century, though it has since been discredited. Interestingly, it seems to structure the Russian mystical-scientific discourse at the turn of the century, as we see in Solov'ev's ideas of interpenetration of matter and spirit (non-material substances). According to Brockhaus and Efron's authoritative Encyclopaedic Dictionary (XLI, from 1904), despite the fluctuating opinions on ether in the nineteenth century, recent theories and experiments had proved that the phenomena of light, electricity, and magnetism were in their essence various manifestations of one and the same all-penetrating medium, Ether, and that light is an electromagnetic phenomenon.³¹ This definition unified the notions of electricity, light, and ether both in scientific and, as we will see, in Symbolist terms. The semi-material ether seemed to support religious and philosophical intuitions about the existence of ethereal, spiritual forms beyond matter.

Working within the mystical-scientific discourse, the Symbolist journal *Libra*, *Vesy* reviewed an article on electric light and radioactivity by the distinguished Russian physicist Professor Nikolai Umov.³² *Vesy*'s review "The Evolution of the Atom" from 1905 codifies the relation between Symbolism and Science, spiritual and electric light.³³ The review shows how science can corroborate and illuminate the main Symbolist concerns with spirituality and transfiguration. Umov's early account of electric light and radioactive phenomena is radically decontextualized and introduced into its new literary context and into a new Symbolist idiom. The notions of light, electricity, and the electron as the building blocks of matter allow for this exchange between science and literary spirituality.

The article starts out by recounting two nineteenth-century experiments with electric light. In 1859 the German physicist Julius Plücker observed the glow of "pale violet rays" (fluorescent glow, phosphorescence), as electric discharge passed through a vacuum glass tube. In 1879 the English physicist and chemist Sir William Crookes proposed that these cathode rays of light are currents of minute particles. He suggested that these tiny particles were the atoms of primal matter or "ether" in the scientific vocabulary of the *fin de siècle*. Crookes entitled his 1879

³⁰ Solov'ev's idea of syzygy, which he defines as conjunction (*sochetanie*) further exemplifies his idea of interpenetration of matter and spirit. Solov'ev 245. According to the OED, "syzygy" means the astronomical conjunction or opposition of heavenly bodies, or the biological "conjunction of two organisms without the loss of identity."

³¹ Prof. D. Gol'dgammer, "Efir," in Brockhaus and Efron, *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar'*, Vol. XLI, 1904, 222-23.

³² "The Evolution of the Atom," *Evoliutsiia atoma*, anonymous review, *Vesy*, March 1905, 83-85. Umov's speech was initially published in the annual report of Moscow University and then re-printed in *Vestnik znaniia*, N.1.

³³ In *Vesy*'s statement of purpose in its first issue of 1904, the editorial board describes the journal as a critical publication focusing on the art, the sciences, and literature; the periodical calls itself a critical, scholarly (scientific), literary, and critico-bibliographic monthly journal, "nauchno-literaturnyi i kritiko-bibliograficheskii ezhemesiachnik." Usually, in each volume of *Vesy*, we encounter one review or article on astronomy, mathematics, or physics. Although the journal focuses on literature and the arts, it also discusses the sciences in their relevance to the arts. Both Konstantin Bal'mont and Viacheslav Ivanov, who were to become two of the closest artistic friends of Skriabin's in the 1910s, were on *Vesy*'s editorial board.

speech “Radiant Matter and the Fourth State,” *Luchistaia materiia i chetvertoe sostoianie*, a title which must have titillated the Russian Symbolist imagination in its concern with light and transfiguration.³⁴

...катодные лучи суть потоки мельчайших телец,—атомов первичной материи “протила”. Здесь, говорит он [Крукс]—мы достигли предела, на котором материя и сила переходят друг в друга; той таинственной грани, которая отделяет известное от неизвестного. Я думаю,—заключает он,—что на этих пределах будут разрешены величайшие научные задачи будущего”.³⁵

...cathode rays are currents of miniscule particles—the atoms of primal matter, protyle. “Here,” he [Crookes] says, “we have reached the limit at which matter and energy (power) pass into each other, that mysterious border that separates the known from the unknown.” “I believe,” he concludes, “that the greatest scientific problems of the future will be resolved while exploring these limits.”³⁶

Crookes’s concern with light and the new fourth state beyond the known solid, liquid, and gaseous states emerges as strikingly Symbolist.³⁷ Given the Symbolists’ preoccupation with light, fire, and the Sun and their aspirations to transfigure the world, science seems to reinforce the beliefs that lie at the heart of the Symbolist quest. If electrons, as these minute particles were to be called later, build up the world, are light, and fulfill the potential “by which matter and power transform into each other,” then they respond to the Symbolist celebration of light and epistemological endeavors to transfigure the world through light. While the Symbolists attempt to achieve knowledge of the luminous divine world through art, that is, through irrational means, physicists rely on the scientific method to study light and electro-magnetic processes. In this way, artistic and scientific goals converge and reinforce each other.

Reviving the long rejected Newtonian notion of protyle, or primal matter, as consisting of tiny particles (electrons), Crookes’s idea was ridiculed in his time. The beginning of the twentieth century, however, confirmed his idea of the minute particles constituting the cathode rays of light by even measuring their weight, the weight of electrons. Electrons as principal carriers of electric charge were also called atoms of electricity (their subatomic nature was not clear at the time):

Отсюда естественно родилась гипотеза, что все материальные атомы как дом из кирпичей, состоят из телец этого одного типа получивших имя “электронов”, и что атомы различных химических элементов отличаются друг от друга лишь числом (от 700 до 160000), составляющих их электронов, их конфигурацией и их движениями. Огромная сложность строения атома доказывается между прочим также видом спектра раскаленного пара. Разнообразие цветных спектральных линий [раскаленного пара] говорит нам, что световой эфир приводится здесь в волнение не одним инструментом, как бы а целом оркестром их. Но как в этом случае эфир колеблется частицами раскаленного тела, так может он приводиться в колебание и вибрирующими электрическими зарядами.³⁸

³⁴ In addition to his scientific studies, Crookes was also interested in spiritualism since 1870, that is, before he formulated his views on radiant matter as the fourth state.

³⁵ “The Evolution of the Atom,” *Vesy*, March 1905, 83.

³⁶ All translations from the review “The Evolution of the Atom” are mine.

³⁷ The idea of the fourth state was suggested to Crookes by Faraday, who in 1819 proposed that it was probable that a fourth radiant as-of-yet unproved state existed.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 84. It is not clear whether the metaphor was first used by *Vesy*’s reviewer or whether it appeared initially in Umov’s article.

Hence the hypothesis arose that all material atoms, like houses made of bricks, consist of this type of particles to be named “electrons.” Further, atoms of various chemical elements are to be distinguished based simply on the number of electrons that constitute them (from 700 to 160,000) and on the configuration of their movements. The enormous complexity of atomic composition is likewise evidenced by the spectrum of hot water vapors. The variety of colored spectral lines of burning hot steam shows us that luminiferous (light) ether is propelled into wave-like motion not by a single instrument but, as though, by a whole orchestra. But while in this case the particles of the heated gas set the ether into vibration, vibrating electrical charges can, too, set the ether into motion.

The electrons build up the objective world in the configurations of their motions. The synaesthetic metaphor embedded in the discussion of electrons poetically conjoins the vapor drops that set luminiferous ether into motion and the electrons that can similarly trigger ethereal vibrations. All these infinitesimal particles synaesthetically enliven dead matter. In the metaphorical language of the review, light and the scorching fire of steam, color and music are tied together in a knot. The burning hot steam shimmers with the whole spectrum of colors and shows us that the ether consists of particles, reminiscent of the foundational electrons and figured as musical instruments. The whole gamut of colors animated by shooting photons, similar to the electrons, corresponds to the sound not of a single instrument but of all the instruments in an orchestra. Thus, a synaesthetic metaphor captures the relation among colors, instruments, light-bearing particles, and electrons.³⁹

We can infer from *Vesy*’s review of “The Evolution of the Atom” that the electrons as the instruments in an orchestra and their electric activity lay the foundations for this world:

Но, что такое—сами основные камни мироздания, — электроны? ... Несомненно одно, что электрон имеет интимную связь с мировым эфиром. Быть-может, электроны представляют части эфира, охваченные вихревым или коловратным движением и потому выделяющиеся от остальных, носящая образ индивидуальности. Быть-может, материя есть только собрание особых форм движения или состояний эфира, — род узлов в эфире, тогда вся природа была бы построенной из эфира. Так старинный дуализм материи и эфира исчезает перед светочем науки.⁴⁰

But how is it possible—are the electrons the basic building stones of the universe? ... What is beyond doubt is that the electron has an intimate connection to the world’s ether. It is possible that electrons are parts of the ether, caught up in a vortical or gyrating motion and, therefore, stand out possessing a certain individual personality. It is also possible that matter is just a collection of peculiar forms of motion or states of the ether, like knots in the ether of sorts; then all nature would be made out of ether. In this way, the age-old dualism between matter and ether vanishes in the light [lamps] of science.

³⁹ We should distinguish between photons, as the light-bearing particles causing spectral lines were later to be called, and electrons. Although related by analogy to the action of electrons, the described spectral lines observed in heated H₂O vapors result from the action of photons on hot steam. In 1905, Einstein first proposed that light was made out of discrete particles or ‘light quanta,’ to be called ‘photons’ in 1926. In this way, the predominant wave theory of light was shaken. Photons are the elementary particles carrying electromagnetic radiation (in this case, visible light) and are characterized by the wave—particle duality that describes the infinitesimal and indivisible quanta in general (and, as quantum mechanics shows, also all macroscopic objects). In this sense, physical light behaves both as a wave and as a stream of infinitesimal particles; it is both continuous (a wave) and discontinuous (made out of particles). Unlike electrons, photons have zero rest (invariable) mass and do not have an electric charge. Still, photons indeed interact with electrons to produce spectral lines, as the ones described in “The Evolution of the Atom.” Spectral lines appear when photons are absorbed or emitted by a system, let’s say by an atom, and change the system’s energy state by affecting the energy level of an electron.

⁴⁰ “The Evolution of the Atom,” *Vesy*, March, 1905, 85.

Matter and ether straddle the age-old distinction between body and soul, the division between material and spiritual world, as we also saw in Solov'ev's writings. Only the light-giving, foundational electron can bring them together thanks to the conjecture that matter and solid inert objects are simply whirlwinds of electrons while ether itself is made up of electrons.⁴¹ The material world thus becomes defined not by still matter but by motion, whereas electrons mediate between and unite ether and matter. Symptomatically, we see here again the prevalence of spiritual ether and its manifestations in light and electricity over matter. According to this Symbolist review, the material world is fundamentally ethereal or spiritual.

Finally, Umov's paper draws attention to radioactive phenomena, and the review in *Vesy* emphasizes both their radiant nature: "radioactive," "luchedielatel'nye," and the transfiguring function of radioactive decay. The review stresses the ability of radioactive elements to transform during the process of radioactive decay. Chemical elements therefore "live" a life; some are short-lived while others are alive for a longer period of time. Umov conjectures that perhaps even the unchangeable materials around us may be undergoing a slow but relentless process of change and transformation. Different elements and states appear to be simply stages in the evolution of the atom. For instance, radium may well be a stage in the evolution of uranium as the most durable of the radioactive elements. In contrast, the most evanescent of stages in radioactive decay endure for a few seconds only; others appear as an alluring "emanation" in a gas-like state. Again, luminous emanation participates in the transformation of matter. Finally, the Darwinian concept of evolution seems to appeal both to scholars and artists of the *fin de siècle*, as we see in Umov's evolution of the atom and in Solov'ev's idea of the transfiguration or evolution of matter by illumination.⁴² While apparently reminiscent of the decadent language of disintegration, the radioactive decay of elements curiously promises evolution, transformation, and transfiguration through light in Symbolist terms.

Fire and Electricity in Russian Symbolism

Electricity illuminates the Russian Symbolist quest in two ways. Its light-giving electrons are interspersed in matter despite its rigidity or constitute the material world; they vivify and spiritually permeate matter. This electric permeation of matter is figured as synaesthetic dispersion of light, as we saw in the Symbolist review of "The Evolution of the Atom." Additionally, electricity is the synthesis of the negative and positive poles in the arc light or the thunderbolt; it is thus a merger of contradictions. So, as a natural phenomenon, electricity moves beyond reason and gives scientific proof for intuitive knowledge and irrationality.

Zinaida Gippius's poem "Electricity," *Elektrichestvo* (1901) is the most famous Russian Symbolist celebration of electric light. It shows us how science and mysticism merge, as do the negative and positive poles of two wires:

⁴¹ It is worth noting that Gol'dammer's article on Ether in Brockhaus and Efron, *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar'*, Vol. XLI, 1904, 223, which I cited earlier, refers to the electrons as the mediating element between molecules (matter) and ether. It seems that "The Evolution of the Atom" amplifies the significance of the light-giving electrons even further, as here they constitute both matter and ether.

⁴² Solov'ev was also interested in the evolution of elements, for instance, in the transfiguration of coal into diamond. Skriabin, too, showed a theosophical interest in the evolution of the races and the spirit.

Две нити вместе свиты,
 Концы обнажены.
 То “да” и “нет” не слиты,
 Не слиты — сплетены.
 Их темное сплетенье
 И тесно, и мертво,
 Но ждет их воскресенье,
 И ждут они его.
 Концов концы коснутся —
 Другие “да” и “нет”
 И “да” и “нет” проснутся,
 Сплетенные сольются,
 И смерть их будет — Свет.⁴³

Two wires are wound together
 With their loose endings bare.
 One yes, one no—not soldered,
 Not melted but spliced there.
 And their dark interlacing
 Is narrow, dead, and yet
 They wait for resurrection
 And are expecting it.
 End will touch end—the right
 Yes-no this yes-no waking...
 Those spliced,
 a fusion making
 And their death will be—Light.⁴⁴

Gippius’s “Electricity” delineates the electrical dynamics between the positive and negative poles of two wires, linguistically represented as “yes” and “no,” as they revive from death or sleep into life in their electric union. The typical Symbolist heightened “moment” of time, “*миг*,” coincides with the flow of the electric current. The resurrection of the metal threads culminates in light, and Gippius’s language suggests this light is divine. The electrical resurrection of light also coincides with the end of the poem. The closure manifests itself in the final, impassive, capitalized “Light,” “Svet,” which is set apart from the rest of the text by a teleological dash. Thus, the end of the poem, pointing at the loaded concept of “the end,” “*konets*” enacts an Apocalypse that features a transfiguration from death to light. I note that death in the last line of the poem is ambiguous. We know the metal wires await their resurrection and are dead throughout the poem, but we also sense that their light also brings their death: “And their death will be—Light,” “*I smert’ ikh budet — Svet.*” This implies the self-annihilation in the transfiguration of the two poles, linguistic, propositional, and electrical. This union does away with their oppositional identities and is thus also death.

The propositional binary of “yes” and “no” preoccupied Konstantin Bal’mont as early as 1899 in the cycle “Yes and No,” *I da i net* and possibly influenced Gippius’s “Electricity” directly. Bal’mont’s poetry collection “Let Us Be Like the Sun,” *Budem kak Solntse* continues to play with the opposition of “yes and no” while, at the same time, the poet extols and privileges the element of fire and the Sun over water, wind, and earth. Interestingly, a critic of Bal’mont’s “Let Us Be Like the Sun” directly associates Bal’mont’s Sun with electricity: “The first unhealthy current of urban influence was introduced into Russian poetry by Konstantin Balmont’... ‘We shall be like the Sun!’ Balmont announced. Alas, his sun proved nothing more than a vast electric lamp, hanging over an outdoor restaurant on the city outskirts.”⁴⁵ Bal’mont’s

⁴³ Z. N. Gippius, “Elektrichestvo,” *Stikhotvorenia* (Sankt-Peterburg: Gumanitarnoe agentstvo “Akademicheskii proekt,” 1999) 111.

⁴⁴ Zinaida Gippius, “Electricity,” *Modern Russian Poetry: An Anthology with Verse Translations*. Ed. and with intro. by Vladimir Markov and Merrill Sparks (London: MacGibbon and Kee Ltd., 1966) 65.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Andrei Toporkov, “The devil’s candle? Street lighting,” *History Today*, Vol. 46, N. 11 (Nov., 1996): 34 (3). Trans. John Crowfoot, Expanded Academic ASAP. Gale. UC Berkeley. 17 Nov. 2007. Gale Document Number: A18850040. Toporkov refers to B. A. Sadovskoi’s criticism of Bal’mont in “Futurism i Rus” (1913). Toporkov also

poem “Bonfires,” *Kostry*, associates the electric dynamic of “yes and no” with the element of fire, as its flames sing:⁴⁶

Мы меняемся всегда.	We are always changing.
Нынче “нет”, а завтра “да”.	Now we are “no,” tomorrow—“yes.”
Нынче я, а завтра ты.	Now it’s I, tomorrow You.
Все во имя красоты. ⁴⁷	All in the name of beauty.

Bal’mont’s “Bonfires” and “Hymn to Fire,” *Gimn ogniu* establish the changeability of fire and its fluctuation between the extremes of “yes” and “no”; of active burning and passive consummation by fire: “Burn me and be burned,” “Zhgi menia – i bud’ sozhzhen”; of living and dead fire, which extinguishes a moment after it has been ablaze; and, finally, of intersubjective transformation of the lyric I into the lyric You. All these transformations by fire are reminiscent of Gippius’s transformation by electric light. Similarly, in Bal’mont’s poetry, the element of fire and the sun also bring about revelation and transformation, as the closing lines of “Hymn to Fire” intone:⁴⁸

Я хочу, чтобы белым немеркнувшим светом	I want that, with a white undarkening light,
Засветилась мне – смерть! (7)	Death lights up in me! (7)

Chiasmically resembling the ending of “Electricity,” the final lines of “Hymn to Fire” enact the transfiguration of the lyric I through burning light and death.⁴⁹ The identification between fire as the eulogized You and the lyric I becomes finalized in the momentary blazing of fire and the consummation of the lyric I where both fire and the lyric I vanish in an instant: “In a moment you’ll die, but you are still living,” “Cherez mig ty umresh’, / no poka ty zhivesh” (3). Bal’mont plays with the possibility of intersubjective transformation from “you” to “I” and their ultimate fusion throughout the poem where “Ty,” You, prevails in the first three sections of the hymn while the emphasis gradually shifts through the middle sections of the poem: “I am the same as you,” “**Ia** takoi zhe, kak **ty**” (5) until section six and seven where “*Ia*,” the lyric I, takes over:

Огонь очистительный,	Purifying fire,
Огонь роковой,	Fateful fire,
Красивый, властительный,	Beautiful, powerful,
Блестящий, живой! (1)	Dazzling, living! (1)
.....

gives an insight into the Russian term “electric suns,” which dates back to the early 1850s “when electric lighting was frequently used for night-work and celebrations. By the early twentieth century the expression was already felt to be a worn-out metaphor.” The fluctuation between the Sun and electric lighting as electric sun was inevitable in the poetic and cultural experience of the Russian Symbolist generation.

⁴⁶ Symptomatically, “Moscow Fires,” *Ogni Moskvy* is the name of the museum of artificial lighting in Moscow since 1980. The exhibit follows the development and continuity of the artificial lighting in Moscow from the kerosene lights to the arc lights and electric lighting.

⁴⁷ Konstantin Bal’mont, *Kostry*, *Liturgiia krasoty* (Moskva: Folio, 2005) 165-66.

⁴⁸ Konstantin Bal’mont, *Gimn ogniu*, *Izbrannoe* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1980) 122-25.

⁴⁹ I should note that, although “Let Us Be Like the Sun” was published as a cycle in 1903, “Hymn to Fire” was written in 1900, and, most probably, the ending of Bal’mont’s poem influenced Gippius’s “Electricity,” 1901.

Ты меняешься вечно,
Ты – повсюду другой.
Ты красный и дымный
В кллокотаньи костра. (3)

You always change,
You are always different.
You are red and full of smoke
In the rustle of flames. (3)

.....
Ты являешься в быстром сияньи зарниц.
Ты, застывши, горюшь в грозовых облаках –
Фиолетовых, аспидно-синих.
Ты средь шума громов и напева дождей
Возникаешь неверностью молний... (3)

.....
You appear in the quick flash of the lightning.
You, stilled, burn in the stormy clouds –
Violet, bluish-gray.
You, in the midst of loud thunders and rain songs,
Originate by the treachery of the thunderbolts. (3)

.....
О, ты светишь, ты греешь, ты жжешь,
Ты живешь, ты живешь! (5)

.....
O, you shine, you warm, you burn,
You live, you live! (5)

.....
Ты блестяшь – как двенадцатицветный алмаз. (5)

.....
You glitter like a twelve-colored diamond. (5)

Bal'mont's hymn places an anaphoric and exclamatory emphasis on fire, as we see in the recurrence of *You*, "*Ты*," and the exclamatory "*О*"s that are interwoven in the very word "*ogon*," fire, and sound eight times in the first two line. Similarly, "*ia*," the lyric *I*, appears subliminally interspersed in the opening sections to counterbalance the hymnic *You* and prepare the full-fledged emergence of the *I*: for instance, "*blestiaeshchii*," "*meniaesh'sia*," "*yavliaesh'sia*," and "*siian'i*"; "*shining*," "*changing*," "*manifesting*," and "*glow*."

However, the binary model of transformation and synthesis in the image of fire and electric light—I and You, Yes and No, assertion and negation, agency and passivity—becomes unsettled by Bal'mont's persistent use of synaesthesia in "Hymn to Fire." Synaesthetic metaphors associating fire with the twelve-colored diamond, the noise of the thunder, the song of the rain, the "rustle of flames," and the red, violet, and bluish-gray colors of the lightning enhance the image of the living fire. They function differently from the lyric *I*'s synthetic striving toward white light and union with and death by fire. Synaesthetic light and electricity in nature, as seen in the thunderbolt, exist on the plane of constant change and transformation, which is also the plane of poetic flow and the life of fire. This is the moment before the blazing instant, "*mig*" elapses and the transfiguring death of the apocalyptic end ensues. In fact, synthesis and death can only bring a closure to the Symbolist text, as we saw in Gippius's and Bal'mont's poems. The Symbolist poems, however, inhabit the synaesthetic region of constant transformation and anticipation, the realm of the living fire and electricity. In this sense, the plane of the ever-changing, living, synaesthetic, intersubjective fire and the electric flow provides us with an alternative to the purely synthetic understanding of light, death, and knowledge in the Russian Symbolist practice.

Bal'mont's reading of Skriabin's "Prometheus" in his essay "Light-Sound in Nature and Skriabin's Symphony of Lights," *Svetozvuk v prirode i svetovaia simfoniia Skriabina* metaphorically emphasizes the importance of the synaesthetic electric current in Skriabin's "Poem of Fire," as well.⁵⁰ Written in 1917 after the first Russian performance of Skriabin's "Prometheus" with *Luce*, the essay underscores the synaesthetic potential of "fire," in its relation to electricity and the sciences. Composed of a prose text with interspersed poems, Bal'mont's

⁵⁰ K.D. Bal'mont, *Svetozvuk v prirode i svetovaia simfoniia Skriabina*. Moskva: IRIS—PRESS, 1996. Moskva: Rossiikoe Muz. Izd., 1917. Reprint. Spelling modernizations introduced.

essay includes two sonnets on the synaesthetic relations in nature and music. The sonnets and Bal'mont's poem on Skriabin "Elf," *El'f* (1916) all use the term "tok": "flow," "current," or possibly "electric current," to describe Skriabin's music and emphasize its musical and synaesthetic connotations. In "Light—Sound in Nature," Bal'mont captures the moment of the ensuing sunrise with an electrical metaphor: "The whole world is tense strings. / Hurry. Hurry. We'll be young again. / And the current of fires struck the strings"; "Ves' mir zemnoi natianutye struny. / Skorei. Skorei. My snova budem iuny. / I tok ognei udaril po strunam."⁵¹ The strings of the world metaphorically transmit the electric current of fires or the fire as electric current. In this way, Bal'mont conflates electricity, fire, and music in one synaesthetic figure of the Sun and the sunrise as visually and musically informed. Bal'mont moves his poetic gaze from the natural scene of the first sonnet to the concert hall in the second sonnet where "light-sound [also] transforms passive slumber into the yarn of the waking mind." This transformation from sleep to higher consciousness is again predicated on the electric flow of fire: "the current of streams," "tok ruch'ev"; "the run of fires," "probeg ognei."⁵² The "jubilating river" of the electric current and the musical flow intertwine in Bal'mont's notion of light—sound, and Skriabin is the one who rules over them:

И светлый Эльф, созвучностей король, Ваял из звуков тонкие камни.	And the luminous Elf, king of harmonies, Shaped fine cameos out of sounds.
Завихрил лики в токе звуковом...	He whirled images in the current of sounds...
... И был певучим гром. И человеку бог был двойником. Так Скрябина я видел за роялью. ⁵³	... And the thunder was singing. And man was god's double. So did I see Skriabin at the piano.

Written in 1916, a year after Skriabin's death, Bal'mont's sonnet "Elf" fuses the visual and musical aspects of his impressions of Skriabin, the performer. The sounds and thunder of his music fashion faces (images) and cameos. This electric current of sounds is also divine; it brings together God and man, nature and technology, religious and mythical past (*Bog* and *El'f*) and technological future (electricity).

Finally, the mystical and divine qualities of light and the electric current, its synaesthetic prevalence in nature and music, urge Bal'mont to inquire into the scientific realm in his essay on Skriabin. After having seen and heard the first Russian light-sound performance of "Prometheus," he discusses the modern advances in the art of musical-visual or pyrotechnical instruments that use both the color and sound of fire. Physical experiments with the chemical harmonium, the hydrogen flame, and the singing vibration of flames seem to be just discovered by scientists, whereas poets have always known of the synaesthetics of fire, Bal'mont announces proudly.

⁵¹ Bal'mont, *Svetozvuk v prirode*, 10.

⁵² Bal'mont, *Svetozvuk v prirode*, 10. My translation.

⁵³ K.D. Bal'mont, *Stikhotvoreniia*, ed. V.I. Orlov (Leningrad, Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1969) 422. The translation is mine.

The Electric Interpenetration of Sound and Light in Scriabin's "Prometheus"

In the theosophical understanding of the Promethean myth, Prometheus bestows on man the spark of creativity and consciousness. The gift of fire, both spiritual and evil, could lead to a union with Agni, the god of fire.⁵⁴ Of course, if this striving of man toward light is the program of Scriabin's work, the composer can only represent it but not enact it. The Gospels associate dazzling white light with the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor; the transfiguration prefigures Christ's resurrection. Fanfares and fire pervade the world of the Apocalypse, as they do Scriabin's "Prometheus." Still, the notion of fire goes beyond its spiritual interpretations, as Mozer's electric-light instrument for Scriabin's "Prometheus" and the theosophical interpretation of fire as electricity testify.

Early on, when Scriabin visited Paris in 1896, he saw music of lights performed on garlands of electric bulbs.⁵⁵ In 1900, he ran to the Paris International Exposition, visiting the technological, musical, and artistic sections, as well as some of the pavilions: "Begal na vystavku, osmotrel mashinnyi, muzykal'nyi i hudozhestvennyi otdel. Takzhe nekotorye paviliony."⁵⁶ He promises his wife he will give her the details later. We can assume he saw the grandiose Palace of Electricity at the Paris Exposition where 5,700 incandescent bulbs would light up every evening and illuminate the water cascades of Chateau d'Eau, creating a spectacular magical atmosphere.⁵⁷ Later, when working on "Prometheus," Scriabin looked at Alexander Wallace Rimington's *Colour-Music* and disparagingly rejected the book as not capturing the essence of light music: "non-sense, this is not at all what it's all about"; "gluposti, sovsem ne to."⁵⁸

The Russian religious philosopher Aleksei Losev (1893-1988) also draws a parallel between fire and electricity in Scriabin's synaesthetic symphony. He contends that Scriabin's "Prometheus" is not so much "a poem of fire" as it is "a poem of electricity."⁵⁹ Losev suggests that utmost irrationality and ecstasy in "Prometheus" are interwoven with a maximum of calculating rationality and intellectualism. To underscore this immersion, Losev uses the metaphor of interpenetration, of piercing through and through: "proizvedenie... naskvoz' pronizano." Electricity here means the permeability of intuition and reason, of melody and harmony in Scriabin's symphonic poem.⁶⁰ Still, the interpenetration of harmony and melody is

⁵⁴ For an early international review of Scriabin's "Prometheus" and its use of the theological concept of Prometheus, see Rosa Newmarch, "Prometheus: The Poem of Fire," *The Musical Times*, Vol. 55, N. 854 (April 1, 1914) 227-31.

⁵⁵ Bulat Galeev, *Poiushchaia raduga* (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1980) 31.

⁵⁶ Scriabin, *Pis'ma*, V. I. Skriabinoi, 24 [11] iunia, 1900, Parizh, 233.

⁵⁷ Schivelbusch reproduces the glamorous exterior and interior views of the Palace of Electricity where the multiple human figures of the visitors are situated in the lowermost horizontal plane of the reproductions and recede. The crowds are dwarfed both by the magnificent architecture and the electrical intensity, which overcomes darkness. Schivelbusch 73 and 74. The pavilion of electricity was also widely covered and discussed in Russian popular media. See Banerjee, "Electricity," 55.

⁵⁸ Galeev, *Raduga*, 31. See also Bowers 204.

⁵⁹ Aleksei Losev, "Prometei Skriabina i Viach. Ivanova," *Viacheslav Ivanov: Arkhivnye materialy i issledovaniia* (Moskva: Russkie slovari, 1999) 155. Made in 1976, Losev's pronouncement on Prometheus dates back to a fictional work from his labor camp years in the thirties. Again calling "Prometheus" a poem of electricity, Losev's character refers to an even earlier mention, which I have not been able to find.

⁶⁰ According to James M. Baker, the Promethean tone collection (6-34) of the all-pervasive Mystic chord in Scriabin's "Poem of Fire" never appears simply as a melodic motive; rather, it only appears in the combination, that

not complete. In my terms, this incompleteness demarcates the territory of anticipation just before the transfiguration. Still, how does Scriabin capture the world of incomplete musical and spiritual-material interpenetration in his “Prometheus”?

My following analysis of Scriabin’s “Poem of Fire: Prometheus” interprets the Promethean music through the lens of light, fire, and electricity, as we saw them conceptualized in Russian Symbolist poetry and mystical philosophy. My discussion inflects the musicological discourse about the ambiguous function and structure of the Mystic hexachord, the all-pervasive sonority that informs Scriabin’s symphony. Thus, I construe the paradoxically fluctuating perception and understanding of the Mystic chord as both dissonant and changeable, and consonant and static, by using as an interpretative prism the idea of the incomplete electrical interpenetration of matter and light.

Richard Taruskin suggests that Scriabin’s Mystic or Promethean chord, which pervades “The Poem of Fire,” embodies the higher divine realm of *realiora*, “the more real,” in the Russian Symbolist vocabulary. It thus enacts the eternal union and revelation Scriabin wanted to achieve in his music.⁶¹ Taruskin’s analysis shows how the Mystic chord abolishes both musical and mystical desire in its “wholly static and quiescent” structure, which makes ego identification with the music impossible. Poised between two static pitch collections, the whole-tone scale and the octatonic scale, the harmonically mystical “Prometheus” is now emptied of the tension of diatonic functionality of Western classical music where dominant harmony always desires to return to and find resolution in the tonic.⁶² The ecstatic self transcends its boundaries, as musical desire extinguishes.

Scriabin’s synthetic or Mystic chord uses two tritones. The tritone is considered the most dissonant interval, but it is also invariant and symmetric. In its inversions, that is, when flipped, the tritone remains the same. It also splits the pure and most consonant interval, the octave, precisely in half, but, in contrast, it carries demonic connotations because of its jarring and harsh dissonant sound. (See and listen to examples 1, 2, and 3 on the interactive on-line music handout.⁶³ Compare the experiential consonance and / or dissonance of the octave (1), the tritone (2), and the 6-34 Mystic chord tone collection and sonority (3).) The Promethean conflation of

is, the interpenetration, of harmony and melody. See James M. Baker, *The Music of Alexander Scriabin* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986) 237.

⁶¹ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton UP, 1997) 308-59. See 340-43. The Mystic chord enacts the extinguishing of the desiring subject, which moves from tonic to dominant back to tonic. The desire for resolution has vanished, as “the sense of harmonic direction and potential closure has been weakened to the point of virtual extinction,” 343.

⁶² Taruskin 343-44.

⁶³ The interactive on-line music handout is meant primarily for scholars in the humanities who are not musicologists. The examples appear also at the end of the chapter. To access and play the on-line music handout that accompanies this chapter, go to <<http://www.sibeliuseducation.com/index.php?ses=worksheets.scorch>>. Next, search for “Scriabin” to retrieve the worksheet. To listen to the handout, you will need to download the free plug-in SibeliusScorch. After downloading Scorch, click on the worksheet “Scriabin’s “Prometheus”: Sound and Light” to open the file. You can now play and listen to the seven examples to which I refer in this chapter. All examples are presented on the same handout, but you can pause, fast-forward, or rewind the worksheet to find the relevant example. A thin blue line follows the music, as it plays, and indicates visually on the score which example is being played. All examples are clearly marked by a number 1-7, and each has an accompanying text, summarizing or clarifying ideas I discuss here.

symmetry and dissonance, of consonance, as Scriabin insisted, and dissonance, as our ears may tell us, is best suited to representing spiritual interpenetration in anticipation of the merger in Scriabin's work and of divine harmony. While the Mystic chord has lost its dominant (desiring) function by becoming invariant and stable throughout, it conjures up a world of anticipation of the merger on another spiritual level.⁶⁴

Still, apart from invariant harmonic figures and fanfare sounds of the apocalypse, apart from Scriabin's vertical and horizontal, harmonic and melodic, interpenetration of the Promethean sonorities, "The Poem of Fire" remains temporal. For one, it uses the sonata form of exposition, development, and recapitulation with a coda. It relies on nineteenth-century conventions of the tonic as a point of departure and return. Here, however, the mildly dissonant Promethean chord is treated as a consonance, as stable and tonic, but in another mystic realm.

In Scriabin's words, "Prometheus" delineates the journey of the spirit from its syncretic origins to its material condition. The spiritual and the material are embodied by the diametrically opposed and most remote tonal regions, removed by a tritone from each other. The spirit then returns triumphantly. The initial spirituality, marked by the Mystic chord on F#, informs the exposition section of the sonata form. The development section encompasses the material world, in Promethean C, while the recapitulation section returns, as it should, to the spiritual F#. In fact, "The Poem of Fire" ends with an unexpected triad on F#, not with the Mystic hexachord. In its musical drive from the beginning to the end, from the spiritual F# through C back to F# notated both in the music and, unequivocally, in the *Luce* part, from the spiritual Blue to the material Red back to the spiritual Blue, Scriabin's synaesthetic symphonic poem describes the spiritual-historical trajectory leading to the Apocalypse, to the point of unison. Yet, the end of history is never realized in "Prometheus." Its apocalyptic ambitions render it untenable. The cessation of time can happen only when music stops, in the aftermath of music. Thus, Scriabin's music synaesthetically anticipates its artistic and spiritual fulfillment in the future.

Albeit temporal, Scriabin's work looks forward to the merger by expanding the tonic triad into a hexachord, transporting it to a new mystically suffused level.⁶⁵ The Mystic chord uses six higher, ethereal partials of the harmonic series.⁶⁶ By departing from the crude fundamental sound, it seeks sound vibrations and frequencies that define tone color, or timbre. Thus, the Mystic chord captures dispersed spiritual light: "luchezarnost'," or "effulgence." In this dispersion of sound into partials or into their constitutive tone color, we see the typically Russian

⁶⁴ The three conflicting views of the Mystic chord as an altered dominant chord desiring resolution; as a stable tonic chord to Scriabin's mind; and as an invariant sonority, defying the flow of music and changeability, inform the critical perception of "Prometheus," as well as the listener's experience of Scriabin's multifarious harmonic realm of anticipation.

⁶⁵ In Scriabin's discussions with Sabaneev, the composer proclaims that in his "Mysterium" he will deploy nine- or even ten-tone chords as stable consonances. Sabaneev 46. The extant sketches from Scriabin's "Preparatory Act" reveal twelve-tone chords, first discovered and reported by Kelkel. Comprising the whole chromatic scale, these twelve-tone chords are composed of two French sixths with a diminished seventh chord on top. As a reminder, both the French sixth and the diminished seventh chords are made out of two tritones, respectively, a whole tone and a minor third apart. Taruskin 346-48.

⁶⁶ Boris de Schloezer, *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*, trans. by Nicolas Slonimsky (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 1987) 331. "The harmonic foundation of Prométhée is based on a mode of six notes: C, F-sharp, B-flat, E, A, and D. This mode represents a transposition, necessarily approximative, of the upper partials of the natural harmonic series. It is simultaneously a chord and a tone color, a timbre."

Symbolist synaesthetic effect. Aesthetically, sound and color coexist. This infinite dispersion pervaded Russian Symbolism with its diverse metaphors of refraction, dispersion of light, and now chords composed of partials of the overtone series. While the material fundamental sound is rejected in Scriabin's music, its six partials still await, anticipate their unison in a dematerialized, spiritual one sound, diametrically opposed to the crude fundamental. Like Bal'mont's synaesthetic fire and thunderbolts and the scintillating electrons, the Mystic chord is poised not in synthesis but in anticipation and constant motion. It is both a temporal harmony, relying on departure and return, and an invariant sonority.

The process of gradual ethereal and electric interpenetration of matter and light that would lead to a merger takes place in the harmonic overlaps that Scriabin's music performs. In fact, in his atonal analysis of "Prometheus," James Baker admits that, although "there are eighteen discernible motives" in the "Poem of Fire," they are "so closely interrelated that their labels are somewhat arbitrary." When following Scriabin's instructions on his autographed score, we notice the occasional ray of light and thunderbolt blazing at pivotal moments in the music. The opening bars of "Prometheus" introduce the Mystic chord on A sustained in the woodwinds and in the strings in tremolo to create the nebulous, chaotic atmosphere before the creation. The main theme of the poem (the theme of Prometheus) is presented in the portentous entrance of the horns on the spiritual F# and is crowned with an apocalyptic fanfare-like flourish. Then, the darkness, "mrak" of the pre-creation and the primordial chaos is penetrated by what is commonly called "the theme of the creative will" in the trumpets in bars 21-23. Scriabin writes in the score: "chisty sine-fiol<etovyi> luch pronizyvaet mrak," "a pure blue-violet ray of light pierces the dark," over bar 22, further punctuating the musically undifferentiated invariant mass. (See and listen to the on-line music handout, example 4.)

The jarring harsh sound of the repeated pair of root-position perfect-fourth chords results not only from the shrill, piercing timbre of the trumpets but also from the movement of the first chord down by a tritone and then, starting over, up by a tritone. The second chord is an equivalent transposition of the first by a tritone (the pitch class set of the chords is 3-9).⁶⁷ We clearly see Scriabin's methodical work with invariance. Still, the difference between the actual pitches of the two chords is maintained: G C F and C# F# B. Despite its symmetry, the creative will is rooted in difference. The gradual interpenetration of the chords has commenced in the symmetry of their tritone transpositions (T6), but is not complete, yet.

Still, if we examine the jarring chords along with the underlying harmony in the strings, we see how the ray of light indicated by Scriabin on the score has far reaching consequences; it enacts harmonically the idea of interpenetration, as the accompanying strings hover in tremolo at the overlap, sustaining the same pitches. The two vertical pitch collections of the moving chords together with the sustained harmony form tritone transpositions of the Mystic chord, 6-34; that is, the Mystic chord appears first at transposition 0 (T0) and then, immediately, at transposition 6

⁶⁷ I will rely on Baker's atonal analysis for my description of the pitch-class sets in "Prometheus" only judiciously. Without subscribing to Allen Forte's pitch-class-set theory underlying Baker's book, I will use a few of his numerical representations of tone collections (6-34 for the Mystic chord and 5-30 for light imagery) as shorthand that will render my argument logically intelligible to non-musicologists. Musicologists can consult my music handout. For a fundamental critique of Baker's book on Scriabin for its essentialist methodology, which amalgamates Schenkerian analysis and set theory, see Richard Taruskin, "The Music of Alexander Scriabin; Scriabin: Artist and Mystic" Reviews, *Music Theory Spectrum*. Vol. 10, (Summer, 1988) 143-69.

(T6)—at the pitch level of D# and A, respectively. While the chords in the trumpets urgently leap down and then up by a tritone, insisting on their difference, their Mystic basis contains four static invariant pitches at their tritone transposition, T6, the maximum possible by transposing the 6-34 pitch-class set. Thus, the harmony does not change despite its transposition; one chord is sustained in the strings while the top moves. This sameness of the harmony, along with the tritone movement in the trumpets, indicates that the partial interpenetration has happened. The Mystic chord allows for both sameness and difference in its transpositions and ethereal interpenetration.

Bracketed by the two chords leaping by a tritone but rooted in their immutable Mystic basis (T0 to T6), the second trumpet call in bar 22 delineates the exalting upward movement of the creative-will theme, as a “pure blue-violet ray of light pierces the dark.” At the outset, this melodic motif wavers in its triplet movement between Bb and C; it rests on C by tying two Cs together, returns to Bb, and then starts over, as the creative will gathers and gains momentum. After this initial hesitation, the motif impetuously soars upward, leaping by greater intervals in its ascent to the striving C in the first beat of measure 23: a minor third, another second, and two major thirds in succession. (Listen to example 4 on the on-line music handout; pay attention to the middle bar 22.) The melodic theme consists of a five-tone group that pervades “Prometheus”: the pitch-class set 5-30. When examining Skriabin’s autographed score, we notice a high correlation between the tone collection 5-30 and Skriabin’s indications of rays of light and thunderbolts in the *Luce* part. The five-tone group 5-30 resembles the Mystic six-tone collection 6-34 in its conflation of the whole-tone and octatonic (tone-semitone) collections, the two invariant tone collections characteristic of “Prometheus.”⁶⁸ (Listen to example 5 on the on-line music handout.) The pitches of the Mystic chord 6-34 (0, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9) overlap in their belonging to both the whole-tone and the octatonic scale with the exception of 0 and 5, which, respectively, belong only to the octatonic scale or the whole-tone scale. The pitch collection 5-30 (0, 1, 4, 6, 8) similarly represents an interpretation of the whole-tone and the octatonic collections. The intersection of the two invariant collections occurs in the pitches (0, 4, 6). On the other hand, 1 belongs only to the octatonic collection while 8 belongs only to the whole-tone collection. In “Prometheus,” these two invariant tone collections partially overlap, awaiting their complete future unison.

After its first presentation in the trumpet call in measure 22, the theme of the creative will, featuring 5-30, appears in measures 30-32 with the triumphant entrance of the piano, marked *imperieux*: pressing, urgent, and imperious. Harkening back to the theme of the creative will in the trumpets, the upward flourish of the piano ascends again in triplets, initially lingering on the repeated A# and B#, separated by two quarter rests. Interestingly, the piano entrance respells enharmonically the trumpet call. That is, the trumpet moves from Bb to C while the piano rises from A# to B#, reduplicating the same note values in a different spelling. (The actual pitches are the same, but their spelling is different.) The sameness and difference of the two presentations of the motif of the creative will emerge both in the enharmonic respelling of the theme and in the slight variations in their rhythmic organization. Furthermore, the piano entrance brings out the underlying relationship between the invariant tone collection 6-34 and 5-30, as the

⁶⁸ Taruskin discusses “Prometheus” as staging a conflict between the invariant whole-tone and octatonic scales, the tension between which replaces the functional progression of diatonic music. Taruskin suggests that the octatonic scale ultimately prevails in its greater non-progressive potential. Taruskin 342-44.

piano opens the phrase with an F# in the bass. F# does not belong to the creative-will tone collection at T0 that presents itself in the piano here and in the trumpets earlier. Yet, the addition of F# in the bass grounds the motif in the Promethean tonality of F#, the Skriabinian tonic of the exposition, which starts in measure 26. The spiritual, blue-violet F# tonality surfaces as the tonic in both the bass line and the *Luce* line, as well as in Skriabin's program notes to "Prometheus."

Additionally, F# completes the pitch-set collection 5-30, by turning it into a 6-34, the tone collection of the Mystic chord. Indeed, the initial F# in the row of A#, B#, D#, E, G# belongs to both the whole-tone scale and the octatonic scale and produces the Mystic chord sonority. This reliance on the Mystic harmony in the melody of "Prometheus" further manifests itself in the accumulation of 5-30 pitches that have already sounded in the melody as underlying harmonic basis for the ascending melodic line. (See and listen to example 6 on the on-line music handout). Finally, the F# sounding and tremolos in the double basses and cellos in measures 26 through 32 define the Promethean tonality and surface as the fundamental frequency in the initial bars of the exposition. This fundamental vibration thus disperses into its Mystic high partials of the natural harmonic series of F# in the higher voices of the upper strings and the piano's 5-30 melody, the complement to F# in its construction of 6-34. The imperious, striving, urgent entrance of the piano with its gradual supplementation and accumulation of melody by and as harmony performs the interpenetration that Skriabin aims to achieve in "Prometheus." At the same time, Skriabin insists on the incompleteness of this interpenetration, as he withholds the fundamental F# from the 5-30 motif, underscores the enharmonic difference of the motif, and incompletely joins together the invariant octatonic and whole-tone pitch collections in the 5-30 creative will theme and the 6-34 Mystic sonority.

After the piano's impetuous entrance with the 5-30 theme at transposition 0 (T0), the piano arpeggiates the 5-30 line (this disguised or incomplete Mystic 6-34 motif, lacking its Mystic basis) in measures 33-34 at transposition 3 (T3) where transposition 0 (T0) and T3 share one common tone—C, the maximum possible. Thus, the two transpositions at which the creative-will motif presents itself intersect or interpenetrate at C. The overlap of Cs enacts another incomplete interpenetration between the two transpositions of 5-30 in the creative-will motif and the related arpeggiation. Furthermore, the fundamental Mystic pitch completing the 5-30 creative-will motif in T3 as 6-34 acts as a common tone between T0 and T3 (D# and Eb), enabling the transposition between T0 in F# and T3 in Eb. So, if 5-30 at T0 and T3 share only one tone, C, the complete 6-34 shares two tones, C and Eb / D#, enacting a greater interpenetration thanks to the Mystic basis of the harmony.

The creative-will theme comes back also in transposition 3 in measures 38-40. This time a thunderbolt, "molniia," sketched in the score, accompanies the transposed tumultuous piano entrance. The arpeggiation also recurs, but at transposition 0. What seems to be a motivic repetition of the two related themes emerges also as a mirroring and a return to the initial transposition: T0-T3-T3-T0. Interestingly, the thunderbolt splits symmetrically the transpositional scheme at the second piano entrance in bar 38-40, instead of announcing the piano's first imperious attack in bars 30-32. That is, the thunderbolt strikes, as the motifs and the

transpositions cross over chiasmically.⁶⁹ In this sense, the lightning bolt reveals the significance of the transpositions and transformations of the 5-30 material and of their motivic resemblance and the tonal overlap (C in the melody and the enharmonically equivalent D# and Eb in the bass). As with the ray of light that pierces the darkness in measures 21-23, where Scriabin explores the invariance potential of the pitch-class sets 3-9 and 6-34, Scriabin emphasizes the overlap and chiasmus of the 5-30 transpositions in bars 30-42. Thus, I suggest that the Mystic sameness and difference of the individualistic creative will theme enact the incomplete interpenetration of light and sound, anticipating their future unison. In this sense, the Mystic intersection of transpositions inform the electric piercing and interpenetration of light and sound, indicated by Scriabin on the score, whereas the dispersion of light and sound not only exhibits individualistic differentiation but also awaits a union or return to sameness on another ethereal and spiritual level, diametrically opposed to that of the crude fundamental sound.

At a pivotal climatic moment in the score in bars 139 and 142, two thunderbolts blaze, as Scriabin's inscriptions dictate. (See and listen to example 7 on the on-line music handout.) With a fast quintuplet run ascending in the woodwinds in the final eighth of measure 139 and the second eighth of measure 142, the familiar 5-30 tone collection resurfaces melodically in transposition 0 (T0), paired with a lightning (*molniia*). The top run in the piccolo contains the same pitches we saw in bars 22 and 31-32, whereas the underlying double basses sustain an F#, which completes the Mystic chord on F#, that is, in T0. The woodwinds present the 5-30 line in simultaneous reduplication on E and A# in the clarinets, the oboes, the flutes, and, finally, the piercing piccolo at forte, the piccolo starting its mounting exultation on high A#. Earlier in the section of emotion and rapture (*avec émotion et ravissement*), which starts in measure 115 at rehearsal mark 7, the quintuplets gradually start punctuating the musical texture in the lower register: in the clarinets and the piano. The 5-30 quintuplet motif presents itself in various transpositions until it reaches its climactic highest pitch, performed by the piccolo in the spiritual tonality of F# against an F# Mystic hexachord in measures 139 and 142.

The expression mark "*avec enthousiasme*" over bar 139 describes the intensity of the illuminated culmination, recalling the etymology of 'enthusiasm' as supernatural, frenzied inspiration and possession by a god. The bedazzling sound-light climax signals revelation, and this epiphany is harmonic and melodic, rooted in the spiritual Mystic F# tonality and featuring the Mystic hexachord. The melodic pitch arrangement of the creative-will theme is infinitely compressed in the fast quintuplets that ultimately dissolve into the awe-inspiring blur of the lightning. While the fundamental sound of F# resonates in the bases, the higher partials of its overtone series (the 5-30 tone collection in the quintuplets), defining the timbre or tone color of F#, condense, anticipating fusion, into the ethereal sound flurry of the blazing white light. The ecstatic flourishes in measures 139-142 are crowned with jubilant trills, performing similarly this blur or interpenetration of tone colors, while the section of emotion and rapture rarefies turning into a pellucid *limpide* in measure 145. The texture becomes transparent, with the vanishing of the piano and the slow composed trills and tremolos at pianissimo in the strings. The union of tone colors then leads to spiritual vanishing or nothingness. I suggest that the section of rapturous emotion in the exposition (measures 115-145) communicates the presentiment of the final climax

⁶⁹ I use the term chiasmus in the literary and rhetorical sense of inverted parallelism of meaning, usually represented by ABBA, where the two As, while semantically related, are structurally or syntactically tied to B, as A and B cross over.

of “Prometheus” in the coda, where, similarly, we can follow the movement from accumulation of sounds and colors to dematerialization, vanishing of the individualistic piano, and rarefaction, as the Mystic hexachord on F# unifies into a glorious F# triad. On its way to merger, the coda accelerates the interpenetration of sounds, colors, and lights by means of dizzying tremolos and trills that fulfill the *fin-de-siècle* synaesthetic utopia of the correspondences of sound and light vibrations—of the physical, psychological, aesthetic, and mystic interpenetration of reality in synaesthesia. The unison in “Prometheus” is that of clustering of sounds and colors that would lead to glaring divine white light—Skriabin demands a “sun” at the end, “solntse”—and then disappearance with the closure of the piece.

After considering the melodic blurring or compression of tones into trills, tremolos, or resonating higher partials of the F# harmonic series in the fast quintuplet runs, we should take a step back to examine the harmonic preparation of the climactic moment in measures 138-142. The piano’s magnificent taking up and reworking of the theme of Prometheus in measures 131-138 (*thème large majestueux*) builds up harmonically to the climax unfurling in measures 139-142. (See and listen to example 7 on the on-line music handout). For the first time, the piano conflates its individualistic creative-will tendencies with the Promethean theme. While, in the beginning of “The Poem of Fire,” the Promethean theme is harmonized with a Mystic A, static throughout the opening in measures 5-12, here the piano constantly transforms the Mystic harmonization of the theme, producing an accelerated harmonic rhythm—a chord per bar. The constantly moving, wave-like triplet pattern against an arpeggiating bass, which underlies the Promethean theme in the piano’s right hand, brings out the mutability of the Mystic harmony in the piano and also in the strings. The piano’s ability to transform harmonically and motivically the piece (for instance, in the measures of the supple, dynamic, glittering 5-30 theme of motion, *très animé, étincelant*, rehearsal mark 3+3—4: 69-86) manifests itself in the piano’s sequencing of the Promethean theme starting on B in bar 131 against a Mystic D and then up a fourth to its transformation starting on E against a Mystic G. In each moving harmonization of the Promethean theme (131-134; 135-138), the piano walks along a circle of minor thirds, the four pitches of which provide the roots for the Mystic chords, as the double basses arpeggiate a diminished seventh chord, that is, the circle of minor thirds, which features two tritones a minor third apart: D-Ab (tritone interval), F-B (tritone interval) (131-134); G-Db (tritone interval), Bb-E (tritone interval) (135-138). Let us mention that there are only three circles of minor thirds that would then define three distinct Mystic tonal areas in “Prometheus.” The harmonization of the four-bar Promethean theme in the piano reveals the underlying pattern of closely related Mystic tonal areas—the three circles of four closely-related Mystic tonalities: 1) D-F-Ab-B; 2) G-Bb-Db-E; and 3) C-D#-F#-G#.⁷⁰ Thus, the piano’s refashioning of the Promethean theme encapsulates in a most succinct and economical way the modulatory scheme of “Prometheus,”

⁷⁰ See Galeev and Vanechkina for a review of the musicological literature on the Mystic chord and its varying interpretations (tonic, dominant, natural harmonic series). Galeev i Vanechkina 84-104. They also suggest that the three areas defined by the three circles of minor thirds can be viewed as closely related and that each appearance of a new Mystic chord can be considered a modulation. Galeev and Vanechkina claim to have examined the score in great detail, but, in the Russian critical tradition, they give hardly any examples except about the grand scheme of development of “Prometheus.” In view of Galeev and Vanechkina’s argument and our local observations, I see the chords harmonizing the Prometheus theme as enacting modulations between closely related Mystic tonal areas, whereas the harmonic transitions from the first to the second presentation of the Promethean theme in 131-134 and 135-138 can be thought of as modulations between distant Mystic areas.

producing a sense of harmonic condensation similar to the melodic condensation we saw in the blurring thunderbolt effect of the fast quintuplets in the woodwinds.

After the first statement of the Promethean theme in the piano, the harmony sequences down a fifth (reminiscent of the circle of fifths sequencing in tonal harmony, as can be seen in my detailing of the three circles of minor thirds above, beginning, respectively, on D, on G, and on a prepared but unrealized C). Perhaps, here Skriabin shows us the Symbolist “more real” (*realiora*), or the Mystic tonal organization behind the real: behind the nineteenth-century Western music tonal harmony that adheres to the circle of fifths. The Mystic harmonic transpositions or modulations between the closely related Mystic areas D (T8), Ab (T2), F (T11), B (T5) govern measures 131-134. In the third beat of measure 134, a quasi-Mystic passing or linear chord on Bb (T4) anticipates (as it belongs to the second circle of minor thirds) and realizes through a chromatic descent by semitone the sequencing of the Promethean theme up a fourth and the modulation to the new Mystic area of G (T1) and its related Db (T7), Bb (T4), and E (T10), defining the second circle of minor thirds in measures 135-138.

The previous sequencing of the Promethean theme attunes us to expect a presentation of the theme on high A and a modulation to the Mystic C of the third Mystic tonal area in measures 139-142, following the Mystic D in 130 and the Mystic G in 135. Seemingly preparing another sequencing down the circle of fifths, the harmony, as if by chance, arrives at or discovers the F# Mystic chord and dwells on it in an elating, jubilant climax. The modulation to the spiritual F#, the most important Mystic chord and Mystic territory in “Prometheus,” soars into the third Mystic tonal area, that defined by F#-A-C-Eb. Skriabin evokes the sense of ecstatic arrival to the spiritual Mystic F# when he breaks out of the previous sequencing of the harmonized Promethean theme by means of a defective Mystic chord, half-stepwise ascent in the right-hand inner voice of the piano (F,G->G#), and dwelling on the Mystic F# for four measures. A chord based on the whole-tone collection, what I called a defective Mystic chord, replaces the Mystic chord to harmonize the final measure of the Promethean theme in 138, as the important sustained C in the melody does not belong to the Mystic E harmony. In measure 134, we briefly flit by this whole-tone harmonization (G in the melody) just so that in the third beat of the measure we move to the linear or passing Bb Mystic chord that smoothly prepares and anticipates the modulation to the Mystic G area, as Bb Mystic belongs to the G Mystic area. In contrast, the sustained defective Mystic chord of the whole-tone harmonization in measure 138 creates a greater sense of Mystic harmonic difference because of its whole-tone sonority, as well as of its resolution to the Mystic F# in 138-139. In fact, the modulation between the whole-tone E-based chord and the Mystic F# is achieved simply by leaving out the D in measure 138. The chord that forms in the piano and the strings is an F# 9th chord (with a diminished fifth spelt as an augmented fourth) of only five whole-tone pitches that turns into a full-fledged Mystic chord with a D# only in measure 140. Still, the tumultuous thunderbolts in the fast woodwind runs in measure 139 supply D#, the one purely octatonic tone in Mystic F# missing in the piano and the strings, thus completing the Mystic tonality.

The serendipitous and felicitous climactic moment in 138-142 provides us with an inkling of the final climax in the coda where the spiritual F# is discovered and maintained, a climax pervaded by trills, tremolos, abbreviated motifs, and a final Mystic F# hexachord condensed into an F# triad. In the finale, this dazzling and blurring compression, melodic and harmonic

condensation, and horizontal and vertical overlap and interpenetration manifest themselves as a blue-violet conflagration that intensifies in a crescendo to a blinding, blazing flame at rehearsal mark 63, bar 590, where tremolos and trills overtake “The Poem of Fire,” and become the synaesthetic fire. Skriabin wrote over the *Luce* line, “Ogromnoe plamia, sine-lilovoe, ognenoe (an impressive crescendo mark) stanovitsia oslepitel’noe, pylaet”; “An enormous flame, blue-violet, fiery (an impressive crescendo mark), becomes dazzling; all is ablaze.”

The idea of melodic and harmonic, horizontal and vertical interpenetration characteristic of the musical language of “Prometheus” has existed in the critical discourse on Skriabin’s late symphonic work since its inception. What I offer in my analysis is a semiotic conceptualization of this interpenetration in view of the Russian *fin-de-siècle* cluster of notions of electricity, light, and fire that would fine-tune current critical perception of Russian Symbolist music and literature. I examine the questions: what does it mean for light and matter to interpenetrate on the way to merger; for electricity and fire to be synaesthetically informed; for melody and harmony and sound and color to blend together on the way to a unison? I see the elaboration of harmony as melody and the accumulation of melodic tones as harmony in Skriabin’s “Prometheus” not merely as a synthesis manifested in the invariance potential of the Mystic harmony but as an incomplete interpenetration of a synthesis to come, as a synaesthetic anticipation of merger. In this way, the Mystic chord epitomizes this almost fulfilled, joyfully foreseen synthesis as an interpenetration of the whole-tone and octatonic tone collection, of the dominant and tonic functions, as seen in the diametrically opposite critical interpretations of the Mystic chord’s functional significance, and the static invariance and symmetry of the chord along with its mutability. The Mystic hexachord readily flows into or modulates to both closely-related and distant Mystic tonalities thanks to the partial tonal overlaps (shared common tones) in all Mystic chords and tonalities derived thereof. Therefore, the Mystic chord remains the same while always changing and anticipating its higher union.

Thus, “Prometheus” vacillates between mystically poised synthetic invariance and temporal progression; it anticipates the Apocalypse, in its synaesthetic interpenetration of sound and light, as scripted in the score. When pierced by light and electric lightning bolts, the harmonic groupings and melodic figures in “Prometheus” overlap while remaining different (for instance, the Mystic C chord and the Mystic F# chord share four common tones out of six). Triggered by flashes of lightning and the electric colors of Skriabin’s keyboard of lights, Promethean harmony and melody enact the Solov’evian incomplete interpenetration of music and light, and capture Bal’mont’s synaesthetic flow of fire and the electric current.

In conclusion, “Prometheus” straddles the invariant and the immutable while remaining in the material world of mutability. It experiments with invariance and unresolved dissonance, while it also uses a tonal bass progression and crowns the piece with a surprising F# major triad.⁷¹ It inhabits the Symbolist realm of incomplete interpenetration of light and matter—poetic

⁷¹ See Baker on “Prometheus” as transitioning from tonality to atonality. See also his analysis of the bass progression. Baker 235-67. While Taruskin bases his analysis of the opening of “Prometheus” on the conflict between two static, non-progressive pitch collections: the whole-tone scale and the octatonic scale, a Russian favorite, much used by the Rimsky-Korsakov school, Baker affords a complete and exhaustive atonal analysis of “Prometheus.” While Taruskin insists on A as the T0 tonality of Prometheus, based on a derivations of the Mystic chord in A from the Extase chord form the “Poem of Ecstasy,” as well as on the striking F# major triad, representing the top three tones of the opening Promethean hexachord, Baker analyzes F# as the T0 tonality of the piece, which

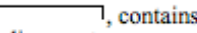
and musical, and of anticipation halfway between mutability and invariance, between dispersion and synthetic fusion. This is the realm of synaesthetic fire and electricity.

agrees with Skriabin's conception of the piece as moving from the spiritual, primordial F# to the material C back to F#. In this particular analysis, Baker relies significantly on Sabaneev's records of Skriabin's conception of the piece rather than merely on his own *a priori* methodology critiqued by Taruskin in his ground-breaking review "The Music of Alexander Scriabin; Scriabin: Artist and Mystic" 143-69.

Appendix 1: Music Examples

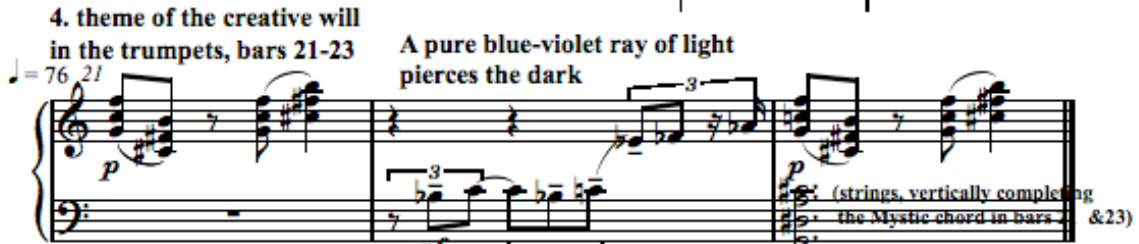
**The Poet of Fire:
Aleksandr Skriabin's Synaesthetic Symphony "Prometheus" and
the Russian Symbolist Poetics of Light
(Polina Dimova, Department of Comparative Literature, UC Berkeley)**

Music Examples 1-7: Listen for the consonance and dissonance in the examples below and try experientially to determine the consonance or dissonance of A. Skriabin's Mystic chord. This handout is meant to familiarize non-musicologists with Skriabin's late-period harmony, as well as suggest ways in which light, harmonic invariance, and symmetry are interrelated in Skriabin's "Prometheus." It accompanies Dimova's dissertation chapter on Skriabin.

1. Two measures of octaves on C. The octave contains six whole tones and is consonant.
2. Two measures of tritones on C and on F#. The tritone, represented here by , contains three whole tones. The tritone splits the octave in two symmetrical halves and is dissonant.
3. Mystic chord on C, pitch collection 6-34. The Mystic chord contains two tritones (those of the French Sixth) and is an incomplete intersection of the whole-tone scale and the octatonic scale.

1. 

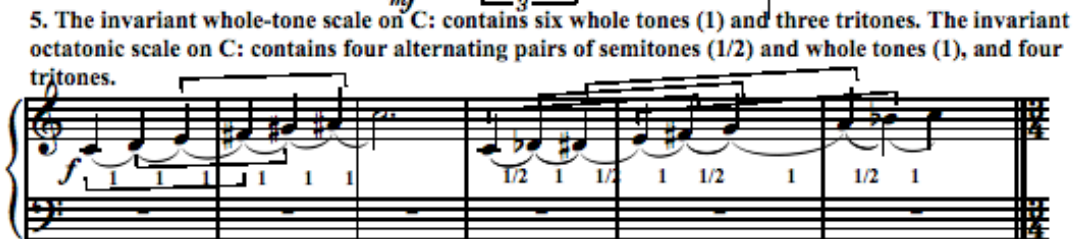
2. 

3. 

4. theme of the creative will
in the trumpets, bars 21-23 A pure blue-violet ray of light
pierces the dark

p *mf* *p* (strings, vertically completing the Mystic chord in bars 21 & 23)

5. The invariant whole-tone scale on C: contains six whole tones (1) and three tritones. The invariant octatonic scale on C: contains four alternating pairs of semitones (1/2) and whole tones (1), and four tritones.



6. The theme of the creative will

First piano entrance reminiscent 5-30 at transposition 0

30 of bar 22. Bars 30-42. ♩ = 96
imperieux
f

5-30 at transposition 3

33
p
 (Flutes, contrasting theme)

darkness thunderbolt 5-30 at transposition 3

36
imperieux
f

5-30 back at transposition 0

41

6. Scriabin's use of the pitch class set 5-30 and its relation to his imagery of light and thunderbolts. Note the repetition of the theme of the creative will in bars 22 and 30 at transposition 0 (T0) and transposition 3 (T3) and its repeated arpeggiation conversely at T3 and T0. All indications of light imagery are Scriabin's.

7. Theme of Prometheus in the piano against a moving harmonization. Right hand of the piano preserved as written in the score; the left hand is a block chord reduction of the piano left hand and the strings.

$\text{♩} = 80$ 131 *thème large majestueux*

INTERLUDE

The Russian Symbolist Dispersion of Light: Viacheslav Ivanov and Aleksandr Skriabin

The Russian Symbolist poet and theoretician Viacheslav Ivanov and Aleksandr Skriabin, who, as we saw, conspired to stage the end of the world in his final unfinished composition, “The Mysterium,” were kindred souls, awaiting and preparing the transfiguration of reality. Skriabin and Ivanov believed that the transformation of the world would be achieved in a religious act, synthesizing all the arts—an act Ivanov called theurgy, or divine action. The two artists also shared a theurgic fascination with synaesthetic and apocalyptic images of light, fire, and the sun, thus seeking to unify the arts and the senses on the way to transfiguration. Skriabin and Ivanov first met in 1909 when the composer returned to Russia after a long sojourn in Western Europe. At that time, Ivanov presented Skriabin with his volume of essays “Among the Stars,” *Po zvezdam*, containing, among others, Ivanov’s essay on Nietzsche and Wagner. Ivanov’s later gift, his poetry collection “Cor Ardens,” would become a favorite of Skriabin’s. In the 1910s, Skriabin was reading symbolist verse and, under the influence of Ivanov, began writing dithyrambic poetry for his unfinished apocalyptic “Preparatory Act.” Thus, from 1913 until Skriabin’s untimely death in 1915, Ivanov gave Skriabin advice on writing the poetic text of “The Preparatory Act,” *Predvaritel’noe deistvo* to Skriabin’s grandiose, transformative, theurgic “Mysterium.” Yet, neither the Preparatory Act nor the Mysterium were ever completed. What remains is the partly revised text to *Predvaritel’noe deistvo*. Skriabin’s music for this preliminary piece was lost with the exception of a few sketches.

In Ivanov’s poetry collections “Transparency,” *Prozrachnost’* (1904) and “Cor Ardens” (1904-1908), like in Skriabin’s symphony “Prometheus: A Poem of Fire,” “Prometei: Poema ognia” (1909-1910), synaesthetic images of fire and the Sun proliferate, always conflating the visual, poetic, and musical potential of light. The concept of synthetic art, synaesthesia, light, sun, and fire informed the works of both Ivanov and Skriabin. In his 1915 commemorative essay upon Skriabin’s death, “Skriabin’s View on Art,” *Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo*, Ivanov created the myth of Skriabin as Orpheus based on the composer’s messianic beliefs that he would compose the eschatological “Mysterium” in a synaesthetic flurry of sounds, lights, colors, scents, textures, and shapes. In his essay, Ivanov posits that, like Orpheus’s art, Skriabin’s work conflates the arts, and his music creates and orders a new world: “Music for Skriabin, as for the mythic Orpheus, was a fundamental principle, building and setting the world into motion. Music had to blossom with words and conjure up images...”; “Музыка для [Скрябина], как для мифического Орфея, была превоначалом, движущим и строящим мир. Она должна была расцветать словом и вызывать образы...”¹ Skriabin’s music flourishes in words, images, and sounds. As an Orphic poet-musician, Skriabin brings together the Apollonian and the Dionysian principles, the visual and the musical, while Skriabin’s untimely death parallels Orpheus’s

¹ Viacheslav Ivanov, “Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo,” *Sobranie sochinenij, Collected Works*, vol. 3, 175. My translation.

descent into the underworld and the mythic hero's violent dismemberment at the savage hands of the raging Maenads: a dismemberment that would regenerate the world. Ivanov imagines the composer demanding the immediate renewal of the world. Yet, Fate decrees otherwise: "Fate answered [to Skriabin]: 'you should die and resurrect yourself alone.' I revere this death," says Ivanov, "remembering that the seed will not come back to life without dying first.;" "Судьба ответила [Скрябину]: 'умри и обновись сам'... Я благоговею перед этой смертью, помня что семя не оживет, если не умрет."² Thus, Skriabin's death regenerates the artist and the world, by sowing the seeds of Orpheus's dismembered body.

In actuality, Skriabin died of a blood infection, and Ivanov never mentions explicitly the dismemberment of the Orphic Skriabin. Still, this interlude suggests that Ivanov's poetic and theoretical practices construe Skriabin's art as mystically dismembered. It shows that, in Ivanov's work, the dispersion of light with its corollary proliferation of the arts and the senses metaphorically parallels the scattered body of Orpheus. Here I examine Ivanov's poetic conflation of light, synaesthesia, and the figure of Orpheus in Ivanov's early poetry collections "Transparency," *Prozrachnost'* (1904). In this way, I trace Skriabin's inscription in Ivanov's Orphic mythology not only in Ivanov's commemorative essays and poems about the composer but also in Ivanov's early poetic definition of Orpheus.

In Viacheslav Ivanov's conception, the evocation of all the arts and all the senses define Skriabin as an Orphic figure. Ivanov's essay "Skriabin's View on Art" concludes with a poem dedicated to Skriabin as a hypostasis of Orpheus:

«Памяти Скрябина» (1915)

Осиротела Музыка. И с ней
Поэзия, сестра, осиротела.
Потух цветок волшебный у предела
Их смежных царств, и пала ночь темней

На взморие, где новозданных дней
Всплывал ковчег таинственный. Истлела
От тонких молний духа риза тела,
Отдав огонь Источнику огней.

Исторг ли Рок, орлицей зоркой рея,
У дерзкого святыню Прометея?
Иль персть опламенил язык небес?

Кто скажет: побежден иль победитель,
По ком — немея кладбищем чудес —
Шептаньем лавров плачет муз обитель?³

"In Memory of Skriabin" (1915)

Music has been orphaned. And
Her sister Poetry was orphaned with her.
The magical blossom has died at the border
Of their adjoining kingdoms, and night has fallen darker

On the shore, where the mysterious ark of newly-created days
Has surfaced. The raiment of the body has smoldered
From the refined lightning-bolts of the spirit,
Having given up its fire to the Source of fires.

Did Fate, hovering like a keen-eyed eagle, tear away
The sacred object from daring Prometheus?
Or did the language of the heavens set the earth afire?

Who can say: conquered or conqueror
Of him, whom - falling silent in the graveyard of miracles -
The abode of the Muses mourns with the whispering of its
laurels.

Trans. by Michael Wachtel

² Ivanov, "Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo," *SS*, vol. 3, 181. My translation.

³ Ivanov, "Pamiati Skriabina" in "Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo," *SS*, vol. 3, 189. Trans. by Michael Wachtel. See Michael Wachtel, "The 'Responsive Poetics' of Vjačeslav Ivanov," *Russian Literature*, XLIV (1998) 308-313. North-Holland.

In Ivanov's sonnet "In Memory of Scriabin," both music and poetry mourn for the Orphic artist as a musician-poet while the fire of the lightning-bolt has purged and transformed the body of the mythic Scriabin into universal fire. Transformation by fire and light enhance the poetic and musical dimension of the Orphic artist, transporting him into the realm of light. This is the realm of the sun god Apollo, Orpheus's father, whose whispering laurels honor the triumphant artist at the closure of the poem. Furthermore, Ivanov likens Scriabin to the light-giving Prometheus, alluding to Scriabin's own symphonic hero. As we already saw, Scriabin's 1909 symphonic poem "Prometheus: A Poem of Fire" prepared his "Mysterium" in its otherworldly, ethereal, invariant, non-progressive harmonies, as well as in its synaesthetic aspirations to conflate music with light and color. Scriabin's "Prometheus" seemed to be a musical representation of the new world to come.

The sestet of the sonnet poses a rhetorical question about the significance of Scriabin's death: was Scriabin conqueror or conquered? Was his "sacred object," his messianic mission, snatched away from him, or did his death purge the whole world by setting it on fire? Scriabin's victory manifests itself in the posterior positioning of his triumph, at the end of the first tercet and at the end of line 12, as well as in the interartistic allusions in the poem to music, poetry, and language as fire (literally, "the tongue of fire").⁴ Scriabin is the "conqueror" who purifies the earth by setting it afire.

In his essay on Scriabin, Ivanov posits that Scriabin reveres all the arts as "instrumental forces, weaving a multi-colored cover for the child – the miracle that had to be born in the choral all-unity of the Mysterium and become the soul of the new, better age..."⁵ Ivanov's metaphor of the multiplicity of the arts as a motley, multi-colored veil for the spiritual miracle suggests the prismatic figuration of mystical transfiguration in Ivanov's thought. Similarly, the spectrum of colors, which here stand for the various arts, can converge in the white light of "the collectively united consciousness, as in a convex lens, gathering light."⁶ White light represents both transcendence and death, as enacted in Ivanov's myth of Scriabin's Orphic death. Thus, the typically Symbolist dispersed synaesthetic and interartistic light anticipates its apocalyptic transfiguration into synthetic white light.

⁴ In the handwritten addendum to his essay, Ivanov describes the first antinomic statements as ironic. Viacheslav Ivanov, "Vzgliad Scriabina na iskusstvo," *Scriabin* (Moskva: IRIS—PRESS, 1996) IX between 36-37.

⁵ Ivanov, "Vzgliad Scriabina na iskusstvo," *SS*, vol. 3, 188. I am footnoting the full passage that I discuss below in Russian and in English (my translation). "Так проблема «синтетического искусства» [была] дорогая Скрибину... Этот гениальный художник не боялся поработить или унижить ни своего, ни других искусств, перед которыми равно благоговел и к которым подходил сам с чисто аскетической строгостью и взыскательностью, — объявив их служебными силами, ткущими многоцветные покрывала для дитяти — чуда, которое должно было родиться в хоровой соборности мистерии и стать душою нового, лучшего века... В соборно слитом сознании [...] должна была, как в фокусе собирательного стекла, воскреснуть память ...и найти в завершительной полноте осознания и преодоления выход в иные просторы бытия, при непосредственной, чудотворной помощи [...] небесного Луча..."; "The problem of "synthetic art" was dear to Scriabin. This genius artist was not afraid that he would enslave or demean his art or the other arts. He venerated the arts and approached them with purely ascetic rigor and exactitude, having declared them to be instrumental forces, weaving a multi-colored cover for the child – the miracle that had to be born in the choral all-unity of the mysterium and become the soul of the new, better age... In the collectively united consciousness, as in a convex lens, gathering light, memory will be resurrected and will find in the completed fullness of awareness and transcendence an exit into other spaces of being with the immediate, miraculous help of the heavenly Ray..."

⁶ Ivanov, "Vzgliad Scriabin na iskusstvo," *SS*, vol. 3, 188.

The prismatic quality of Ivanov's aesthetics of colorful dispersion of light can be traced back to Vladimir Solov'ev's mystically-positivist idea of the transfiguration of matter by illumination (*preobrazhenie*) and the incarnation of spiritual light into matter (*voploshchenie*).⁷ Solov'ev exemplifies his aesthetic principle with the evolution of the crystalline structure of the carbon element. For Solov'ev, dark coal transfigures into the refractive and light-dispersing diamond in the chemical interpenetration of light and matter.

Viacheslav Ivanov adopts Solov'ev's idea of the transfiguration of dark coal into illuminated diamond in his cycle "Kingdom of Transparency," "*Tsarstvo Prozrachnosti*." Precious stones inhabit Ivanov's kingdom of transparency: the diamond, the ruby, the emerald, the sapphire, and the amethyst.⁸ As in Solov'ev's notion of spirit as light, Ivanov's gemstones mediate divinity to humanity by refracting glaring white light and producing iridescent, crimson red, green, blue, and violet-colored beams. Thus, the invisible and incomprehensible divine light descends toward humanity in the whole spectrum of colors and lights. Transparent gems enable this vertical communication between matter and spirit.

But, what does "transparency" mean for Ivanov? In her introduction to Ivanov's Collected Works, Olga Shor-Deschartes, Ivanov's closest companion in his later years, literary executor, and first biographer, offers a lapidary, tantalizing summary:

Viacheslav Ivanov sets out to examine the nature of that spiritual medium where the incarnations of mystical reality take place. The nature of this medium is oppositional: on the one hand, the medium must be transparent so as not to impede the passing of the sunbeam, which would be halted, darkened, or made invisible by the non-transparent medium; yet, the medium should not be absolutely transparent, as it needs to refract the ray of light – otherwise, *Res* will not be seen, as it is invisible in its essence.⁹

Viacheslav Ivanov sets out to examine the nature of that spiritual medium where the incarnations of mystical reality take place. The nature of this medium is oppositional: on the one hand, the medium must be transparent so as not to impede the passing of the sunbeam, which would be halted, darkened, or made invisible by the non-transparent medium; yet, the medium should not be absolutely transparent, as it needs to refract the ray of light – otherwise, *Res* will not be seen, as it is invisible in its essence.

Rigid, dark, impenetrable matter thwarts illumination, and only the transparent yet refractive spiritual medium of the gem can render the mystical reality of light knowable to mankind. The refraction and dispersion of white light in the transparent medium translates divinity in polychromous human terms. Man can know white light or God only in the

⁷ For a discussion of Solov'ev's main aesthetic categories in the essay "Beauty in Nature" (1889) and his mystical realism as a synthesis of scientific and religious views on reality and for an evaluation of his influence on the Russian Symbolist poets in their utopia aiming to transfigure reality through art, as well as in their use of the metaphor of incarnation of spirit into matter, see Irina Paperno, "The Meaning of Art: Symbolist Theories," Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Symbolism, eds. Irina Paperno and Joan Grossman (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994) 13-23.

⁸ Precious stones and ornate jewelry are a favorite decadent image evoking artifice. Interestingly, in view of our concern with light and electricity, the magazine *L'Illustration* presented a drawing of a ballerina, poised in dance, girdled and crowned with electric jewels. The illustration clearly articulates the relations between light, art, and technology in the visual culture of the time. See "Electric Jewels," *L'Illustration*, (1881) reproduced in Schivelbusch 72. While decadent imagery coupled electricity and jewels with the artificial world, the Russian symbolists saw electricity and jewels as a part of nature.

⁹ Ivanov, SS, vol. 1, 63. Olga Shor-Deschartes, "Introduction to Ivanov," 1971. My translation.

multiplicity of colors, and, by extension, in the multiplicity of the senses and the arts, as Ivanov's essay on Skriabin and Skriabin's synaesthetic work attest.

The transparent yet scintillating medium of gems was thought to be enabled by what *fin-de-siècle* culture believed to be **luminiferous ether**, Solov'ev's *insubstantial substance*, "*veshchestvo neveshchestvenoe*." The inner ether that objects accommodate makes them transparent or opaque, permeable and refractive.¹⁰ In Russia of the 1900s, the transparency of matter was explained in the following way: Light sets ether into vibration, and rigid matter either absorbs or reflects light unless the vibrating particles of ether could squeeze through the crevices of matter.¹¹ Then they would enter the object and set into motion the inner ether that fills it. Thus, the inner ether transmits and disperses vibrating light. For Ivanov transparency enacts this transmission by luminiferous ether and the interpenetration of matter and light in the ethereal medium of the gemstone:¹²

ЦАРСТВО ПРОЗРАЧНОСТИ
АЛМАЗ

Когда, сердца пронзив, Прозрачность
Исполнит солнцем темных нас,
Мы возблестим, как угля мрачность,
Преображенная в алмаз.

Kingdom of Transparency (1904)
Diamond

When, piercing the hearts, Transparency
Fills us in the dark with sun,
We'll shine upward, as the coal's darkness,
Transfigured in the diamond.

¹⁰ Solov'ev 542.

¹¹ See the entry on "Light," "*Svet*" in Brockhaus and Efron, *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar'*, Vol. XXIX, 1900, 238. I summarize the wave theory of light according to Huygens, as expounded by Brockhaus's encyclopaedia. It is important to note that the encyclopedic entry does not cast doubt on the notion of ether (luminiferous ether) even after the new electromagnetic theory of light had been formulated in the nineteenth century. Ether now obtained electrical and magnetic characteristics that were as-of-yet unknown, but could be studied with greater precision. The electrical and magnetic dimensions of a transparent medium or, rather, the ether of this transparent medium could determine the speed of light. According to the article, this showed most saliently the interpenetration (*vzaimnoe proniknovenie*) of electricity and light as two spheres of natural phenomena (246). In this sense, we should underscore again the scientific and conceptual permeability of light, electricity, the transparent medium, and ether in the mind of the *fin-de-siècle* Russian intellectual.

¹² The notion of transparency as a refractive medium can easily find a counterpart in the *fin-de-siècle* decorative arts and material culture. European *style moderne* and art nouveau interior designers focused on the expressive, poetic, and refractive qualities of glass. Tiffany lampshades and windows created a kaleidoscope of lights reminiscent of Gothic stained glass windows: "iridescent glass flux, shimmering in all colors of the rainbow and creating most delicate nuances, develops a wavy, irregular surface when the substance is compressed before it cools," quoted in Schivelbusch 182. In their gorgeous color and irregularities, Tiffany lampshades "compensated for the monotony of electric light" (182). Windows acted as a "colored filter," poeticized the room, and "[broke] up the dazzling, formless mass of light from the window" (183). In Moscow, the architect Shekhtel' employed *style moderne* for the Stepan Riabushinskii house, begun in 1900. In his colorful treatment of glass, his work bears a resemblance to Tiffany's: in the two-storey stained glass windows, as well as in the Tiffany-style electric lamp. See Brumfield 23-26. About Moscow architecture at the turn of the century, see William Brumfield, "The Decorative Arts in Russian Architecture: 1900-1907," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 1987. On the artistic and poetic uses of glass by Emile Gallè and Louis Comfort Tiffany, see Liudmila Kazakova, "Steklo E. Gallè i L.K. Tiffany kak khudozhestvennyi fenomen," *Evropeiskii simbolizm*, ed. Prof. Svetlov (Sant-Peterburg, ALETEIIA, 2006) 316-31. The Russian symbolists' interest in the refractive medium's permeability, in its metaphorical transparency, and in its spiritual ability to disperse light certainly bears resemblance and can be possibly traced back to these art nouveau developments in glass design and the interest in the prismatic qualities of glass. Likewise, the paintings and stained glass windows by Mikhail Vrubel' (1856-1910), in their mosaic-like luminescent flat surfaces, and the Rayonist paintings of Mikhail Larionov (1881-1964), engaging with the musical play of reflected rays of light, open up a fascinating new dimension of the constellation of light, refraction, and the transparent medium at the *fin de siècle*. See Figures 15-19.

Взыграв игрою встреч небесных,
Ответный крик твоих лучей,
О Свет, мы будем в гранях тесных:
Ты сам - и цель твоих мечей!

Всепроницаемой святыней
Луча божественное Да,
Стань в сердце жертвенном твердыней,
Солнцедробящая звезда!¹³

Playing by the play of celestial encounters,
We will be within the narrow limits,
O Light, the respondent cry of your beams:
You yourself – and the target of your swords.

By the all-penetrating sacredness
Of the ray's divine 'Yes,'
Become a stronghold in the sacrificial heart,
Sun-shattering star!

Ivanov's "Diamond" illuminates the confined, dark, material lyric "We" with celestial light by the power of ethereal transparency. Physical and spiritual light merge in the metaphor of the human heart. The heart is transformed into a figurative diamond, embracing and dispersing light. Transparency as the interpenetration of matter and light structures the poem. The interlocking rhymes, alternating between feminine and masculine, as well as the interplay of images of light and darkness set into motion the process of permeation. While in the first two quatrains semantically opposite words are coupled in rhymes: transparency and darkness, the unlightened "We" and the diamond; celestial and narrow, beams and swords—, by the final quatrain of the poem, all rhyming words carry positive connotations: sacredness, Yes, stronghold, and star.

Transparency, all-penetration, and piercing through carry the semantic and acoustic charge of the poem: "prozrachnost'" (1), "pronizv" (1) and "vsepronitsaemyi" (9). Etymologically, the Latin prefix "pro-" signifies "forward" movement and unifies the key words phonetically. The voiced forceful fricative "z," also in the final consonant of *almaz*, the diamond as adamant, seems to pierce the texture of the poem with the letting out of air through a narrow opening between the tongue and the teeth. Similarly, the affricative "ts" as a semi-soft consonant in "all-penetrating" (9) relates to "z" in its alveolar position but is softened as if to suggest the ever-growing permeability and transparency of the human heart. The ray of light has pierced our hearts and illuminates them in a metaphorical process similar to the transfiguration of coal into diamond. In fact, light acts upon both the diamond and the heart, as they become iridescent or radiant.

The celestial encounters and the interplay of matter and spirit in the heart posit the interaction between man and light as a process of perpetual creation of light in man. Indeed, the Russian instrumental case, or, literally, "creative" case, *tvoritel'nyi padezh*, pervades "Diamond." Transparency fills us "with sun" in line 1; we communicate with and respond to the light rays "by the play of celestial encounters." Finally, the poetic speaker exhorts "the sun-shattering star" to become a stronghold in the heart by means of the "all-penetrating sacredness" of the light ray's "Yes" in the last quatrain. This creative interaction of pervasion and impregnation by light molds the complicated intertwining of the heart and the diamond. The heart merges with the diamond and thus disperses light into myriads of incandescent lights. The metaphorical heart-diamond becomes a stronghold "*tverdinei*" that breaks the sun into particles

¹³ Ivanov, "Almaz," *SS*, vol. 1, 754. My translation.

and disperses light, “*solntsedrobiashchaia zvezda*” (11-12). In this sense, the poem closes with the dispersion and not the union of light, with the spectrum of colors and not with white light.

Ivanov underscores the violence in the process of interpenetration or piercing. Our hearts are sacrificed to the penetrating sunbeams. The piercing of the hearts by the light-bearing transparency and the “swords” of its rays enacts the illumination of humans. Additionally, the sun itself is shattered by matter, embodied in the star of our heart as a diamond. In this way, Ivanov’s poem “Diamond” reveals the violence involved in the scattering of light, as well as in the interpenetration of matter and light. This sacrificial piercing and shattering of both the human heart and the sun evokes Ivanov’s understanding of Orpheus as a divinity who is offered sacrifices and is the sacrifice itself.¹⁴ Also, “The Kingdom of Transparency” recalls Orpheus’s poetry collection “Lithika,” which contains magical songs on gemstones whose beams are healing.¹⁵ Perhaps, Orpheus is figured in the cycle as both using gemstones and being pierced by their beams, as both the receiver of sacrificial offerings and the sacrifice itself. Thus, the sacrificial dispersion of light in “Diamond” parallels the dismemberment of Orpheus as spiritual ascent and purification. Interestingly, after Orpheus’s tearing asunder in Ivanov’s dithyramb “Orpheus Dismembered,” also from “Transparency,” Orpheus rises as a red sun. This is reminiscent not only of the sun cult of Orpheus, but also of the process of *solification*, the alchemical separation of the (Orphic) head from the body.¹⁶ The chorus of Maenads sings:

Орфей Растерзанный (1904)

Он младенец. Вот он в зеркало взглянул: В ясном зеркале за морем лик его, делясь, блеснул! Мы подкрались, улучили полноты верховной миг, Бога с богом разлучили, растерзали вечный лик,

И гармоний возмущенных вопиет из крови стон: Вновь из волн поработанных красным солнцем встанет он. Строя семя, искра бога сердце будет вновь томить.¹⁷

“Orpheus Dismembered” (1904)

The infant, lo, he looked into the mirror: in the clear mirror, beyond the sea, his countenance, divided, flashed! We snuck up, seized the sublime moment of plenitude, separated God from the god, tore to pieces the eternal image,

Out of the blood, a wail full of indignant harmonies rose up: He will rise again as a red sun out of the enslaved waves. Ordering the seeds, the divine spark will again let the heart suffer.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ivanov’s “Kingdom of Transparency” draws on Orpheus’s “Lithika,” which contains a collection of magical songs devoted to gemstones, the rays of which Orpheus used to heal or to enter the cosmic space. See Lena Szilard, “‘Orfei rasterzannyi’ i nasledie orfizma,” *Viacheslav Ivanov: Arkhivnye materialy i issledovaniia* (Moskva: Russkie slovari, 1999) 214.

¹⁵ For more on the historical sources for the figure of Orpheus, on his gift as a healed, and on his “Lithika,” see Nikola Gigov, *Gela: Orfeevo tsvete* (Sofia: Meditsina i fizkultura, 1988) 3-45. Gigov translates Orpheus’s name as “magnetic light,” a meaning that powerfully resonates with our discussion of light and electro-magnetic phenomena at the *fin de siècle*.

¹⁶ Szilard 232.

¹⁷ Ivanov, “Orfei rasterzannyi,” *SS*, vol. 1, 804.

¹⁸ My translation.

Ivanov renders the dismemberment of Orpheus in visual terms, reinforcing the relationship between Orpheus, light, and the sun. (Early on in the dithyramb, Orpheus explicitly juxtaposes the ray of light and the divine countenance: “where there is a beam, there is an image/face”; “gde luch, tam lik.”) The figurative mirror reflects and separates the embodied face of the god by transforming it into an image. The Russian noun “lik” captures the meanings of both face and image, and the verse fluctuates between the visual, light-giving image and the embodied Orpheus. The reflected face further “flashes” in the mirror, “blesnul.” By the end of the verse the corporeality of Orpheus resurfaces with the separation of the god from the god and the dismemberment of the eternal face. Finally, after Orpheus rises in blood as a red sun, the divine spark, or shall we say the divine particle or seed, is sown into the human heart. This metaphor anticipates Skriabin’s Orphic seed that cannot live without dying first.

To sum up, the dispersion of light is figured as Orphic sacrificial dismemberment; the dispersed light represents the scattered Orphic or divine body. Furthermore, Ivanov’s figuring of Orphic dispersion of light becomes synaesthetic in his poetry. His “Gli spiriti del viso,” also in “Transparency,” reveals the scattered body of the suffering god in nature:

Gli Spiriti del Viso (1904)

Есть духи глаз. С куста не каждый цвет
Они вплетут в венки своих избраний;
И сорванный с их памятью ранней
Сплетается. И суд их: *Да* иль *Нет*.

Хоть преломлен в их зрящих чашах свет,
Но чист кристалл эфиросных граней.
Они – глядят: молчанье – их завет.
Но в глубях дали грезят даль пространней.

Они – как горный вокруг души туман.
В их снах правдив явления обман.
И мне вестят их арфы у порога,

Что радостен в росах и солнце луг;
Что звездный свод – созвучье всех разлук;
Что мир – обличье страждущего Бога.¹⁹

Gli Spiriti del Viso (1904)

There are spirits of the eyes. They will not weave every
flower / From the bush into the garlands of their selection; /
And the plucked flower with their early memory /
Intertwines. And their judgment is Yes or No.

Although the light is refracted in their seeing flower cups, /
Yet the crystal of their ether-bearing facets is pure. / They
look: silence is their bidding. / But in the depths of the
distance they dream of a vaster distance.

They are like a mountain mist around the soul. / In their
dreams the deception of phenomena is true. / And their harps
tell me at the threshold,

That the meadow is joyful under dew and sun; / That the
starry vault is the accord of all separation; / That the world is
the outer appearance of a suffering God.

Trans. by Pamela Davidson

The first line of “Gli Spiriti del Viso or “Spirits of the Eyes, “Dukhi Glaz” enacts an enriched synaesthetic translation of *spiriti*. It evokes both “dUkhi” as spirits; and perfume, dukhI, in Russian. This secondary meaning of the enriched translation is reinforced by the flower metaphor that informs the rest of the poem on the level of vision, fragrance, and also music in the flowers’ melodious harps.

The flowers as spirits and fragrance refract light with their cups of petals, literally, “glasses.” Just like Ivanov’s precious stones, the flowers thus function as mediators of the divine,

¹⁹ Ivanov, “Gli Spiriti del Viso,” *SS*, vol. 1, 785. Trans. by Pamela Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov: A Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 1989) 167-68.

as they disperse light into Orphic colors and sounds, The flower cups seem made out of pure crystal that would transmit and not distort the divine image. For a moment, the whiff of “dukhl” resurfaces in the permeable and refractive ether of the blossoms’ delicate edges, “efironosnye grani.” These “ether-bearing facets” are reminiscent of the facets of Ivanov’s diamonds. In any case, these “facets,” “grani” delineate the permeable border between the human spirits and God; they define the territory of ethereal and crystal interpenetration as synaesthetic refraction.

This border is transcended in multiple synaesthetic ways. The flower-eyes gaze into the distance and perceive not simply a silence but also a vaster distance. Through space and sight, the spirits communicate beyond words with the divine. Their perfume further departs from the flower-soul: “They are like a mountain mist around the soul”; “Oni—kak gornyi vkrug dushi tuman.” The fragrant mist not only envelops the soul but also flows away from it, acting as another refractive filter for the divine, ensuring access to the divine. Finally, sight and scent are completed with the sounds of the lyre that heralds the dreams of the eye-flowers to the lyric I. All separation vanishes in harmony, “sozvuchie,” figuring sound again. Thus, the synaesthetic spirits-eyes-perfumes are able to envision the suffering God scattered in nature, and nature is the suffering Orpheus.²⁰

Viacheslav Ivanov’s poem “Rainbows,” “Radugi” also performs the scattering of the divine body in the material world through the synaesthetic dispersion of light. The refraction of light produces the whole spectrum of colors, and light disperses synaesthetically not only into colors but also into sounds, perfumes, and flavors. Through the spiritual process of refraction, the divine (the Orphic) manifests itself. The mediating rainbows in the poem are both visible, “seven-colored / ethereal arcs,” “. . . semicvetnye / arki efirnye,” and audible “harmonious spectrums,” “spektry sozvuchnye”; and “murmurs of lyres,” “rokoty lirnye.”²¹ Thus, we can know, access, and experience the divine only in its infinite breaking up into particles (dispersion of light)—by means of the mediating rainbows.²²

So, refraction of light produces synaesthesia, as well as synaesthetic rainbows. We saw Solov’ev’s and Ivanov’s diamond similarly mediate between the human and the divine, and Solov’ev’s essay “Beauty in Nature” figures the diamond as a “solidified rainbow”: “In this unified, inseparable state of matter and light, both retain their nature, and neither of them can be seen as disparate. Rather, we can see only luminiferous substance and incarnated light—enlightened coal and solidified rainbow.” «В этом не слиянном и нераздельном соединении вещества и света оба сохраняют свою природу, но ни то, ни другое не видно в своей отдельности, а видна одна светоносная материя и воплощенный свет – просветленный уголь и окаменевшая радуга.»²³ “Rainbow,” “raduga,” also suggests a false etymology connecting the noun to its factitious root in the verb “radovat’sia, raduius’,” “to rejoice” with all its divine connotations.

²⁰ The last line of the sonnet is usually interpreted to refer to the suffering Dionysus. However, as Szilard observes, Orpheus is a hypostasis of Dionysus for Ivanov. Orpheus also conflates both the Apollonian and the Dionysian principles. See Szilard 223 and the quotation from Ivanov’s “Orfei,” in Szilard 217.

²¹ Ivanov, “Radugi,” *SS*, vol. 1, 750-52.

²² On Goethe’s influence on Ivanov’s conception of the rainbow as mediating between humanity and divinity, see Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Viacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1994) 86-88.

²³ Solov’ev, “Krasota v prirode,” 358. My translation.

Interestingly, rainbows emerge not simply as manifestations of light, light beams, and the Sun in the human world of transparency. Additionally, they retain a complex relationship to a synaesthetic fire: “fire-sounding” and fire-visible”; “ognezvuchnye” and “ognezrachnye,” creating synaesthetic clusters anticipating Skriabin’s “Prometheus.” On the one hand, the thunderbolt, “molniia,” which accompanies rain and precedes the rainbow, explains Ivanov’s insistence on fire imagery in a poem about rainbows. Yet, on the other, we have seen fire associated with both light and sound, and with both coal and diamonds also in Bal’mont’s “Hymn to Fire.” I propose that Viacheslav Ivanov’s divine light disintegrates into partials in synaesthetic phenomena encompassing the whole gamut of colors and sounds. Polychromatic and polyphonic refraction in the rainbow exemplifies synaesthetic descent and anticipation, the reverse process to the one of merger that the Russian Symbolists strove to achieve. Subsequently, light, the sun, and fire surfaced as inherently synaesthetic in Russian Symbolist practice. Thus, interartistic endeavors gravitated toward light imagery and perpetuated it. Light and fire imagery appear as the irreducible remainder of Ivanov’s poetic practice that anticipated exchanges among the arts, for instance, in his artistic collaboration with Skriabin.

The purpose of Symbolist art was to unify the particles of God (Orpheus, colors, and sounds) so that mankind can attain the divine and be transfigured. Yet, Ivanov fine-tuned the Symbolist theoretical and philosophical strivings toward wholeness and transfiguration, as he conceptualized ascent toward the divine (*voskhozhdenie*) as coinciding with the poetic practice of infinite dispersion and transformation, expressed in the divine descent toward humanity (*niskhozhdenie*).²⁴

We can follow this process of ascent toward the divine and generous descent of the divine toward humanity in Ivanov’s cycle “The Kingdom of Transparency.” In the last poem of the cycle, “The Temptation of Transparency,” the spectrum of seven colors thirsts [upwards] to merge in a ray of white light: “I, k nim skloniaias’, Semizrachnost’ / Vozhazhdet slitsia v belyi luch” (3-4). Tempted by the promise of conflation, dispersed light descending toward the abysses (“bezdny”) strives upwards in the prefix “voz-,” “up.” Still, the vivid medium of heavenly heights will hold back this desire, and the exultant “Yes” will keep singing in the tender refractions: “But you will hold back by your spirit of the powerful, / O, bright medium of the heavenly heights, / ... And in the sweet refractions / The all-jubilant Yes will be singing!” “No ty uderzhish’ dukhom sil’nykh, / O vysei iarkaia sreda, / ... I v perelomleniakh umil’nykh / Poet vseradostnoe Da!” (ll. 6-10). Ivanov valorizes the dispersion of light and its benign descent toward humanity, the descending and bending down to the nether, unilluminated regions: “You descend toward the lower spheres,” “Niskhodish’ ty do sfery nizkoi” (“Amethyst,” l. 7); “the Seven-colored effulgence bends down toward them,” “k nim skloniaias’, Semizrachnost’” (“Temptation of Transparency,” l. 4). The poetic closure of the cycle synaesthetically transforms dispersed light into a song of affirmation: “And in the sweet refractions / The all-jubilant ‘Yes’ will be singing!” (l. 10). Aesthetically, Ivanov privileges the generous descent and the dispersion of light to the proud ascent into whiteness. Similarly, in “Sapphire,” the blue gemstone manifests itself as the condensed ether of the skies, as the sapphire succeeds in materializing pure spirit in

²⁴ For a discussion of Ivanov’s understanding of ascent and descent as aesthetic and theurgic principles, see Victor Terras, “The Aesthetic Categories of *Ascent* and *Descent* in the Poetry of Vjaceslav Ivanov,” *Russian Poetics*, eds. Thomas Eekman and Dean S. Worth (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1983) 393-408.

terms of color (blue), rhyme (sapfir-efir), and transparency (both ether and the gem refract and transmit light). Again, contrary to our expectation of further spiritualization and illumination, we dwell in the middle region of enchanting refractions and the play of light halfway between descending divinity and ascending humanity. Finally, the living powers of the emerald's beams will not freeze or die in transparent lights, as long as their green rays reflect and communicate with the spring meadows in our consciousness: "The living powers of your beams / will not die away in transparent lights, / as long as the spring meadows are dear to us / O emerald!" "Tvoikh luchei zhivye sily / V prozrachnykh svetakh ne zamrut, / poka luga vesny nam mily, / O nenagliadnyi izumrud!" ("Emerald," ll. 1-4). Again, the light descending toward nature prevents the transparent death of the glittering beams, as only the interpenetration of the human realm and the divine light can fulfill the unison, not as the ultimate transfiguration of reality but as a complex mediation halfway between divinity and humanity.

By creating a middle region between rigid matter and ethereal light, Ivanov exalts artistically and spiritually exactly this space of illuminating descent, which meets with spiritual elevation. Interpenetrating spirit and matter define the privileged territory of aesthetic mediation, seven-colored lights, jewels, rainbows, and fires, as well as synaesthesia. I propose that in his poetry collection "Transparency," Ivanov formulates his ideas of mediation as just this intermediary stage between matter and light where pure divine light is refracted through precious stones and the diamond. The synaesthetic and interartistic dispersion and descent in this mediation of the divine appear as the processes counterpoised to those of unison.

In the final analysis, Ivanov's art engages with the natural mediations of the divine as the only proper subject for his aesthetic endeavors. Further, art appears as another mediation of the divine, as it moves down toward humanity. So, humanity and the divine meet halfway not only in the mediations of nature but also in artistic mediations refracted through the prismatic medium of art. The rainbows as colorfully dispersed light are inherently synaesthetic and interartistic. Thus, I propose that Ivanov's divine light disintegrates into particles of various synaesthetic phenomena. Dispersed light encompasses the whole gamut of colors and sounds. As we saw, dispersion of light is also the manifestation of the dismembered Orpheus.

If we now turn briefly to Skriabin's verse for "The Preparatory Act," which Skriabin was writing under Ivanov's guidance, we immediately notice Skriabin's appropriation of Ivanov's Orphic poetics of light dispersion and refraction. The synaesthetic metaphors of light inherently mediate among the arts, in this case, among Ivanov's poetry, Skriabin's verse, and Skriabin's music. Here is a representative sample:

Предварительное действие

Это луч, белый луч
В нас распался, певуч
Своей негою луч
Своей лаской—могуч.

Хрупкий, он рассыпался
Светами и звонами

From "The Preparatory Act" (1913-15)

Shaft of light, white light
Dispersed in us, singing,
With its blissful delights,
With its caress, the great ray reigns.

Delicate, it scattered
In lights and peals

Бездны огласилися
Сладостными стонами

The abysses resounded
With sensual moans

Заиграли радуги
Расцветались сны...

The rainbows danced,
Colorful dreams blossomed...

Искрятся алмазами...

Scintillating with the diamonds...

Боги в отражениях
Сны свои дробят...²⁵

Gods, in the reflections,
Splinter their dreams...

The ray of white light, disintegrating into colors and sounds (“*raspalsia*,” “*rassypalsia*”), the sparkling diamonds, and the play of the rainbows synaesthetically reflect the multi-medial, interartistic nature of the unfinished “Preparatory Act” for “The Mysterium.” Furthermore, the gods also participate in this process of dispersion and fragmentation as “in the reflections, / they splinter their dreams,” or is this perhaps a splintering of their bodies, a metaphorical dismemberment through reflections and dreams?

In conclusion, I suggest that, by writing the text to “The Preparatory Act,” Skriabin inscribed himself in Ivanov’s poetics of Orphic dispersion of light. Skriabin’s *Predvaritel’noe deistvo* lent the composer an appropriately Symbolist textual dimension. In a way, by adopting Ivanov’s imagery, Skriabin prepared his own poetic tombeau, which the poet then carefully wove into a multi-colored, musical narrative. Thus, Ivanov created the Orphic myth of Skriabin in an act of life creation, or shall we say, death creation.²⁶

²⁵ Aleksandr Skriabin, “Predvaritel’noe deistvo,” *Russkie Propilei*, vol. 6, ed. By M. Gershenzon (Moskva, 1919) 218-19.

²⁶ For a discussion of Ivanov’s poetic and mythic rethinking or emplotting of his life in the cases of his second wife, Lidiia Zinov’eva-Annibal, and her daughter, Ivanov’s third wife Vera, see Robert Bird, “Introduction: From Biography to Text,” *The Russian Prospero* (Madison, U of Wisconsin P: 2006) 21-26. The sonnet “Liubov” (1899) from the early “Pilot Stars” (“My—dva grozoi zazhzhennye svola”) epitomizes Ivanov’s tendency to mythologize life in retrospect, for it served as the basis for his “Garland of Sonnets,” “Venok sonetov” (1909) that appeared after Lidiia’s death in 1907. Thus, Lidiia’s death seems to be prefigured in the early sonnet. As Bird puts it: “The result is an almost Talmudic explication of the original poem,” 22.

CHAPTER THREE

Rodin, Orpheus, and the Phonograph:

Rainer Maria Rilke's Poetics of Synaesthetic Translation

We have thus far seen that synaesthesia at the *fin de siècle* is no mere synthesis of the senses. In Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, synaesthetic figuration anticipates future interartistic artworks disseminating the myth of Salome across drawings, opera, and dance. Likewise, apocalyptic anticipation defines Russian Symbolist synaesthesia in poetry and music. The synaesthetic dispersion of light into colors, tones, and words anticipates the final merger in Aleksandr Skriabin's music, as well as in Konstantin Bal'mont's and Viacheslav Ivanov's poetry and in their poetic creation of the myth of Skriabin. Russian synaesthetic representations capture the moment just before poetry, colors, and music gather together in the glaring white light of the merger.

Rainer Maria Rilke does not pursue a static synthetic experience of sensory union, either. Rather, he attempts dynamically to complete and conjoin the fragmented circle of the senses, where, he imagines, the abysses of the unperceivable keep the senses apart (See Fig. 20). In his poetry, synaesthesia attains a different slant as an authentic, full phenomenological experience, where all the senses—visual, tactile, or auditory, as well as olfactory and gustatory—equally contribute to the perception of the world, rather than unite in an ecstatic merger. Beyond the turning point of scientific naiveté, where the senses work in unison in the human organism, Rilke lives in a world where the senses are scientifically separated.¹ His synaesthetic poetry thus attempts to recuperate the wholeness of experience where each of his poems ever since his first encounter with Auguste Rodin in the fall of 1902 strives to capture and transmit a multi-sensory existence, concentrated and intensified into the art-thing, *Kunst-Ding*.

Unlikely companions, Rodin, Orpheus, and the Phonograph define Rilke's poetics of the senses—Rodin as a sculptor, working with the visual realm, space, and touch; Orpheus as a poet-musician; and the phonograph, as the technological innovation that translates sound into a visual

¹ I will discuss in greater detail the nineteenth-century scientific insights into the division of the human senses discovered by Johannes Müller and elaborated on by Heinrich Helmholtz in the section "On Orphic Synaesthesia." For now, we should keep in mind that, contrary to the misguided understanding of literary modernism as a reaction to technological progress and modernity, Rilke was always a good science student and was quite curious about the natural sciences and technology. (Compare his intentions for further study of the sciences and technology detailed in a letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé from May 12/13, 1904). His poem "The Ball," "Der Ball" from *Neue Gedichte* (1908) testifies to his synaesthetic interest in physics, as he describes the parabola of the ball's physical motion and the effects of gravitation on the flying round object while, simultaneously, focusing our attention not only on kinaesthetic movements (also in the dance of the players that the ball organizes with its throw and flight: "dance figure," "Tanzfigur"), but also on its warmth and tactility. As a round object, the ball is to be thrown and caught, receiving and passing on the living warm sensations of the playing hands. On Rilke and science, see Pasewalck 14, especially fn. 27.

trace and produces a writing and that can be read, reproduced, and thus revived. In this chapter, I will show that, in Rilke's poetics, Rodin, Orpheus, and the phonograph all preserve the memory of *things* for eternity: Rodin as the sculptor-craftsman, *Handwerker*, laboring manually to create with his hands a living visual and plastic world; Orpheus as a traveler between the underworld and the human world, in his respective walkable, musical, and poetic journeys; and the phonograph as a transcribing device, with a needle as its shaping hand. The artist, the mythic hero, and the technological device each promise to turn death into life, to reconnect a divided universe, and to bring the past into the present while going along the circle of the senses (and the arts), as represented in Rilke's 1919 essay "Primal Sound":

If the world's whole field of experience, including those spheres which are beyond our knowledge, be represented in a complete circle, it will be immediately evident that when the black sectors, denoting that which we are incapable of experiencing, are measured against the lesser, light sections, correspond to that which is illuminated by the senses, the former are very much greater... ; [the poet] is compelled to use the sense sectors to their full extent, as it must also be in his aim to extend each of them as far as possible, so that his lively delight, girded for the attempt, may be able to pass through the five gardens in one leap.

The Rilkean poet endeavors to attain this synaesthetic expansion of the senses by transcending the unknowable sensory voids.² Achieved in synaesthetic leaps, the whole field of sensory experience manifests itself in synaesthetic translations and synaesthetic fullness: Rodin's in his plastic evocation of hand, light, voice, and gait (the tactile, the visual, the musical, and the kinesthetic); Orpheus's in his traversing of the dark and the light sectors of the sensory realms and death and life, as well as of unifying music, poem, and all the senses; and, finally, the phonograph's in the synaesthetic translations of sound into a visible trace and back into sound through the engraving touch of the needle.

Rainer Maria Rilke, the Arts, and the Circle of the Senses

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), the greatest German Modernist poet, began his poetic career with writing high-flown and intensely subjective late Romantic and Symbolist verse. A poet of seemingly universal affirmations and urgent addresses that always implicate the reader, Rilke weaves his verse out of inwardness and paradoxes. Interested in the arts and crafts of the time, Rilke would discover a new visual objectivity and an original objective stylistic vocabulary in his middle period (1902-1910) thanks to his dedicated work alongside Auguste Rodin and his veneration of Paul Cézanne. A secretary, student, and disciple of Auguste Rodin and an admirer of Paul Cézanne, Rilke would recreate his experience of their art, especially of Rodin's, in his

² Although conceding that Rilke's poetry clearly belongs to the modernist tradition of literary synaesthesia, Silke Pasewalck, the author of the first extensive book-length study on Rilke and the senses, insists on not confusing Rilke's poetics of the senses with the concept of synaesthesia. See, Silke Pasewalck, *Das Fünffingrige Hand* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002) 27-32, 102, 273. Pasewalck interprets synaesthesia simply as the unity of the senses while showing the maintained differences among the senses in Rilke's poetry. Her assumptions about synaesthesia, while well researched in view of the current Rilke scholarship on synaesthesia, are a perfect example of the limited view on the metaphor and the phenomenon of synaesthesia in current literary criticism. Indeed, Rilke's circle of the senses insists on the differentiation of the five senses; however, the Rilkean poet is entitled to recover the sensory regions of the as-of-yet unperceivable by the senses, the dark voids separating the senses. This admittedly utopian enhancement of sensory perception is to complete the circle of the senses and reach the synaesthetic fullness of experience where each sensory impression would resonate across our sensorium.

thing poems, *Dinggedichte*, in *New Poems, Neue Gedichte* (1907/1908), while, in his *Duino Elegies, Duineser Elegien* (1912-1922), he would praise and glorify the Things, as if they gave meaning to human existence. His explorations of Things, *Dinge* from the early 1900s on would take his modernist quests even further and lead him to foray into abstraction in his late work, notably in his *Duino Elegies* and his *Sonnets to Orpheus, Die Sonette an Orpheus* (1922).

The visual arts thoroughly informed Rilke's poetry.³ The Russian icon provided Rilke with his first visual epiphany. Rilke visited Russia twice, in 1899 and 1900. At that time, he studied Russian, translated from the Russian, and was enamored with the Russian icon; he also wrote poetry in Russian, as his knowledge of the language advanced.⁴ Albeit orientalizing, his experience of Russia contributed to the development of Rilke's poetic voice, artistic identity, and aesthetic spirituality, a development reflected in his *Book of Hours, Das Stunden-Buch* (1899-1904).⁵ Rilke studied art and art history in Berlin and hoped to start a career as an art critic. His trips to Russia with Lou Andreas Salomé would open his eyes to the spiritual world of the Russian icon. Still, it was not until his life and conversations with his two friends at the art colony at Worpswede, Paula Becker and Clara Westhoff (1878-1954), his future wife, that Rilke would learn to see aesthetically, "Sehen-Lernen," and form his artistic vision.⁶ Rilke made his acquaintance with Auguste Rodin in September 1902, at the time he moved to Paris with the goal of writing a critical essay on the sculptor. He was commissioned to write a monograph on Rodin, and his was to be the first study in German on the sculptor; to this day, it continues to exercise its influence and prove its validity with the subtlety of its observations. Before Rilke's arrival in Paris, his wife Clara Rilke, a sculptor and former student of Rodin's, had recommended him to the French artist. Later, in 1905, Rodin invited Rilke to become his assistant with his correspondence and other small secretarial tasks. Rilke's study of Rodin, his daily visual encounters with Rodin's artwork, and his contemplation of the sculptor's creative process would transform Rilke's poetic identity and poetic language, as well as his understanding of his creativity and artistic vocation. Rodin's devotion to ceaseless artistic work, not relying on the Romantic whims of inspiration, and his precision in the act of sculpting would transform Rilke's tortured, highly subjective lyric speaker of his early poetry by evacuating the lyric I from his *New Poems*. In this poetry collection, he followed religiously the artistic principles he had discovered in Rodin's sculpture and in Rodin the Artist: those of artistic precision, poetic exactitude, and aesthetic dedication to creative work where no compromises would be allowed.

In comparison to Rilke's subtle appreciation and profound knowledge of the visual arts (Rodin's sculpture and the painting of Van Gogh, Cézanne, Picasso, and Klee), his attitude

³ For a comprehensive overview of the scholarship on Rilke, vision, and the visual arts, see Pasewalck 34-48 and Antje Büssgen, "Bildende Kunst," *Rilke Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Manfred Engel, ed. (Stuttgart, Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2004) 130-150.

⁴ On Rilke's spiritual and artistic relationship with Russia and his trips to Russia, see Judith Ryan, *Rilke, Modernism and Poetic Tradition* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1999) 27-32, and James Rolleston, "The Poetry and Poetics of the Young Rilke, 1895-1902." *A Companion to the Works of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and introd. Erika A. Metzger and Michael M. Metzger (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001) 53-57.

⁵ Judith Ryan identifies the following characteristics of Rilke's *Book of Hours* that prefigure the poet's later modernist development: first, his "brilliant early developments of the appellative structures that give his poetry its charisma"; then his "reflection of the divine with a precarious search for self-identity and an exploration into the nature of artistic creativity"; and, finally, his poetry's "highly abstract terms and apostrophic forms." Ryan 32.

⁶ On *Sehen-Lernen*, see Büssgen 133-135.

toward music has been critically pronounced as negative or at least ambivalent.⁷ For the poet, music has been said to be overwhelming and uncontrollable. He could hardly appreciate it because of its implicit dangers (in view of Nietzsche) and had always needed musician friends as mediators (a violinist and a singer) to access it. It has been even argued that Rilke attempts to neutralize the danger of music by spatializing it, making it into a thing.⁸ Crucial for the understanding of Rilke's attitude toward music are the following texts, which need a separate, comprehensive study: *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Beethoven's death mask in section 24 and section 37; 1898 essay "Notizen zur Melodie der Dinge"; 1900 "Marginalien zu Friedrich Nietzsche"; "An die Musik," "Sonette an Orpheus," and "Gong"; letters to Lou Andreas Salomé (8.8.1903); Sidonie Nádherny (13.11.1908); Magda von Hattingberg (1.2.1914); Mary and Antoinette Windischgraetz (15.7.1924); Krenek (11.5.1925).⁹

Rilke's involvement with the visual arts has always attracted great critical attention in Rilke scholarship, but the definitive study of writer's poetic use of and attitude toward music and sound is yet to be written.¹⁰ My synaesthetic analysis of the poet does not focus merely on the narrower topic of Rilke and the visual arts, but rather shows the centrality and the interactions of the five senses, the plastic arts, and music in Rilke's poetics. Rather than discussing the disparate arts and the senses as separate topics in Rilke's oeuvre, I use them to understand the overall metaphysical thrust of his poetry. The senses and the arts enable the unification of Rilke's divided world of the living and the dead, as we shall see in his New Poems, The Duino Elegies, Sonnets to Orpheus, the essay "Primal Sound," and his study of Rodin. While in his middle period Rilke concentrates on making autonomous, self-contained works of art that encapsulate the process of transition and transformation on a much more subdued, internal level, later on he moves to a different Orphic poetics where the artistic and the sensuous self-consciously perpetuate the movement across the divided realms of life and death. In this sense, while Rilke seems not to sanction the transformation of his exquisitely complete poems into other artistic forms (in particular, songs and settings to music), he nevertheless embraces this process later on in his poetic career by asking the then-young composer Ernst Krenek (1900-1991) to complete his poem "O Lacrimosa" with music.¹¹ Even as early as *Neue Gedichte*, Rilke's Apollo poems follow this impetus to translate and adapt the visual arts while perpetuating their interartistic life. The category of life and the enlivening, animating of a work of art can be traced back directly to

⁷ Rüdiger Görner, "Musik," *Rilke Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Manfred Engel, ed. (Stuttgart, Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2004) 151-54. On the other hand, Silke Pasewalck convincingly argues the positive reevaluation of music in Rilke's late work, where music, silence, and noise form an important unified cluster of metaphysical significance. The audible sensory dimension of ordered sounds comes to cooperate with the visual dimension in Rilke's poetry. See Pasewalck 252-56.

⁸ On the spatialization of sound, see, for instance, Judith Ryan's chapter "The Modernist Turn." Ryan 165.

⁹ See Pasewalck for a detailed discussion of "Ur-Geräusch" and the development of Rilke's poetics of the senses up to this late-period essay. Pasewalck notes that her text is the first one to discuss in conjunction the two parts of "Primal Sound": the technical and the poetological. Pasewalck 9-33. In my discussion, I will bring her unified reading a step further by situating the figure of Orpheus as an ideal poet at the center of Rilke's nexus of the phonograph and the senses. As a mediating figure, Orpheus embodies both modernist technological advances and the perceptual possibilities of Rilke's modernism. On Rilke's developing poetics of the senses from 1898 through 1907 and to 1919, see Pasewalck 24. On music and hearing in Rilke's texts listed above, see Pasewalck 221-87.

¹⁰ Görner, "Musik," *Rilke Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, 154.

¹¹ See Rilke's letter to Ernst Krenek from November 5, 1925. Quoted in Stephen Mitchell, ed. and trans., Notes to "O Lacrimosa," *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Bilingual Edition (New York: Vintage International, Vintage Books, 1989) 342-43.

Rilke's engagement with Rodin, as we see in his essay on the sculptor. Similarly, the interchange between art and life, *Kunst und Leben* find its Austrian roots in the artistic movement of *Jugendstil*. Vitalism (going back to Nietzsche and Bergson) defines the poet's work both in his attempt to animate his poems as art-things and to devote his life entirely to his poetic vocation, following Rodin's example and exhortation, "Oui, il ne faut que travailler, rien que travailler."¹² This exchange between life and art has a peculiar correlative in Rilke's existential categories of life and death. Just as life and art should merge in his creative work, so too do life and death unify in his metaphysical poetics. These vitalist and artistic aspects of the poet's work bring to the fore his engagement with the arts and the senses, as aesthetic perception and sensory experience inform Rilke's poetic experiments with language, with figuration and abstraction, and with metaphysics.¹³

Crucial for understanding Rilke's phenomenological synaesthetics and his desire to secure the artwork's afterlife, to refer again to Benjamin's idea from "The Task of the Translator," is Rilke's concept of the Thing, *das Ding* as a perceptual object transformed and preserved for eternity by the poet's consciousness. Rilke began developing his idea about *things* as early as the late 1890s with his first trip to Russia, where he saw and absorbed perceptually (but not linguistically, since he yet lacked the knowledge of Russian) "die Russische Dinge,"¹⁴ and continued to elaborate on this notion until the end of his life, most notably in his *Duino Elegies*. What Rilke means by a Thing, *Ding* or artistic Thing, *Kunst-Ding* is the realization of an object or its transformation into a real, indestructible, and heightened *thing*. Such a Thing is initially perceived and then transmuted by the artist's consciousness into an Art-Thing, thus securing the its afterlife.¹⁵ In this process of attaining the Thing or actualizing it, Rilke follows Rodin's concept of *Verwirklichung* and Cézanne's *la réalisation* or *Dingwerdung* (in Rilke's translation).¹⁶

Rilke calls these objectified, materialized, and preserved sensory experiences simple Things that live "near our hand and within our gaze," in the Ninth Duino Elegy—Things concrete, sensuous, tactile, and visible. Artistic Things—"pillars, pylons, the Sphinx, the striving thrust / of the cathedral" (Seventh Elegy) are thus rescued by human perception. Their transformation in our consciousness and deliverance in poetic language preserve in concrete poetic form sensuous experiences, emotions, and works of art, by transferring them through our

¹² Quoted in Ralph Freedman, *Life of a Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996) 161.

¹³ On Rilke's *Figur* and shift to abstraction, see Ryan, "The Modernist Turn," 156-218 and *Rilke Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*: Manfred Engel, "Abstrakte Gestaltung – Poetik der 'Figur' am Beispiel *der Neuen Gedichten*," 521-24 and "Orphische Verwandlung 2: Poetik der Figur," 412-16.

¹⁴ On Rilke's Russian experience and "die Russische Dinge," see also Ralph Freedman's biography *Life of a Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke* 89-103, in particular, 95.

¹⁵ On Rilke's things, see Rilke's interpretation of Rodin's engagement with things in the poet's letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé from August 9, 1903. Rainer Maria Rilke, "45. To Lou Andreas-Salomé, August 8, 1903," *Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, 1902-1926*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Macmillan, 1946) 30-33.

¹⁶ On the realization or *Verdingung* in Rilke's work, as inspired by both Cézanne and Rodin, see Martina Kurz, *Bild-Verdichtungen: Cézannes Realisation als poetisches Prinzip bei Rilke und Handke* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003). "Im Bilde bleiben": Poetisches Realisieren bei Rilke und Handke," 366-74. See also Rilke's description of *la réalisation* or *Dingwerdung* as "the purpose of Cézanne's innermost work" in his *Letters on Cézanne*: "To achieve the conviction and substantiality of things, a reality intensified and potentiated to the point of indestructibility by his experience of the object." Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, ed. Clara Rilke, trans. Joel Agee (New York: North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985, 2002) 32.

praise (the human praise, the artist's praise) to the "endless vision" of the Angel (Seventh Elogy). "Even lamenting grief purely decides to take form, / serves as a Thing or dies into a Thing—, and blissfully / escapes far beyond the violin" (Ninth Elogy). I need to clarify a point about Rilke's aesthetics that has often been misunderstood. While Rilke interprets the visual, particularly in Rodin's sculpture, as aspiring toward and attaining the essence of things, Rilke seems to disparage music. For him, an artistic Thing requires a further concentration and intensification of Things encountered in reality, whereas music in his understanding is an anti-aesthetic diffusion, not concentration. Yet, as the musical thing escaping the violin in the Ninth Duino Elogy shows, music as abstraction can also be actualized into a Thing. Rilke denounces the seductive and distracting sensations that music could arouse, as they turn the reality of appearances into further illusions; such music enslaves people and creates paltry, diffuse, ephemeral appearances rather than heightening, concentrating, and intensifying reality into artistic Things.¹⁷ Still, music as lament, the violin sound, or a singer's voice can all become artistic Things in Rilke's poetry, as we shall see in this chapter.

In his engagement with the visual art, and his understanding of the haptic sense and the resonance of music, Rilke enhances our conception of modernist synaesthesia with his poetic practice and late theory of the translation (*übersetzen*, *übertragen*, *Verlegung*) and transitions (*Übergänge*) among the senses as a way toward perceptual wholeness to enhance and unify the circle of the senses. Again, this is a process of dynamic transformations or metamorphoses, which does not rely on static synthesis, as a simplistic view of synaesthesia may imply.

Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* (1907/1908) of his middle period and his late work including *Duineser Elegien* (1912/1922) and *Sonette an Orpheus* (1922) bifurcate in their poetic conception of Rilke's antithetical world. In the 1900s, Rilke's fascination with the visual arts and the work of Rodin and Cézanne is stringently delimited by the contour, *Kontur*, as a visual trope for the self-sufficient work of art, autonomous in its life, *Leben*, and its fullness, *Fülle*. Meanwhile, in his late period Rilke allows for the acoustic (or musical) animation of contours by sound vibration: *Schwingung*.¹⁸ While Rilke's middle period is exclusively focused on the visual,

¹⁷ See Rainer Maria Rilke, "45. To Lou Andreas-Salomé, August 8, 1903," *Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, 1902-1926*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Macmillan, 1946), 32, "...it was time for a very powerful personality [that of Rodin is meant here] to rise up against it; also he had to be one who did things, who did not talk, who created without cease. From the very beginning his art had to be an actualisation (and as such diametrically opposed to music, which transforms the apparent realities of the daily world and still further de-actualises them into insubstantial, ephemeral appearances. Which is just the reason why this direct antithesis of art, this failure to condense, this temptation towards diffuseness, has so many friends and sympathisers and slaves, so many who are not free, chained to pleasure, who feel no inner intensity but only a stimulation from outside...)." For the German, see Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe* (Wiesbaden: Insel Verlag, 1950) 58.

¹⁸ In Silke Pasewalck's work on Rilke and the senses, *Die Fünffingrige Hand*, the author uses productively two sensory and artistic figures that Rilke emphasizes throughout his creative career: the visual one of the contour or "die Kontur" and the auditory one of the acoustic vibration or "die Schwingung" that suggests the transcending of boundaries (lines, contours) in view of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Additionally, Pasewalck's study of the five senses in Rilke's late poetry uses the terms *Kontur* and *Schwingung* to discuss the development from his visually poetic objectivity of the contour, or the boundary that separates and is not to be transcended or disturbed, into the multi-sensory concept of the contour that can be translated across the senses into sound, touch, and line according to Rilke's poetics of the senses formulated in his essay "Primal Sound," "Ur-Geräusch." Thus, by poetically translating between the senses, the permeable contour, the vibration, the wave, or the swinging, *Schwingung* made visible, Rilke's late poetry allows for the interchange between inner and outer space, and is connected to Rilke's understanding of life and death. While incorporating in my chapter Pasewalck's central concepts of *Kontur* and

in his late period, Rilke relies on the cooperation of vision and music, contour and acoustic vibration in his poetics of the senses.¹⁹ We can add that, while, during his middle period, Rilke insisted on the autonomous poem as a work of art and on the delimiting quality of contours and lines, which should not be overstepped, in his late poetry Rilke reworks his concept of boundaries as moving and animated by the vibration of sound. Most important, as a figure and poetic procedure, the concrete acoustic vibration, *Schwingung* empowers hearing, the auditory sense, and creates an acoustic space in a metaphysical sense—a mythical realm where the poet-musician Orpheus reigns. Thus, Rilke’s late works allow for the transitions between Rilke’s divided human space of life and death and the overcoming and transcendence of the oppositional boundaries of affirmation and negation in language and existence.

Aesthetic Principles: Rilke’s / Rodin’s Illuminated Living Surface

As they appear in his Rodin monograph, Rilke’s aesthetic principles of the middle period focus on his concept of thingness and objectivity, “Sachlichkeit.”²⁰ The poet follows the sculptor in his absorption in the process of work, *Arbeitsethos*, based on the artistic condition of “toujour travailler” and in his oblivious devotion to the sheer thingness of the material molded by Rodin’s sculpting hands beyond any knowledge or intellectual thought. Thus, in his disciplined, artistic seclusion, Rodin produces nameless artworks out of “simple seeing,” “einfaches Schauen.” Out of this intense concentration on the artistic material, on artistic work, and on the creative process, Rilke formulates his idea of the autonomous artwork, *Kunst-Ding* that is complete in itself, thus responding to his need for sharp boundaries and limits between artworks and personal life. In this way, Rilke attempts to counteract and curb his earlier propensity for emotional excitement and impressionable sensibility, which, he thought, threatened his artistic identity.

Rilke sees Rodin’s plastic works as living in the play of light and surfaces. In Rilke’s account, Rodin’s creative process and artistic task focus on creating and exploring further living surfaces. Rodin animates his sculptures by his touch and thus embodies life in them. The body becomes Rodin’s language (408), and his art relies on his infallible knowledge of the human

Schwingung, I examine in detail and show how the senses in Rilke’s poetry transcend the oppositions of his antithetical world by traversing life and death and completing the life cycle, and by working at and enlivening, or stirring, the in-between zones of transitions, vibration, etc. This is achieved by the synaesthetic fullness of phenomenological experience captured Rilke’s lyric poetry, as the writer creates a sensorily complete world of synaesthetic *things*.

¹⁹ See Pasewalck’s work. In fact, in the overarching argument of her book, Pasewalck shows how Rilke’s highest appreciation for vision in his middle period becomes reevaluated in his later work to join forces, most importantly, with music and sound; with a new-found dynamic sense of touch as kinesthesia and body movement, going beyond the more subdued, stable, static, gentle middle-period sense of touch (*Berührung*); and with the recuperated lower senses: smell and taste. Pasewalck attentively analyzes all manifestations of the senses in Rilke’s poetry, engaging with their wide linguistic spectrum: for instance, the glance, *Blick*; looking, *Schauen*, the gentle touch, *Berührung*, the grip, *Greifen*; etc. By exploring the whole gamut of perception and sensation without subscribing to any preexisting phenomenological methodology, Pasewalck shows Rilke’s nuanced and variegated treatment of the senses in his late work, as well as the transition in his treatment of the senses from his middle to his late period. She identifies the senses as a topic of scholarly investigation of utmost importance and provides a comprehensive study of the workings of the senses in Rilke’s late poetry.

²⁰ On Rilke’s aesthetic principles in their connection to the visual arts and in particular to his Rodin’s essay and lecture, see Büssgen 139-42.

body. The body as a language gives Rodin's sculptures not only the precision of contours and profile, but also transfers its own life to the stones, or perhaps even corresponds to the life within the stones. Thus, the living body parallels the living stone:

Rodin wußte, daß es zunächst auf eine unfehlbare Kenntnis des menschlichen Körpers ankam. Langsam, forschend war er bis zu seiner Oberfläche vorgeschritten, und nun streckte sich von außen eine Hand entgegen, welche diese Oberfläche von der anderen Seite ebenso genau bestimmte und begrenzte, wie sie es von innen war... Und schließlich war es diese Oberfläche, auf die seine Forschung sich wandte. Sie bestand aus unendlich vielen Begegnungen des Lichtes mit dem Dinge, und es zeigte sich, daß jede dieser Begegnungen anders war und jede merkwürdig. An dieser Stelle schienen sie einander aufzunehmen, an jener sich zögernd zu begrüßen, an einer dritten fremd aneinander vorbeizugehen; und es gab Stellen ohne Ende und keine, auf der nicht etwas geschah. Es gab keine Leere.

In diesem Augenblick hatte Rodin das Grundelement seiner Kunst entdeckt, gleichsam die Zelle seiner Welt. Das war die Fläche, diese verschieden große, verschieden betonte, genau bestimmte Fläche, aus der alles gemacht werden mußte. Von da ab war sie der Stoff seiner Kunst, das, worum er sich mühte, wofür er wachte und litt. Seine Kunst baute sich nicht auf eine große Idee auf, sondern auf eine kleine gewissenhafte Verwirklichung, auf das Erreichbare, auf ein Können...

...Nun erst waren alle die herkömmlichen Begriffe der Plastik für ihn wertlos geworden. Es gab weder Pose, noch Gruppe, noch Komposition. Es gab nur unzählbar viele lebendige Flächen, es gab nur Leben, und das Ausdrucksmittel, das er sich gefunden hatte, ging gerade auf dieses Leben zu.²¹

Rodin knew that, first of all, sculpture depended upon an infallible knowledge of the human body. Slowly, searchingly, he had approached the surface [and now a hand stretched out from the outside in the opposite direction, which (was) determined and delimited (by) the surface as precisely from the outside as it was from the inside]... And, ultimately, it was this surface toward which his search was directed. It consisted of infinitely many movements. The play of light upon these surfaces made manifest that each of these movements was different and each significant. At this point, they seemed to flow into one another; at that, to greet each other hesitatingly; at a third, to pass by each other without recognition, like strangers. There were undulations without end. There was no point at which there was not life and movement. [No place was empty.]

Rodin had now discovered the fundamental element of his art; as it were, the germ of his world. It was the surface—this differently great surface, variedly accentuated, accurately measured, out of which everything must rise—which was from this moment the subject matter of his art, the thing for which he labored, for which he suffered, and for which he was awake.

His art was not built upon a great idea, but upon a minute, conscientious realization, upon the attainable, upon a craft...

...Not until now had all the traditional conceptions of plastic art become worthless to him. Pose, grouping, composition now meant nothing to him. He saw only innumerable living surfaces, only life. The means of expression which he had formed for himself were directed to and brought forward this [life]...²²

The exact correspondence between the sculpting hand and the internally defined surfaces of the corporeal stone guides Rodin's art. The artistic touch of Rodin as a Pygmalion figure is enlivening, as it is precise and exactly searching for the life of the surfaces of the artistic things he creates. Moreover, the haptic sensation of the sculptor parallels the tactile experience of the living surface not only as a recipient of the artist's touch, but also as a guiding subject of the

²¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden*, "Auguste Rodin, Erster Teil," Band 4 (Hrsg. von Manfred Engel, Ulrich Fülleborn, Horst Nalewski, und August Stahl. Frankfurt a. Main und Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1996) 411-12. All following German quotations from this text will be from this *Werke: KA* edition.

²² Rainer Maria Rilke, "Auguste Rodin," trans., *Auguste Rodin: Readings on His Life and Work*, ed. and intro. Albert Elsen (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965) 116. All translations from Rilke's 1902 essay on Rodin will follow this edition with the occasional modification I make to achieve greater precision or to add parts of the original omitted in the translation. These modification and additions will be indicated by [...].

touch, defining its own limits both grammatically and spatially: “Slowly, searching, he had advanced toward his surface and now a hand stretched out from the outside in the opposite direction, which (was) determined and delimited (by) the surface as precisely from the outside as it was from the inside.” The beauty of this sentence lies in its ambiguity. Whose hand reaches from the outside and in what direction? Is it Rodin’s hand met by the inner definition of the actively living surface in the object position, pressing against the sculptor’s hands? Or is it the surface’s hand coming toward Rodin’s sculpting hands (and outside of them), imposing the constraints of the living form? This ambiguous syntactic relation is encapsulated in the identically declined feminine nouns and pronouns *die Hand / welche* and *die Oberfläche* that remain the same in the accusative and the nominative. This results in the double transitivity of syntax and of tactile perception, of the subjectivity and objectivity of touch, experienced when our two hands come in contact with each other, both as agents and as recipients. Susan Stewart has expressed saliently this peculiar phenomenological relation that, as we shall see, defines Rilke’s poetic practice: “As happens when we touch one hand with another, we can move between feelings of subjectivity and objectivity, between sensations that are localizable and those that are dispersed.”²³

Interestingly, Rilke aspires to achieve this double transitivity of perception also across the other senses. For instance, in his New Poems, vision is not only the active seeing of the reader, but also his/her state of being seen, the Thing’s returning of the gaze as in Rilke’s “Der Panther” (1903), and, even more strikingly, in his “Archaïscher Torso Apollos” (1908), where the inanimate, headless antique statue is not merely seen, but rather possesses in its torso a powerful gaze that sees the reader, instead: “for here there is no place / that does not see you” (ll. 13-14). Further disquieting is Rilke’s late poem “Gong” (1925), where the gong does not simply sound, but its sound is also depicted as an enormous ear perceiving sound; the sound of the gong hears us, as opposed to being heard: “No longer for ears. . . : sound / which like a deeper ear hears *us*, who only seem to be hearing” (ll. 1-4). This peculiar enhancement of the senses as both recipients of sensations and agents of sensation constitutes another way in which Rilke expands our sensory realm by filling out the gaps of the sensory circle. These voids or interruptions of perception need to be approached through inter-sensory, synaesthetic translation or, as in this case, through enriching the perceptual capacities of the senses.

Rodin’s stones are revived not only in the double tactile contact of hand and material—in their mutually reversible sensory receptivity and agency, but also through the encounters of stone with light. In these encounters, myriad surfaces are created, welcoming and taking in the light, or hesitating to greet it. Occasionally, in their respective movements, things and light merely pass by each other, a disinterested non-encounter that still creates the surface. In their perpetual encounter with light, Rodin’s surfaces never stand still. Defined by never-ending transitions, flow, and passing, the play of light on the surfaces reveals the infinity of encounters of light and thing. Places, “Stellen” on the sculpted body thus multiply and become infinite, “ohne Ende” in this flux-like happening of light-and-stone play in myriad perspectives, shades, and light conditions. No place can remain empty in this eventful abundance of surfaces bathed in light.

²³ See Susan Stewart’s engagement with Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the passive and active touch in his Phenomenology of Perception. Susan Stewart, Poetry and The Fate of the Senses (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 163.

Furthermore, the creation of this infinity of places depends also on an infinite number of touches and thus on the multiplication of the artist's indefatigable hand applied to the plasters, taking shape. The artist's hand itself multiplies, capturing the movement in the creative process. The artistic thing contains the creative process itself, as inscribed in the movement of the artist's hand and in the multiplicity of touches by the hand. It is no wonder then that Rilke would be particularly fascinated with the numberless self-contained fragmentary hands in Rodin's studio, as we shall see later. (See also Fig. 36). Similarly, the moving body of the dancer in Sonnet to Orpheus, 2.18, represented as a "tree of motion," captures and preserves within itself the "swarm" of earlier dance "figures." The movements of the dance and of sculpting persevere in the spatialized creative process as a living work of art: the dance as a "tree of motion" and a "crown of stillness" and as a sculpture of living surfaces.

The sculpting hand attains yet another role as translator of myth, poetry, historical events, or a human being into the plastic, visual language of raw material turned into a Thing:

Wo die erste Anregung vom Stofflichen ausging, wo eine antike Sage, die Stelle eines Gedichtes, eine historische Szene oder eine wirkliche Person Schaffensanlaß war, da übersetzt sich, wenn Rodin beginnt, während der Arbeit das Stoffliche immer mehr in Sachliches und Namenloses: in die Sprache der Hände übertragen, haben die Anforderungen, die sich ergeben, alle einen neuen, ganz auf die plastische Erfüllung bezüglichen Sinn. (430)

Where the first suggestion comes from some definite subject, where an ancient tale, a passage from a poem, an historical scene, or some real person is the inspiration, the subject matter [translates] itself more and more into [the objective and the nameless] during the process of the work[:]. Translated into the language of the hands, the interpretations acquire entirely new characteristics which develop into plastic fulfillment. (130)

The linguistically defined subject matter or narrative material gradually abandons language, names, and stories to attain the status of a Thing in the hands of the artist. The plastic, artistic Thing breaks free from the confines of language by means of touch, of the tactile shaping language of the hands and moves into the fulfillment of sheer sensuous life. This fulfillment, *Erfüllung* or fullness, *die Fülle* in the sense of the infinity of sculpting motions, light-and-thing encounters, and light modulations on the sculpted surfaces becomes Rilke's ideal for achieving life in Rodin's artistic *Dinge*, whereas emptiness, *die Leere* does not exist. Rilke calls this process of abandoning the stilted old conventions of subject matter and literature, of story line or historical scene, a translation into "the language of the hands." Literature succumbs to the senses in the act of tactile translation. This synaesthetic translation, *Übertragung*, *Übersetzung* creates the "nameless" and "objective" artwork full of sensuous life: tactile, visual, and plastic.

Similarly, Rodin's drawings also enact the forgetting and transformation, "dieses Vergessen und Verwandeln" (431) of subject matter into the language of the living and sensuous surface, as Rilke saw in Rodin's illustrations for Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*:

Dann kommen Akte, die mit jagender Sicherheit gezeichnet sind, Formen, ausgefüllt von allen ihren Konturen, modelliert mit vielen schnellen Federstrichen, und andere, eingeschlossen in die Melodie eines einzigen vibrierenden Umrisses, aus dem sich mit unvergeßlicher Reinheit eine Gebärde erhebt. (431)

There are drawings that are done with a direct certainty, forms complete in all their contours, [modeled] with many quick strokes of the pen; there are others enclosed in the melody of a single vibrating outline. (130)

Interestingly, here the surface of the drawing becomes spatial by means of its strictly two-dimensional pictorial contours. The contours “fill in,” “ausfüllen” the forms; the plane, “Fläche” of the drawing creates spatial fullness, “Fülle” through lines. Rodin’s strokes thus create the sense of sculptural space in its fullness. Syntactically—in the parallel past participle subordinate construction: “filled in..., modeled...”; “ausgefüllt..., modelliert...,”—“all the contours” as the total sum of outlines from multiple perspectives seem to complement the traditional technique of drawing as “modeling” with quick strokes, “Schnellen Federstrichen.” The contours amplify the sense of modeling, of rendering three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional surface.

The multiplicity of strokes and contours that create the sculptural effect of Rodin’s drawings is further enhanced by another sensory translation of the contour. The “vibrating outline,” “der vibrierende Umriss” captures the artwork’s musical dimension, its melody. In fact, this single synaesthetic line in its undulating movement is the melody of the artwork. Thus, in Rilke’s thought, the Rodinian living surfaces translate among the different senses and the different arts. Defined by its visual, plastic, tactile, and aural dimensions, the living synaesthetic surface as a sensory recipient and a sensory agent (as a passive object and an active subject) creates drawings, sculptures, and music as living artworks.

In the final analysis, both hand and light form a sensuous language beyond words and thus enliven Rodin’s artistic Things. In their infinite proximities and conjunctions with the plaster surfaces, hands and light act as animating agents of the cast bronzes or carved marbles. This fullness of encounters saturates the artistic things and defines life in Rilke’s aesthetic reflections on Rodin. The contour of the surface mediates between the permeating senses of touch, space, and vision. Precisely this intimate union of the senses of the artist and the artwork as a living being engenders life in Rodin’s art:

Es gab weder Pose, noch Gruppe, noch Komposition. Es gab nur unzählbar viele lebendige Flächen, es gab nur Leben, und das Ausdrucksmittel, das er sich gefunden hatte, ging gerade auf dieses Leben zu. Nun hieß es, seiner und seiner Fülle mächtig zu werden. Rodin erfaßte das Leben, das überall war, wohin er sah. Er erfaßte es an den kleinsten Stellen, er beobachtete es, er ging ihm nach. Er erwartete es an den Übergängen, wo es zögerte, er holte es ein, wo es lief, und er fand es an allen Orten gleich groß, gleich mächtig und hinreißend. Da war kein Teil des Körpers unbedeutend oder gering: er lebte. (412)

Pose, grouping, composition now meant nothing to him. He saw only innumerable living surfaces, only life. The means of expression which he had formed for himself were directed to and brought forward this [life]. The next task was to become master of himself and of his abundance. Rodin seized upon the life that was everywhere about him. He grasped it in the smallest details; he observed it and it followed him; he awaited it at the crossroads where it lingered; he overtook it as it ran before him; and he found it in all places equally great, equally powerful and overwhelming. There was not one part of the human body that was insignificant or unimportant; it was alive. (116)

Rodin rejects traditional compositional devices in sculpture (composition, grouping, and pose) in favor of his newly found artistic material of the living surface. Life becomes an aesthetic category in its own right in Rilke’s interpretation of Rodin. Rodin observes, captures, and awaits aesthetic life in the minutest details and in the transitions between planes, *Übergänge* of his sculpted works, where it is least noticeable, where it hesitates and lingers. Transitions in

sculpture, in painting, and poetry, as well as in Rilke's metaphysical divided space of life and death will become a loaded concept that can connect the split world and bring the fullness and abundance of life and experience. For Rilke, oscillating transitions, contours, and the vibrating lines at the crossroads of both perception and life and death become immensely important ever since his engagement with the visual arts.

In Rodin's late marble works, Rilke sees a delicate texturing through illumination that captures Rodin's working with light as associated not only with animating his artworks but also with transcending their boundaries proper. While Rodin's bronzes turn into living artworks through their much more roughly textured, densely inflected surfaces, Rodin's marbles are much subtler, more delicate, and luminous. In Rodin's stones, the interactions of light and air expand the contours and boundaries of Rodin's surfaces, prefiguring Rilke's transition from the self-contained, delimited artwork within its living surfaces to the animated, vibrating boundaries, which necessitate and trigger the transcendence of limits between the five senses, between the arts, between life and death. In this way, Rilke's view of Rodin's marbles, formulated toward the end of the poet's monograph on the sculptor, already looks toward Rilke's later unifying poetics in his synaesthetic search to go beyond linguistic and metaphysical oppositions:

Es gibt unter den neueren Werken kleine Gruppen, die durch ihre Geschlossenheit wirken und durch die wunderbar sanfte Behandlung des Marmors. Diese Steine behalten auch mitten im Tage jenes geheimnisvolle Schimmern, das weiße Dinge ausströmen, wenn es dämmt. Das kommt nicht allein von der Belebtheit der Berührungstellen her; es zeigt sich, daß auch sonst zwischen den Figuren und zwischen ihren einzelnen Teilen hier und da flache Steinbänder stehengeblieben sind, Stege gleichsam, die in der Tiefe eine Form mit der anderen verbinden. Das ist kein Zufall Diese Füllungen verhüten das Entstehen wertloser Durchblicke, die aus dem Dinge hinausführen in leere Luft; sie bewirken, daß die Ränder der Formen, die vor solchen Lücken immer scharf und abgeschliffen scheinen, ihre Rundung behalten, sie sammeln das Licht wie Schalen und fließen fortwährend leise über. Wenn Rodin das Bestreben hatte, die Luft so nahe als möglich an die Oberfläche seiner Dinge heranzuziehen, so ist es, als hätte er hier den Stein geradezu in ihr aufgelöst: der Marmor scheint nur der feste, fruchtbare Kern zu sein und sein letzter leisester Kontur schwingende Luft. Das Licht, welches zu diesem Steine kommt, verliert seinen Willen; es geht nicht über ihn hin zu anderen Dingen; es schmiegt sich ihm an, es zögert, es verweilt, es wohnt in ihm. (Auguste Rodin, Erster Teil, Band IV, 447.)

There are among the more recent works small groups that are striking because of their concentration and the wonderful treatment of the marble. The stones preserve, even in the midst of the day, that mysterious shimmer which is not the result of the vibrant quality of the points of contact alone, but is due in part to the flat [bands] of stone that lie between the figures [or between the figures' parts] like small bridges which connect one form with the other over the deepest clefts in the modeling. [It is no coincidence that stone fillings] are placed there to prevent [the valueless perspectives coming forth into the empty air]. They preserve in the forms that otherwise would appear too [sharp and] clear-cut, an effect of roundness; they gather the light like vases that gently and continuously overflow. When Rodin seeks to condense the atmosphere about the surface of his works, the stone appears almost to dissolve in the air, the marble is the compact, fruitful kernel, and its last, softest contour the vibrating air. The light touching the marble loses its will, or does not penetrate into the stone, but nestles close, lingers, dwells in the stone. (142-43)

While the concentration or self-enclosure of the small marble groups Rilke describes still suggests the idea of the autonomous work of art as a living object, those recent works by Rodin seem to go beyond the points of contact that animate the surfaces of his artworks, as previously discussed. It is not merely the contact points and the encounter between surface and light that enlivens Rodin's works anymore. Rather, the small bridges made of bands of stone capture the transitions within the sculpture where light becomes a powerful agent of transcending the stone.

The stone fillings “gather light like vases that continuously overflow.” Light does not become part of the marble, does not penetrate it, but rather overflows, transcends its boundaries. Rilke’s analysis gently shifts away from the surface to the condensed atmosphere around it. In this luminous atmosphere of “mysterious shimmer” that the strips of stone and the light create, the marble seems to “dissolve in the air,” “als hätte [Rodin] hier den Stein geradezu in [der Luft] aufgelöst.” The merging of stone and atmosphere, the dissolution of their boundaries conjoins marble and light, where the marble is “the compact fruitful kernel,” “der feste, fruchtbare Kern” as a bearing interiority to its outside—“the vibrating air,” “schwingende Luft” as a “softest contour,” “leisester Kontur.” The permeability of thing and air through the vibrations of light implies a new unity, where the caressing touch of light and marble makes light lose its will, as the marble lures into its orbit both air and light. Light becomes a part of the stone, as it lingers, hesitates, and nestles closer onto the marble. The transcendence of the interiority of the artistic object enacts an incorporation of the outside as a vibrating contour, anticipating Rilke’s later overstepping of boundaries and synaesthetic translations. Thus, in Rilke’s interpretation of Rodin’s work, hand and light create living surfaces and ensure the translations among the senses and the arts, the transitions beyond the boundaries of an artwork, and, ultimately, the transcendence of the life—death divide.

Synaesthetic Fragments as Sensory Figures of Transition

Hands

For Rilke, the hand is not simply an object and subject of touch, not merely a tool of artistic creation. Poetically, its overarching significance spans also into the realm of the sculpted artwork where the hand attains its own life not as a body part, but as a thing in itself. The sculpted fragment of the hand comes to life in Rodin’s work. The hand fragment embodies the artistic whole in Rodin’s work.

Dem Künstler steht es zu, aus vielen Dingen eines zu machen und aus dem kleinsten Teil eines Dinges eine Welt. Es gibt im Werke Rodins Hände, selbständige, kleine Hände, die, ohne zu irgendeinem Körper zu gehören, lebendig sind. Hände, die sich aufrichten, gereizt und böse, Hände, deren fünf gesträubte Finger zu bellen scheinen, wie die fünf Häse eines Höllenhundes. Hände, die gehen, schlafende Hände, und Hände, welche erwachen; verbrecherische, erblich belastete Hände und solche, die müde sind, die nichts mehr wollen, die sich niedergelegt haben in irgendeinen Winkel, wie kranke Tiere, welche wissen, daß ihnen niemand helfen kann. Aber Hände sind schon ein komplizierter Organismus, ein Delta, in dem viel fernherkommendes Leben zusammenfließt, um sich in den großen Strom der Tat zu ergießen. Es gibt eine Geschichte der Hände, sie haben tatsächlich ihre eigene Kultur, ihre besondere Schönheit; man gesteht ihnen das Recht zu, eine eigene Entwicklung zu haben, eigene Wünsche, Gefühle, Launen und Liebhabereien. Rodin aber, der durch die Erziehung, die er sich gegeben hat, weiß, daß der Körper aus lauter Schauplätzen des Lebens besteht, eines Lebens, das auf jeder Stelle individuell und groß werden kann, hat die Macht, irgendeinem Teil dieser weiten schwingenden Fläche die Selbständigkeit und Fülle eines Ganzen zu geben. (421-22)

[In the art of sculpture, also] it is left to the artist to make out of many things one thing, and from the smallest part of a thing [a world].

There are among the works of Rodin hands, single, small hands which, without belonging to a body, are alive. Hands that rise, irritated and in wrath; hands whose five bristling fingers seem to bark like the five jaws of a dog of Hell. Hands that walk, sleeping hands, and hands that are awakening; criminal hands, tainted with hereditary disease; and hands that are tired and will do no more, and have lain down in

some corner like sick animals that know no one can help them. But hands are a complicated organism, a delta into which many divergent streams of life rush together in order to pour themselves into the great storm of action. There is a history of hands; they have their own culture, their particular beauty; one concedes to them the right to their own development, their own needs, feelings, caprices, and tenderness. Rodin, knowing through the education which he has given himself that the entire body consists of scenes of life, of a life that may become in every [place] individual and great, has the power to give to any part of this vibrating surface the independence [and fullness] of a whole. (123-24)

In Rilke's interpretation of Rodin, the hand is the autonomous, self-sustained artwork *par excellence*. *Pars pro toto*, the hand is a living organism and creates a new world. Figured as a river delta, the hand's fingers as rivers of life flow together into the stream of unified action. Indeed, the hand's association with water makes it essential to life and presents a vitalist image. Furthermore, the hand has a history and a culture. It expresses the whole spectrum of human emotions, desires, moods, and love. In its synaesthetic connotations—aural, visual, and kinaesthetic, the hand's "vibrating surface," "schwingende Fläche" bestows on the hand its life. The sensory perceptivity of every place, "Stelle" on the hand makes it a living whole. The hand bristles up and barks, where the fingers are compared to throats, "Häse" of a hellish dog. Theatrical, affective, resounding, walking, sleeping, the hand is a complete, complicated organism with a life and artistry of its own. It perceives as a human being would, as well as produces all human sensory impressions—visual, tactile, aural, and spatial. It produces and perceives synaesthetic sensations.

In Rilke's Rodin monograph, the synaesthetics of touch acquire also the dimension of transition, of the departure and transcendence of boundaries and of the establishing of new ones:

Eine Hand, die sich auf eines anderen Schulter oder Schenkel legt, gehört nicht mehr ganz zu dem Körper, von dem sie kam: aus ihr und dem Gegenstand, den sie berührt oder packt, entsteht ein neues Ding, ein Ding mehr, das keinen Namen hat und niemandem gehört; und um dieses Ding, das seine bestimmten Grenzen hat, handelt es sich nun. (422)

A hand laid on another's shoulder or thigh does not any more belong to the body from which it came—from this body and from the object which it touches or seizes something new originates, a thing that has no name and belongs to no one. [This thing, with its definite boundaries, is now the focus of discussion.] (124)

The double transitivity of touch creates new Things, nameless and free. By touching a shoulder or a thigh, the hand goes beyond its own body; it settles in this new state of in-betweenness where subject and object simultaneously perceive the touch, the grip, or the caress. This engendering of a new tactile space, of a new Art-Thing out of haptic reciprocity reveals its metaphysical dimensions in Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, where this space of tactile transition, of touching and being touched, seems to give meaning to human existence.

In his Second Duino Elegy (1912), Rilke explicitly focuses on the delimiting relationship of touch, positioned and oscillating between the inner and the outer, between subjectivity and objectivity, between sensory agent and sensory recipient. Among a series of destabilizing, doubting questions of Rilke's speaker, the lovers' caress seems almost to secure eternity in its doubly transitive haptic perception:

Liebende, euch, ihr in einander Genügten,
 frag ich nach uns. Ihr greift euch. Habt ihr Beweise?
 Seht, mir geschiehts, daß meine Hände einander
 inne werden oder daß mein gebrauchtes
 Gesicht in ihnen sich schont. Das giebt mir ein wenig
 Empfindung. Doch wer wagte darum schon zu *sein*?
 Ihr aber, die ihr im Entzücken des anderen
 zunehmt, bis er euch überwältigt
 anfleht: nicht *mehr* -; die ihr unter den Händen
 euch reichlicher werdet wie Traubenjahre;
 die ihr manchmal vergeht, nur weil der andre
 ganz überhand nimmt: euch frag ich nach uns. Ich weiß,
 ihr berührt euch so selig, weil die Liebkosung verhält,
 weil die Stelle nicht schwindet, die ihr, Zärtliche,
 zudeckt; weil ihr darunter das reine
 Dauern verspürt. So versprecht ihr euch Ewigkeit fast
 von der Umarmung... (ll. 44-60, 158)

Lovers, gratified in each other, I am asking *you*
 about us. You hold each other. Where is your proof?
 Look, sometimes I find that my hands have become aware
 of each other, or that my time-worn face
 shelters itself inside them. That gives me a slight
 sensation. But who would dare to exist, just for that?
 You, though, who in the other's passion
 grow until, overwhelmed, he begs you:
 "No *more* . . ."; you who beneath his hands
 swell with abundance, like autumn grapes;
 you who may disappear because the other has wholly
 emerged: I am asking *you* about us. I know,
 you touch so blissfully because the caress preserves,
 because the place you so tenderly cover
 does not vanish; because underneath it
 you feel pure duration. So you promise eternity, almost,
 from the embrace... (159)]

Indeed, what persists in the lovers' experience is their intimate reciprocal touch, which creates "pure duration," "das reine / Dauern." Touching is a protective gesture and covers the flesh, and, by extension, the being of the lover. The blissful caress originates a new "place," "Stelle," where hand and the gently caressed body of the other form a new Art-Thing, nameless and free, as we saw already in Rilke's book on Rodin. The reciprocity of the lovers' touch is also reminiscent of the animating touch of the artist, of Rodin's hand, which molds artworks and thus preserves things. It is this sensory aspect of the creative process that defies the vanishing of humanness. Finally, Rilke insisted on the physical, literal, sensuous quality of the touch as

presented in this passage.²⁴ In this way, Rilke performs an astonishing creative leap between the materialness of touch and the metaphysical categories of duration and eternity.

The philosophical abstractions of duration and eternity define the shared tactile sensation of the caress. The feeling hand and the feeling skin in their mutual contact abolish the sense and passing of time: there is nothing before the tactile eternity, and nothing comes after the abundance and overwhelming ecstasy of the shared touch. Still, Rilke makes tactile sensation suspect by evoking the moment when the vertical time of touch (the eternity of *kairos*) is replaced by chronological time, as the clichéd events of every love story set in and the promise of loving forever becomes mundane and untrue (ll. 60-65). Rilke gives us two options: to stay with the heightened moment, or to succumb to the transitoriness of life and daily routine.

According to the first option of suspicion, touch is perhaps not enough. Earlier, Rilke's tormented speaker asks: "That [self-touch] gives me a slight / sensation. But who would dare to exist, just for that?" While the solipsistic sensation of the poetic speaker sheltering his face, or his hands becoming aware of each other, only prompts him to ask more questions, touch finds its fulfillment in the reciprocity of the mutual caress, as if promising eternity. Still, even in the caress, the modal adverb "almost" seems to subvert the promise of eternity inherent in the loving reciprocal touch, by making it partial. What could a part of eternity be? What is a half-promise?

We can also pose the question differently: can the promise of eternity almost contained in the embrace be completely fulfilled? As opposed to yielding to Rilke's pressure of considering the failure of any love story that promises eternal communion in lines 60-65, we can see the completion of what is not quite there by searching for the complement to touch. In Rilke's poetry, only the poetic word has the power to fulfill a sensory or an aesthetic experience. The writing of touch and of vision, and later on, in Rilke's late career, of sound, music and all the senses becomes his poetic vocation: the task of preserving the synaesthetic thing—the most meaningful condensed part of human experience. In Rilke's elegies, the synaesthetically intensified thing as a meaningful fragment, a unit, a hand, or a place where the hand has rested guarantees eternity. Thus, only the fragment of experience possesses rich, concentrated, dense completeness that is preserved and lives on *ad infinitum*.

In conclusion, in Rilke's understanding, only the sensory (touch) and the aesthetic (the thing rescued for eternity) transcend the mundane. Further, the intensified sensory experience protects us and consoles us; poetically, it remains and continues as a *thing* or an Art-Thing, capturing intensified, condensed reality:

...only our eyes would need to be a shade more seeing, our ears more receptive, we ought to take more fully the taste of a fruit, we ought to be more aware of our sense of smell, and in touching and being touched more quick-witted [alert, present] and less forgetful —: to gain from our experiences consolations straightway, that would be more convincing, all-encompassing and true than all the suffering that can shake and undermine us. (1915)²⁵

²⁴ Rilke criticized Marie Taxis about her figurative translation of this passage into Italian, urging her for literalness. See Rilke, *Werke: KA*, Band 2, 632.

²⁵ Letter to Marie Taxis from 6.9.1915. Ulrich Fülleborn und Manfred Engel, eds., *Materialien zu Rianer Maria Rilkes "Duineser Elegien"*, Band 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980) 129. For the translation, see Roger Paulin and Peter Hutchinson, eds., *Rilke's Duino Elegies* (London: Duckworth, 1996) 127.

The hand as a synaesthetic fragment and the experienced synaesthetic moment as a *thing*-like fragment of touch, sight, hearing, taste, and smell bestow on us an immediate sense of truth and emotional security that defy human suffering. Thus, the experiencing body at any point of time expands into eternity and grants “pure duration.” The preserved synaesthetic experiences that Rilke attempts to bring to our consciousness promise consolation and salvation by enlivening our feeling senses, by urging us, too, to be a shade more receptive to our sensory impressions.

The Vision of the Fragmented Torso

In his understanding of Rodin’s fragments, as well as in his own poetry, Rilke came to valorize the fragment as a full-bodied living organism. Rilke’s fragments attain the already noted peculiar double transitivity of the senses and promote the synaesthetic translations among the senses and the arts. The fragment acquires the status of a feeling bodily abstraction: the hand; the torso; the smiling, speaking, or devouring mouth; the ear; the walking limbs; or the singing throat—that both triggers synaesthetic impressions in the reader and perceives the visual, the tactile, the audible, the edible, or the kinaesthetic world.

Like the sculpted fragmented hand or the feeling human hand as such a sensory abstraction, the sculpted divine head or torso in Rilke’s “Early Apollo” and “Archaic Torso of Apollo” from *New Poems* is both perceiving with all its senses and heightening our own sensory perceptions. In this doubly transitive synaesthetic process, the fragmented stone body and the readers’ senses are brought to life, as their perceptions poetically awaken. This double animation parallels Rilke’s vitalist interpretation of life, decay, and death in Rodin’s essay: “In the course of the lines there was movement; there was movement in the contours of the surfaces... Nothing possessed rest, not even death; for decay, too meant movement, dead matter still subject to life. Nature is all motion and an art that wished to give a faithful and conscientious interpretation of life could not make rest, [which] did not exist, its ideal” (120); “In dem Verlauf der Linien war Bewegung, Bewegung war in der Neigung der Flächen... Es gab also keine Ruhe, nicht einmal im Tode; denn mit dem Verfall, der auch Bewegung ist, war selbst das Tote dem Leben noch untergeordnet. Es gab nur Bewegung in der Natur; und eine Kunst, die eine gewissenhafte und gläubige Auslegung des Lebens geben wollte, durfte nicht jene Ruhe, die es nirgends gab, zu ihrem Ideale machen” (417). As Rilke had learnt from Baudelaire’s poem “A Carrion,” where art synaesthetically oscillates between life and death and is informed by the natural cycle, Rodin’s sculpture and the poet’s creations should capture life, living decay, and animated death in art, as Rilke portrays them in his new poem “Roman Sarcophagi,” discussed in the Introduction. So, movement, life, and sensation underlie the natural cycle, as well as inform Rodin’s art of living surfaces and Rilke’s poems. Rilke’s poems on Apollo evoke and examine the synaesthetic life of artworks and the natural cycle that underlies them.

Früher Apollo

Wie manches Mal durch das noch unbelaubte
Gezweig ein Morgen durchsieht, der schon ganz
im Frühling ist: so ist in seinem Haupte

nichts was verhindern könnte, daß der Glanz

aller Gedichte uns fast tödlich träfe;
denn noch kein Schatten ist in seinem Schaun,
zu kühl für Lorbeer sind noch seine Schläfe
und später erst wird aus den Augenbraun

hochstämmig sich der Rosengarten heben,
aus welchem Blätter, einzeln, ausgelöst
hintreiben werden auf des Mundes Beben,

der jetzt noch still ist, niegebraucht und blinkend
und nur mit seinem Lächeln etwas trinkend
als würde ihm sein Singen eingeflößt.²⁶

Early Apollo

As sometimes between still leafless branches
a morning looks through that is already
radiant with spring: so nothing in his head
could obstruct the splendor of all poems

from striking us with almost lethal power;
for there is still no shadow in his gaze,
his temples are still too cool for laurel,
and only later from his eyebrows' arches

will the rose garden lift up tall-stemmed,
from which petals, one by one released
will drift down upon his mouth's trembling,

which now is still quiet, never-used and gleaming
and only drinking something with its smile
as though its song were being infused in him.²⁷

Archaischer Torso Apollos

Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,
darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,

²⁶ Rilke, *Werke: KA*, Band 1, 449.

²⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke, *New Poems [1907]*, Bilingual Edition, Trans. and intro. by Edward Snow (New York: North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984) 5.

sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.

Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;

und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern
aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern.²⁸

Archaic Torso of Apollo

We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,

gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.

Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:

would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.²⁹

Rilke's "Early Apollo," "Früher Apollo" (1906) and "Archaic Torso of Apollo,"
"Archaïscher Torso Apollos" (1908) open, respectively, the two books of his *New Poems*, *Neue
Gedichte* (1907) and *Der Neuen Gedichte Anderer Teil* (1908).³⁰ The sculpted head of "Early

²⁸ Rilke, *Werke: KA*, Band 1, 513.

²⁹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Selected Poetry*, Bilingual Edition, ed. and trans. by Stephen Mitchell, intro. by Robert Hass (New York: Vintage International, Vintage Books, 1989) 61.

³⁰ For interpretations of the poems, see Ryan 80-89, who elevates fragmentariness as a main aesthetic principle for Rilke's *New Poems* without, however, recognizing the wholeness of the fragment, as Rilke saw it in Rodin's work. For an ekphrastic interpretation of "Early Apollo," suggesting the productive tension between the deconstructive failure of poetry to render visual reality, as well as its success: two poles of reading between which the reader oscillates in *New Poems*, see Carsten Strathausen, *The Look of Things: Poetry and Vision Around 1900*, (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2003) 59-64. Finally, see Edward Snow's comparison of the poems, which points out the poetic distinctions between the two parts of *New Poems*, *New Poems [1907]* and *New Poems [1908]*—the one still relying on embellishing language, the other on intensification, see his "Introduction," *New Poems [1908]* (New York: North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987) ix-xii.

Apollo,” on which the poet zooms in, inhabits the space and time at the origin of Apollonian artistic history, before the Greek Apollo’s interartistic transformations have begun to happen. Meanwhile, “The Archaic Torso of Apollo” represents a headless fragment ravished by time and gathered inwardly into a more compact fragmentary state, intensified and concentrated into a *thing*, densely rich with its interartistic history. The Early Apollo exists as a blank slate to be written upon, whereas the Archaic Torso resides in the aftermath of artistic history, as a synaesthetic thing salvaged from time into eternity.

“Early Apollo” is framed in a double temporal perspective: once, at the origins of time, as the sculpture first arose as a plastic representation, and once, in the flow of time thereafter, as the statue came to be continuously refashioned through time by the other arts. Thus, the marble Apollo, at its early origin, needs all the interartistic and synaesthetic work by poems, songs, and nature to transform it into an archaic torso. No original aura exists in the youthful, innocent statue of Apollo in its historical springtime; it is “the splendor of all poems” that infuses the marble with its lethal power. The early Apollo is a creation of nature and springtime. It possesses a potential that we see through the second temporal perspective of its unfurling artistic life when all adverbs of its not-yet-realized artistic experience and power will be brought to completion: “still no shadow,” “still too cool,” “only later,” “still quiet” and “never-used.”

The cycle of nature and the seasons informs the statue from the double view of what has not yet happened in springtime and what would happen with the flourish of summer, the ripe approach of autumn, and the decline toward winter. Vegetation will overtake the Early Apollo, and the natural metaphors of blooming are aligned with artistic triumph—the laurel that would come to grace Apollo’s temples; the song that is yet to be” infused” in Apollo’s mouth; and the poems that give the splendor or radiance, “*der Glanz*” of the statue. Thus, in the statue, the interplay of light and marble dazzles with verbal, not visual brilliance. Apollo’s head is still transparent; it can be pierced and thus informed by poetry. Apollo is still a receptive non-presence or at least a blank, negative, transparent presence. His mouth is mute and barely visible in his not-quite-trembling, quiet smile that can only drink in songs and flavors or breathe in the scent of the rose petals that would drift down its curves, but it cannot yet produce these sensory and aesthetic impressions. The Archaic Torso will become possible only by means of Apollo’s interactions and clashes with artistic history and artistic production. The life of Early Apollo as an artwork follows the natural cycle of its inception, prime, and decay, which, however, is not artistically isolated but is rather informed by future artistic production. Through the early statue of Apollo, we see the artwork’s afterlife, as artistic history and the tradition of Apollo representations, adaptations, and appropriations mold it and revive it—as they perpetuate the forward movement and life of the artwork.

Rilke’s “Archaic Torso of Apollo” inhabits the aftermath of Apollo’s flourishing artistic creativity, both as a poem and as a sculpture conjured up by a poem. While “Early Apollo” captures the sculptural innocence of Apollo as a lack to be artistically elaborated upon, “The Archaic Torso” describes the millennial creation of a rich interartistic tradition, which further bears the scars of time—deformed, cut short, fragmented (See Fig 31). Interestingly, both Apollos are represented as a lack. Still, whereas Early Apollo’s lack is weak, too cool, transparent and anticipates to be unfurled and completed, the Archaic Torso’s lack signifies the drawing within of all artistic endeavors that have touched the early *kouros* in an intensification

and further concentration of Apollo's essence as a composite intermedial artwork, a synaesthetic art-thing, *Kunst-Ding*. The "splendor of all poems," their "brilliance," "Glanz," could pierce through the original *kouros* unobstructed. At the opposite pole of time, the archaic torso has internalized this radiance, which has become a constitutive element of Apollo as a living, interartistic fragment: And yet his torso / is still suffused with brilliance from inside, / like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low, // gleams in all its power" (ll. 2-5); "Aber / sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber, / in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt, // sich hält und glänzt" (ll. 2-5). Historically defined as a gas lamp, "Kandelaber," turned down low, an anachronistic invention that is being superseded by electricity in Rilke's time, Apollo's gaze gleams throughout the torso with the intensity gathered through centuries. The previously unmarred, clear gaze of Early Apollo: "still no shadow in his gaze"; "noch kein Schatten ist in seinem Schauen" (l. 6), has matured in the ripened eyes, which, now plentiful and overabundant, have fallen like ripe apples. Just like the "legendary," "unheard-of" head of the Archaic Torso, "unerhörtes Haupt," the eyes have vanished in the natural cycle with the flow of time.

Fallen down low, the gaze suffuses the living fragmentary body with a brilliance that dazzles us. This light from within endowed with sight recalls Rodin's living surfaces pervaded and animated by light. This animation by light enhances the perceiving capabilities of the sentient fragment, as its surfaces come to life in the glistening of the wild beast's fur: a fur opening the dangers of touch, as well as endowed with the sense of touch. Pervaded by sight and touch, the living and perceiving fragment of Apollo sees with the multiplicity of all its places, just like a Rodinian sculpted surface, and this reversal and accommodation of double transitivity in perception serves to expand the circle of the senses in Rilke's poetry. Moreover, the living Archaic Torso fulfills the transitions and translation among the senses and the arts that "Early Apollo" suggested. As receptacle of its interartistic and synaesthetic elaborations: poems, songs, visual representations, the mutilated ancient figure has been filled to its brims with life and with art, its plenitude bursting beyond its limits as a brilliant gaze: "from all the borders of itself, / burst like a star:"; "brüche [] aus allen seinen Rändern / aus wie ein Stern:" (ll. 12-13). Having shaped it gradually through time, the artistic excess underlying the statue cannot be contained, and the statue violently transcends its own borders. Again, this transition is motivated by all the arts and all the senses informing "The Archaic Torso of Apollo." The gradual accretion of artistic reinterpretations of Apollo through time—visual, musical, and verbal, creates the life of, gives sight to, and brings to speech the fragmented marble Apollo. As a living being, he exhorts us at the end with a vehement, animalistically fierce, relentless injunction to the reader: "You must change your life"; "Du mußt dein Leben ändern" (l. 14). This injunction compels through the wisdom gained in Apollo's artistic transformations and through the expansion of the statue's senses. It is an aesthetic and synaesthetic command.

In their intimate connection to the visual arts, New Poems attempt to create a new language of objectivity beyond referential meaning. Rilke's endeavor to speak objectively, "sachliches sagen" and shape things creates a poetic procedure of presentation rather than representation of Things. The spatial arts in their ability to make things "*Dinge* machen," as we see in Rilke's monograph on Rodin, as well as in his Letters on Cézanne, rather than evoke or refer to things set the highest model for Rilke's new poetics. Rilke felt the failure of poetry in the art of presentation and had to grapple with an acute sense of artistic inferiority toward the visual arts in their ability to present Things in color, texture, and stone. The linguistic nature of poetry

distances it from any sort of referentiality. Certainly, sculpture and painting surpass poetry in their ability to make Things and offer them directly to human experience. Yet, in his Apollo poems, Rilke powerfully suggests the impossibility of visual art to signify an essence or present a *thing* in isolation. Only by co-opting all the arts and all the senses can the marble torso of Apollo dazzle us. The plastic artwork itself transcends its limits in interartistic and synaesthetic transitions along Rilke's circle of the senses.

Voice and Gait: Rilke's Visual Abstractions

Dieser *Johannes* ist der erste Gehende im Werke Rodins. Es kommen viele nach. Es kommen die *Bürger von Calais*, die ihren schweren Gang beginnen, und alles Gehen scheint vorzubereiten auf den großen herausfordernden Schritt des *Balzac*.

Aber auch die Gebärde des Stehenden entwickelt sich weiter, sie schließt sich, sie rollt sich zusammen wie brennendes Papier, sie wird stärker, geschlossener, erregter.³¹

This "St. John" is the first that walks in the work of Rodin. Many follow. The citizens of Calais begin their heavy walk, and all walking seems to prepare for the mighty, challenging step of Balzac.

The gesture of the standing figure develops further. It withdraws into itself, it shrivels like burning paper, it becomes stronger, more concentrated, more animated. (122)

Rilke divides Rodin's works into two types of gestures or acts—the moving act of the walking body and the standing act of the inwardly closed, often female body. Both figure types conjure up a cross-sensory perception beyond the visual and spatial dimensions of sculpture. Gait brings out the kinaesthetic dimension of Rodin's walking men, while the standing figures often suggest the concentrated inward or outward listening, "lauschen" or the confinement of a voice within a body—"stronger, more concentrated, more animated". Before discussing the walking figures in Rodin's sculpture, I will focus on Rodin's standing acts as the gesture modality of his work that evokes the sound of a voice in Rilke's interpretation of Rodin's *La Méditation* or *Voix intérieure*. (See Fig. 22, 24, 25.)

Inner Voice

Immer und immer wieder kam Rodin bei seinen Akten auf dieses Sich-nach-innen-Biegen zurück, auf dieses angestrengte Horchen in die eigene Tiefe; so ist die wundervolle Gestalt, die er *La Méditation* genannt hat, so ist jene unvergeßliche *Voix intérieure*, die leiseste Stimme Viktor Hugoscher Gesänge, die auf dem Denkmal des Dichters fast verborgen unter der Stimme des Zornes steht. Niemals ist ein menschlicher Körper so um sein Inneres versammelt gewesen, so gebogen von seiner eigenen Seele und wieder zurückgehalten von seines Blutes elastischer Kraft. Und wie auf dem tief seitwärts gesenkten Leibe der Hals sich ein wenig aufrichtet und streckt und den horchenden Kopf über das ferne Rauschen des Lebens hält, das ist so eindringlich und groß empfunden, daß man sich keiner ergreifenderen und verinnerlichteren Gebärde zu erinnern weiß...³²

Again and again in his figures Rodin returned to this bending inward, to this intense listening to one's own depth. This is seen in the wonderful figure called "La Méditation" and in that memorable "Voix intérieure," the most silent [quite, soft] voice of Victor Hugo's songs, that stands on the monument

³¹ Rilke, *Werke: KA*, Band 4, 420.

³² Rilke, *Werke: KA*, Band 4, 420.

of the poet almost hidden under the voice of wrath. Never was human body assembled to such an extent about its inner self, so bent by its own soul and yet upheld by the elastic strength of its blood. The neck bent sidewise on the lowered body, rises and stretches and holds the listening head over the distant roar of life; this is so impressively and strongly conceived that one does not remember a more gripping gesture or one of deeper meaning... (122-23)

Rodin's standing acts are inwardly withdrawn, hearkening to their own inner depths. His "Meditation" and "Inner Voice" capture exactly these states of intense inner concentration. Interestingly, these two statues draw back on the same figure for Rodin's "Gates of Hell" (1889) (Fig. 21 and 21^a). After its initial modeling in 1885, the figure was added, subtracted, refashioned, and renamed multiple times by the sculptor. In its initial version, it is presented as a slightly smaller figure than the original model and appears in the extreme right corner of the tympanum of "The Gates of Hell." Next, it transformed into a drawing for Baudelaire's poem "The Beauty"; then into a stand-alone figure ("The Meditation"); further, it was the effigy of a muse concealed behind the "Monument to Victor Hugo," with arms cut off and a left kneecap removed so as to be integrated in the monument; and, finally, it turned into a fragmented, armless stand-alone figure ("Inner Voice," 1896) (Fig. 22-26). While "The Meditation" as a stand-alone (various bronze versions after 1890) represents a "complete thing," "ein Ding-Ganzes," a sinuously bending bronze with its arms twisted over the head and the head bent down and projected forward, tucked under the right arm, "Inner Voice" as a stand-alone plaster is fragmented. The figure's arms are severed and the left knee seems brutally knocked off, evoking the sense of a ruin, which creates, however, an artistic whole both in Rilke's and in Rodin's view. Paradoxically, seeking for and discovering artistic completion, Rodin removes the arms of the sculpture in his plaster for the never-to-be-completed Monument to Victor Hugo. He abstracts the figure from the greater figural group, and, in this way, it becomes in his own terms one of the best of his works: "The study of nature is complete here and I have made every effort to render art as whole as possible. I consider this plaster to be one of my best finished works, the most perfect (sic)."³³

Interestingly, in their titles, the two figures with the same origin capture two diametrically opposed states or gestures, *Gebärde* of interiority, that of reflection, of language, thought, and reason, and that of voice or music.³⁴ Rilke describes this music as "the most quiet (soft, gentle) voice of Victor Hugo's Songs," "die leiseste Stimme Viktor Hugoscher Gesänge." Thus, Rilke interprets the sculpted figure through the prism of both music and literature, by alluding to its musicality and the poetic interiority of Hugo's Romantic songs. Arguably, these inner songs do not simply refer to Hugo's poetry collection *Inner Voices*, *Voix Intérieures* (1837) but also to their musical counterparts—the songs written by a host of composers in Hugo's time based on his texts. Thus, Berlioz, Liszt, Saint-Saens, Massenet, and many others realized Hugo's poems' potentiality for being set to music. The still quiet, unfulfilled voice of the poems looks forward to becoming music. Similarly, "Inner Voice" translates Hugo's poetic voice into

³³ Auguste Rodin cited in Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, "Around the Gates of Hell," Musée Rodin's official site in English, <<http://www.musee-rodin.fr/senf2-e.htm>>. Accessed on March 2, 2010.

³⁴ I should note that the titles for the two figures of identical origin are now often used interchangeably. Still, what we could maintain is that the concept behind "The Meditation" predated "Inner Voice." The idea for "Inner Voice" must have arisen thanks to the figure's incorporation within the "Monument to Victor Hugo" and its concurrent mutilation. Likewise, Rilke portrays "The Meditation" as organically whole and "Inner Voice" as fragmented yet artistically complete.

sculpture, and, along this circle of the arts, Rilke's Rodin essay and poetry close up the cycle of interartistic translations when they describe and implement Rodin's plastic method in verse.

For Rodin, the standing fragment "Inner Voice" removes the literary content from his female figure although it carries the residual connotation of its various earlier transformations: into a damned soul as a weeping willow; into the figure of language-informed meditation, drawing all its mental power into itself; and into the muse of Hugo's poetry. Fragmentation also liberates the sculpture from any traditional compositional devices; it becomes an organ of its own: "Und die süße leise *Innere Stimme*, armlos wie Inneres und wie ein Organ ausgelöst aus dem Kreislauf jener Gruppe" (459). As an organ, this statue is at once a voice and an ear (anticipating Rilke's "Gong"), intently listening both to "one's own depth" (122) and to the distant rustle of life: "der Hals sich ein wenig aufrichtet und streckt und den horchenden Kopf über das ferne Rauschen des Lebens hält." The neck as the locus of sound production is so unnaturally stretched and twisted sideways that we cannot imagine it externally projecting the figure's voice. The voice as music is strenuously kept within, torturously molding the entire body—flexing it and extending it, desperately trying to overcome this body. In a typically Rilkean doubling of perceiving a sensory impression and producing it, the figure as voice kept within cannot and does not sing, but rather hearkens to what Rilke had called in 1898 the "melody of life," "Lebensmelodie."³⁵ The fragmentary state of the figure as a sensory organ and an organ of production of what can be perceived emphasizes its self-sufficiency. It is divested of content as it is divested of words. No longer a meditation of articulate thoughts and sentences populating its interior world, the statue has entered the wordless realm of pure sensation and perception where musicality has become a contour of the undulating body, poised in equilibrium of utter contrasts. The raised left leg juts out, bent in its missing knee—in a sort of ellipsis or a musical rest. The drawn-in abdomen has fallen a victim to the utter tension of the outstretched head, which protrudes even further forward than the knee. The torso is contorted with a stretched left flank and a contracted right flank, which moves the balance all the way to the right. The back and the shoulders strain to sustain this pose. The body stands in this inner contradiction and writhing tension—music and musical desire barely contained within it. "The Meditation" used to represent a damned soul with her violently twisted body conjuring up a "weeping willow" and then the perplexities of reflection and doubt, still keeping the logic of a body endowed with arms. "Inner Voice" has entered the space of the illogical contradictions that deny "the assumption of narrow-minded pedantry, which says that arms are a necessary part of the body and that a body without arms cannot be perfect."³⁶ Thus, Rodin's perfect fragment goes beyond language and common-sense logic and captures music.

The Riddles of Music

Rilke's much later poem "To Music," *An die Musik* (1918) focuses on the incorporation of musical voice in poetry and tackles exactly this divide between propositional language and illogical music that we saw expressed in Rodin's "Inner Voice" and in Rilke's reading of it. The poem explores the power of music and transforms musical progress in time into space, into a Rilkean Thing, a material icon, and a poetic presence. Music in the poem creates a puzzle that

³⁵ Rilke, *Werke. KA*, "Notizen zur Melodie der Dinge," Band 4, 103-113.

³⁶ Rilke, *Werke. KA*, Band 4, 123.

the reader is required to solve. The music riddle heightens our awareness of the different ways in which Rilke's poems can be read. In this sense, linguistic structure, material letters, and music as a concept and an aural presence simultaneously signify in the text to produce a richer multivalent reading.

An die Musik

Musik: Atem der Statuen. Vielleicht:
Stille der Bilder. Du Sprache wo Sprachen
enden. Du Zeit,
die senkrecht steht auf der Richtung vergehender Herzen.

Gefühle zu wem? O du der Gefühle
Wandlung in was? —: in hörbare Landschaft.
Du Fremde: Musik. Du uns entwachsener
Herzraum. Innigstes unser,
das, uns übersteigend, hinausdrängt, -
heiliger Abschied:
da uns das Innre umsteht
als geübteste Ferne, als andre
Seite der Luft:
rein,
riesig,
nicht mehr bewohnbar.³⁷

To Music

Music: breathing of statues. Perhaps:
silence of paintings. You language where all language
ends. You time
standing vertically on the motion of mortal hearts.

Feeling for whom? O you the transformation
of feelings into what?—: into audible landscape.
You stranger: music. You heart-space
grown out of us. The deepest space *in* us,
which, rising above us, forces its way out,—
holy departure:
when the innermost point in us stands
outside, as the most practiced distance, as the other
side of the air:
pure,
boundless,
no longer habitable.³⁸

³⁷ Rilke, *Werke: KA*, Band 2, 158.

³⁸ Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Selected Poetry*, ed. and trans. by Stephen Mitchell, 147.

“To Music” was written in 1918 during the hiatus between Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, which the Rilke mythology has labeled as time of absent inspiration. Rilke wrote the poem in the guest book of Frau Hanna Wolff after a concert at her house. Contextually, the poem functions as an autograph, a visual signature of the poet. To read Rilke’s “To Music,” we need to mobilize all skills we have learned from reading his thing poems in *Neue Gedichte*. For instance, in “The Tower,” “Der Turm” (1907) the syntactic complications of the text become the reader’s tortured experience of chthonic climbing up a tower, and the looming immensity of both tower and syntax presses the reader down. Poetry becomes a visceral, perceptual experience. Likewise, “To Music” requires the reader’s identification and phenomenological experience of its text. A distanced reading of the text working primarily with word signification and the propositional structure of Rilke’s paradox-ridden poetic language will not suffice.³⁹ Rather, it will result in a partial reading or a misreading.

How do we understand, for instance, the most striking claim of the poem, “the innermost point in us stands / outside,” “das Innre umsteht,” (l. 11)? How can our inner essence lie outside of or around us? If we resort to logic, Rilke’s assertion will seem to rest on contradiction.⁴⁰ We can also limit our answer to the process of breathing as the exchange of spaces, but so we would seem to neglect or generalize on the concrete addressee of the poem, that is, Music.⁴¹ The title “To Music” prompts us to ask what it is about music that can oust our interiority and situate it outside us or what rises and forces its way out of us musically. If we adopt the imaginary position of identification Rilke has fashioned for us, we will be able to solve the riddle of the seemingly self-annihilating contradiction in terms. The paradox dissipates once we phenomenologically follow Rilke’s suggestions that music is “heart-space / grown out of us, . . . / which forces its way out” and thus “stands / outside, as the most practiced distance.” Rilke’s aural riddle describes the visceral projection of interiority out of a body, not out of subjectivity. The answer becomes clear: Voice. The poem enacts the outward projection of a voice from a singer’s inner depths or “heart-space,” “Herzraum” and creates an identification position for us as readers to experience the process of singing. Thus, the projection of the singer’s voice solves the apparent paradox of the poem. After all, in addition to delineating the voice’s expansive trajectory from inside out, Rilke invokes the music of the inner space, as well as the “practice,” “geübteste Ferne” of what can only be a trained voice.

The poem creates a space of music, an “audible landscape,” and we are invited to experience it now as the singers in a drawing-room, now as members of the audience affected by music’s acoustic power. The breath of the statues and the silence of the paintings interestingly involve the visual arts in the production of music. They participate in the making of music by

³⁹ See, for instance, Ryan’s or Bernstein’s readings of the poem where the logical paradoxes of “To Music” are emphasized. Similarly, Paul de Man focuses on the clash of language and logic in Rilke’s poetry, where simultaneous affirmations and negations abound. Ryan 158-66. Also, in Michael Bernstein, “Rainer Maria Rilke: The Book of Inwardness,” *Five Portraits: Modernity and the Imagination in Twentieth-Century German Writing* (Imprint Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2000) 11-34.

⁴⁰ Michael Bernstein suggests that the poem is constructed on “the play of contradictory affirmations” in its assertion that “the innermost point in us stands / outside.” Bernstein 31.

⁴¹ Pasewalck 248-52; see 250, in particular. Although Pasewalck examines the workings of the senses in Rilke’s poetry and tries to construe the sensory significance of music in the poem, she fails to notice Rilke’s clues, which lead us to the poem’s natural solution: voice and, by extension, instrumental music.

occupying the same space where music reigns. Paintings and sculptures are certainly not simply metaphors for music but are physically touched by the waves of music so that the relationship between visual arts and music is one of imperceptible contiguity via sound. Painting and sculptures participate in the physical reflection of sound and inform the acoustic space, which makes music audible. Thus, music is figured as the experience of a space. It becomes an *art-thing*, as musical breaths and silence are transmitted to the palpable, visible objects. Further, Rilke's poem as a *thing* in itself salvages music in its visual world, as we saw Rilke's messianic words of the Ninth Elegy do. Rilke carries the musical thing of the past into the future (or, alternatively, into the Angels' eternity), by making it synaesthetic: verbal, visual, plastic, and musical.

The positioning of music between language and the end of all languages captures another salient characteristic attributed to music: its ability to communicate emotion without clarity or definition. The experience of music brings questions as to the feelings it evokes and their transformations: "Feeling for whom? O you the transformation / of feelings into what?"⁴² The abstracted emotion of music remains vague, scripted in the interrogative mood. Music's questions resolve merely into undifferentiated space, "audible landscape," into a presence denying any communicable answer. The ethereal essence of music conveys music's apparent inability to communicate as a clearly defined language, as well as its ability to spread, to conquer spaces, to affect us. Still, while Rilke stresses the intangibility of music, he is able to turn its sound into space, into a *thing* by evoking the visual arts and using short verbless fragments as sentences to capture its spatial aspect. Like his *thing* poems, Rilke fashions "To Music" as a substantivized poetic being with iconic concreteness. In this spatial iconicity of music, the reputed inwardness and uncharted interiority of the self overcomes its limits and transitions to the exterior space, the undifferentiated "audible landscape" of music. Further, the synaesthetic identification position he creates for his readers, which enables them to experience music and the visual arts phenomenologically, rescues the artwork in the consciousness of the reader. Thus, Rilke secures the afterlife of the *things* he creates as objects of experience, *things* with which he populates the world of his elegies: "Perhaps we are here in order to say: house, / bridge, fountain, pitcher, fruit-tree, window – / at most column, tower..." (IX Elegy) The poetic afterlife of things is granted not only in the world of the Angels by means of the messianic poetic word, but also in the reader's experiential involvement in the perception of *things* inhabiting Rilke's poetic world.

In addition to suggesting the poetic handing down of *things* from past to present, "To Music" engages with synaesthetic translations and metaphysical transitions that enable the preservation of artworks and shows the preeminent role of the senses and music in Rilke's poetics and thought. The sentence fragment "Music: the breathing of statues" performs a synaesthetic leap across the arts and recalls Rodin's living fragments. The breathing statue, as in Rodin's fragment "Inner Voice," is music. The "silence of paintings" captures music in its soundlessness, as a musical rest or as an acoustic surface. This simultaneous synaesthetic opposition and identification of music and painting carries on in Rilke's notion of music as a language that is also the end of languages. Again, music, as a poetic fragment or a visual work, is not language, but it certainly expands the sensuous potential of language, that which Rilke would call a translation among the senses, or the leaping over the voids separating the five human

⁴² See Paul Verlaine, "L'Art Poétique," *Selected Poems*, Bilingual Edition, trans. Martin Sorrell (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 122-25.

senses in his Phonograph essay. It seems that translation is an inherent quality of music. In this sense, music transforms: “the transformation / of feelings into what?”; it is a “stranger” occupying an opposite space, “the other / side of air.” The otherness of music is emphasized in the apostrophic structure of the poem with its “Du” addresses to music. However, music is also a departure, “Abschied,” a going beyond, or perhaps going toward death. It thus surpasses any boundaries, lines, or contours that a plastic fragment may impose, preparing us for the musical poetics of metamorphosis, overstepping, and transcendence of *Die Sonette an Orpheus*, written three years later. Most important, music unifies, as it transcends “the deepest space *in us*” into the outer “audible landscape.” Inside and outside coexist; their distinctions are canceled out in a “boundless,” “riesig” space.

Similarly, the ending of the First Duino Elegy (1912) captures succinctly this unifying role of music in Rilke’s divided universe: the two realms of life and death, of here and the beyond:

...—Aber Lebendige machen
alle den Fehler, daß sie zu stark unterscheiden.
Engel (sagt man) wüßten oft nicht, ob sie unter
Lebenden gehn oder Toten. Die ewige Strömung
reißt durch beide Bereiche alle Alter
immer mit sich und übertönt sie in beiden.

Schließlich brauchen sie uns nicht mehr, die Früheentrückten,
man entwöhnt sich des Irdischen sanft, wie man den Brüsten
milde der Mutter entwächst. Aber wir, die so große
Geheimnisse brauchen, denen aus Trauer so oft
seliger Fortschritt entspringt -: könnten wir sein ohne sie?
Ist die Sage umsonst, daß einst in der Klage um Linos
wagende erste Musik dürre Erstarrung durchdrang;
daß erst im erschrockenen Raum, dem ein beinah göttlicher Jüngling
plötzlich für immer enttrat, das Leere in jene
Schwingung geriet, die uns jetzt hinreißt und tröstet und hilft.

...—Though the living are wrong to believe
in the too-sharp distinctions which they themselves have created.
Angels (they say) don't know whether it is the living
they are moving among, or the dead. The eternal torrent
whirls all ages along in it, through both realms
forever, and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous roar.

In the end, those who were carried off early no longer need us:
they are weaned from earth's sorrows and joys, as gently as children
outgrow the soft breasts of their mothers. But we, who do need
such great mysteries, we for whom grief is so often
the source of our spirit's growth—: could we exist without *them*?
Is the legend meaningless that tells how, in the lament for Linus,

the daring first notes of song pierced through the barren numbness;
and then in the startled space which a youth as lovely as a god
has suddenly left forever, the Void felt for the first time
that harmony which now enraptures and comforts and helps us.

From the perspective of the Angel,⁴³ the realms of the living and the dead coalesce and become indistinguishable in one full world, which the “eternal current” or flow (wave-like, electric, in any case, possibly physically defined) traverses and joins together in the flood of its thunderous sound. The sound of the eternal flow dominates all ages, “übertönt [alle Alter] in beide” in an aural metaphor capturing the all-powerful, flood-like, possibly musical, unified tone subsuming all other earthly sounds in its dominion.

Further, it is the living who yearn for the deceased. At the existential moment of death, music originates as lament, enlivening the deadening terror and frozen space of emptiness. Musical lament warms up the Void left by the dead Linus as the paradigmatic figure of the young deceased with its comforting harmony and vibrating sound, or the *Schwingung* of music. Music expresses a longing and thus reconnects the living with the dead in its wave-like (*schwingende*) motion, as if oscillating between the two realms.

Moreover, the deceased demigod Linus is also a singer, who had hubristically challenged Apollo to a singing contest and was consequently struck down by the sun god.⁴⁴ Linus thus occupies a double position in Rilke’s poetic world of the here and now and of the world beyond. He is at the same time an active carrier of music in his singing while the musical lament for him turns him into a passive recipient of music, into an object summoned by or recreated in music. Thus, Linus’s transition between this world and the world beyond, his subject-object relationship to music, and the seemingly oppositional locations of music in the underworld with Linus and in our world with the lament for Linus conjoins the two realms. The figure of Linus transcends and goes beyond their sharp distinctions through music while the acoustic vibrations of music dissolve the boundaries between the two realms. Thus, the singer exceeds the differences between life and death, which are imposed by human consciousness.

This analysis of voice and music in Rilke’s poetry demonstrates the translation of visual artworks into music, as well as the poetic transmutation of music into Things, *Dinge*. Rilke’s poetic attempt at preserving the creative traces of humanity: monuments, cathedrals, the Sphinx, marble fragments, as well as spatialized, *thing*-like music—becomes not only the poet’s vocation but also his way of transcending death into life, of enabling and enacting the metaphysical transition between life and death, and of perpetuating the afterlife of artistic *Things* not only messianically in the poetic word, but also experientially in the reader’s phenomenological consciousness.

⁴³ Interestingly, Ryan adds the figure of Rilke’s Angel to a host of other metaphors “for the complex interaction of subject and object in the imaginative act,” for instance, that of music in “An die Musik.” Ryan 158.

⁴⁴ Peter and Sheila Stern, “Elegy One,” *Rilke’s Duino Elegies: Cambridge Readings*, eds. Roger Paulin and Peter Hutchinson (London: Duckworth, 1996) 16-17. While the authors seem to suggest that Linus’s singing craft followed by his untimely death give birth to music, I emphasize the double role of Linus in the creation of music: that of a singer and that of a young deceased, who is musically mourned for. The lament for Linus the singer is itself the origin of music. This subject-object position of Linus as a creator and a recipient of music is fundamental for Rilke’s poetic practice.

Excursus

*Reading Rilke Phenomenologically: Between Language and the Senses*⁴⁵

Our reading of “An die Musik” clearly presents two different approaches to Rilke’s verse: the linguistic or logical one that proliferates paradoxes, and the phenomenological or experiential one that is not limited to the oscillation between positive and negative terms but rather keeps the complex relationship between language and the senses. Exploring both sides of the “language – music” divide inscribed in the poem allows the reader to experience both the constraints and dead-end impossibilities of language, as well as the salvaged chamber music, the experience of the singer, and the visual atmosphere of the concert at Frau Hanna Wolff’s. Finally, the readings based on linguistic paradoxes, of affirmation and negation, resulting in loss, departure, and death, invite metaphysical explications as in the First Duino Elegy. Still, the perceptual or phenomenological reading of Music, which has spontaneously originated with the lament of Linus’s death, helps bare music’s and sound’s powerful potential for uniting the metaphysical realms of life and death.

Paul de Man’s exploration of linguistic paradoxes, figuration, and signification in Rilke’s poetry serves as a good example for a reading based on contradictory propositions and linguistic oppositions. For Paul de Man, Rilke’s New Poems create a “pure poetry... of ‘figures’” (48) where poetic language is liberated from signification.⁴⁶ Through his poetry of reversals and chiasmic poetics, Rilke breaks with referential reality: the reflected world of Brügge’s past life in “Quai du Rosaire” attains a presence independent from logical meaning through a series of reversals following the reversal of reality and reflected, illusory world; the headless torso of Apollo sees us through its non-existent eye based on an ocular reversal; while the sundial of “L’ange du méridien” captures time not only in daylight but also at night. However, Rilke’s “rhetoric of figuration” reverts to the “rhetoric of signification” (49) in *Duineser Elegien* and *Die Sonette an Orpheus*. According to de Man, this return to meaning, which had become inaccessible in the impersonality and objectivity of New Poems, creates an existential philosophy

⁴⁵ Phenomenological interpretations of Rilke’s poetry, especially of his New Poems, have a long-lasting tradition. Käte Hamburger’s 1966 essay “Die phänomenologische Struktur der Dichtung Rilkes” juxtaposes Husserl’s phenomenology developed initially in Husserl’s “Logische Untersuchungen” (1900/1901) with Rilke’s *Neue Gedichte*, both written during the same historical moment. See Hamburger, Käte. “Die phänomenologische Struktur der Dichtung Rilkes.” Philosophie Der Dichter: Novalis, Schiller, Rilke (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966) 179-275. Carsten Strathausen’s critique of Hamburger pinpoints two crucial problems with her interpretation: she simplifies Husserl’s concept of the phenomenon by reducing it to the mere perceptual appearance of things, while, on the other hand, she reads Rilke philosophically, by bracketing the metaphorical nature of language and identifying Rilke’s images with the objects themselves. See Carsten Strathausen, The Look of Things: Poetry and Vision Around 1900, (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2003) 293. Müller finds problematic Hamburger’s use of Husserl’s concept of the phenomenological reduction and offers in his own phenomenological reading a consideration of Rilke’s New Poems in view of Husserl’s text “Raum und Ding” (1907) and his idea of perspectival seeing. Müller, Wolfgang G., “Rilke, Husserl und die Dinglyrik der Moderne,” Rilke und Weltliteratur, Engel, Manfred and Dieter Lamping, eds. (Düsseldorf/Zürich: Artemis & Winkler Verlag, 1999) 214-35. For a critique of Hamburger’s phenomenological approach to Rilke, see also Rilke Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung and Anthony Phelan, “‘Gesicht aus Aussehen’: Rilke, Cézanne, Merleau-Ponty,” Rilke und die Moderne. Eds. Adrian Stevens, and Fred Wagner (München: IUDICIUM Verlag GmbH, 2000) 135-54.

⁴⁶ Paul de Man, “Tropes (Rilke),” Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 20-56.

based on negative experiences: lack, loss, departure, innocent or youthful death, unfulfilled love—and showcases Rilke’s peculiar “reversal of negativity into a promise”—this is the “ambivalent thematic strategy” of the *Duino Elegies* (50). This is why Rilke’s poetry paradoxically and necessarily relies on two different types of interpretation and on their juxtaposition: one—the prevalent messianic reading, which forgets about Rilke’s linguistic plays by focusing on his affirmative language, the other—recognizing the linguistic structure of reversal in Rilke’s language that cancels out and renounces any truth claims of his poetry (51). Thus, in Rilke’s Horseman or *Reiter* “Sonnet to Orpheus,” 1.11, we witness the “failure of figuration” (54) when the constellation of the rider, as a composite figure of man and horse, is exposed as an optical illusion, a mere deception, and its “figure’s truth turns out to be a lie at the very moment when it asserts itself in the plenitude of its promise” (55).

While Rilke’s involvement with the language of figuration, as de Man defines it, is undeniable, de Man’s emphasis on the linguistic structure of Rilke’s poetry that undoes a philosophical or thematic reading based on signification narrowly associates Rilke’s poetry only with language and linguistic or logical processing. Rilke’s engagement with the senses offers an alternative reading to the linguistic reading of reversal and paradox that de Man formulates. While in a linguistic reading of affirmations and negations paradoxes abound, in a phenomenological reading of Rilke’s poetry, involving all the senses and experiencing what Merleau-Ponty calls “lived perspective” referring to Cézanne’s painting,⁴⁷ linguistic paradoxes dissolve. Figuration and signification never fail in a synaesthetic reading of Rilke’s poetry, as we saw with Rilke’s “To Music.” Indeed, as de Man insists, Rilke’s poetry relies on a double reading. Instead of using the term of the metaphysical, thematic reading, I insist on a different oppositional pair of readings: one that is paradox-ridden and is strictly linguistic, figurational or semantic, and one that transcends the clash of linguistic oppositions in an all-sensory, synaesthetic, phenomenological experience of a poem.

In Rilke’s poetry, the phenomenological subject becomes embodied in the poems about works of art. Reader, poet, and work of art are connected, embodied in one another, by means of the poem as the sensory object to be experienced. The various mediations of poems become a succession of traces to be read: artistic object (statue, music, Medieval city, Orpheus’s song); the poet’s experience and transformation of the aesthetic object, the poems; and, finally, the reader’s experience of the preserved *things*, as the reader is powerfully implicated and summoned in Rilke’s urgent appellative poetic structure. These successive artistic translations secure the afterlife of works of art, their dissemination.⁴⁸ Thus, Rilke’s poetry necessitates a peculiar experiential reading of the poetically created visual, aural, and spatial realms. This phenomenological reading will account for or resolve the apparent paradoxes and inexplicable twists of figurative language often ascribed to Rilke’s poetry by distanced word-centered readings. As we saw, Rilke’s poem “An die Musik” constructs such an apparently contradiction, where “the innermost point in us stands / outside.” However, a felicitous experiential reading of

⁴⁷ On Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne, and the “lived perspective” through which all objects are present to “all the senses at once,” see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 159. See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1992) 9-25.

⁴⁸ Rilke’s actual involvement with linguistic translation will be of interest to such study, discussing interartistic translations: for instance, Rilke’s early translations from the Russian; poetry in Russian; Russian passages and phrases that pop up in Rilke’s letters; Rilke’s letter exchange with Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva; or Rilke’s late poetry in French.

the poem solves the conundrum of the contradiction by revealing how the trained singer's voice captures vocal interiority and projects it outside the body as music.

Similarly, in Rilke's "The Gazelle / Gazella Dorcas," "Die Gazelle" (1907), as well as in other New Poems, Rilke poses a visual riddle, which is often interpreted as a figurative flourish commencing the series of similes in the poem: "From your forehead rise leaf and lyre, / and all you are already moves in simile"; "Aus deiner Stirne steigen Laub und Leier / und alles Deine geht schon im Vergleich" (ll. 4-5).⁴⁹ Yet, a literal, experiential, and phenomenological reading clearly leads us to imagine "Laub und Leier" by identifying with Rilke's vision and sighting of the gazelle. Thus, we can visualize the lyre-shaped horns, graced with two ears, rising out of the forehead of the Gazella Dorcas, even if we do not really know what gazelle the Latin name designates precisely (Ill. 1).⁵⁰ Thus, Rilke's stylized emblem "leaf and lyre" encapsulates and posits the poet's creative perception of the gazelle, his artistic transformation of it, and, finally, the reader's phenomenological processing of the image and reconstitution of the sighted gazelle.



In this sense, Rilke inscribes in his image the multiple focusing possibilities of re-translation of perception into poetry and, further, into readerly experience. This process of metapoetic transitions is captured also on the poetic level as countless figurative transfers, commenced by the "moving into simile"—going or passing through metaphors: "alles Deine geht schon im Vergleich." The figurative gait or going, also the running of the gazelle—"comes and goes," "moves in simile," "run"; "kommt und geht," "geht im Vergleich," "Lauf"—evokes the multiple levels of transitioning in Rilke's poetry: poetic, rhythmic, metaphorical, existential, etc.⁵¹ This forward-moving process defines Rilke's artistic translations and dissemination of forever-living artworks, as we shall see also in his interpretation of Rodin's walking figures, "die Gehende."

We are used to talking about Rilke in terms of his elegiac perspective, yet, it seems that looking back is just the opposite of what his forward-looking, perpetuating artistic and phenomenological translation performs. Indeed, Rilke's elegiac subject occupies a space beyond the limits of the meaningful poetic event Rilke's poems communicate and capture. "Quai du Rosaire / Brügge" dramatizes this space of the aftermath by posing the questions: how do we experience a city after it has expired? "Quai du Rosaire" answers this question by evoking the inversion or reversal of history in the animated water reflections of the extinct city of Bruges, which contrast the suspension of time in the rest of the poem. A parallel question arises: how does one render a city in poetry? The elegiac mode, encompassing the territory beyond that of

⁴⁹ I am using Edward Snow's translation. Snow, New Poems [1907], 75. Rilke, Werke: KA, Band 1, 469-70. Lisa Gates, for instance, claims that "Laub und Leier" confirms the animal's status as an art object. Lisa Gates, "Rilke and Orientalism: Another Kind of Zoo Story," *New German Critique*, N. 68, Special Issue on Literature (Spring - Summer, 1996) 75.

⁵⁰ <<http://www.africa-onweb.com/faune/media/animaux/images/gazelle-dorcas.jpg>>. In his letter to Clara Rilke from June 13, 1907, Rilke focuses precisely on the ears and the horns of the gazelle: "I saw the radiance from ears and horns around her slender head." (in Mitchell, 300). It is interesting to note the literal perception of the gazelle in the letter as opposed to the metaphorical one in the poem, which was written on July 17, 1907. Rilke's two different discourses on the gazelle show how "ears and horns" turn into "leaf and lyre" by capturing the temporality of Rilke's creative process.

⁵¹ On the multiple interpretive levels in "Die Gazelle," see David Wellbery, "Zur Poetik Der Figuration Beim Mittleren Rilke: 'Die Gazelle'," Zu Rainer Maria Rilke, Ed. Egon Schwarz (Stuttgart: Klett, 1983) 125-132.

possible access, becomes the mode of synaesthetic translation, as well. Poetry is the only access the poet has to sculpture, music, and the city; that access however is inadequate, always failing. We feel this inadequacy most poignantly in Rilke's most successful thing poems. The need to visualize them and experience them so as to comprehend them, and comprehend them only to a certain degree, reveals their proximity to as well as tortured verbal difference from what they attempt to capture. Instead of tracing their relationship to the visual arts backwards, these poems progress forward from poetry to its phenomenological visualization (the visual arts), thus widening the gulf of elegiac removal. Their enhanced verbal proximity to the pictorial realm distances them even further from the visual original, as this new visibility grows out of language, not sculpture. Still, is not the elegiac mode absolutely necessary for salvaging *things*? Rilke's backward-looking perspective enables him poetically to rescue artworks from oblivion, to preserve, and memorialize.

Thus, Rilke insists on perpetuating and regenerating *things* beyond medial boundaries. The figure of Orpheus acts in exactly this fashion, embracing a forward perspective, which distances us from any initial orphic song but is also the only perspective available to us. In fact, this forward-looking transformation becomes the essence of what is orphic:

Das Sonett an Orpheus, 1.5

Errichtet keinen Denkstein. Lasst die Rose
nur jedes Jahr zu seinen Gunsten blühen.
Denn Orpheus ist. Seine Metamorphose
in dem und dem. Wir sollen uns nicht mühen

um andre Namen. Ein für alle Male
ist Orpheus, wenn es singt. Er kommt und geht.

“Sonnet to Orpheus,” 1.5

Erect no monument. Allow the rose
to unfurl each year on his behalf.
For it's Orpheus. His metamorphosis
In this, in that. We needn't bother

With other names. Once and Forever
it's Orpheus, when there is song. He comes and goes.

The gravestone of the backward-looking poet does not suffice; rather, organic regeneration in the blooming rose set in a gnomic present, as well as the very metamorphosis of Orpheus moves all his artistic traces forward. In fact, the ORPHic is an essential part of the word “metamORPHosis,” and, similarly, metamorphosis constitutes the inherently orphic state.⁵² This

⁵² I am indebted to William Waters's discussion of sonnet I.5 in terms of the continuance of poems, kept alive in the reader's perception. This is what I came to call in my work “the artwork's afterlife,” invoking Benjamin. See William Waters, *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003) 117-20.

perpetual change, physical, metaphorical, interartistic, and existential coming and going encapsulates another of Rilke's figures of transition that he admired in Rodin's work: Gait.

Gait

"St. John the Baptist Preaching" (1878) is a finished bronze featuring a fine illusionistic modeling of the muscles (Fig. 27). On the other hand, the study for "John the Baptist," "The Walking Man" (1877-78), which was only later exhibited both in its small scale original version and as an enlarged bronze (1900 / 1905), was bold and radically modern: headless and armless in its fragmentary state, emphasizing the massive walking stride, which moves forward the battered, less than illusionistically carved muscular figure (Figs. 28 and 29). The signs of violence on the sculpted fragment: rips, cuts, slashes, seem to belie its claim to being a complete, a whole object of art. Yet, Rilke would be the first critic who came to see Rodin's fragments as unified, complete artworks, acknowledging their finished state. Torn and ruptured, "The Walking Man," "der ungeheure *Gehende*," is even more alive in its surface and in its colossal stride.⁵³ It overwhelms Space in the horror and infinity of its cosmic gait.⁵⁴ "The Walking Man" embodies the paradox of Rilke's Orpheus: both dismembered and living, experiencing death in his descent to the underworld while both reclaiming Eurydice's life and losing it.

es entsteht jener *Johannes* mit den redenden, erregten Armen, mit dem großen Gehen dessen, der einen anderen hinter sich kommen fühlt. Der Körper dieses Mannes ist nicht mehr unerprobt: die Wüsten haben ihn durchglüht, der Hunger hat ihm weh getan, und alle Dürste haben ihn geprüft. Er hat bestanden und ist hart geworden. Sein hagerer Asketenleib ist wie ein Holzgriff, in dem die weite Gabel seines Schrittes steckt. Er geht. Er geht, als wären alle Weiten der Welt in ihm und als teilte er sie aus mit seinem Gehen. Er geht. Seine Arme sagen von diesem Gang, und seine Finger spreizen sich und scheinen in der Luft das Zeichen des Schreitens zu machen.

Dieser *Johannes* ist der erste *Gehende* im Werke Rodins. Es kommen viele nach. Es kommen die *Bürger von Calais*, die ihren schweren Gang beginnen, und alles Gehen scheint vorzubereiten auf den großen herausfordernden Schritt des *Balzac*. (420)

[In a thought's glow and a storm in will] it unfolds itself and that "St. John" steps forth with excited, speaking arms and with the splendid step of one who feels Another follow him. The body of this man is not untested. Deserts have glowed through it, hunger has made it ache, and all thirsts have tried it.

⁵³ On fragmentation and assemblages in Rodin, see Albert Elsen. Frances Mary Scholz's on Rilke and Rodin's fragmented man explores in detail various representations of broken, asymmetrical faces and human figures both in Rodin sculpture and in Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge*. Yet, she interprets fragmentation in the customary way for Modernist criticism as a symptom of the emotional and psychological disorientation, disfiguration, alienation, and incoherence of the modern man in the conditions of modernity although she admits that Rilke in his thought seeks mystically to transcend fragmentation into a new reintegration in Rilke's novel. See Frances Mary Scholz, "Rilke, Rodin, and the Fragmented Man," *Rilke and the Visual Arts*, ed. Frank Baron (Lawrence, KS: Coronado, 1982) 19-25. As in my Russian chapters, I will take an issue with the single-minded reading of Modernist fragmentation as purely negative, by drawing on Rilke's writings on Rodin and his later work.

⁵⁴ In his 1907 lecture on Rodin, Rilke interprets the headless walking statues in terms of their cosmic self-sufficiency, "kosmischen Selbständigkeit," as they come to win over space, "die Erwerbung des Raumes." For the poet, naturalistically complete statuary is confined to its limits (for instance, "John the Baptist"), while the walking fragment transcends itself and is thus able to dominate and take over all space: "Da ist der *Jüngling des Âge d'airain*, der noch wie in einem Innenraum steht, um den Johannes weicht es schon auf allen Seiten zurück, um den Balzac ist die ganze Atmosphäre, – aber ein paar hauptlose Akte, der neue ungeheuerer *Gehende* vor allem, sind wie über uns hinausgestellt, wie ins All, wie unter die Sterne in ein weites unbeirrbares Kreisen." Rilke, "Auguste Rodin, Zweiter Teil," *Werke: KA*, Band 2, 463.

He has endure and has become hard. His lean ascetic body is like a forked piece of wood that encloses, as it were, the wide angle of his stride. He walks. ... He walks as though all distances of the world were within him and he distributed through his mighty step. He strides. ... His arms speak of this step, his fingers spread and seem to make the sign of striding in the air.

This "St. John" is the first that walks in the work of Rodin. Many follow. The citizens of Calais begin their heavy walk, and all walking seems to prepare for the mighty, challenging step of Balzac. (122)

By focusing on nominalized going, on human gait and on the walking person, Rilke makes sense of the striding in Rodin's bronzes as an abstraction similar to the figure, *Figur* in Rilke's poetics. While Rodin entitles this headless walking torso "L'homme qui marche," Rilke talks in general about Rodin's *Gehende* with the nominalized present participle of "gehen" assuming universal proportions, as we see in Rilke's abstract use of going as both a static and a dynamic, concrete and figurative state in Rilke's poetry (for instance, in "Die Gazelle" or in "Sonnet to Orpheus," 2.18). Going becomes a self-sufficient existential gesture that is independent of the human body as a referent; the head and the arms do not play a role anymore. Only the torso's and the shoulder's musculature in motion expresses and supports the overwhelming impetus to move forward embodied in the indomitable gait. Thus, in this abstracted form, Rodin's going, seen through Rilke's eyes, is no mere fragment of the human body but rather allegorically embodies the sculptural transitions between lit surfaces in their encounters on the aesthetic level, as well as fulfills the existential transition between life and death in the transfer of body weight, in the advancing motion, in the affirmative forward-going impulse of "The Walking Man"'s colossal, horrific stride. Rodin inscribes the process of walking in his figure. The artist first renders the sculpted man as beginning his stride on the securely rooted and balanced left foot; then he leads our gaze up the left leg, as the weight transfer to the right leg happens in the lower torso; and, finally, he directs our glance down the right leg, as the stride takes place and completes the process with the right foot firmly positioned on the ground.⁵⁵ The temporality of our viewing doubles the temporality of the stride itself. In fact, in real gait transfer, the pose of the two legs is untenable; it is only feasible in this temporally dynamic movement captured in Rodin's bronze. We cannot have both of our feet firmly grounded in the process of walking. The paradoxical position of the two legs of Rodin's "Walking Man," impossible or at least unnatural, strained, and uncomfortable in real life, renders life, time, and transition while obliterating the frozen, dead paradox that the plastic arts were fated to before Rodin. This perceptual, phenomenological experience ("lived perspective") of walking allows us to resolve the apparent paradox of the beginning or end of the process of walking, as well as the multiple, yet sensorily harmonious perspectives in Cézanne. Similarly, Rilke will be able to dissolve the apparent paradoxes of his verse, figurational or signifying, as de Man would have it. Exactly this sensory reading of Rilke's poems allows us to overcome the confines of language.

The Fragmented Orpheus and the Senses

We can follow Rilke's synaesthetic development from visuality to musicality, from the limit of the line to its transcendence and the merging potential of music, in Rilke's respective middle-period and late-period poetic representations of Orpheus. While Rilke's long poem "Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes" (1904) dramatizes the failure of Orpheus's art and love, stemming

⁵⁵ On "The Walking Man" and its rendition of walking movement, Elsen 27-33. See also Albert Elsen, *Rodin's the Walking Man* (Northampton, MA: Smith College Museum of Art, 1966).

from the insurmountability of the alien space of death in its complete estrangement and diametrical opposition to the world of life, Sonnets to Orpheus positively recast Orphic art as capable of transcending boundaries and limits and reintegrating life and death into a fullness of metaphysical experience.⁵⁶ Still, the synaesthetic qualities of Rilke's poems on Orpheus reveal that during both his earlier and later works, albeit in different ways, Rilke searches for phenomenological unity of experience that would fuse both realms of existence and transcend metaphysical oppositions.

Already the lapidary title of Rilke's earlier narrative poem on the Orphic myth "Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes" evokes separation with its use of periods demarcating the names of the three self-contained figures: the living, the dead, and the divine mediator, the guide of the departing souls traversing the space between life and death. The Naples sculpted relief "Hermes, Eurydice, and Orpheus" (c. 500-400 BCE) inspired the poem with its title's choppy, as if sculpted, arrangement of names (See Fig. 32).⁵⁷ It has been also suggested that Rilke's fascination with Orpheus may go back to Rodin's representation of the subject originally modeled for the "Gates of Hell": "Orpheus and Eurydice" (1893) or "Orpheus" (modeled 1890-1900 and cast in 1908) (See Fig. 33-35).⁵⁸ In any event, Rodin's influence on Rilke clearly emerges in the poem's emphasis on touch and on the abundant wholeness of Eurydice in her death: "Und ihr Gestorbenheit / erfüllte sie wie Fülle."

In "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes," the manner of walking or going becomes one of the emblems of each of the characters, whereas Orpheus's and Eurydice's sensory perceptions set them apart in two different world of life and death, or, perhaps, we should say life in death for Orpheus:

Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes

...
Und dieses einen Weges kamen sie.

Voran der schlanke Mann im blauen Mantel,
der stumm und ungeduldig vor sich aussah.
Ohne zu kauen fraß sein Schritt den Weg
in großen Bissen; seine Hände hingen
schwer und verschlossen aus dem Fall der Falten
und wußten nicht mehr von der leichten Leier,
die in die Linke eingewachsen war
wie Rosenranken in den Ast des Ölbaums.
Und seine Sinne waren wie entzweit:
indes der Blick ihm wie ein Hund vorauslief,
umkehrte, kam und immer wieder weit

⁵⁶ On the distinctions between the Orphic figure in Rilke's New Poems and the sonnets, see Charles Segal, "Orpheus in Rilke," Orpheus: the Myth of the Poet (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989) 126.

⁵⁷ See Rilke's letter to Clara Rilke from 12.2.1906. Rainer Maria Rilke, Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe, Band 1, 954.

⁵⁸ Ursula Emde, Rilke und Rodin (Marburg/Lahn: Verlag des kunstgeschichtlichen Seminars, 1949) 69. Notably, on the left side of the tympanum of "The Gates of Hell" appears a group of figures representing "Orpheus and the Maenads" (before 1889) (See Fig. 34 and 21^a). Orpheus's severed head lies at the knees of the Maenad.

und wartend an der nächsten Wendung stand, -
 blieb sein Gehör wie ein Geruch zurück.
 Manchmal erschien es ihm als reichte es
 bis an das Gehen jener beiden andern,
 die folgen sollten diesen ganzen Aufstieg.
 Dann wieder wars nur seines Steigens Nachklang
 und seines Mantels Wind was hinter ihm war.
 Er aber sagte sich, sie kämen doch;
 sagte es laut und hörte sich verhallen.
 Sie kämen doch, nur wärens zwei
 die furchtbar leise gingen. Dürfte er
 sich einmal wenden (wäre das Zurückschaun
 nicht die Zersetzung dieses ganzen Werkes,
 das erst vollbracht wird), müßte er sie sehen,
 die beiden Leisen, die ihm schweigend nachgehn: (ll. 15-41)⁵⁹

Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes

...
 And on this single path they came.

In front the slender man in the blue mantle,
 who mutely and impatiently, looked straight ahead.
 Without chewing his strides ate the road
 in huge bites; his hands hung,
 heavy and clenched out of the falling folds,
 and knew no longer of the light lyre,
 which had ingrained itself into his left
 like rose tendrils on an olive branch.
 And his senses were as if split in two:
 for while his sight raced ahead like a dog,
 turned around, came and again far away,
 and waiting stood at the next turn,—
 his hearing stayed behind like a smell.
 Sometimes it seemed to him as if it reached
 Back to the footsteps of those other two,
 who were to follow for this whole ascent.

Then once more it was just the climbing's echo
 and his mantle's wind that were behind him.
 But he told himself they *did* come
 said it out loud and heard the words die away.
 They *did* come, only they were two
 Who walked with frightening softness. If he
 might once turn around (if looking back

⁵⁹ Rilke, Werke: KA, Band 1, 500-03. All German quotes from "Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes" are from this edition.

were not the crumbling of this entire work,
so near completion), he would have to see them,
those two light ones, who followed him in silence: (ll. 15-41)⁶⁰

The way or road from the underworld to the world of the living defines the ascent of the three characters. Orpheus's stride devours the path in big bites: "fraß sein Schritt den Weg / in großen Bissen," whereas Eurydice's movement is restricted by her long shroud: "Sie aber ging an jenes Gottes Hand, / den Schrittbeschränkt von langen Leichenbändern / unsicher, sanft und ohne Ungeduld." Hermes as the divine mediator is the God of Gait—of going, moving, traveling: "Gott des Ganges." He guides the souls to the underworld and his feet are endowed with wings. While Eurydice's irrevocable possession by death is poignantly anticipated, as we first see her, confined and unsure in her walk, Orpheus's inability to bring to fruition his mission appears in the scattering and confusion of his senses.

Orpheus's senses are fundamentally split in two: "seine Sinne waren wie entzweit." No coherence or harmony between them is possible in Rilke's poem. In this way, Orpheus's poetic figure fails in what Rilke would later formulate as his poetics of the senses, of the sensory perceptions that can transmute into one another and that enrich and expand each other in the widening circle of the adjacent senses, finally able to touch each other. His distraught senses experience walking, the kinetic, spatial, and existential movement of transition, as thoughtless, rash devouring, where Orpheus forgoes taste, texture, and digestion for what seems to be a faster progress and movement. The disjunction of the senses intensifies in Orpheus's renunciation of his hands and his sense of touch as an essential part of his art of music and song. His hands have forgotten the touch of the lyre and the sound of its music; they are heavy, stiff, and immobile. His vision and his hearing also pertain to his senseless—meaningless and perceptually empty, going. His gaze runs forward while his hearing lags behind him like a sense of smell. It is not Orpheus's smell that is left behind but rather his sensory ability, the sniffing itself. His vision as a figurative dog races forward to catch a glimpse of the human world and become a harbinger of life. Then, having traversed the spatial distance up to the next turn on the road to life, vision stops and waits for Orpheus's stride to catch up with his gaze scanning the distances ahead, the turn obstructing Orpheus's view. Although his vision embodied in a dog turns around, "umkehrte," while impatiently awaiting Orpheus, the glance back in the dog metaphor can never reach back to the imperceptibly walking God and newly dead beloved. Then the dog of vision implicitly turns into a dog of hearing that pricks up his ears straining to perceive the sound of the otherworldly pair walking, a sound that cannot be heard. This failure of perception, which permeates the poetic representation of the senses in "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes," accelerates into yet another transformation of Orpheus's sensory perception down the vicious circle of the ungraspable sensory experiences. The sensory dog now slows down to sniff and to inhale the scent of presence of the walking Hermes and Eurydice. Conversely, the animal's own scent lingers behind so that it can reach Eurydice and cross paths with her senses. Yet, Orpheus's walking senses—discordant, excessively agitated, and confused, in all their figurative transformations, unified by the figure of the dog, are restricted by the injunction that he should not to look back. This ban on his senses divides them in their perceptions while making them unable to perceive anything beyond themselves. Doomed to perceptual solipsism, Orpheus can distinguish only his own walking and his own voice. While his hearing deceptively seems to

⁶⁰ Snow, trans., "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes," *New Poems* [1907], 170-177. See 171, 173.

reach back to the God and his beloved's footsteps, he can hear only the rustle of the wind in his mantle. His urgent attempt to convince himself that they are following him by uttering out loud: "They *did* come," "Sie kämen doch," is redoubled only by the echo, as his own words die away. Yearning to receive a response, a mere sensory confirmation from those walking behind him, he receives none.

While Orpheus's senses are spatially scattered, uncoordinated in their perception, and delusion-ridden, Eurydice's senses have closed up in the self-sufficiency of her being; she does not need to perceive and to communicate with the outside world. Thus, both man and woman are deprived of their perceptual capabilities in the poignantly divided world of the poem. Their diametrically opposed sensory incapacity underscores the failure of Orpheus's attempt at bringing back his wife from the underworld.

Sie war in sich, wie Eine hoher Hoffnung,
und dachte nicht des Mannes, der voranging,
und nicht des Weges, der ins Leben aufstieg.
Sie war in sich. Und ihr Gestorbensein
erfüllte sie wie Fülle.
Wie eine Frucht von Süßigkeit und Dunkel,
so war sie voll von ihrem großen Tode,
der also neu war, daß sie nichts begriff.

Sie war in einem neuen Mädchentum
und unberührbar; ihr Geschlecht war zu
wie eine junge Blume gegen Abend,
und ihre Hände waren der Vermählung
so sehr entwöhnt, daß selbst des leichten Gottes
unendlich leise, leitende Berührung
sie kränkte wie zu sehr Vertraulichkeit.

Sie war schon nicht mehr diese blonde Frau,
die in des Dichters Liedern manchmal anklang,
nicht mehr des breiten Bettes Duft und Eiland
und jenes Mannes Eigentum nicht mehr.

Sie war schon aufgelöst wie langes Haar
und hingegeben wie gefallner Regen
und ausgeteilt wie hundertfacher Vorrat. (ll. 60-81)

She was within herself, like a woman rich with child,
and thought not of the man who walked ahead,
and not of the path that rose into life.
She was within herself. And her having-died
filled her like abundance.
As a fruit full of sweetness and night,

she was full of her own great death,
which was still so new, that she grasped nothing.

She was in a new virginity
and untouchable: her sex had closed
as a young flower at approach of evening,
and her hands had been so weaned
from marriage, that even the light god's
infinitely soft, guiding touch
afflicted her like too great an intimacy.

She was no longer this blonde wife,
Who echoed often in the poet's songs,
no longer the wide bed's scent and island,
and that man's property no longer.

She was already loosened like long hair,
and given over like fallen rain,
and handed out like limitless supply. (ll. 60-81)⁶¹

Death possesses Eurydice. Rilke's notion of life as defined by going, infinite transitions (as in Rodin's sculptures), and sensory experience cannot transform Eurydice anymore, as she has reached the state of completion, her final destination. This self-contained state of death is described as fullness and fulfillment, reminiscent of that of a woman "rich with child." While her metaphorically pregnant state has received life (the child) in Eurydice's being, as well as the ripeness, the utter plenitude of life in the ripe fruit (note the alliteration on "F" emphasizing this ultimate fullness: fulfilled, fullness, and fruit); *erfüllt*, *Fülle*, and *Frucht*, it is, in fact, death that fills her being: "ihr Gestorbensein / erfüllte sie wie Fülle"; "Wie eine Frucht von Süßigkeit und Dunkel, / so war sie voll von ihrem großen Tode." Eurydice's enclosure within herself is commensurate with her death, whose enormity—spatial in its size and full roundness, visual in its darkness, and tactile and gustatory in the fruit's texture and sweetness, turns her self inwards. Her in-volution does not allow for any interference or input from the exterior world. Her sense of touch repels any contact, sealing her within herself, as her sex closes in its new virginity like the evening blossom gathering its petals. Even Hermes's guiding hand, touching her ever so softly, unbearably violates her new inner seclusion, where touch does not seek proximity but rather guarantees distance. Her givenness to death is irrevocable like a loosened hair or fallen rain. Her newly found state evokes only the beauty of her long sweeping tresses, the delicateness of the closed flower, and the appetizing deathly sweetness of the fruit, but it utterly excludes her sense of touch and her ability to see the man or the road ahead. In fact, Eurydice is described as a visual object, as a sort of artwork. In its fullness, it rivals a Rodin sculpture, like "The Inner Voice," but its death sets her apart from Rodin's living sculptures, as she is nearly immobile, blind, thoughtless, untouchable, utterly bereft of perception. And yet, according to Rilke, even death when represented in Rodin's art is living. This is how Eurydice comes to life in her inaccessible realm of death. Rilke captures her death as a deprivation of her senses. Yet,

⁶¹ Snow, trans., "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes," *New Poems* [1907], 175, 177.

Eurydice's death lives on in his superb poetic representation, as the poet was the first one to rework the Orphic myth by focusing on and delicately describing the heroine: as a flower closing its cup before sleep and as a woman expecting a child and perpetuating life.

Still, exactly the fragmentation and separation of the senses in Rilke's early treatment of the Orphic myth is what constitutes the failure of Orpheus's heroic descent into the underworld and inability to retrieve his beloved.⁶² While Orpheus's senses are scattered and lack the circular integration of the senses that Rilke's poetic theories posit, Eurydice's perceptual world is closed onto itself. She does not experience, as her death has overwhelmed her. This death of sensation, doubling the fullness of Eurydice's death, exposes the dangers of Rilke's middle-period poetic practice: the danger of the autonomy of the artwork, defined by its contours, inaccessible to the processes of transformation that will perpetuate life and death in their fluidity in Rilke's late poetry and, in particular, in his Sonnets to Orpheus. A perfect work of art, bound by its contours, Eurydice cannot transcend death. This is a failure of the divided senses that Rilke will overcome in his late poetry by newly refashioning the Orphic myth.

On Orphic Synaesthesia

The fragmentation of the senses in "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes" reflects the scientifically imposed separation of the senses discussed in Crary's Technique of the Observer. This separation of the senses was established by Helmholtz's and Müller's nineteenth-century texts. The phonograph as a device of recording and reproducing sound will then offer Rilke a way through the sensory impasse with its synaesthetic translations interpreted by Rilke technologically, poetically, and mythically.

As we saw in the introduction to this dissertation, the aesthetic discourse on the Wagnerian total artwork (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) fused with the mystical discourse on transcendence, in which synaesthetic and ecstatic merger would overcome the fragmentation of the modern world. This is how the mystical Russian Symbolists imagined the transfiguration of reality through art. Yet, there was also a scientific way to think of the senses at the turn of the century. The scientific discourse on perception established the separation of the five human senses and recovered the physiological body of the experiencing subject in the nineteenth century, as Jonathan Crary has argued.

However, Crary also shows that scientists experimented with electrically cross-connecting the senses. Nineteenth-century scholars discovered that the same sensations could be caused by a multiplicity of stimuli while the same cause—for instance, an electric impulse—can cause widely diverging sensations across the human sensorium:

An important landmark in the field of physiological optics and in the formation of the new observer was the publication of Johannes Müller's *Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen*, beginning in 1833... The most influential part of Müller's work was his study of the physiology of the senses... Müller made the most widely known statement of the subdivision and specialization of the human sensory apparatus... The theory was based on the discovery that the nerves of the different senses were

⁶² The failure of Orpheus's attempt to rescue Eurydice from death in Rilke's poem has been variously interpreted. See, for instance, Segal 120-125 and de Man, "Tropes (Rilke)" 46-49.

physiologically distinct, that is capable of one determined kind of sensation, and not of those proper to the other organs of sense. It asserted quite simply—and this is what makes it an epistemological scandal—that a uniform cause (for example, electricity) generates utterly different sensations from one kind of nerve to another. Electricity applied to the optic nerve produces the experience of light, applied to the skin the sensation of touch...

Emil Dubois-Reymond... seriously pursued the possibility of electrically cross-connecting nerves, enabling the eye to see sounds and the ear to hear colors, well before Rimbaud's celebration of sensory dislocation...⁶³

As interpreted within the Symbolist logic of Rilke's and Ivanov's poetry, Orphic art, and its associations with light and electric light, as we saw in Skriabin's and Ivanov's work, seems to lie at the heart of the synaesthetic cross-connection of the senses. Similarly, light animates Rodin's works in its encounters with the sculpted surfaces, making them living artworks, endowed with all the human senses (vision, hearing, touch). Light and the electric impulse become the synaesthetic stimuli *par excellence*, as they can trigger sensations across the human sensorium. To translate Müller's discoveries into the physio-aesthetic language of the senses and the arts: aesthetic signs (verbal, pictorial, and musical) can trigger sensations not only in their respective artistic medium, but also across the other arts. Conversely, cross-modal aesthetic stimuli (words, sounds, images) can cause the same sensation, be it visual, musical, or tactile.

The Orphic principle fulfills these cross-modal associations across the arts and the senses and thus counteracts the separation imposed by the optical and physiological discoveries of the nineteenth century. The senses mystically converge, beyond their corporeal and sensory separation, being embodied in the pieces of divine flesh, violently torn apart—those living Rodinian fragments: hands, walking torsos, limbs, or busts (See Fig. 36). In Rilke's last "Sonnet to Orpheus," Orphic song creates the "magic power at [the] senses' crossroads, / the [sense] of their strange encounter;" "Zauberkraft am Kreuzweg deiner Sinne, / ihrer seltsamen Begegnung Sinn" (2.29, my italics). In Rilke's work, Orpheus is the center and the crossing of the senses, fervently pursued by scientists experimenting with electricity. Orpheus overcomes the divide of the senses in his mystical power as a god and in his association of poetry, music, and vision. In this sense, we cannot talk any more about synaesthesia in its Romantic poetic sense (think of Brentano), as its discourse has shifted in view of the scientific and technological advances of modernity. During the nineteenth century, the senses are scientifically torn apart, and synaesthesia becomes impossible. This fragmentation of the human sensorium triggers a chain reaction of attempts across the arts, the sciences, and the technologies to reclaim the sensory totality, the "cross-road of the senses" of which the modern subject was irretrievably deprived.

Orpheus and the Phonograph

Now we will examine how Rilke strives to attain an experientially whole, unified world through the synaesthetically informed Orphic myth. Synaesthetic transfers reconnect Rilke's paradoxically divided lyric world of his Sonnets to Orpheus, and Rilke thus envisions the phenomenological recovery of complete synaesthetic experience, of the visual and musical

⁶³ Jonathan Crary, "Subjective Vision and the Separation of the Senses," Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) 89-93.

Orphic body in his poetry. Both the linguistic paradoxes and the mythic death of the Orphic figure emphasize the impossibility of Rilke's utopian aesthetics. Still, the living fragments of the dismembered Orphic body synaesthetically regenerate the world (just like the perfect living sculpted fragments of Rodin work), by evoking the multiplicity of the arts and the senses along the sensory circle where synaesthetic transfers create the wholeness of experience.

The structure of Rilke's new poetically reinvented world is inherently synaesthetic and interartistic, moving between Orphic poetry and music, and passing into dance and light. In Rilke's work, the scattered body of Orpheus metaphorically parallels the circular complementation, not the synthetic unification annihilating difference, of the arts and the senses. Besides, the power of Orpheus as a poetic figure resonates with the capacity of modern technology to transform the world synaesthetically. We will now see how Orpheus as a poetic figure is endowed with the faculty of phonographic translation of visual traces into sounds, a translation that also anticipates further synaesthetic and interartistic transfers, projected into the future. This anticipation of primordial Orphic and technologically attained phenomenological wholeness of experience defines Rilke's synaesthetic theory and embeds it in the current discourses about synaesthesia as resonating both with mystical and mythological transfiguration and with the scientific and technological achievements of the time. Rilke's essay "Primal Sound," *Ur-Geräusch* (1919) figures the synaesthetic poetic act as a phonographic translation, conflating the primordial syncretism of the natural trace as a token for sound with the phonograph's promised potentiality of technologically translating the visual into the musical. The essay was written two years before the feverish creative act of February 1922 brought into existence Rilke's Sonnets to Orpheus, *Die Sonette an Orpheus* (1922), and I examine the essay alongside Rilke's Orphic sonnets.

Before we turn to Rilke's Sonnets to Orpheus, Viacheslav Ivanov's and Rainer Maria Rilke's respective treatment of Orpheus merits a brief discussion. From the outset, I want to note that there is no known direct influence between Rainer Maria Rilke and the mystical Russian Symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanov. Rilke's poetry was brought to Viacheslav Ivanov's attention in the 1920s, but he read only Rilke's early "Book of Hours."⁶⁴ For Ivanov, Goethe and Novalis remained the best poets Germany had produced, and he translated their works with passion and dedication.⁶⁵ What brings together Rilke's and Ivanov's literary projects is their synaesthetic conceptualization of Orpheus. With its treatment of loss, violent dismemberment, and triumph of art over death, the Orphic myth held an irresistible sway over the *fin-de-siècle* artistic imagination, resonating with ideas of the fragmentation of the modern world and its subsequent aesthetic transcendence. The figure of Orpheus informed the works of Rainer Maria Rilke, as it did the poetry and essays of the Russian Symbolist poet and theoretician Viacheslav Ivanov, who identified Aleksandr Skriabin with the new hypostasis of Orpheus. The transformational poet and musician Orpheus, priest of Dionysius, son of Apollo—the god of the sun and the arts, traverses the underworld to reclaim his wife Eurydice, stolen by Death. Through his song, Orpheus wins back Eurydice but loses her again, as he fails to obey Hades' injunction not to look back at her

⁶⁴ K. M. Azadovskii, "Viacheslav Ivanov i Ril'ke: Dva rakursa, Russkaia literatura: Istoriko-literaturnyi zhurnal," vol. 3, 115-27, 2006.

⁶⁵ Fluent in German and trained as a scholar at the Berlin University, Ivanov was of formidable erudition. He relinquished his academic career in favor of his artistic endeavors and became one of the most important poets in the second, mystically oriented generation of Russian Symbolists (along with Aleksandr Blok and Andrei Belyi).

until they exit the Underworld. Finally, Orpheus experiences a violent death at the hands of the raging Maenads, who tear him to pieces. Yet, his song lives on, as his head floats on his lyre down the river Hebrus. The divine origins of Orpheus and the structure of the Orphic myth perfectly blend the musical, poetic, and visual principles, making Orpheus a productive figure for synaesthetic exploration.

The figure of Orpheus promised the transfiguration of reality for Viacheslav Ivanov and a return to a primordial synthesis of the divided world for Rilke. Both Rilke and Ivanov believed in the transformative power of poetry and art, manifested in Orpheus's song. For them, Orpheus is a musician-poet whose art can conquer death. In this sense, the Orphic myth simultaneously captures the transformational and interartistic impulses of Symbolist poetry. Yet, death is a necessary precondition for Orphic transformation, as Orpheus dies twice. Rilke understands this death as the complement to life, as the regeneration of the world in music and poetry while Ivanov conceptualizes it as a transition to a higher state of being, presumably realized by Skriabin through his death in 1915. However, in Rilke's poetry, the dismembered Orphic body incarnates the multiplicity of the senses and the arts in the figure of synaesthesia and destabilizes and defies the simple linguistic binary and paradoxical lyric structure of Rilke's life—death; love—loss; permanence—change; and affirmation—negation.

In his "Sonnets to Orpheus," Rilke imagines the completeness of human experience as a return to the primordial, synaesthetic, originally whole song of Orpheus. For Rilke, human existence is fundamentally split into two halves: of the here and now and of the Beyond or the Open; of life and death; of love and loss or departure; of promise or affirmation and negation; of permanence and change. The Orphic realm, on the other hand, is synthetic, as it brings together both halves of human existence. Furthermore, it is predicated on the transformation and flow between the two, which is not simply binary but circular, encompassing the five senses and all the arts. Orphic poetry as music, breath, wind, and metamorphosis reconnects the two realms through the poet: "Breathing, you invisible poem! / World-space in pure continuous interchange / with my own being"; "Atmen, du unsichtbares Gedicht! / Immerfort um das eigne / Sein rein eingetauschter Weltraum," 2.1. Rilke captures this constant interchange in the dispersal of the scattered God in nature, and we see the poet identifying himself as a hypostasis of Orpheus—thus, the interchange, the divine or artistic dispersion is both Orphic and poetic: "Erect no monument. Allow the rose / to unfurl each year on his behalf. For it's Orpheus. His metamorphosis / in this, in that." 1.5 (ll. 1-4). Orphic essence is in itself metamorphic, as the sound pattern implies: ORPHEus and metaMORPHosis. The infinite divinity of Orpheus permeates the finite world in the image of the fleeting rose, in this and that.

Simultaneously, Rilke casts himself as an Orphic poet in yet another fashion—by memorializing the untimely death of the promising young dancer Vera (Wera) Ouckama Knoop (1900-1919), to whom *Sonnets to Orpheus* are dedicated. Vera was a childhood playmate of Rilke's daughter, Ruth Rilke, and, in November 1921, Rilke had requested from Vera's mother, Gertrud Ouckama Knoop, more details about her daughter's death. Their letter exchange, offering Rilke's belated consolation to the mother, culminated in his wish for a keepsake to remind him of Vera. On January 1, 1922, Rilke received a specially prepared package chronicling Vera's final stages of leukemia in anticipation of her death. Vera's mother did not enclose any personal text herself: she did not share any sentiments and did not provide any

explanations. In a matter-of-fact way, Rilke learnt that, in her illness, Vera's supple body gradually grew stiffer, and, from dance, Vera turned to music, and finally to drawing just before her death:

Tänzerin erst, die plötzlich, den Körper voll Zögern,
anhielt, als göß man ihr Jungsein in Erz;
trauernd und lauschend—. Da, von den hohen Vermögern
fiel ihr Musik in das veränderte Herz. (*Das Sonett an Orpheus*, 1.25, ll. 5-8)

Dancer first, whose body, full of hesitation,
suddenly stopped—as if your youth were being cast
in bronze (grieving; listening). Then, from
the powers above, music fell into your altered heart. (“Sonnet to Orpheus,” 1.25, ll. 5-8)⁶⁶

In the *Sonnets*, Rilke captures Vera's journey from life to death as an interartistic initiation. From the vigor of her dance, she faltered, and her movement was arrested into a frozen bronze, reminding us of Rodin's sculpture “The Inner Voice”: “grieving; listening”; “trauernd und lauschend.” Cast motionless in her beautiful youth, the dancer has turned to intense listening, and the art of music guides the dancer in her listless listening along the circle of the arts and the senses, from life to death. The transformation of her body also alters her inwardly; her “altered heart” prefigures the dancer's stepping into the death, into the Open: “it [her blood] stepped through the hopelessly open gate”; [ihr Blut] “trat in das trostlos offene Tor” (1.25, l.14). Thus, in Rilke's recasting of Vera's death, the arts facilitate her transition from life to death. In this way, Rilke's *Sonnets* reflect on the two important episodes of the myth of Orpheus: his attempt to rescue Eurydice from the Underworld through his art, and the dispersal and interchange of the Orphic body in nature, meant to regenerate the world. By conjoining poetry, music, dance, and drawing, as well as the multiplicity of the human senses, Rilke captures the Orphic wholeness because both the arts and the senses, as defined by the living and creative body, open up a pathway into death and prefigure death so as to fulfill the Orphic synthesis.

Rilke's most interartistic “Sonnet to Orpheus,” 2.18, is addressed to the deceased dancer Vera and renders her transition from life into death, as mediated by the arts and the senses:

Das Sonett an Orpheus, 2.18

Tänzerin: o du Verlegung
alles Vergehens in Gang: wie brachtest du's dar.
Und der Wirbel am Schluß, dieser Baum aus Bewegung,
nahm er nicht ganz in Besitz das erschwungene Jahr?

Blühte nicht, daß ihn dein Schwingen von vorhin umschwärme,
plötzlich sein Wipfel von Stille? Und über ihr,
war sie nicht Sonne, war sie nicht Sommer, die Wärme,
diese unzählige Wärme aus dir?

⁶⁶ Edward Snow, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, 55.

Aber er trug auch, er trug, dein Baum der Ekstase.
Sind sie nicht seine ruhigen Früchte: der Krug,
reifend gestreift, und die gereifere Vase?

Und in den Bildern: ist nicht die Zeichnung geblieben,
die deiner Braue dunkler Zug
rasch an die Wandung der eigenen Wendung geschrieben?

“Sonnet to Orpheus,” 2.18

O dancer: your steps translating
all vanishing into act: what lines they traced!
And the final spin, that tree of motion,
did it not whirl into itself the fleeting year?

Did it not put forth its crown of stillness—so that
your earlier figures swarm within it? And up above
was it not summer, was it not sun—all that heat
from you, that measureless radiant warmth?

But it bore, it bore, your tree of ecstasy.
Are not these its quiet fruits: the jug,
with its ripening stripes, and the fully ripened vase?

And in pictures: does not the drawing remain,
That dark stroke of your eyebrow
Sketched swiftly on the wall of their turning?

The first line establishes the progression of the poem as a “translation,” “Verlegung.” We follow the “transfers” that the dancer enacts, mediating between Rilke’s two halves of existence: life and death, permanence and change, space and time. Initially, the dancer’s steps convert all “vanishing,” or decaying into her act. Both “vanishing” and “act, gait, movement,” “alles Vergehens” and “Gang,” derive from the verb “to go,” “gehen.” Yet, the dancer translates the negatively charged decay and passing away into the becoming and forward motion of her act while the poet eternalizes her dance in his etymological move from vanishing, dying, “alles Vergehens” to the permanence of the nominalized movement, “Gang.”

The “final spin” of the dance, “Der Wirbel am Schluß,” performs a number of metaphorical leaps. Its finality is existential, as it implies the transition from life to death, reminding us of Vera’s demise. Then, the dancer’s spinning body transforms into a “tree of motion,” poetically enhanced by the alliteration on “B” in the German: “Baum aus Bewegung.” The tree gives body to the whirling motion, phonetically and phenomenologically blending the spatial and temporal dimensions of dance. Rilke extends the space-time tree metaphor into the second quatrain where the treetop is figured as a “crown of stillness” within which “earlier figures swarm.” The image fluctuates between the tree remembering its slow natural growth,

inscribed in its crown, and the poised dancer at the end of her act, her body harking back to the unfurling of its kinaesthetic figures.

In addition to conflating the synthetically complementary notions of permanence and change, space and time, poetry and dance, Rilke opens up the symbolic dimension of “Sonnets to Orpheus” with the image of the tree. Rilke’s sonnets begin with the creation of a tree ex nihilo: “A tree arose. O pure transcendence! / O Orpheus sings! A tall tree within the ear!” 1.1. The tree is composed out of the sound of Orpheus’s song and Rilke’s poetry. It represents music, poetry, and dance, in the later sonnet. Its natural growth in sonnet 1.14 further corroborates its participation in the flow between life and death: “A thing of succor rises from the dark / and its hues may gleam with the jealousy // of the dead, those who strengthen the earth.” 1.14. The colorful plant is inseparably intertwined with the dead bodies enriching the soil, the dark earth it feeds on. The tree and its fruits become a reminder of death in Sonnet 1.13:

Voller Apfel, Birne und Banane,
Stachelbeere... Alles dieses spricht
Tod und Leben in den Mund...

Wird euch langsam namenlos im Munde?
Wo sonst Worte waren, fließen Funde,
aus dem Fruchtfleisch überrascht befreit.

Wagt zu sagen, was ihr Apfel nennt.
Diese Süße, die sich erst verdichtet,
um, im Schmecken leise aufgerichtet,

klar zu werden, wach und transparent... (1.13, ll. 1-12)

Ripe apple, blackberry and banana,
nectarine... These all speak
death and life into the mouth...

Does all grow slowly nameless in your mouth?
Where words once were, discoveries flow,
set free from the fruit’s flesh, amazed.

Dare to say what you call “apple.”
This sweetness that first condenses, thickens,
and then, finely sublimed in taste,

grows clear, awake, transparent... (1.13, ll. 1-12)

The sweetness, texture, and flavor of the fruits speak “death and life into the mouth.” The sensuous quality of the tree is, however, inherently connected to both death and life. The fruits expand the image of the kinaesthetic, spatial, temporal, and musical tree now into a tree of taste. Rilke’s poetic language also attempts, ironically, to transcend its naming function and become

another sense, that synaesthetic sense at the crossroads of the senses. Rilke's language aspires to fulfill the Orphic primordial encounter of poetry, music, dance, taste, touch, and vision, thus achieving the Orphic synthesis of existence. Let us remember that the tree, its fruit, the dance are all "Orpheus. His Metamorphosis / in this, in that."

Going back to sonnet 2.18, we see the dancer and the tree further associated with vision and light and touch and warmth: "was it not summer, was it not sun—all that heat / from you, that measureless radiant warmth?" (ll. 7-8). The transition from life to death that the poem enacts emerges in the gradual introduction of various senses. At first, we experience the kinesthesia of the dancing body, oscillating between stillness and movement. With the sunlight and the warmth of the dancer's body, we move to the less dynamic senses. The dancer-tree becomes a "tree of ecstasy"; etymologically, it is a tree that stays, immobile, beyond itself. The fruits allude to taste and death, as we saw in sonnet 1.13, and here the fruits also turn into the inanimate objects of a Cézannean still-life, a *nature morte*, or "dead nature": "Are not these its quiet fruits: the jug, / with its ripening stripes, and the fully ripened vase?" Even the participles of maturity "ripening" and "ripened" progress from the ever becoming present participle and the implicit conjugated present verb "ripens" that constitutes the second half of the word "striped," "**reifend gestreift**," to the past participle that has reached the full completion of maturity, "**die gereifere** Vase," static in its enclosure between article and noun.

The pictures in the concluding tercet of 2.18 realize the complete immobilization of the dancer toward her death. They are reminiscent of Vera's attempts at artistic expression just before her death, as her body grew motionless and frozen in a pictorial fashion: "And in pictures: does not the drawing remain, / That dark stroke of your eyebrow / Sketched swiftly on the wall of their turning?" The dancer's drawings preserve her turning motion in the dark stroke of her eyebrows forever inscribed on the wall. The parallel between the spatial static wall and the dancer's turning appears also in Rilke's poetic language, as wall and turning, "Wandung" and "Wendung" are not only alliterative but also nearly homonymic. In fact, as the dancer retreats from movement into stillness, inanimateness, and finally death, the poet ensures her passing into the open Beyond and the synthetic whole, as he takes over the artistic expression in the final lines with the "dark stroke" that is "written," "geschrieben." The dark stroke of Vera's eyebrows transmutes then into the trace of the poet's pen. Thus, sonnet 2.18 delineates the artistic journey to death as a creative self-realization mediated by music, painting, drawing, dance, and poetry as well as by all the senses. Still, although allegedly enhancing life with death, the mediating arts and the senses as another manifestation of Orpheus's dismembered flesh seem never to attain wholeness. Rilke's propositional paradoxes, his poetry's flux in stasis and permanence in change, not only affirm but also question his Orphic utopia. The only resolution of this paradoxical world of language and concepts in Rilke's poetry emerges in the realm of the senses: in eating the apple in Sonnet 1.13, as it dissolves into sweetness and textured, fleshy thickness, not in naming the fruit "apple." In Rilke's synaesthetic and interartistic mediation between life and death, logical impossibilities are canceled out by the senses. Any sentient fragment, any Rodinian living surface, any experience can constitute a synaesthetic whole in the moment of perception.

Rilke's 1919 essay "Primal Sound," *Ur-Geräusch* articulates a synaesthetic theory of poetry by using as its figurative foundation the phonograph, the exciting new device for

encoding and reproducing sound that Rilke experienced in the 1890s. In a physics class during Rilke's school years, Rilke recounts, the professor and his students built a simple version of the phonograph. They put together a funnel, as the receiver into which the boys will speak, and a sensitive brush bristle attached at the end of it, as the needle that would vibrate in response to their voices and record the sound waves onto a rotating cylinder, coated with a thin layer of wax. As the students spoke or sang into the funnel, meandering writing would emerge on the slowly rotating roll. When the curves of the inscribed notation were retraced, the voices of the boys would be resurrected coming out of the funnel, which acted this time as the speaker. What impressed itself indelibly on young Rilke's receptive mind was the engraved line of mysterious writing that can then be put again under the needle and transformed into sound:

At that time and all through the intervening years I believed that that independent sound, taken from us and preserved outside of us, would be unforgettable. That it turned out otherwise is the cause of my writing the present account. As will be seen, what impressed itself on my memory most deeply was not the sound from the funnel but the markings traced on the cylinder; these made a most definite impression.⁶⁷

Interestingly, Rilke's failed expectations of an unforgettable sonic memory reveal not so much the prevalence of one impression, that of writing, over another, that of sound, but the fusion of visual and auditory memories. Together they create the potential of the trace of writing to be invoiced. Later in his years at the Parisian *École des Beaux-Arts* during his study of anatomy, Rilke recollects how the memory of the scratched traces, "jene der Walze eingeritzten Zeichen," surfaces in a moment of epiphany, as his glance captures in passing the intricate engravings of the skull suture, its contours and grooves:

By candlelight—which is often so peculiarly alive and challenging—the coronal suture had become strikingly visible, and I knew at once what it reminded me of: one of those unforgotten grooves, which had been scratched in a little wax cylinder by the point of a bristle!

And now I do not know: is it due to a rhythmic peculiarity of my imagination that ever since, often after the lapse of years, I repeatedly feel the impulse to make that spontaneously perceived similarity the starting point for a whole series of unheard-of experiments?

...*What* is it that repeatedly presents itself to my mind? It is this:

The coronal suture of the skull (this would first have to be investigated) has—let us assume—a certain similarity to the close wavy line which the needle of a phonograph engraves on the receiving, rotating cylinder of the apparatus. What if one changed the needle and directed it on its return journey along a tracing which was not derived from the graphic translation of sound but existed of itself naturally—well, to put it plainly, along the coronal suture, for example. What would happen? A sound would necessarily result, a series of sounds, music...

...what variety of lines, then, occurring anywhere, could one not put under the needle and try out? Is there any contour that one could not, in a sense, complete in this way and then experience it, as it makes itself felt, thus transformed, in another field of sense? (40-41)

Rilke's recollection conflates the experiment-oriented technological spirit of his time, mirrored in the phonograph, the innovative device for sound writing and reproduction, with the synaesthetic flight of his imagination, envisioning the sound reproduction of the seemingly

⁶⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Primal Sound," in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone. Film. Typewriter*, eds. Timothy Lenoir and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, trans. and intro. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999) 38-42. For the original German, see Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

engraved seams of the human skull. In fact, the very name of the apparatus—*phono-graph*, is synaesthetically informed, conjoining the visual, graphic dimension of encoded sound and the sound waves reproducing the sound. Rilke brings his illusory experiments into the realm of poetry and nature, as the tantalizing quality of these “unheard-of experiments” lies in their task to decipher and translate into sound lines and contours in nature that have never been encoded. The resulting “primal sound,” “Ur-Geräusch, would be “a series of sounds, music,” the transformation of visual sensory experience into auditory sensory experience. This process of decoding the unreadable traces of nature would “complete” the phenomenological experience of natural lines, and we can add, of any contours that delimit and delineate objects. Rilke markedly designates this natural synaesthetic experience not as resulting from “a graphic translation of sound,” the reading into sound of the artificially created trace on the waxed roll of the phonograph; at the same time, he posits the immanent synaesthetic translatability of the phenomenal world.

After spelling out how technology can make the world synaesthetically manifest and phenomenologically bring it to consciousness, Rilke proposes a synaesthetic theory of poetry. He laments the dominance of sight in modern European poetry and propounds the poetic contribution of all five senses to poetry, as in Arabic poetry for instance:

And yet the perfect poem can only materialize on condition that this world, acted upon by all five levers simultaneously, is seen, under a definite aspect, on the supernatural plane, which is, in fact, the plane of the poem. (41)

The achievements of the microscope, of the telescope, and of so many devices which increase the range of the senses upward and downward: do they not lie in *another* sphere altogether, since most of the increase thus achieved cannot be interpreted by the senses, cannot be experienced in any real sense? It is perhaps not premature to suppose that the artist, who develops the five-fingered hand of his senses (if one may put it so) to ever more active and more spiritual capacity, contributes more decisively than anyone else to an extension of the several sense fields... (42)

But if we are looking for a way by which to establish the connection so urgently needed between the different provinces now so strangely separated from one another, what could be more promising than the experiment suggested earlier in this recollection? (42)

Rilke’s essay curiously negotiates between the supernatural plane of the united senses and the metaphorical language of mechanical contraptions. The five senses are now “levers” that can bring the poem into existence, make it sensuous and sentient. Furthermore, the figure of the poet is placed in the company of technological devices increasing the range of the senses: the telescope and the microscope. Yet, the “five-fingered hand” of the artist’s senses, his technological tool, surpasses the potentiality of scientifically manufactured devices. The telescope and the microscope can only enhance the visibility of objects but do not offer them to human experience directly, by synaesthetically transcending the abysmal, vast spaces between the five senses, as the poet would. What the telescope and microscope lack is the transformative aspect of the poet’s work, or the translation that the phonograph can effect. Unlike the perception-enhancing devices, synaesthetic poetry does not simply alter and adjust a pre-given object, but rather translates it into a diametrically inaccessible sensory realm and attains a previously unintelligible and unheard-of experience.

Similarly, if we were to look for an instrument, a tool, or a means, “ein Mittel,” for establishing the connection between the senses, the author proposes again the phonograph experiment that would manifest nature’s inherent music. The implicit comparison between the phonograph and the poet figures them as tools “promising” to bridge the senses in an act of valorized though seemingly impossible translation. The poetic act equals the technological revelation of nature, anticipated as a promise of the future. Thus, technology and poetry join forces in their utopian attempts to reconnect the senses and attain the world in a synaesthetic technologically informed future. Synaesthetic translation is not artistic or creative; it is revelatory, as it unveils the phenomenological richness of the world and offers completeness of experience.

As I write this, I have before me the diagram which I have always used as a ready help whenever ideas of this kind have demanded attention. If the world’s whole field of experience, including those spheres which are beyond our knowledge, be represented in a complete circle, it will be immediately evident that when the black sectors, denoting that which we are incapable of experiencing, are measured against the lesser, light sections, correspond to that which is illuminated by the senses, the former are very much greater.

Now the position of the lover is this: that he feels himself unexpectedly placed in the center of the circle, that is to say at the point where the known and the incomprehensible, coming forcibly together at one single point, become complete and simply a possession, losing thereby, it is true, all individual character. This position would not serve for the poet, for individual variety must be constantly present for him; he is compelled to use the sense sectors to their full extent, as it must also be in his aim to extend each of them as far as possible, so that his lively delight, girded for the attempt, may be able to pass through the five gardens in one leap.

As the lover’s danger consists in the nonspatial character of his standpoint, so the poet’s lies in his awareness of the abysses which divide the one order of sense experience from the other: in truth they are sufficiently wide and engulfing to sweep away from before us the greater part of the world—who knows how many worlds? (41-42)

To illustrate his poetics of the senses, Rilke refers to a diagram of the whole field of experience, previously drawn by him (See Fig. 20.)⁶⁸ It represents a circle with dark sectors signifying the unknowable and lighter sectors evoking the respectively marked five realms of the senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Circular arrows cross the dark sections, transitioning from one sense to another: from the largest sector of sight, *Gesicht*, to the second largest, hearing, *Gehör*, and the three narrow segments of touch, taste, and smell—*Tastsinn*, *Geschmack*, *Geruch*. Above the circle, we can see Rilke’s drawing of a phonograph, with the meandering engravings of the needle on the roll clearly demarcated, a drawing of a skull with a similarly wavy coronal suture, and a drawing of the extracted, abstract curvy trace itself. Rilke uses the visual medium to argue by means of pictorial similarity the feasibility of his synaesthetic phonographic experiment and thus relinquishes linguistic difference (to invoke the Saussurean sign as an assemblage of a signifier and a signified) that would undermine the project of synaesthetic translation. Still, can the contours delineated by Rilke be put under the needle and invoiced? Can poetic writing as a visual trace be also put under the needle and turned into sound?

⁶⁸ The diagram is reproduced in Silke Pasewalck, “Rilkes Zeichnung zum Aufsatz Ur-Geräusch,” *Die Fünffingrige Hand* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002) 20.

Interestingly, Rilke compares and differentiates between the lover's position and the poet's position as fulfilling the synaesthetic project. The lover's danger lies in the annihilation of space and his location at the point of merger of sensory and incomprehensible experience where no differentiation is possible. On the other hand, poetry is both spatial and visual—in its ability to extend the sense sectors and to overcome them in a single leap across the five sensory gardens—and spatial and linguistic, relying on articulation and difference, mapped out as the perceivable regions of the senses divided by dark abysses. This implicit articulation in spatiality of black and light areas allows for the crossing over, for the translation from one sensory realm to another. This binary code of the perceivable and the incomprehensible is also spatial by being extendable. Love's fusion, on the other hand, results in non-articulation and non-spatiality; it exists at the synthetic center of the senses and not where the senses can transmute into each other, complete each other, creating the fullness of experience. In this sense, Rilke's synaesthetic project in its spatial-visual, linguistic, and auditory aspects does not conflate the senses, as love would do, but rather insists on their difference so as to make them individual, amenable to translation, and thus perceivable. This spatial-linguistic synaesthetic theory renders writing a contour that can be translated into sound. Yet, the very articulation and differentiation of writing makes it untenable, belonging to the future, always anticipating the transition from one sense to another, from one art to another to complete the cycle.

Finally, Rilke's theoretical and poetic projects posit the possibility of synaesthetically translating nature, the life cycle, and the human condition with its unique situations. That is, Rilke attempts to capture synaesthetically the untranslatable and the unrepresentable by trying nostalgically to regain a lost experiential wholeness, which the senses and the arts mediate. He looks back on the time before the scientific severing of the senses, and he looks forward toward the technological and poetic reconstitution of complete experience. Yet he resides in the temporal interim where synaesthetic wholeness is afflicted by the dark chasms separating the senses, the poet's danger of articulation and differentiation, and the undifferentiated confounding of the senses, the lover's danger of synaesthetic conflation. This productive oscillation between the two synaesthetic (im)possibilities of the circle of the senses and the merger of the senses perpetuates the interartistic impulses Rilke's poetry triggers, impulses most recently embodied in the Rilke-Projekt, an internet site intended to inspire and featuring the setting to music and sound painting of Rilke poetry.⁶⁹ As with Salome's interartistic history and synaesthetic metaphors and Skriabin's synaesthetic ideas of illuminated music, Rilke's use of synaesthesia promotes interartistic exchanges, thriving in the interplay between a lost primordial Orphic order and a future technological potentiality of synaesthesia come true, of synaesthesia experienced.

To sum up, this chapter discusses Rainer Maria Rilke's aesthetic principles rooted in the plastic arts, and, in particular, in the work of Rodin, and the synaesthetic abstractions Rilke uses to capture phenomenologically the synaesthetically living things or the lived experience of things. It squares his lyric translations of visual and musical objects with his interartistic Orphic poetic practice and his theory of synaesthesia, developed in the essay "Primal Sound." Rilke's essay figures the synaesthetic poetic act as an act of phonographic translation, suggesting that visual traces in nature can be technologically translated into musical sounds. So, Rilke's synaesthetic theory resonates both with the Orphic myth and mysticism in his poetry and with the current fascinating scientific and technological discoveries. Rilke's poetry anticipates the

⁶⁹ See < <http://www.rilke-gedichte.de/rilke-projekt.htm>>. Accessed on September 28, 2008.

coming into being of interartistic and synaesthetic things, *Dingwerdung* across the arts and the senses, by seeking their completion in the primordial Orphic, yet technologically motivated wholeness of sensory experience.

Appendix 1

Ur-Geräusch¹

Zur Zeit, als ich die Schule besuchte, mochte der Phonograph erst kürzlich erfunden worden sein. Er stand jedenfalls im Mittelpunkte des öffentlichen Erstaunens, und so mag es sich erklären, daß unser Physiklehrer, ein zu allerhand emsigen Basteleien geneigter Mann, uns anleitete, einen derartigen Apparat aus dem handgreiflichsten Zubehöre geschickt zusammenzustellen. Dazu war nicht mehr nötig, als was ich im folgenden aufzähle. Ein Stück biegsamerer Pappe, zu einem Trichter zusammengebogen, dessen engere runde Öffnung man sofort mit einem Stück undurchlässigen Papiers, von jener Art, wie man es zum Verschlusse der Gläser eingekochten Obstes zu verwenden pflegt, verklebte, auf diese Weise eine schwingende Membran improvisierend, in deren Mitte, mit dem nächsten Griff, eine Borste aus einer stärkeren Kleiderbürste, senkrecht abstehend, eingesteckt wurde. Mit diesem Wenigen war die eine Seite der geheimnisvollen Maschine hergestellt, Annehmer und Weitergeber standen in voller Bereitschaft, und es handelte sich nur noch um die Verfertigung einer aufnehmenden Walze, die, mittels einer kleinen Kurbel drehbar, dicht an den einzeichnenden Stift herangeschoben werden konnte. Ich erinnere nicht, woraus wir sie herstellten; es fand sich eben irgendein Zylinder, den wir, so gut und so schlecht uns das gelingen mochte, mit einer dünnen Schicht Kerzenwachs überzogen, welches kaum verkaltet und erstarrt war, als wir schon, mit der Ungeduld, die über dem dringenden Geklebe und Gemache in uns zugenommen hatte, einer den andern fortdrängend, die Probe auf unsere Unternehmung anstellten. Man wird sich ohne weiteres vorstellen können, wie das geschah. Sprach oder sang jemand in den Schalltrichter hinein, so übertrug der in dem Pergamente steckende Stift die Tonwellen auf die empfängliche Oberfläche der langsam an ihm vorbeigedrehten Rolle, und ließ man gleich darauf den eifrigen Zeiger seinen eigenen (inzwischen durch einen Firnis befestigten) Weg wieder verfolgen, so zitterte, schwankte aus der papierenen Tüte der eben noch unsrige Klang, unsicher zwar, unbeschreiblich leise und zaghaft und stellenweise versagend, auf uns zurück. Die Wirkung war jedesmal die vollkommenste. Unsere Klasse gehörte nicht eben zu den ruhigsten, und es möchten nicht viele Augenblicke gewesen sein, da sie, gemeinsam, einen ähnlichen Grad von Stille zu erreichen fähig war. Das Phänomen blieb ja auch überraschend, ja recht eigentlich erschütternd, von einem Male zum anderen. Man stand gewissermaßen einer neuen, noch unendlich zarten Stelle der Wirklichkeit gegenüber, aus der uns, Kinder, ein bei weitem Überlegenes doch unsäglich anfängerhaft und gleichsam Hilfe suchend ansprach. Damals und durch die Jahre hin meinte ich, es sollte mir gerade dieser selbständige, von uns abgezogene und draußen aufbewahrte Klang unvergeßlich bleiben. Daß es anders kam, ist die Ursache dieser Aufzeichnung. Nicht er, nicht der Ton aus dem Trichter, überwog, wie sich zeigen sollte, in meiner Erinnerung, sondern jene der Walze eingeritzten Zeichen waren mir um vieles eigentümlicher geblieben.

Vierzehn oder fünfzehn Jahre mochten seit jener Schulzeit hingegangen sein, als mir dies eines Tages zum Bewußtsein kam. Es war in meiner ersten Pariser Zeit, ich besuchte damals mit ziemlichem Eifer die Anatomie-Vorlesungen an der École des Beaux-Arts, wobei mich nicht so sehr das vielfältige Geflecht der Muskeln und Sehnen oder die vollkommene Verabredung der

¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Ur-Geräusch." The essay is copied in full from <<http://www.rilke.de/>>. Accessed on September 26, 2008.

inneren Organe anzusprechen schien, als vielmehr das aride Skelett, dessen verhaltene Energie und Elastizität mir damals schon über den Blättern Lionardos sichtbar geworden war. So sehr ich nun auch an dem baulichen Ganzen rätselte - es war mir zu viel; meine Betrachtung sammelte sich immer wieder zur Untersuchung des Schädels, in dem, sozusagen, das Äußerste, wozu dieses kalkige Element sich noch anspannen konnte, mir geleistet schien, als ob es gerade hier überredet worden wäre, sich zu einem entscheidenden Dienst bedeutend anzustrengen, um ein letzthin Gewagtes, im engen Einschluß schon wieder grenzenlos Wirkendes in seinen festesten Schutz zu nehmen. Die Bezauberung, die dieses besondere, gegen einen durchaus weltischen Raum abgeschlossene Gehäus auf mich ausübte, ging schließlich so weit, daß ich mir einen Schädel anschaffte, um nun auch so manche Nachtstunde mit ihm zuzubringen; und, wie es mir immer mit den Dingen geht: nicht allein die Augenblicke absichtlicher Beschäftigung haben mir diesen zweideutigen Gegenstand merkwürdigerweise angeeignet, - meine Vertrautheit mit ihm verdanke ich ohne Zweifel zu einem gewissen Teile dem streifenden Blick, mit dem wir die gewohnte Umgebung, wenn sie nur einige Beziehung zu uns hat, unwillkürlich prüfen und auffassen. Ein solcher Blick war es, den ich plötzlich in seinem Verlaufe anhielt und genau und aufmerksam einstellte. In dem oft so eigentümlich wachen und auffordernden Lichte der Kerze war mir soeben die Kronen-Naht ganz auffallend sichtbar geworden, und schon wußte ich auch, woran sie mich erinnerte: an eine jener unvergessenen Spuren, wie sie einmal durch die Spitze einer Borste in eine kleine Wachsrolle eingeritzt worden waren!

Und nun weiß ich nicht: ist es eine rhythmische Eigenheit meiner Einbildung, daß mir seither, oft in weiten Abständen von Jahren, immer wieder der Antriebe aufsteigt, aus dieser damals unvermittelt wahrgenommenen Ähnlichkeit den Absprung zu nehmen zu einer ganzen Reihe von unerhörten Versuchen? Ich gestehe sofort, daß ich die Lust dazu, so oft sie sich meldete, nie anders, als mit dem strengsten Mißtrauen behandelt habe, - bedarf es eines Beweises dafür, so liege er in dem Umstande, daß ich mich erst jetzt, wiederum mehr als anderthalb Jahrzehnte später, zu einer vorsichtigen Mitteilung entschließe. Auch habe ich zugunsten meines Einfalls mehr nicht anzuführen, als seine eigensinnige Wiederkehr, durch die er mich, ohne Zusammenhang mit meinen übrigen Beschäftigungen, bald hier, bald dort, in den unterschiedlichsten Verhältnissen überrascht hat.

Was wird nun immer wieder innerlich vorgeschlagen? Es ist dieses:

Die Kronen-Naht des Schädels (was nun zunächst zu untersuchen wäre) hat - nehmen wirs an - eine gewisse Ähnlichkeit mit der dicht gewundenen Linie, die der Stift eines Phonographen in den empfangenden rotierenden Zylinder des Apparates eingräbt. Wie nun, wenn man diesen Stift tauschte und ihn, wo er zurückzuleiten hat, über eine Spur lenkte, die nicht aus der graphischen Übersetzung eines Tones stammte, sondern ein an sich und natürlich Bestehendes -, gut: sprechen wirs nur aus: eben (z. B.) die Kronen-Naht wäre -: Was würde geschehen? - Ein Ton müßte entstehen, eine Ton-Folge, eine Musik ...

Gefühle - welche? Ungläubigkeit, Scheu, Furcht, Ehrfurcht -: ja, welches nur von allen hier möglichen Gefühlen verhindert mich, einen Namen vorzuschlagen für das Ur-Geräusch, welches da zur Welt kommen sollte ...

Dieses für einen Augenblick hingestellt: was für irgendwo vorkommende Linien möchte

man da nicht unterschieben und auf die Probe stellen? welchen Kontur nicht gewissermaßen auf diese Weise zu Ende ziehen, um ihn dann, verwandelt, in einem anderen Sinn-Bereich herandrängen zu fühlen?

In einer gewissen Zeit, da ich mich mit arabischen Gedichten zu beschäftigen begann, an deren Entstehung die fünf Sinne einen gleichzeitigeren und gleichmäßigeren Anteil zu haben schienen, fiel es mir zuerst auf, wie ungleich und einzeln der jetzige europäische Dichter sich dieser Zuträger bedient, von denen fast nur der eine, das Gesicht, mit Welt überladen, ihn beständig überwältigt; wie gering ist dagegen schon der Beitrag, den das unaufmerksame Gehör ihm zuflößt, gar nicht zu reden von der Teilnahmslosigkeit der übrigen Sinne, die nur abseits und mit vielen Unterbrechungen in ihren nützlich eingeschränkten Gebieten sich betätigen. Und doch kann das vollendete Gedicht nur unter der Bedingung entstehen, daß die mit fünf Hebeln gleichzeitig angegriffene Welt unter einem bestimmten Aspekt auf jener übernatürlichen Ebene erscheine, die eben die des Gedichtes ist.

Eine Frau, der solches in einem Gespräche vorgetragen wurde, rief aus, diese wunderbare, zugleich einsetzende Befähigung und Leistung aller Sinne sei doch nichts anderes, als Geistesgegenwart und Gnade der Liebe, - und sie legte damit (nebenbei) ein gutes Zeugnis ein für die sublimen Wirklichkeit des Gedichts. Aber eben deshalb ist der Liebende in so großartiger Gefahr, weil er auf das Zusammenwirken seiner Sinne angewiesen ist, von denen er doch weiß, daß sie nur in jener einzigen gewagten Mitte sich treffen, in der sie, alle Breite aufgebend, zusammenlaufen und in der kein Bestand ist.

Indem ich mich so ausdrücke, habe ich schon die Zeichnung vor mir, deren ich mich, als eines angenehmen Behelfes, jedesmal bediente, so oft ähnliche Erwägungen sich aufdrängten. Stellt man sich das gesamte Erfahrungsbereich der Welt, auch seine uns übertreffenden Gebiete, in einem vollen Kreise dar, so wird es sofort augenscheinlich, um wieviel größer die schwarzen Sektoren sind, die das uns Unerfahrbare bezeichnen, gemessen an den ungleichen lichten Ausschnitten, die den Scheinwerfern der Sensualität entsprechen.

Nun ist die Lage des Liebenden die, daß er sich unversehens in die Mitte des Kreises gestellt fühlt, dorthin also, wo das Bekannte und das Unerfaßliche in einem einzigen Punkte zusammendrängt, vollzählig wird und Besitz schlechthin, allerdings unter Aufhebung aller Einzelheit. Dem Dichter wäre mit dieser Versetzung nicht gedient, ihm muß das vielfältig Einzelne gegenwärtig bleiben, er ist angehalten, die Sinnesausschnitte ihrer Breite nach zu gebrauchen, und so muß er auch wünschen, jeden einzelnen so weit als möglich auszudehnen, damit einmal seiner geschürzten Entzückung der Sprung durch die fünf Gärten in einem Atem gelänge.

Beruhet die Gefahr des Liebenden in der Unausgedehnthet seines Standpunkts, so ist es jene des Dichters, der Abgründe gewahr zu werden, die die eine Ordnung der Sinnlichkeit von der anderen scheiden: in der Tat, sie sind weit und saugend genug, um den größeren Teil der Welt - und wer weiß, wieviel Welten - an uns vorbei hinwegzureißen.

Die Frage entsteht hier, ob die Arbeit des Forschers die Ausdehnung dieser Sektoren in der von uns angenommenen Ebene wesentlich zu erweitern vermag? Ob nicht die Erwerbungen

des Mikroskops, des Fernrohrs und so vieler, die Sinne nach oben oder unten verschiebender Vorrichtungen in eine andere Schichtung zu liegen kommen, da doch der meiste, so gewonnene Zuwachs sinnlich nicht durchdrungen, also nicht eigentlich "erlebt" werden kann. Es möchte nicht voreilig sein, zu vermuten, daß der Künstler, der diese (wenn man es so nennen darf) fünffingrige Hand seiner Sinne zu immer regerem und geistigerem Griff entwickelt, am entscheidendsten an einer Erweiterung der einzelnen Sinnggebiete arbeitet, nur daß seine beweisende Leistung, da sie ohne das Wunder zuletzt nicht möglich ist, ihm nicht erlaubt, den persönlichen Gebietsgewinn in die aufgeschlagene allgemeine Karte einzutragen.

Sieht man sich aber nun nach einem Mittel um, unter so seltsam abgetrennten Bereichen die schließlich dringende Verbindung herzustellen, welches könnte versprechender sein, als jener, in den ersten Seiten dieser Erinnerung angeratene Versuch? Wenn er hier am Schlusse, mit der schon versicherten Zurückhaltung, nochmals vorgeschlagen wird, so möge man es dem Schreibenden in einem gewissen Grade anrechnen, daß er der Verführung widerstehen konnte, die damit gebotenen Voraussetzungen in den freien Bewegungen der Phantasie willkürlich auszuführen. Dafür schien ihm der, während so vielen Jahren übergegangene und immer wieder hervortretende Auftrag zu begrenzt und zu ausdrücklich zu sein.

Soglio, am Tage Mariae Himmelfahrt 1919.

CONCLUSION

What does synaesthesia mean at the *fin de siècle* and how does it impact early Modernist literature, music, and visual art? Blending the sensory perceptions of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, synaesthesia surges as a scientifically documented subjective experience at the turn of the century and becomes appropriated as a metaphor and interartistic strategy by the time's literature, music, and art in their aesthetic experiments. As we saw over the course of this dissertation, synaesthetic experience informs Wagner's synthetic utopia of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which conflates all the arts, engages all the senses, and is meant to enable knowledge through feeling and sensory perception in the composer's music dramas. In their Wagnerian aspirations, symbolists and decadents alike revel in synaesthesia. As in the octet of Baudelaire's poem "Correspondences," synaesthesia seems to unify and transcend the fragmented experience brought by modernization and rationalization in a disenchanting reality. Thus, it brings about the mystical apocalyptic merger in the theories of Russian Symbolism, reflected in the works of Aleksandr Scriabin and Viacheslav Ivanov. Conversely, as in the sestet of Baudelaire's sonnet, Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* delights in the decadent fragmentation of the senses. Language transforms into sensuous imagery and music, and the phenomenology of vision and voice subverts the rational, spiritual logic of the Word. In the play, murder, death, perverse desires, and abnormal sexuality are synaesthetically enhanced and synaesthetically motivated. In 1892, Max Nordau denounced this decadent disintegration of language into sensory corporeality, and stigmatized it as moral, evolutionary, physiological, and mental degeneration. For Nordau, the confusion of the senses is a symptom of man's relapse into the primitive state of a mollusk. Indeed, the specialization and segregation of the five human senses was scientifically established during the nineteenth century, and, within the prevalent scientific discourses of evolution and perception, a confusion of the sensory modalities could only be considered a deviation, or an atavistic relapse. Finally, the influx of technological inventions in the nineteenth century transformed the time's material culture, everyday life, and people's experiences. Technology enhanced and modified perception and reconfigured the human sensorium of the time. So, electric light informed the apocalyptic quests of the Russian symbolists who figured light, electricity, and fire synaesthetically and interartistically. Scriabin, Bal'mont, and Ivanov anticipated the transfiguration of reality by divine light, as well as by electric light as its technological counterpart, which the artists similarly interpreted as striving toward a utopian mystical future. Likewise, Rainer Maria Rilke's experience of the phonograph remained indelible in his memory since his school days so that much later in his life he devoted to the phonograph the enigmatic essay "Primal Sound"; it conceptualizes his poetic theory of synaesthesia in view of technology and its promises of enhancing perception. Rilke's essay was crucial for his synaesthetic project, and he often read it at his poetry readings.¹ A discursive and experiential nexus where literature and the arts, mysticism and aesthetics, and science and technology met, synaesthesia attained enormous resonance at the time, co-opting all fields of intellectual and artistic endeavor.

¹ See Rilke, *Werke: KA*, Band 4, 1042-43.

However, encapsulating a bundle of unrelated sensory perceptions and associating at will sensory modalities and artistic mediums, synaesthesia has been looked down upon as a precious aesthetic mannerism that is offered for the connoisseur to appreciate and marvel at, but has been otherwise deemed unworthy of serious intellectual study. Indeed, as an oddity, irreducible to discursive meaning, synaesthesia requires a completely different analytical approach. This is why this dissertation has aimed to cut across literature, music, and the visual arts of English, Russian, and German Modernism and read them by using the synaesthetic metaphor as an interpretative tool to analyze interartistic texts, musical pieces, and artworks. Such interartistic reading does not privilege language and textuality over visual and musical expression; rather, it finds a common ground for critical inquiry in aesthetic and sensory perception. So as to do justice to synaesthesia as both a metaphor across the arts and a physiological condition, I have relied on thick contextualization; close literary, musical, and visual analysis; and theoretical and scholarly work on literature, music, and visual art. Such intensive study of interartistic modernism has allowed me to demonstrate synaesthesia's significance as a defining trope of early interartistic Modernism.

While laboring to re-establish synaesthesia's significance for our understanding of early European Modernism and the Inter-Arts, I have sought to complicate the current conception of the synaesthetic metaphor. While we undoubtedly see synaesthesia either strive to achieve a mystical merger or reflect upon the fragmentation of the modern world by wishing to retrieve a lost past when the inherent correspondences among man, nature, and god were still legible and transparent to humans, I foreground the future orientation of synaesthesia both in interartistic and conceptual terms. Synaesthesia is not itself a merger; it rather looks forward to a future mystical or aesthetic realization. Synaesthetic anticipation in early Modernist interartistic works clearly emerges in the flourish of artistic projects inspired by Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*. I have shown how the play's web of synaesthetic desires promotes and, in fact, necessitates the projection of textual synaesthesia onto the level of artistic production in illustrations, opera, and dance. As visual and musical gaps in the text, the play's sensuous gazes and voices desire to become illustrated and rendered in music. The luxuriant synaesthetic figuration and the striking image of Jokanaan's severed head: the redness of Jokanaan's mouth which evokes the sound of fanfares, the fragrance of incense, and the color and scent of the pomegranate blossoms and fruit were to be rendered visually by the sensuous lines of Aubrey Beardsley. Richard Strauss would embody Jokanaan's voice as sheer timbre and music in his opera "Salome." Thus, Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* looks forward to its adaptations across the arts; it contains the synaesthetic seeds of its future interartistic dissemination. The play's translation in drawings and music will secure its afterlife on the level of creative production, if we may invoke Benjamin's notion of translation from his "Task of the Translator."

The idea of the play's afterlife conjures up vitalist and decadent notions of life persisting even in death as synaesthetic decay, as we saw in Baudelaire's poem "A Carrion." Thus, the synaesthetic artwork oscillates between life and death in its quest for a future interartistic afterlife. The decapitated John the Baptist and Wilde's textual heroine, crushed under the shields of Herod's soldiers, await their rebirth and regeneration across other mediums. In this sense, my work with the Inter-Arts lays the foundations for a theory of adaptation that does not look back reverentially on the original sources; rather, it murders or erases them thus privileging interartistic translation.

Synaesthetic anticipation figures prominently in the Russian Symbolist religious and aesthetic ideas of the transfiguration of the world, as well. Aleksandr Skriabin, Konstantin Bal'mont, and Viacheslav Ivanov saw this aesthetic and mystical transformation as an artistic act that co-opts all the arts in a synaesthetic *Gesamtkunstwerk* that will bring about the Apocalypse. Still, this is the mystical synthetic utopia of Russian theurgical Symbolism. In practice, the Russian artists strove to approximate this ultimate artwork by synaesthetically mixing the arts and the senses. The images that logically became the focus of their mystical aspirations were those of divine light, fire, and electricity as electric light, cast as powerful natural and supernatural agents that would catalyze the impending Apocalypse. On the one hand, the cluster of fire and light promised divine regeneration. Still, on the other, in their work, Skriabin, Ivanov, and Bal'mont had to negotiate between the synaesthetically living fire, light, and the electric flow, and the annihilating merger of the opposite electric poles. Figured as death by the glaring divine and electric light, electric annihilation would bring about the transfiguration of reality, as well as the end of the world. Thus, while philosophically pursuing the closure and regeneration of the world in death, the two poets and the composer reveled in the synaesthetic confluences of sounds, colors, lights, poetry, and music that promoted further interartistic projects that would lead up to but would not fulfill the merger of the glaring white divine light.

Interestingly, while synaesthetic fragmentation has always been conceived of in negative terms as representing the decline of modern society, Skriabin's and Ivanov's musical and poetic works bring to the fore a positive spin to synaesthetic fragmentation. This is what I have called the benign dispersion of divine light into living colors and sounds. Refracted and dispersed, natural light synaesthetically mediates between man and God as white light in Ivanov's poetry. We can see this positive fragmentation in the poet's synaesthetic dispersion of light into rainbow colors and in Skriabin's breaking of sound into its constitutive partials of the harmonic series, as used by the composer in his Mystic chord. The Mystic chord further disperses sound into tone colors as timbre and into the colorful electric lights of his electric keyboard. Finally, this positive fragmentation manifests itself as the basis for Rainer Maria Rilke's salvaging of art-things and continuing of their afterlife through his poems, as well as in his readers' phenomenological experience of his lyric works. Rilke privileges the synaesthetic fragment and the sensory abstractions of Rodin's plastic works (the hand, the voice, and the gait, which evoke all the senses) and keeps them alive in his poetry. The fragmentary artwork, perfect in its incomplete state, surfaces as parallel to the dismembered body of Orpheus, each synaesthetic fragment of which perpetuates the Orphic life and the Orphic artwork.

Ultimately, my future-oriented perspective on synaesthesia as promoting the artwork's interartistic afterlife rectifies another misconception about the metaphorical blending of the senses. Always thought of as a Modernist reaction to modernization, synaesthesia as mystical and aesthetic anticipation actually inhabits the future realm of technology and science, as we saw in terms of Rilke's fascination with phonography, and Skriabin's and Mozer's conceptualization of the organ of twelve electric light bulbs (Fig. 12). We have thus seen how the early Modernist arts co-opt science and technology for their own aesthetic goals. In conclusion, this dissertation has approached its topic through intermedial analysis of literature, music, and visual art; next, it has re-signified the metaphor of synaesthesia at the *fin de siècle*, and, finally, it has inquired into the productive interactions between science and the arts at the turn of the century.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. Oscar Wilde as Salome?



Fig. 2 a. and Fig. 2 b. Hungarian soprano Alice Guszalewicz as Salome.¹



¹ Steven Morris, "Importance of not being Salome," *The Guardian*, Monday July 17, 2000. "Mr. Schroeder discovered a photograph of Alice Guszalewicz, a Hungarian soprano who sang in the opera Salomé in Cologne in 1906. Her jewelry and clothing were almost identical to that of the Wilde figure."



Fig. 2 c. Alice Guszalewicz as Salome.
Source for 2 b-c: In Horst Schroeder, Alice in Wildeland
(Braunschweig, 1994) 33 and 29.



Fig. 3. Domenico Ghirlandaio (1448-1494)
“Feast of Herod and the Dance of Salome,”
Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Italy
Photo Credit : Scala / Art Resource, NY

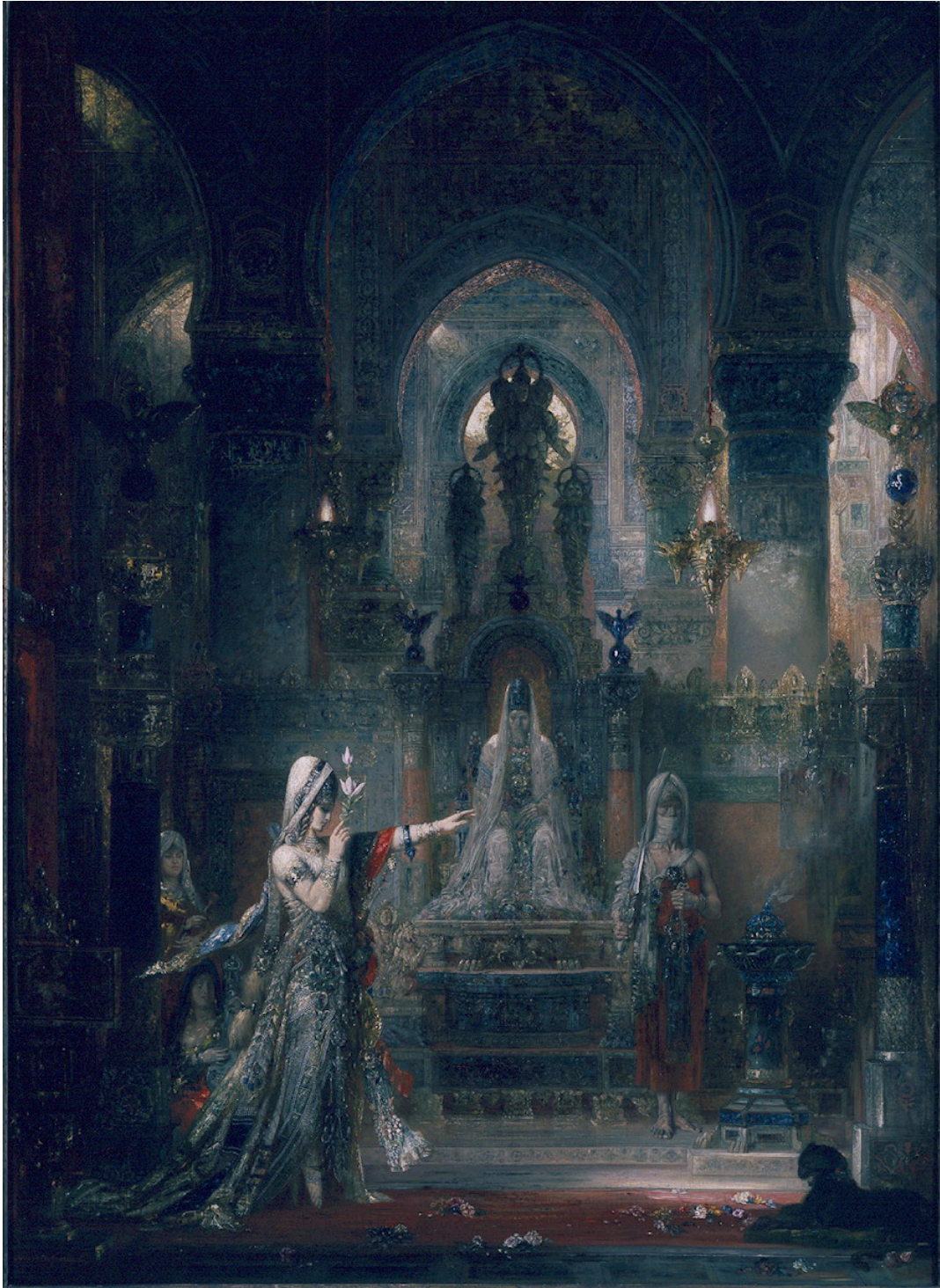


Fig. 4. Gustave Moreau, "Salome Dancing Before Herod," 1876. Oil on canvas. The Armand Hammer Collection. Gift of the Armand Hammer Foundation. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California.



Fig. 5. Aubrey Beardsley, "Enter Herodias," 1894. A Picture from *Salomé*.



Fig. 6. Aubrey Beardsley. "The Toilette de Salomé I," 1894. A Picture from *Salomé*.



Fig. 7. Aubrey Beardsley, "The Black Cape," from *Salomé*.



Fig. 8. Aubrey Beardsley, "The Climax," from *Salomé*.



Fig. 9. Aubrey Beardsley. "Toilette de Salomé II," from *Salomé*.



Fig. 10. Marcus Behmer, Illustration for Salome. "Herodes: Löscht die Fackeln aus. Verbergt den Mond, verbergt die Sterne."



Fig. 11. Marcus Behmer, Illustration for Salome. "Herodes: Ah, es ist kalt hier! Es geht ein eisiger Wind, und ich höre... warum hör' ich in der luft dies Rauschen von Flügeln?"



Fig. 12. Scriabin's Organ of Twelve Electric Light Bulbs
 Source: State Memorial Museum of A. N. Scriabin, Moscow



Fig. 13. Jean Delville, Cover illustration for the Score of "Prometheus"



Fig. 15. Mikhail Vrubel', «Demon Seated,» Oil on Canvas (1890)²



Fig. 16. Mikhail Vrubel, «Knight» Stained-Glass Window (1894-96)



Fig. 17. Mikhail Vrubel, Drawing (1909)

² «Contours «are merely an optical illusion that occurs from the interaction of rays falling onto the object and reflected from its surface at different angles.» (M. Vrubel') Cited in Anthony Parton, Mikhail Larionov and the Russian Avant-Garde (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 46.



Fig. 18. Mikhail Larionov, «Blue Rayonnism,»
Синий лучизм (1912)³



Fig. 19. Mikhail Larionov,
Glass (1911)

³ «Rayonnism is a synthesis of Cubism, Futurism and Orphism... [It] is concerned with spatial forms which are obtained through the crossing of reflected rays from various objects... Painting parallels music while remaining itself.» (M. Larionov). Cited in Camilla Gray, The Russian Experiment in Art (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1986) 138-40.

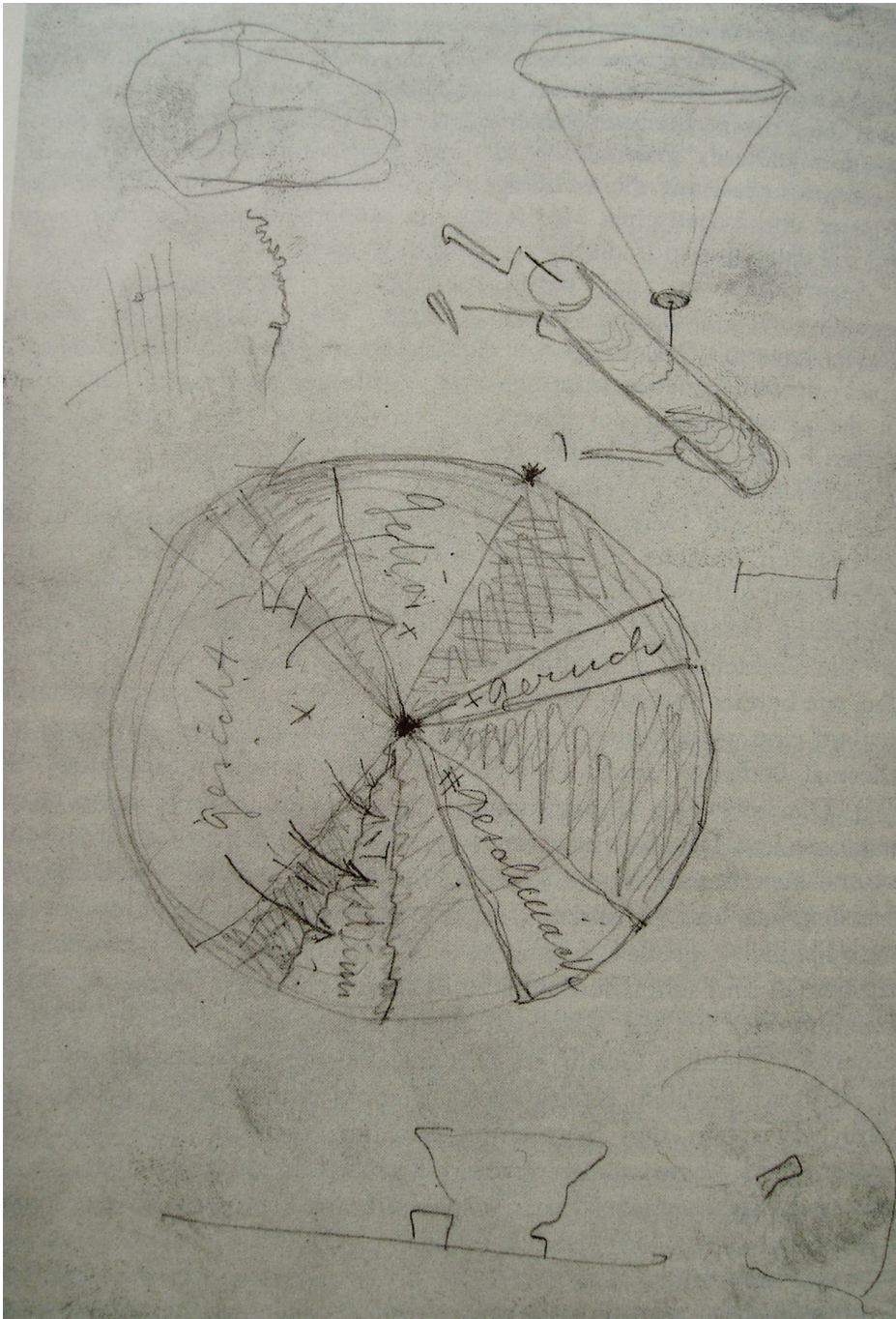


Fig. 20. Rilke's drawing for his essay "Primal Sound." Rilke archive, Bern, Switzerland.
Source: Pasewalck 20.



Fig. 21. Auguste Rodin, "The Gates of Hell"



Fig. 21^a. Tympanum of “The Gates of Hell”
Source: Auguste Rodin, Rodin: Sculptures, Plate 10



Fig. 22. Auguste Rodin, "Inner Voice"

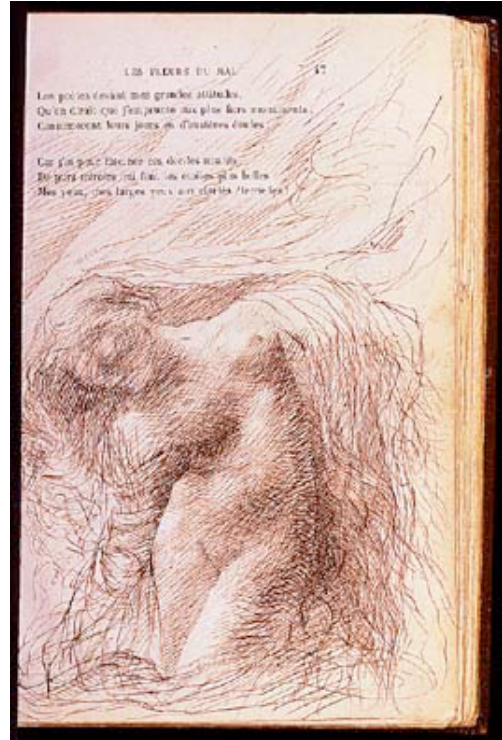


Fig. 23. Auguste Rodin, "La Beauté."
Illustration for Charles Baudelaire's
poem.



Fig. 24. Auguste Rodin, "Inner Voice"



Fig. 25. Auguste Rodin, "The Meditation"



D. 10 Auguste Rodin. Modell zum MONUMENT A VICTOR HUGO. Gips
1890. Meudon. Musée Rodin.

Fig. 26^a and 26^b. Auguste Rodin,
“Monument to Victor Hugo”
Source: Matina Krießbach, Rilke und Rodin.





Fig. 27. Auguste Rodin, "St. John the Baptist Preaching"



Fig. 28. Auguste Rodin, "The Walking Man"

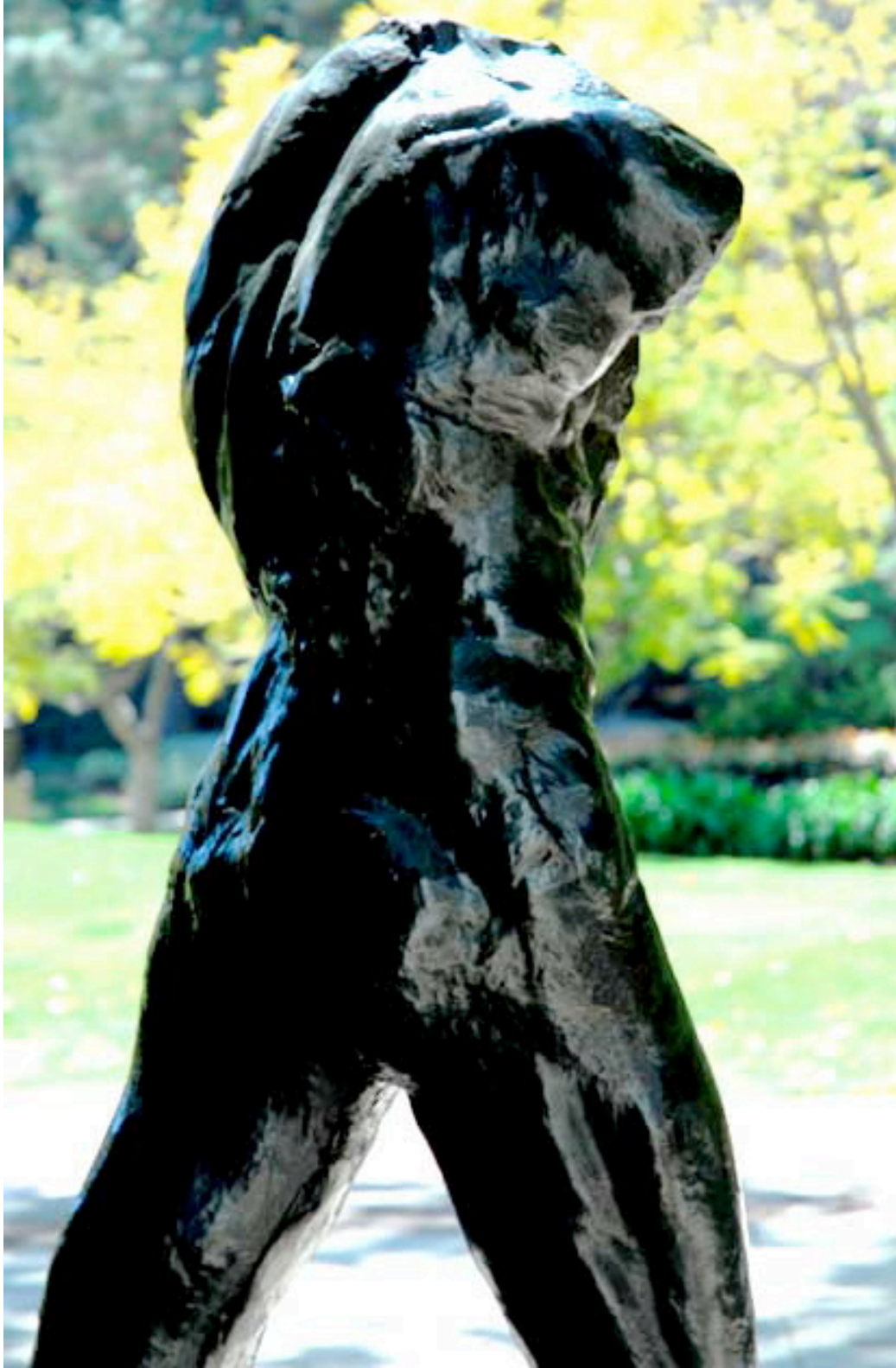


Fig. 29. Auguste Rodin, "The Walking Man," Detail



Fig. 30. Auguste Rodin, study for “The Walking Man”



Fig. 31. Male torso, marble (perhaps Parian), from the island of Miletos, "Severe" early classical style. C. 480-470 BC. The Louvre, Paris. Photo © R.M.N./H. Lewandowski



Fig. 32. Hermes, Eurydice, and Orpheus. Circa 500-400 BCE. Relief. Naples National Museum



Fig. 33. Auguste Rodin, "Orpheus and Eurydice"



Fig. 34. Auguste Rodin, "Orpheus and the Maenads,"
From the Tympanum of "The Gates of Hell"



Fig. 35. Auguste Rodin, "Orpheus"



Fig. 36. Auguste Rodin, Drawer from Basement Studio, Meudon.
Source: Elsen 176.