

“THIS IS POETRY”: U.S. POETICS AND RADIO, 1930-1960

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ABSTRACT

“This is Poetry”: U.S. Poetics and Radio, 1930-1960 examines the significance of radio broadcasting to the theorization and construction of American poetry and poetics in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Poets found in the pervasive and popular mass sound medium resources for poetic experiment, models of communication, and a means to intervene in poetic, cultural, and political debates. I demonstrate how poets generated poetic models of speaking and listening based on how they theorized the capacity of radio broadcasting to facilitate both mass (distal and simultaneous) circulation and the effect of intimate (proximate and personal) communication. Both radio broadcasting and second-generation modernist writing practices developed in an interwar and postwar period of anxiety about political affiliation and rhetoric, propaganda, the position of the United States in the global scene, and the role of literary work in cultural debates. By developing “critically communicative” poetic techniques and texts that proceeded from their ideas about how radio broadcasting functions, I argue, poets negotiated tensions attendant to the literary cultural moment and questions about the potential work of poetry among mass cultural channels.

Through examining the poems, essays, radio dramatic scripts, broadcast recordings, and personal correspondence of second-generation modernists Lorine Niedecker, Louis Zukofsky, Archibald MacLeish, Ruth Lechlitner, and Kenneth Rexroth, this thesis demonstrates how radio enabled poets to investigate the possibilities and limits of mass sound communication for both poetic and public discourse. Chapter one articulates radio broadcasting as a model for intimate non-visual poetic reception that enabled attention to the sounding of regional and marginalized Depression-era voices. Chapters two and three demonstrate how broadcasting enabled interventions into interwar and wartime mass cultural configurations and facilitated critical cultural debate, but also examine how the temporal, commercial, and regulatory structures of broadcasting limited such public interventions. The final chapter addresses how radio broadcasting informed the development of postwar “personalist” oral poetics which engaged intimate, spontaneous strategies of written and oral communication to pose challenges to dominant literary and cultural modes and strictures.

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INTRODUCTION:

Radio Broadcasting and Poetics in the 1930s-1950s

In his preface to the 1939 *New Directions*, editor James Laughlin writes that "[o]ne of the most important new directions of the present time is the use of the radio for literary expression" (Laughlin "Preface" xvii). The *New Directions* annual anthology of late modern innovative writing (founded in 1936) regularly considered the potential of radio for poetic experiment in the late 1930s: in 1937, it featured an essay on radio verse drama; in 1938 it included an example of a radio play; and in his 1939 editorial preface, Laughlin devoted a page and a half to discussing the possibilities that radio offers for poetic work. He suggests that writers and groups scattered across the country organize a "liaison service" to connect and coordinate artistic radio efforts, and even calls for a prominent poetry magazine to publish a "radio page" with schedules of new poetry broadcasts (Laughlin xvii).¹ Such a page never materialized, but writers became widely interested in radio because of its potential to enlarge audiences and reinvigorate poetic experiment as well as its suitability as a site through which to address questions about poetic and public discourse in the emerging era of mass communications.

Radio's ubiquity in the late 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s made it an impossible phenomenon to ignore. It emerged as *the* primary mass medium in the period, becoming a widely-available mode for the mass transmission of information beginning in the early 1920s "boom."² Newspapers and magazines (including new radio magazines) helped promote "radio fever," a phrase that characterized the proliferation of new radio broadcasting stations³ and the purchase of radios. Radio receiver ownership steadily increased: in 1922, 260,000 households owned radios; only five years later, that number had increased to 6.5 million (Balk 42). By 1937, over 80 percent of American

households owned a radio set, in contrast with 40 percent in 1930 (Loviglio 6). As broadcasting entered the 1930s and networks circulated programs nationwide, radios brought news, dramas, music, educational programs, sporting events, variety shows, weather reports, time signals, commercials, political forums, quiz shows, and poetry into all these homes on a daily basis.

Radio's expanding networks and roles, and technological improvements to sound quality by the mid-1930s, generated interest in how poets might take advantage of the medium. As Douglas Kahn writes, for example, "the mere promise of technology" recharged early modernist endeavors but that by the late 1920s artists "confronted changed conditions led by the technical possibilities of [implemented] audiophonic technologies," such as sound film, microphony, electric phonography, amplification, and radio (12). The rise in radio news popularity beginning in the later 1930s, for example, when radio surpassed newspapers in popularity as a source for information, contributed to the medium being understood as the primary source of up-to-date cultural and political reports. In addition to providing new, widely available experiences of listening, radio in the 1930s and 1940s became increasingly available to writers, offering employment and a channel for the reading and distribution of their creative work.

A cursory history of the dominant modes of radio broadcasting in the United States in its first four decades illustrates the multiple changes and configurations writers encountered as they listened to, wrote for, and theorized the medium. Radio broadcasting in the 1920s can be roughly characterized by a proliferation of regional and nationally-affiliated stations with partial-day scheduling, nascent technology that often produced static and cross-talk, and an emerging network system. The later 1920s and 1930s saw

increased regulation, the implementation of advanced technology for better sound, and continuous, mainly network-based broadcasting of a wide variety of popular drama, documentary, music, and news programs. In the later 1930s, the “press / radio wars,” the conflict between network radio and newspaper conglomerates over the extent to which radio would broadcast news, resulted in radio news broadcasting surpassing the popularity of newspaper news reception. Radio in the early 1940s largely shifted into a forum for wartime news and programming, maintaining its network and advertising structures and mass popularity, and after the war maintained its centrality until the early 1950s, when television began to control markets and audiences. Reinventing itself as a medium in the late 1940s and 1950s, radio broadcasting saw a brief resurgence of local and regional programming and a proliferation of FM stations by the later 1950s while the major networks shifted to music-based formats run by nationally-owned chains.

This dissertation explores the “new directions” that the (first) mass medium of radio generated for poetic work, as it was articulated as a mode through which second generation modernist poets could both imagine and enact new forms of public and poetic discourse. Radio poetic exchanges and projects emerged as writers confronted Depression-era and interwar social and political debates and a legacy of avant-garde modernist experimentation that often appeared distanced from “popular” audiences and voices. Radio presented the possibility of new channels for poetry at a politicized moment when many writers sought to write socially-relevant work that both addressed and represented individual and collective members of a large public. Making poetry relevant to the contemporary age, many found, required engaging radio communication and examining how poetry might function in an era of emerging mass communication

and culture. Broadcast radio's emerging public, political, and artistic functions in the 1920s and 1930s grew out of its capacity to address large audiences immediately and simultaneously at great distances. Poets found that radio made available a number of communication modes, as it modeled both mass and intimate dynamics, emphasized sound and listening, showcased multiple (local, national, and international) voices, and modeled possibilities for dialogue and debate.

As radio programs broadcast multiple voices in multiple scenarios, they foregrounded dynamics of vocal communication. Radio, in other words, (in addition to music, sound effects, and live sonic events) broadcast people talking to people. Announcers, newscasters, and presenters directed their comments to distant radio listeners, but also to program participants and live studio audiences (for popular network programs). Some of these speakers delivered straight talks or reports, such as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his "fireside chats," or newscaster Edward Morrow in his transatlantic wartime reports from London. However, many programs relied heavily on dialogue between speakers, as they engaged features of dramatic, interview, and panel discussion genres. Such programs include shows such as the popular dramatized news broadcasts of *The March of Time*, sports and musical programs that featured commentator banter, audience participation programs such as *Vox Pop*, *America's Town Hall of the Air*, and quiz shows, which solicited questions and responses from both live and listening audiences. Radio's capacity to broadcast voices, speakers in conversation, and spoken elements such as ad-libbed and spontaneous (or seemingly-spontaneous) remarks and live question and answer periods differentiated it from prior large-scale public media such as newspapers or magazines. Because radio relies only on sound for

public media such as newspapers or magazines. Because radio relies only on sound for presentation, in its early years in particular (because of its status as a live medium and its widespread engagement of conversational genres) it emphasized, innovated, and developed medium-specific codes for the ways in which people talk to other people.

Despite the wide popularity and cultural centrality of radio broadcasting beginning in 1920s, and the wide and varied ways in which writers engaged the medium throughout the interwar period and the decades following World War II, radio technology and media have not often been discussed by literary scholars in relation to modernist and mid-century writing. In 1997, media historian Michele Hilmes wrote of radio that “[n]o other medium has been more thoroughly forgotten, by the public, historians, and media scholars alike,” (*Radio Voices* xiv) and scholarship of twentieth-century poetics might be added to her list of fields of study that have, until very recently, tended to footnote or ignore the exchanges between radio and literary work. The reasons for the critical gap in radio research are many: the archival record of broadcasts is limited, since most broadcasts particularly in the first few decades of radio were not recorded or saved, and many of those that were have since been lost; the visual orientation of many critical projects and discourses has, according to many critics and theorists, not encouraged attention to sound projects and the study of sound media; the overshadowing of radio by television as the primary (and visual) broadcast medium since the mid-1950s has contributed to the lack of work on radio; the status of radio as predominantly a popular, commercial medium in the United States has also likely contributed to its lack of study until recent cultural studies work has taken interest in its popular and mass aspects. Radio still remains an under-theorized medium in literary critical studies, although, along with

sound technologies such as the phonograph and tape recorder, it has been taken up recently in some critical work.

Several recent literary critical articles articulate how wireless and radio technology and characteristics of radio broadcasting served as models for modernist literary projects. For example, James A. Connor, Jane Lewty, and others have discussed James Joyce's engagement of radio as a unifying device in his experimental novel *Finnegans Wake* (1939).⁴ Connor suggests that early radio opened modernist ears to new modes of communication, as well as "noises, wandering signals, high altitude skips, and super-heterodyne screeches" and "voices all speaking at once" (18), and finds that in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce embeds radio voices and noises in monologues and includes sequences of radio advertising to represent the popular and prevalent new communication medium (20-24). Lewty, describing how radio permits a "convergence of personal and general address," argues that *Finnegans Wake* treats the immediacy and fluidity of radio communication as a "decentralizing, pluralistic force" that creates a new interpretive structure where the reader performs the decoding (Lewty "Aurality"). Sarah Wilson's article "Gertrude Stein and the Radio" (2004) establishes radio as an important formal model for Stein's late poetics; Wilson discusses how 1930s and 1940s programs such as the national forum *America's Town Hall of the Air* figure radio as a contested, contesting, and participatory public sphere made up of dialogic, multiple perspectives, and argues that Stein represents this conversational model in several late works.⁵ Timothy C. Campbell addresses Pound's participation in what Pound himself characterized in *Guide to Kulchur* as the "radio age" through positing wireless technology, and Pound's connection to the network of wireless and broadcasting technology through his typewriter

and microphone, as crucial to the development of the *Cantos* multi-vocal technique (Campbell 112). Each of these essays primarily speaks to the way a particular writer's engagement with radio contributes to the construction of a particular text, emphasizing how radio broadcasting formats and sonic signatures formed models that were taken up in literary works.

In my dissertation, I examine the poetics and texts of second-generation American modernist poets who wrote for radio. While many writers interacted with radio in a wide variety of ways in its first few decades, I have limited my study to those who composed texts specifically for radio and theorized radio in relation to their work. Second generation modernist poets' writing for radio, I believe, largely differentiates their engagement with radio from that of earlier modernists. Attending to radio writing projects also enables me to investigate how writing for radio and thinking through *how* to write for radio produced specific strategies of composition. The five poets I consider in my chapters, Lorine Niedecker, Louis Zukofsky, Archibald MacLeish, Ruth Lechlitner, and Kenneth Rexroth (born 1903, 1904, 1892, 1901, and 1905), developed their writing crafts and poetics – and also, for most, entered adulthood – in the era of radio broadcasting.⁶ Broadcasting proved a crucial context for their work; however, almost no critical attention has been paid to their writing for, speaking on, and theorizing of radio.

My overall argument in *"This is Poetry": U.S. Poetics and Radio, 1930-1960* is that second generation modernist poets generated poetic models of speaking and listening that proceeded from how they theorized the mass and intimate dynamics of radio broadcasting. As they observed the operations of the new mass medium and constructed such models, they differentiated their work from prior modernisms, participated in

cultural debates, and investigated the literary innovations and cultural interventions that broadcasting made possible. My thesis examines the poetics – the theories and strategies of composition – of Lorine Niedecker, Louis Zukofsky, Archibald MacLeish, Ruth Lechlitner, and Kenneth Rexroth in relation to their interactions with and understandings of radio. Each of these poets interacted with radio through writing texts for broadcast or speaking on the air, as well as by listening to and theorizing the medium. Each developed writing strategies, forms, and styles, I argue, in relation to their understanding of the communicative work of radio. I have drawn the first portion of my dissertation title from poet Cid Corman's radio poetry program "This is Poetry," which aired and promoted contemporary poets beginning in the late 1940s. "This is Poetry" invokes the indexical statements often given by radio broadcasters when identifying themselves, their geographical location, or the station over which they speak. As such, it notates the personal, distal, mass, and aural qualities of the medium, where such facts must be identified through speech. It also suggests that "this" – the broadcast voice and the radio situation – is now a way of both describing and disseminating poetry. My dissertation examines the significance of radio as a new possibility for the conception and construction of poetic texts, and how radio became a site in which writers approached and investigated the possibilities and limits of mass sound communication.

By developing poetic techniques and texts that proceeded from their ideas about how radio broadcasting functions, the poets I examine in this dissertation negotiated tensions attendant to their particular literary cultural moment and questions about the potential work of poetry among mass cultural channels. My work participates in the literary critical project of recuperating political, leftist, and popular dimensions of poetry

written in the first half of the twentieth century,⁷ but reframes the conversation in terms of writers' engagement with the popular cultural phenomenon of radio and the communicative dynamics it engendered. Poets' interactions with radio, I argue, encouraged them to evaluate, articulate, and refigure their poetics in terms of the communicative work of radio, and to develop critically communicative poetics. The writers I discuss in my dissertation engage the "communicative" work of radio when they enlist the medium to participate in public and political debates and to articulate positions on the air or in texts written for broadcast. Such writing participates in cultural conversations and attempts to speak directly to readers and listeners through strategies of personal and mass address. As they interacted with the medium, poets developed "critically communicative" strategies that examine processes of dialogue and communication in the era of mass media and the ubiquitous radio voice. Critically communicative writing, as I articulate it in relation to radio, depicts and examines processes of interpersonal interaction, including sites of local or regional speech and occasions of national or international expression. It examines the social dynamics of spoken language and its potential to regulate or challenge social systems such as capitalism and political events such as the Spanish Civil War through the broadcast and circulation of multiple positions and voices. Both radio broadcasting and late modernist writing practices developed in an interwar and postwar period of anxiety about political affiliation and rhetoric, propaganda, the position of the United States in the global scene, and the role of aesthetic or literary work in cultural debates. Poets' interactions with radio produced responses to these social, public, and political questions, in both direct

statements and in the development of poetic techniques that engage radiophonic channels and models.

In the following sections of my introduction, I expand on the literary, cultural, and media contexts in which poets interacted with and theorized radio broadcasting. The first section of this introduction elaborates on the reasons poets found radio a productive site for poetic work by sketching debates central to cultural and literary discourse in the United States in the 1920s – 1950s. I discuss how the literary cultural milieu in which second-generation modernists began publishing motivated many to engage radio broadcasting in relation to their poetic work, and how radio enabled the imagination and development of new "social functions" for poetry. Drawing on cultural histories and theories of radio, which contribute to the emerging field of (cultural) radio studies,⁸ the second section articulates the tension between mass communication and strategies of intimate communication that poets engaged as they examined and participated in the communicative work of radio. All of the writers in my study take up aspects of these dynamics as they write for, speak on, and write about radio, and as they develop radiophonic poetic techniques. They do so to participate in constructing the possibilities for radio broadcasting and to investigate, characterize, and criticize the operations of mass communication. In the final section of the introduction, I summarize each of my dissertation chapters, articulating the radio poetic theorizations and writings of Niedecker, Zukofsky, MacLeish, Lechlitner, and Rexroth. My chapters develop my argument that second-generation modernist poets developed models of listening and speaking that took up the mass and intimate dynamics of radio and contributed to

developing radiophonic poetics that also investigated the possibilities for poetic intervention in literary culture and political debates.

The “social function of poetry”: Negotiating Literary Culture in the 1930s-1950s

The wide social function of poetry could be restored through radio, if poets would prepare themselves to use it.

— Davidson Taylor of CBS radio, quoted in *Poetry* 1941

My dissertation focuses on second-generation modernist writing of the 1930s-1950s in the United States, and differentiates this writing from earlier iterations of modernism in part because of the cultural moment later modernists interacted with as they began their careers. First-generation American modernist poets such as Pound, Eliot, Stein, and H.D. relied on little magazines to distribute their work to relatively small audiences; they broke from Victorian literary conventions by engaging poetic strategies such as Classical allusion, formal fracture, prose rhythms, quotation, and syntactical play; and, with other novelists and poets, they moved to London or Paris, writing in predominantly European centers of early twentieth-century literary activity. Literary moves such as these contributed to the reception of their work as elite and even elitist, even as recent critical work has demonstrated how early modernist work also draws on and speaks to contemporary issues and popular cultural phenomena. I do not claim that the generation of poets who began publishing in the later 1920s and 1930s formed a clean break with earlier modernisms. Zukofsky, Niedecker, George Oppen, Muriel Rukeyser, and other second-generation modernist poets took up many of the practices initiated by early twentieth-century literary innovators.⁹ However, I believe that those poets who participated in later iterations of modernist aesthetic experiment *began* publishing in a

distinctly different cultural milieu, and developed poetic strategies and wrote poems that address wide and “popular” mass audiences and that take up political and social issues in ways that earlier modernisms do not. Second-generation modernist poets came of age in a global scene already fractured by World War I, and confronted a different cultural moment than did earlier modernists.

The decades before and after World War II shifted the cultural and literary climates in the United States, and with these changes writers reevaluated the work of poetry in relation to emerging mass audiences and the contemporary political scene. The relative prosperity of the post-Great War 1920s was abruptly altered by the 1929 stock market crash and subsequent 1930s economic depression. The defining figures and features of 1920s literary modernism (with its coming-of-age in 1922 with the publication of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*) also shifted by the early 1930s as second-generation modernists began publishing; Louis Zukofsky’s guest-editing of the prominent early-modernist little magazine *Poetry* in 1931, and Muriel Rukeyser’s winning the Yale Younger Poets award for her first book *Theory of Flight* in 1935 mark two examples of interventions by the new “garde.” Zukofsky, Rukeyser, and others borrowed from early modernist techniques of fragmentation, collage, and quotation, but also engaged genres such as documentary, modes such as proletarian realism and the lyric, and, as I will argue, communicative strategies modeled after radio broadcasting.¹⁰ Communist-affiliated, leftist, and documentary writers engaged such genres and strategies as they responded to widespread unemployment and poverty exacerbated by mid-1930s drought conditions domestically, and to mounting military tensions, fascist governments, and the Spanish Civil War abroad.

Radio's centrality to public discourse and experience in the interwar and postwar years led writers of many affiliations to take up the medium. First-generation modernists were among those writers who engaged radio as it grew in popularity. Like many writers, they found radio interesting as a new mode of communication and as a potential source or model for modes of speech. Pound, for example, compared the form of his *Cantos* XVIII and XIX to the multiple voices of broadcast radio, where "you know who is talking by the noise they make" (qtd. in Terrell 75).¹¹ First-generation modernists also engaged with radio by speaking over the medium; Eliot, Pound, H.D., and Stein all gave lectures, interviews, or readings on radio in the 1930s and 1940s, and Eliot and Pound in distinctly different ways addressed the public sphere via radio. Ezra Pound famously broadcast political, economic, and fascist speeches on Radio Rome in the early 1940s, and T.S. Eliot broadcast lectures on the BBC in London periodically beginning in 1929. Michael Coyle discusses Eliot's BBC broadcasts given between 1929-1963 in three interrelated articles, describing how Eliot found in radio a medium to engage new and larger audiences and shape ideas about the unifying value of "culture."¹² Coyle also explains how Eliot contrasts cultural "unity" with mass cultural uniformity, and situates Eliot's interest in radio broadcasting in terms of his vision of the mass medium's potential to serve a public, critical, and cultural role, in contradistinction to a more categorical rejection of mass cultural modes by modern cultural theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer ("T.S. Eliot On the Air" 145). The potential for such a role, and for expanding audiences, were hopes of many writers in the period who were drawn to radio broadcasting because of its emerging status as a global, oral, mass medium and because they hoped to help shape the terms of its emergence.

My research indicates, however, that second-generation modernists engaged with radio broadcasting in different ways than earlier modernists who also took up radio in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. In particular, they wrote texts *for* radio, experimented with radiophonic dramatic script forms, and advocated for the broadcast of more poetic and literary work on the radio. Second-generation modernist poets also found the radio a productive site to intervene in cultural, political, and literary debates through broadcasting politically-inflected literary works or literary discussions that took up cultural questions. They imagined radio as a site through which poetry might be popularized and more widely distributed, and through which the functions of poetry might be extended to more directly address and respond to crises in contemporary society.

In texts written for and in relation to radio, second-generation modernist poets invoked conventions and information gleaned from wartime radio news coverage in order to both publicize and examine such coverage; modeled political debates about U.S. intervention in World War II and cultural debates about capitalist individualism versus socialist collectives; designed aural environments showcasing the social dynamics of regional and classed spoken language; called on international citizens to "make their voices heard"; experimented with narrative and narration, pronouns, indexical phrases, and dramatic codes; in the McCarthyist, atomic era, championed pacifism and free speech; and consistently experimented with composition styles and forms, from MacLeish's and Lechlitner's choral radio verse drama to Rexroth's and Niedecker's poems meant to invoke direct, interpersonal communication. Such work spoke to and about popular, political concerns and queried relationships between politics and art, the mass

and the individual, the region and the nation, the autonomy of art and the social contexts and functions of poetry. Poets' interactions with and articulations of radio in these ways enabled them to negotiate the central tensions of literary culture in the period.

Broadcast radio in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, embedded as it was in key cultural debates about mass communications and culture, was an appropriate site for considerations of the social and political functions of poetry. Just as writers in the 1930s and after were forced to articulate their poetics in terms of intersections between modernist aesthetic experiment and Cultural Front popular and politicized writing, radio networks, local stations, government officials, and the general public were engaged in debates in the 1920s and early 1930s over what radio was going to sound like in the United States, who was going to control the airwaves, and what ratio of commercially-sponsored programming versus public interest (i.e. informational, literary, and educational) programming would air. The 1927 Radio Act upheld the governmental precedence of licensure preference to commercial stations, and the 1934 Communications Act, following great debate in Congress and among interested radio parties, similarly upheld practices which granted networks and commercial stations the optimal frequencies; however, the 1934 Act also encouraged networks to provide public interest programming, a move which opened the door to a number of non-sponsored dramatic and other series.¹³ Radio networks, Congress, and the public discussed the potential cultural benefits of literary and "educational" forms of radio programming. As poets engaged with radio, they likely would have been aware of the parallels between literary and broadcasting debates about target audiences, distribution, and dominant trends in subjects.

In a 1941 forum on the market possibilities for poetic work on radio, *Poetry* magazine took up questions about how poetry might be made more socially relevant via broadcasting. In her preface to the forum, which gives practical assistance from radio network executives and writers about the market for radio verse drama, *Poetry* Business Representative Amy Bonner quotes both Davidson Taylor of CBS radio¹⁴ and socialist poet John Wheelwright on the capacity of radio to address diverse and disparate listeners. She asks if poets might take up Wheelwright's and Taylor's challenge to write work that serves a public function. Bonner quotes Taylor's assertion that most poets have neglected to notice that

radio reestablishes with their public the contact which made the troubadours and their humbler colleagues socially significant. The wide social function of poetry could be restored through radio, if poets would prepare themselves to use it. (qtd. in Bonner 281)

Taylor's position, which reaches back to the fourteenth century for an (oral) model of socially-significant poetics and assumes that such a social function has since been lost, emphasizes that radio might bring poetry back to the people. While newspapers and magazines in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also circulated political and socially-engaged poetry, Taylor and others found that radio, with its reliance on the spoken voice and its capacity to address millions at the same time, mobilized such poetry in different ways. Taylor suggests that poets might make use of these capacities, which he finds generate a different kind of "socially significant" contact than recent literary projects and print media enabled.¹⁵ Taylor here invokes the idea that avant-garde and experimental poetics of the first decades of the twentieth century were "difficult" or removed from both access and relevance to the average person. Poetry written for and delivered by radio might expand audiences and reinstate the relevance of poetry, Bonner

suggests through quotation of Taylor. Bonner also quotes Wheelwright, who wrote in the June 1939 issue of *Poetry* that “the social implications of broadcasting” are wide and subtle. Wheelwright finds it crucial that listeners hear, rather than read on the page, the kinds of voices and forms of language that poetry is able to mobilize. In fact, he asserts, “To leave a large part of citizens deaf to poetry is politically dangerous” (qtd. in Bonner 280). Wheelwright suggests here that poems have the capacity to offer crucial and useful perspectives on political and cultural issues, and that *not* circulating poetry widely is detrimental to the lives of people.¹⁶ Wheelwright’s statements also mount a critique of the current state of radio programming; he calls on poets to take up broadcasting in order to contribute to the political economy in which radio is already involved.

Poetry’s forum emphasized that radio might make poetry available and relevant to wide audiences on the cusp of the U.S. entry into World War II in a way, the article suggests, some recent experimental poetries had not been. Radio broadcasting was a particularly engaging site for poetic exploration and experiment in this period both because it offered a chance to circulate poetry on the air to wide audiences and because it offered the potential to publicly participate in political and cultural debates. Such engagement, writers felt, might make poetry relevant to contemporary listeners and readers. Discussions about the potential for radio to enlarge poetic audiences appeared in articles and forums, as I have mentioned, in little magazines such as *New Directions*, *Poetry*, and *Furioso* in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In 1939, the new poetry journal *Furioso* somewhat surprisingly launched its first issue with an open letter from Archibald MacLeish that critiqued the function of little magazines and advocated the poetic

engagement of radio. In his letter, MacLeish critiques the insularity that he found had come to characterize poetry magazines: he writes that

[a] magazine of poetry is a place where poetry gets published. It is not, however, a place where poetry gets read" (MacLeish "Letter" 1).¹⁷

MacLeish argues that inaugurating a new magazine of poetry would only be productive if it can extend its reach to audiences beyond poets and critics. He points to the way in which little magazines, the central mode of high modernist poetic distribution and crucial to the formation of modernist literary communities, to a large extent addressed coterie communities instead of wider publics. Radio, MacLeish offers, can be a way to address these larger and more diverse audiences, and perhaps increase the relevance of poetry.¹⁸

Other poets concurred, finding that radio had the potential to widely circulate poems and poetic ideas in ways that addressed different audiences in new ways. For example, when William Carlos Williams read and spoke about poetry on a radio poetry program in February 1937, Louis Zukofsky wrote excitedly to Williams that his broadcast was "entertaining & could be made that for a wide public" (*Correspondence* 243).

Zukofsky's interest in Williams's broadcast demonstrates how the program showed that radio could be engaged to both educate about contemporary poetics *and* be engaging to a wide array of listeners. Many writers also thought of the radio as a productive site over which to circulate politically-engaged poetry and verse drama and envisioned broadcasting as a way to make poetry relevant to cultural and political debates. In addition to being canonized as the first American radio verse drama, for example, MacLeish's *The Fall of the City* also advocated for U.S. intervention in fascist aggression abroad. The extent of verse drama written for radio during the early 1940s is an

underrepresented component of the domestic war effort, one hard to appreciate sixty years later as most programs were not recorded or not kept and scripts are buried in archives.¹⁹ The radiophonic experiments many poets engaged in the era of broadcast radio attempted to make poetic innovation relevant to current issues and to the examination of shifting cultural questions.

As many have documented, the cultural upheaval throughout the interwar and immediately postwar periods prompted a rapid politicization and attempted depoliticization of writing. While the 1930s fomented socialist, leftist, communist-affiliated, and politicized literary work, leftist literary culture was all but sent underground in the climates of post-World War II legislated anti-Communism. The institutionalization of New Critical literary critical approaches, which canonized the major modernist poets and lauded particular aspects of their poetics, such as their allusive, intellectual, non-"sentimental" and non-overtly-political, well-crafted poems, also contributed to the dismissal of leftist politically-oriented work.²⁰ Following the Second World War, for example, as critics such as Michael Thurston and Walter Kalaidjian document, it became difficult to find publishing venues or audiences for leftist-oriented poetry, and writers such as Rukeyser and Spanish Civil War veteran and poet Edwin Rolfe were tracked by the FBI or called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Thurston explains how an anti-political, anti-popular aesthetic and "set of assumptions dominated American literary institutions for a generation, from the late 1930s until the rise of a newly politicized literary criticism in the 1960s" (7). In other words, the dominant literary critical project during the period of my study was increasingly interested in the traditions of the later work of modernists such

as T.S. Eliot and later modernists such as W.H. Auden, as well as work sanctioned by New Critical *Partisan Review* critics. While many poets writing in this period do not fall neatly into politicized categories such as "Communist" or "southern agrarian," most were compelled to articulate their positions on the parameters of the cultural work of poetry, both in the face of the 1930s and early 1940s sense of a writer's responsibility to speak to political questions *and* in the face of the later 1940s and 1950s cultural injunction *not* to do so.

Along with many writers, the poets I consider in my dissertation engaged radio broadcasting as a way to both participate in and examine an emerging radiophonic and mass media culture. As writers engaged radio, however, they also encountered its potential faults and fault lines – radio's institutional capacity to regulate who speaks, when, and for how long. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, when 88 percent of listeners reported they preferred network to local broadcasting, and networks (based in New York) by 1937 had control of over 93 percent of the broadcasting capacity in the United States (Lenthall 57), writers and speakers on radio were aware that the power to distribute information on such channels could also prove controlling or standardizing. The late 1930s examples of Hitler's broadcasts in Germany or Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre dramatization of *The War of the Worlds* emphasize such potential. Radio did prove to be a site through which poets found new listeners and negotiated the position of poetry in contemporary society. However, poets interested in reaching larger audiences through national radio and in participating in public debates also confronted the complexities of mass radio communication.

Communicative Dynamics and the Intimate Mass Medium

My friends, it's very hot here in Washington tonight.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt, Fireside Chat, July 24, 1933

When Zukofsky described Williams's 1937 radio broadcast in a letter to Pound, he wrote that Williams sounded as "youthful as ever, with a voice almost as pleasant as the President's – even if a bit nervous," demonstrating both familiarity with Roosevelt's voice and close attention to Williams's (*Pound / Zukofsky* 191).²¹ Zukofsky further noted that it was the "nearest [he had] got to [Williams] in six months" (191), indexing how the broadcast of voices on radio can produce the effects of proximity and intimacy, effects that many early listeners to radio registered. Radio broadcasting, a profoundly public and social media system that circulates information immediately and simultaneously over great distances, generated from its early years a sense of producing both *mass* and *intimate* communication dynamics. Speakers over radio and listeners to radio, for example, might register both dynamics as voices were broadcast from small studios (or sometimes homes) to many individual homes at large distances. In this section, enlisting current scholarship on radio communication, I ask with the writers in my study how the broadcast voice signified as both personal and plural. Following this section, I will articulate further how poets' developed models of speaking and listening to examine the mass/intimate dynamics of radio in their own work. As I will demonstrate, poets took up these dynamics to both examine the functions of radio in society and extend the functions of poetry.

Because radio brings people's voices into domestic and interior spaces, radio speakers often capitalized on the capacity of radio to produce a sense of vocal intimacy. Most famously in the period and clearly a model for Zukofsky and other writers, Franklin

Delano Roosevelt's voice and use of the radio in promoting his administration's projects indexes radio's capacity to invoke intimacy with listeners on a mass scale. Radio became a primary venue for the articulation and defense of Roosevelt's federal reform programs beginning in March 1933;²² throughout the 1930s he described and defended New Deal programs in numerous "fireside" broadcasts and public speeches. With facts, anecdotes, quotes from citizens' letters, definitions, and the use of "I," "you," and "we" pronouns to indicate personal address and collective experience, Roosevelt used radio broadcasting to personalize policy and appeal to listeners as individuals *and* as national interconnected subjects. The term "fireside chat," coined by Harry Butcher of CBS in a press release before a May 7, 1933 broadcast and quickly adopted by press, public, and later Roosevelt himself (Buhite xv), aptly describes the constructed and perceived "intimacy" of Roosevelt's broadcast style as it signals the "fireside" as a space of familial or private discourse. As radio cultural historian Jason Loviglio notes, broadcast announcers such as "Roxy" Rothafel and Father Coughlin in the late 1920s and early 1930s helped develop and popularize conventions for informal and intimate radio speaking (Loviglio 6). Such strategies, in turn, drew on long-tested rhetorical methods of public address, adapting them for radio audiences. Speaking strategies taken up by Roosevelt include plain diction, measured cadence, short sentences, enthusiastic intonation, and relatively slow pace (7). Roosevelt's broadcasts differed from the tone of those by Hitler and Mussolini in the same period "who were heard in public appearances with a background of hysterical crowds," radio historian Eric Barnouw reports, in part because they were delivered from a quiet domestic setting in the White House (Barnouw 7).

During a radio talk in July 1933, Barnouw reports, Roosevelt stopped mid-broadcast to ask for a glass of water, took an audible sip, and stated "My friends, it's very hot here in Washington tonight"; it is unknown whether Roosevelt planned this action as a way to connect with listeners, but it nevertheless conveys the conversational tone he achieved in his broadcasts (7). His July broadcast summarized the first hundred days of New Deal programs and tried to generate support for the new National Relief Administration. By interrupting his talk with a mundane need for a drink of water and a comment on the weather, in a season of drought in some parts of the United States, Roosevelt expresses spontaneity and generates a possible connection with others also experiencing the summer heat. According to Barnouw, Roosevelt's aside generated a "minor sensation" and was admired by the radio producers broadcasting his fireside chat. That Roosevelt's comment interrupted his talk, I believe, was crucial to the success of his articulation of thirst; though Roosevelt already assumed a conversational tone in his fireside chats, the interruption would have changed his register of speech, diction, and tone. Spoken by a figure in the highest seat of public office, the line "My friends, it's very hot here in Washington tonight" expresses the intimacy of Roosevelt's personal experience and, accompanied by the "sound effect" of sipping water, invoked Roosevelt's swallowing throat in kitchens across America. The intimacy the President achieved in this moment was also, however, a radio intimacy. That is, its personal gesture is a plural one, addressing "friends" and describing the local situation to those who are not in Washington, i.e. to multiple and distant listeners. The example demonstrates radio's capacity to produce a mass intimate dynamic, where an individual's voice can convey

markers of intimate or private address, though articulated in the plural and broadcast to millions of homes at once.

Radio speakers interested in connecting with listeners often cultivated styles of address that suggested that they were speaking directly to individuals, promoting imagined connections between listeners and radio speakers, and between listeners and other listeners. Cultural historian of radio and communications scholar Susan Douglas, in her book *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (1999), argues that radio communication is indeed deeply personal, as it cultivates the imagination and “produces individualized images and reactions” through its reliance on sound rather than image (17). Listeners' ability to identify voices broadcasting at the same times day-to-day or week-to-week enabled them to experience familiarity with speakers over mass communication channels. Radio, Douglas argues, helped listeners “imagine [them]selves and [their] relationships to other Americans differently” as it brought diverse voices and personas into homes, encouraging listeners to either identify or disagree with positions and perspectives. Through imagining other listeners, Douglas writes, radio also helped form, in Benedict Anderson's term, imagined communities of people who were listening at the same time. Radio speakers often carefully tailored their speaking styles, content, and program formats to invoke proximity and gesture toward the wide range of potential listeners, and radio was broadcast and received by a mass of disparate listeners who were imagined by speakers (and imagined themselves) in varying degrees of cohesion. Some connections listeners felt toward radio speakers were also acknowledged publicly; the popularity of some early radio announcers is demonstrated by an anecdote that radio historian Clifford Doerksen cites in *American Babel: Rogue Radio Broadcasters of the*

Jazz Age (2005), when 100,000 citizens of Detroit attended, uninvited, the funeral of station WABC announcer Jerry Buckley in 1930 (7). This instance is an example of an imagined radio community – fellow listeners to Buckley’s Detroit programs imagined by both Buckley and listeners – made physically apparent.

Although listeners’ connections to radio speakers and programs were largely imagined, they were also nurtured by speakers’ encouraging and receiving epistolary responses from listeners, some of which were then read and discussed on the air. Letters from listeners were important markers of the mass audience to which Roosevelt and others spoke, and made speakers aware of the individuals making up the aggregate to which they broadcast. Like other radio announcers in the period, Roosevelt solicited letters during some of his broadcasts; this action both demonstrates a further mode of connecting with listeners and also emphasizes the distance between Roosevelt and his listeners, as well as the size of the audience. Listeners responded to Roosevelt’s chats in volumes of letters and telegrams. Largely in response to Roosevelt’s March 1933 fireside chat, for example, a half million letters were sent to the White House, requiring mail assistants to be hired (beyond the one assistant who had sufficed throughout World War I and the stock market crash), and tens of thousands of responses were sent in response to the broadcast given several months later, in May 1933 (Barnouw 7; Loviglio 1).²³ Roosevelt used radio to introduce federal relief and war policies and to speak to as many people as possible at once to mobilize support for these policies. Not everyone agreed with Roosevelt’s politics, of course, but most agreed that his radio project was highly successful. The magnitude of epistolary responses from listeners – sustained throughout Roosevelt’s presidency – underscores the fact that the fireside chats, and radio programs

in general, were broadcast to be received in millions of living rooms, cars, and public venues.

Radio, as the primary mode of mass communication in the 1930s and 1940s, helped coalesce and was representative of an emerging mass culture marked by the increasing standardization and centralization of cultural products and information. In *Radio's America: the Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture* (2007) Bruce Lenthall documents how mass cultural markers "accelerated dramatically in the Great Depression" as bureaucratic structures grew and face-to-face contacts with decision-makers or information sources decreased (10). Components contributing to the development of twentieth-century mass culture emerged throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through expansion of railroads, urbanization, the introduction of the telegraph and automobile, and increased mass production of goods and chain stores. The awareness of an interconnected national system was made even more evident in the 1930s by the failure of local institutions such as banks, businesses, and relief organizations, and by the implementation of national New Deal programs. As Americans listened to the radio an average of four to five hours a day during the 1930s Depression, and predominantly listened to standardized network radio based in New York, radio broadcasting held a unique position as the predominant mode of mass communication²⁴ (Lenthall 13). Radio, Lenthall argues, was crucial to the articulation of mass culture and of the shifting meaning of "communication" which, he writes, "came to emphasize 'to make common' more than 'to share' or 'to exchange'" (7). Shifts in modes of communication threatened to standardize and limit individual expression and possibilities for meaningful action and interaction.²⁵ Lenthall documents how radio also, however,

enabled people to make sense of cultural and communications changes in the period, and enabled some to participate in addressing mass audiences through broadcasting. Part of making sense of mass culture through listening to radio, in fact, Lenthall asserts, was the way in which listeners identified with radio speakers who personalized their broadcasts through their voice signature and strategies of address.

Clearly, the capacity of radio to broadcast widely, while still generating the sense that a radio speaker is also somehow speaking directly to a given listener, is a central paradox, characteristic, and tension of the medium. The constant interplay between speakers, listeners, and radio writers' imagining and experiencing radio's intimacy and its reach also had the effect of blurring some of the distinctions between public and private spaces and spheres. As media historian Michelle Hilmes describes in *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (1997), radio "promised simultaneity of experience without direct contact, exposure to the public in the privacy of one's own home," and the capacity to "bring the public into remote private spaces" through broadcasting news stories and dramas representing multiple voices and experiences (14). Radio historian Jason Loviglio, with Hilmes and other recent radio scholars, discusses how radio voices, and the tensions generated between "national and local, inclusion and exclusion, publicity and privacy" can both reinforce and transgress distinctions between the public and private, forming "'blurred' social spaces" (Loviglio xv). For example, network radio both brought the voices of public figures and political and cultural leaders into homes and cars, and enabled pedestrians to hear entire presidential fireside chats or episodes of the highly popular serial comedy *Amos n' Andy* wafting from homes and car windows as they walked down public streets (Loviglio xiv; Lenthall 61). Listeners also tuned in to

(public) radio programs for personal and domestic advice, news information, and expert guidance (Lenthall 55-56). As they did so, Lenthall demonstrates, they created personal ties to radio speakers, at times imagining relationships and "transform[ing] the large and abstract world of radio into a private one" (79).²⁶ Some radio writers and speakers took advantage of the capacity of radio to invoke such personal ties, while others invoked the mass and multiple nature of broadcast circulation. Radio broadcasting itself brought both dynamics into play, and this fact has prompted Loviglio to assert that the tension between intimate and public aspects of radio communication is in fact "the defining feature of early network radio, its central problem and its greatest appeal" (xvi). That radio circulated voices to a mass of individual listeners; that voices on radio experimented with how to address people in a way that would make broadcasts compelling and personal; that radio speakers asked listeners to imagine connections with themselves and other listeners; that networks, participating in the construction of mass culture, potentially standardized ideas and centralized information channels; and that radio trafficked only in communication by voices and sounds was not lost on writers working in the period of its mass popularity and cultural significance.

"This is Poetry": Poetics of Speaking and Listening

[Poets'] best potential outlet today is the radio. . . . It puts the stress rightly on the spoken word.

— Cid Corman, *Poetry* 1952

As I develop in my chapters, Niedecker, Zukofsky, MacLeish, Lechlitner, and Rexroth each take up components of the mass / intimate dynamics of radio in the construction of poetic models of listening and speaking. Each poet wrote or delivered cultural and

political work for radio broadcast; each conceived of the medium as a productive site for poetry; and each engaged in critically assessing how radio functioned. In the preceding sections, I have articulated how radio was understood by writers to be a promising site for poetic experiment, the distribution of poetry, and the (poetic or discursive) intervention into cultural and political debates. As poets approached radio, they confronted the characteristic tension of radio broadcasting I articulated in the third section of this introduction, radio's capacity to broadcast to mass audiences and to convey intimacy at the same time. Poets engaged radio broadcasting as they developed strategies that situated their writing in the contemporary cultural field in which they wrote and examined how this mass-mediated cultural field communicated.

Niedecker, Zukofsky, MacLeish, Lechlitner, and Rexroth engaged electronic sound over a medium that was also instigating new codes and models for conveying and receiving information through sounds and speech. Radio periodicals throughout the 1920s and 1930s discuss the challenge of constructing scripts and dramas that are suitable for listening audiences; the practice of airing dramatic scripts that worked well on stages quickly gave way to the writing of radio adaptations and original scripts. As early theorist of radio Rudolf Arnheim repeatedly notes in his 1936 study *Radio*, radio writers had to consider the capacities and limits of a medium that “for the first time . . . makes use of the aural only”; artists and practitioners must have “rejoiced,” Arnheim claims, when wireless radio “for the first time offered [them] the acoustic element alone” (14; 16). His book details numerous facets of radio composition, including methods of constructing and indicating dialogue, sound montage, speaking choruses, commentary, spatial dimensions, and changes of scene. Arnheim's work indexes how sound and

speech function differently on radio than in face-to-face interchange or in live performance: sound and speech circulate electronically without visual or embodied accompaniment.

Recent critical studies of literary texts that engage radio have drawn attention to how the advent of radio brought *sound* into millions of homes, and how literary texts register the phenomenon of radio sound through developing new ways to represent and invoke the sonic register. Such critical conversations were initiated to a large degree by two seminal anthologies that posit the centrality of sound (and sound technologies and media) to twentieth-century writing. Sound theorists and artists Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead's seminal edited collection *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (1994) establishes phonography and radio technologies as crucial to twentieth-century writing and poetic consciousness, stating their hope that in its investigation of sound, the collection might “literally *give another sense* to the broader contours of cultural history” (x; their italics). They ask: “How could our understandings of modernism, the avant-garde, and postmodernism *not* be transformed” by the array of sonic and auditory practices writers and sound artists participated in (x; their italics)? Their emphasis on sound art and practices as under-theorized fields of cultural study is taken up in Adalaide Morris’s edited volume *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies* (1997). In her introduction to the collection, Morris states that the volume aims to reorient the study of twentieth-century literature towards approaches that investigate sound via the study of sound technologies and media. “Most twentieth-century thinkers,” Morris asserts, “draw their models for reading, writing, and the formation of subjectivity from mirrors, lenses, cameras, screens, and other paraphernalia

of the gaze” (2). Essays in the volume present sound as an alternate orientation to such a visual bias, dialoguing with Kahn and Whitehead’s volume and drawing on Marshall McLuhan’s understanding of the electronic-acoustic turn and Garrett Stewart’s articulation of the “phonotext” – the aural elements that accompany the graphic aspects of a text. Since, as Morris states, “the interplay between textuality and twentieth-century acoustical technologies remain largely undocumented and undertheorized,” (4) both anthologies call for more work on sound technologies and writing.

The attention to sound and approaches to the study of sound technologies and media that Kahn, Whitehead, Morris and others propose has opened exciting directions for thinking through operations of radio sound; however, their work also generates questions about what differentiates radio sound from other kinds of sound and sound technologies. My dissertation takes as its point of departure the fact that what distinguishes radio sound from both face-to-face speaking and recorded sound (such as from a phonograph) is the way in which radio broadcasting distributes sound instantaneously and simultaneously to a mass audience. Via radio communication, speaking and listening become mass activities, and such mass dynamics mediate and frame the experiences of issuing and perceiving sound. As I outlined in section three of this introduction, the phenomenon of mass sound distribution produced both theories of radio’s vastness, collectivity, and homogeneity, and theories of radio’s paradoxical intimacy and proximity. My dissertation is concerned with the ways in which practitioners of radio – in this case, poets who wrote for, spoke on, and wrote about the medium – developed practices and theories of listening and speaking that both examined and constructed possibilities for communication in the era of emerging mass media.

As I have outlined, my study argues that second-generation American modernist poets negotiated cultural and aesthetic tensions and debates attendant to the literary cultural moment through the construction of models of listening and speaking that were based on their understandings of the mass and intimate dynamics of radio broadcasting. My chapters examine how Niedecker, Zukofsky, MacLeish, Lechlitner, and Rexroth understood radio to offer a particular set of communicative possibilities and terms, and developed poetic strategies that accounted for the non-visual intimate and mass dynamics of radio. Broadly, both Niedecker and Rexroth developed poetics that drew on the capacity of radio to produce and perform intimacy, and Zukofsky, MacLeish, and Lechlitner address the possibilities and limits of mass communication. Niedecker found radio's non-visual delivery a useful metaphor for the concentrated, intimate, attention to sound and speech in her poetry; with radiophonic delivery as a model, she constructed aural environments through the use of sound cues and sound directions in her play-scripts and radio plays. Zukofsky found radio a means to engage a large, popular audience, a venue to intervene in mass cultural configurations of artistic production and social relation, and a productive model for the way voices and information can circulate among multiple contexts. MacLeish and Lechlitner found in radio a potentially critically-engaged mass audience for poetic drama that participated in political debates; they also found radio a medium that potentially limits public discourse in part because of the way in which broadcasting regulates the time frames of programs. Rexroth found radio a model for the direct, personal, spontaneous, and intimate dynamics that he developed in his poetry and a venue over which to broadcast personal speech. They each address how

radio conveys the dynamics of mass and intimate communication through oral and aural means.

In creating poems, radio dramas, and radio essays according to their radiophonic understandings of dynamics of mass intimacy and radio's modes of speaking and listening, poets developed work that both addresses social and political contexts and debates *and* critically examines communicative forms, styles, and strategies that radio circulates. In radio verse drama, for example, MacLeish critiques both fascist politics and radio media systems for perpetuating anti-interventionist policies. In a poem about radio on the eve of America's entry into World War II, Lechlitner critiques the limits that radio places on sustained and thorough political debate. In his poem "A'-10," (1940) Zukofsky laments the disconnection of French radio communication in Nazi-occupied Paris as it shuts down the voices of the people of France. In these and other texts, poets considered the role of poetry and writing in the contemporary cultural moment and advocated for writing to participate in, address, and critically examine radio broadcasting and mass communication.

In chapter one, I demonstrate how radio was a model for the kind of intimate reception Niedecker imagined for poetic work and argue that she composed sound cues, sound descriptions, and speech transcriptions in her poetry and play-scripts in order to signal modes of perception for the reader. Niedecker wrote about listening in radiophonic terms, and wrote script-poems (1930s), wartime radio scripts for civilian defense efforts (1942), and original and adapted radio plays (1950-1952). I demonstrate how Niedecker signals and examines radiophonic perception in her work by drawing attention to speakers who are represented by voice tones instead of visual markers and

speakers who engage in private address or interior monologue. Niedecker engages an aural poetics in order to register the dynamics of listening to language (whether hearing it spoken, reading it silently, or speaking it out loud to oneself). By representing oral performances in text, and in imagining radio as a productive site for the presentation of these voices, her work also promotes listening as a way of knowing characters, landscapes, and regions that might more often be portrayed visually, and demonstrates how listening practices can amplify aspects of a soundscape (Schafer 274)²⁷ or phonotext (Stewart 28) that contribute to generating meaning in a text.

Between 1935 and 1944 Zukofsky was employed writing for and about radio, and in his radio reading and talk (1937), his radio scripts (1939-40), and his poem "A"-10 (1940), Zukofsky measures the possibilities radio offers for addressing "the masses" and labor issues and for circulating popular voices. His work investigates radio's capacity to broadcast and portray both poetic and popular voices, and both the potential and the limits of poetic address of contemporary political issues through radio channels and metaphors. In the radio scripts he composed while working for the New York branch of the WPA-sponsored Index of American Design, Zukofsky foregrounds cultural histories and labor contexts to situate early American practices of craft and design. The radio scripts attempt, in his words, to "revivify" objects and bring their histories "back to the people" through articulating popular anecdotes and information about artists, designers, and the circulation of everyday objects. Zukofsky examines the potential of radio to be a politically liberatory media system in "A"-10, a section of his long poem that describes how the disconnection of radio in wartime France silences the voices of the people, and demonstrates the implications of the potential for radio to limit or regulate speakers.

In chapter three, I demonstrate how MacLeish's and Lechlitner's texts imagine the mass audience as a critically engaged public, contribute to the development of a nascent radio art, and intervene in public discourses about war and postwar tensions. MacLeish's 1930s radio dramas critique fascism, while Lechlitner's 1938 radio play critiques capitalist systems, and their postwar radio dramas critique McCarthy-esque practices and the apocalyptic culture of the atomic bomb. In their radio verse dramas, MacLeish and Lechlitner also engage temporal codes to critique the potential of radio to limit public debate.²⁸ Until after World War II, all radio was essentially produced "live" and broadcast schedules dictated short and closely-timed programs. My chapter suggests that time, including conventions associated with emerging "real-time" actuality news and documentary genres, was central to the production and writing of radio verse drama in the late 1930s and 1940s. MacLeish and Lechlitner take up the temporal aspect of radio in multiple ways, and experiment with rhythm, duration, and pause in their dramas; they also thematize time to portray a centralized and mechanized fascist threat and critique radio media systems for the "fast pace of the clock" that may prevent dialogic or democratic discourse. Their work also engages temporal aspects of sound to differentiate between fascist "efficient" regulatory agendas and popular, public temporal codes, and to make the case for resistance to oppressive structures and intervention in international conflict with fascist states.

Chapter four proposes that Rexroth's long-term broadcasting work from the late 1940s into the early 1970s for station KPFA contributed to the development of his personalist poetics which are rooted in a philosophy of intimate, spontaneous communication. Rexroth's poetic intimacy differs from Niedecker's as it stresses more

personal communication and increasingly, from the 1940s, engages direct and personal narrative modes. I argue in this chapter that his work for radio helped him theorize and construct these poetic modes. Rexroth's poetics address the contemporary literary-cultural climate by refusing the metaphysical and allusive poetics popular in dominant literary circles by mid-century in favor of simple diction, narrative descriptions, and direct statement. Radio was a venue for the oral presentation of poetry, a practice that was crucial to the emerging "outrider" poetic culture and politics of the 1950s. For Rexroth, radio was also a site of direct and personal statement that he engaged by broadcasting a book review and comment program weekly for over twenty years. Radio also offered him a site from which to speak publicly about literary and political concerns that informed his poetic work, and helped to position him as a central figure in mid-century poetic circles and what has become known as the San Francisco Renaissance.

In Cid Corman's article "Communication: Poetry for Radio" published in *Poetry* in 1952, he discusses his radio program "This is Poetry" and writes that "[poets'] best potential outlet today is the radio. . . . It puts the stress rightly on the spoken word" (212). In the article, Corman lists other reasons poets might make use of radio, including the way poetry on radio "revives the need of the oral-aural commitment in verse," as well as permitting "the largest possible audience" to listen in. Corman's comments emphasize the way in which radio can amplify experiences of speaking and listening in a way that print cannot, and the way in which poetry on radio can generate public relationships between writers, speakers, texts, and listeners. These features characterize the wide excitement about poetic interactions with radio in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. In *Sound States*, Morris writes that questions about textual sound "cannot be answered with our old

vocabularies” (4). My dissertation proposes that radio offered new lexicons and modes of thinking about practices of listening and speaking on a mass scale. In what follows, I draw on letters, poems, essays, radio dramatic scripts, recordings, schedules, and interview transcripts to articulate the practices, projects, and theories that emerged from poets’ attention to the broadcast medium of radio.

CHAPTER ONE:

“Speech without practical locale”: Lorine Niedecker’s Auralty and Radio Intimacyⁱ

In early 1952, Lorine Niedecker sent a copy of her newly completed radio script dramatizing the lives of Henry, William, and Alice James to Louis Zukofsky. She included a letter with the script that discusses the aptness of radio for poetry. She writes:

Radio *should* be a good medium for poetry – speech without practical locale. Stage with all its costumes and place and humans tripping about too distracting sometimes. Poetry and poetic drama – suggestion – the private printed page plus sound and silence. (Penberthy *Niedecker* 191)

Particularly interested in the capacity of radio to broadcast voices that are not visually represented, Niedecker describes broadcasting as the circulation of “speech without practical locale” – speech that issues from multiple and unseen places and bodies. She suggests here that the visuality and physicality of embodied performances can distract audiences from the crafted language of a script or make a poetic subtlety or “suggestion” obvious. She figures radio as a model of a sounded and intimate form of communication, one that sounds the “private printed page” and creates a listening environment where poetic reception might best occur.²⁹ Niedecker engaged her observations about radio’s intimate listening dynamics as she created strategies for composing her script poems, radio plays, and poetry that emphasize unique, private, and anonymous speech.

Niedecker’s interest in radio communication contributes to her theorizing of aural perception, which is central to her poetics and epistemology. For Niedecker, for example, listening produces the knowledge that enables identification of birds; she writes in a letter May 19, 1946 of a bird-watching trip where her guide “always had to *see* the

ⁱ An early version of this chapter, titled ““Speech without Practical Locale”: Lorine Niedecker’s Auralty,” is forthcoming in the volume *Broadcasting Modernism*. Eds. Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle, and Jane Lewty. Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 2009.

birds to appreciate ‘em whereas I knew by their sound what they were and knowing what their colors were in my mind, was happy enough” (140). Niedecker suggests here that listening produces an interior mode of mental perception, and that sound can even invoke characteristics that are often attributed to visual perception alone, such as color.³⁰

Throughout Niedecker’s poetic career, she demonstrated an abiding attention to rendering sound and assembling particulars of speech in poetry. She often notes fragments of conversations, radio programs, and the tones of birdsong and other elements of her environment in her letters, and these sonic transcriptions generated material for her poems.³¹ Literary critics often emphasize how Niedecker’s careful structuring of sound and speech is characteristic of her work: Peter Quartermain asserts that sound is the “chiefest” distinction of Niedecker’s poetry, signaling her “amazing management of *sound*, and the ways in which she uses sound to manage sense” (221; 226); Peter Middleton notes an “extraordinary precision in [Niedecker’s] use of sound in poetry” throughout her career (204); Jenny Penberthy cites her “ready ear for charged speech” in composing poems based on overheard or read language (Penberthy *Niedecker* 44). Niedecker cues *how* we might listen to the voices in her poems and scripts and suggests that we might imagine the soundscapes and modes of communication she invokes. The aural environments she constructs and represents in her poems and scripts draw on her experience listening to speech and sounds and then characterizing these experiences in writing.

Drawing on Niedecker’s comments on the potential suitability of radio broadcasting for poetic voicing, and examining Niedecker’s texts written both *for* radio and those that invoke radiophonic delivery, in this chapter I suggest that radio is a

sustained subtending component of Niedecker's poetics of listening and speaking. In particular, I propose that the potential for radio broadcasting to produce intimate communication and reception served as an important model for Niedecker's projects and poetics. I show how she developed poetic strategies that take up the medium's capacity to broadcast private or non-visually-represented speech and that invoke particular kinds of listening. Her poems and scripts consistently invoke situations of intimate, unseen, anonymous, or private speech. They also consistently emphasize voice tones and pitches, nonstandard pronunciations and colloquial phrases, environmental sounds, and patterns and recurrences of sound. Niedecker employed strategies such as voice labels, sound cues, stage directions, and quotational practices to produce the kind of intimate, sounded reception she imagined as most productive for poetry. I draw on her poems, play script, script poems, radio scripts, and letters to show how she constructs texts that signal aural environments in which readers and listeners might imagine the poems spoken and sounded.

As I argue in this chapter, however, it is not that Niedecker hopes that her entire oeuvre might be broadcast on network radio; it is rather that she develops poetic strategies to construct the kind of intimate, aural environments that she understands radio broadcasting to convey. She figures radio as a productive site both for the circulation of poetry and as a site from which to imagine the sounding of poetry when read on the page. In the same letter to Corman that I quote from above, Niedecker discusses how knowledge of one's audience and mode of poetic dissemination can influence composition practices and writing material. In particular, she asserts that a poet who knows he or she will read his or her poems to a room of people might generate more

prosaic lines that someone who imagines a more private kind of audience or delivery. Niedecker takes up the intimate communication radio enables through presenting local details and qualities of sound that personalize voices. As she does so, she examines how radiophonic modes of communication operate.

Niedecker's assessment of the sound medium of radio as productive for poetry is based on a long engagement with broadcasting throughout the 1930s –1960s. Indeed, I believe that Niedecker imagined radio as a model for poetic reception throughout her “Objectivist”-affiliated literary career.³² She regularly listened to and annotated radio broadcasts in letters, describing programs, pronunciations, and interesting fragments of speech. While Niedecker spent time in New York City in the 1930s and made regional trips around the Great Lakes and other mid-west areas, she lived most of her life in rural Wisconsin; radio was useful to her as a source of information from multiple places and as a medium which circulated a variety of speakers. In 1942, she was employed writing radio scripts for “a program of [her] own” that aired on Madison, Wisconsin station WHA (qtd. in Penberthy *Woman and Poet* 97).³³ Niedecker's radio script work for WHA grew out of her employment as a writer and research editor between 1938-1942 at the Federal Writers’ Project, a branch of the Works Progress Administration, and at the Wisconsin Writers’ Project. When this Project, based at the University of Wisconsin Madison, closed due to funding cuts, Niedecker was able to work for several months as a radio scriptwriter working on wartime programs that aired on the University station. Such work gave Niedecker an opportunity to experiment with radio dramatic conventions and to hone her skills in writing for aural reception. This brief radio employment remained a central component of her career as she recalled it in letters to poets Kenneth

Cox, Ronald Ellis, Bob Nero, and Charles Tomlinson late in her life.³⁴ In the early 1950s, she returned to the genre of radio drama and wrote two unaired radio plays: an adaptation of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and an original play about Henry, William, and Alice James titled "TASTE AND TENDERNESS." Her interest in radio as a listener and writer contributed to her theorizing of the medium's possibilities for poetry.

Niedecker cited radio as a model for the dissemination of poetry late in her career in the context of her critique of poetry readings. Her statements reiterate her earlier ideas that poetry is best distributed and received intimately and that radio is a useful model for such communication. In the late 1960s, after being asked to perform and record her poetry, Niedecker dialogued with poets Cid Corman,³⁵ Basil Bunting, Cox, and Nero on the practice of reading poetry aloud in front of audiences, which had increased in popularity beginning in the later 1950s.³⁶ She wrote to Corman in 1967 that poetry performed aloud can produce unnecessary drama due to the presence of a "somewhat inattentive audience." Niedecker insists that poems are best received in intimate exchanges, stating:

Poems are for one person to another, spoken thus, or read silently.
How would the bug on the branch, walking to the end of it, or the
raindrop there—your poems—be read to a hall filled with people?
(Faranda 121)

Niedecker rejects the idea that "a hall filled with people" is a suitable site for poetry, finding instead that silent reading, or one person speaking a poem to another, generates the attentive stance she advocates for in the reception of poetry. Further, she imagines that the aural reception of poetry can occur best in the context of broadcasting or other circumstances that remove the necessity of public appearance. She continues:

. . . if your voice came from somewhere not seen, i.e. radio,

or out of suffused light— perhaps [performing aloud would be]
OK. (Faranda 121)

Radio here and elsewhere serves as a model for the kind of reception Niedecker finds most productive for poetry, as it enables a non-visual, intimate site in which one or more voices might be featured.

Niedecker's work is invested in evoking and representing voices in text; in the dramatic and radiophonic work I will discuss in this chapter, she invokes and constructs models of radiophonic intimacy in order in part in order to promote attention to marginalized speakers. The poetic strategies for marking and describing voices that Niedecker develops in relation to radio enable her to draw attention to speech that might otherwise be unheard and unseen and voices that do not always circulate. The 1930s play scripts and script poems and her 1950s radio dramas that I will discuss feature the voices of women, children, the elderly, and the poor, and her poems, especially in her folk poetry projects in the 1930s and 1940s, quote speech she transcribes from her local Wisconsin environment; her work in this period emphasizes these voices and instances of speech as they investigating the dynamics of intimate and private communication.

Niedecker's emphasis on representing marginalized and unseen voices, I believe, participates in and dialogues with genres and practices of social documentary prevalent in the 1930s and early 1940s. In fact, I also read the second-generation modernist "Objectivist" interwar poetic practices that Niedecker was affiliated with as dialoguing with and responding to the documentary practices highly popular in Depression-era America. "Objectivist" attention to "historical and contemporary particulars" and to the material contexts of objects and events produced a number of projects that, in the words of literary critics Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain, engage the poem as "a

mode of social observation” (Zukofsky “Program” 268; DuPlessis *Objectivist* 3).³⁷ Historian William Stott, in his still-foundational text *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (1973), writes that social documentary tries to expose conditions of human struggle in a “particular social context at a specific historical moment” (19-20) and depends on case histories of “specific individuals who represent a group of common people generally overlooked in society” (Stott 178). With Stott, literary critic Michael Thurston argues that the Depression in particular rapidly provoked the social documentary genre (170). Documentary was one mode which many leftist writers took up as a way to respond to domestic conditions of poverty and labor issues, and international threats of fascism; by presenting “facts” about particular issues, writers and practitioners of documentary aimed to redress the lack of representation or misrepresentation they perceived. Niedecker’s work does not take up documentary practices in the manner of, for example, James Agee and Walker Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1936) which documented the lives of tenant farmers with photographs, prose, newspaper clippings, and chore lists, or Muriel Rukeyser’s *The Book of the Dead* (1938) which features court documents, letters, statements, and observations about a mining disaster in Gauley Bridge, West Virginia.³⁸ Her work does, however, document and transcribe local and regional voices and speech patterns, and in doing so archives particular social conditions and statements at particularly charged economic and political moments in the Depression and World War II period.

Engaging “Objectivist” concerns with detailed, realist, materialist, and socially-contextualized poetics, Niedecker’s work explores how the model of radio broadcasting can maintain the privacy and anonymity of subjects’ speech, but can still make the

specific conditions of their lives known to others. In this way, she posed a critique of the more sensational or appropriative aspects of some documentary projects. Documentary proved problematic at times, and has been subject to charges of voyeurism, sentimentality, and propaganda, as Paula Rabinowitz explores in her book *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (1994). Interestingly, Rabinowitz draws attention to the way in which the visual medium of documentary photography made private moments public. She writes: “Privacy itself had become public; photography assured that there could be no haven from the crowds of the city – even rural shacks hidden in the Alabama cotton fields” were subject to exposure (269). Niedecker’s amplification of marginalized and local voices participates in critical documentary approaches that sought to represent rural, multi-regional, and marginalized figures as it intervenes in mass media portrayals that might gloss over such voices, but her work also examines the politics of representation as it investigates mechanisms of private and overheard communication. Radio sound and the broadcast of speech generate models in which voices and subjects might be potentially represented in ways that maintain the privacy or anonymity of subjects.

In what follows, I examine Niedecker's strategies for cueing sound, constructing sound environments, invoking intimate reception, and examining multiple kinds of voices. The first section of this chapter examines Niedecker’s 1930s play and script-poems, in which she figures non-visibility as intimacy and examines models of dialogue, interpersonal communication, and structures of power between (seen and unseen) voices. The second section discusses her early 1950s radio scripts. Her radio plays take up the plurality of radio intimacy – the fact that many people listen at once – by portraying

individuals speaking intimately or privately while signaling that these voices are heard or overheard by other characters or a listening audience. Niedecker's work requests that readers listen attentively to both the speech and sounds the texts invoke and the modes of communication they examine. She develops a framework for attentive listening by drawing on models of radiophonic distribution and reception.

Voices Outside: Intimate Listening

Niedecker's play script "DOMESTIC AND UNAVOIDABLE" (1935) and script-poem "The President of the Holding Company" (1936) emphasize sound issued and heard from sources and speakers that cannot be seen.³⁹ In "DOMESTIC AND UNAVOIDABLE," all but one of the characters speaks from offstage, and in "The President of the Holding Company," most of the lines in the play are attributed to one or more "Voices Outside." The scripts play with the dynamics of non-visibility to suggest intimate speech and listening. It might seem counterintuitive that Niedecker figures intimacy as non-visual, as face-to-face contact is often privileged as the optimal condition for intimate communication. However, Niedecker's work explores the contours of speaking and listening through invoking radiophonic proximity. As I discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, radio speakers evoke proximity and intimacy when they engage strategies of personal address and provide details that might generate connections with listeners, and radio listeners can imagine such proximity as they listen to familiar voices in their own domestic spaces. Part of the dynamic of radio intimacy, of course, is that radio voices are not connected to bodies seated at everyone's kitchen table or situated in "practical locale[s]." Niedecker examines in her 1930s scripts how unseen voices and

"Voices Outside," and the intimacy they invoke, can be mobilized to both defamiliarize speech and draw attention to particular aspects of language and speech. The scripts employ dramatic conventions such as character names and stage directions but proceed via interaction between multiple voices rather than by linear or cohesive narrative. They unfix conventions of dialogue, assemble spoken fragments, and draw attention to atypical acts and exchanges of speech. Her work suggests that non-visual radiophonic communication can produce attentive listening to qualities of voices, the disjointed aspects of conversations, and the contributions of voices one might not otherwise hear. She invites readers to imagine intimate aural reception through poetic strategies such as voice descriptions, sound cues, and by indicating voices issuing from non-visual or non-physically embodied positions.

Niedecker's nine-voiced poetic play script "DOMESTIC AND UNAVOIDABLE" opens with a description of the radiophonic mode from which the voices of the play emerge. The "stage directions" set up the onstage and offstage dynamic carried through the play, where a young man seated onstage in his study is the only figure who is consistently "seen." The remaining eight voices speak from the dining room and the hall near the study, occasionally casting shadows near its entrance⁴⁰; they are proximate and yet removed from the visual center of action. The opening sequence reads:

Voices from dining room and hall off study. Voices of old man and old woman as their shadows pass back and forth with trays of food and drink, near entrance of study – their forms are reflected on wall of study. The curtain rises on a young man seated at desk in the study, busy with pencil, paper, ruler. The only light is shed from a reading lamp onto desk and leaving rest of the room in comparative darkness. A confused murmur of voices of men and women from dining room soon becomes merely a suspicion of sound as of air in a tunnel or as a loud speaker of a radio turned on but not speaking— movement in stillness out of which the action of the

words comes clear. (Niedecker *Collected* 68; Niedecker's italics)

Cumulatively, the lines produce an orchestral effect, akin to the experience of listening to the dissonant sounds of strings and horns tuning before a performance. The lines contrast the offstage murmuring of voices, whose bodies are seen in the play only as shadows or reflections in the dark, with the silent studious man lit onstage. The “confused murmur” they describe invokes the kind of noise that might be heard at a party or in a busy, multi-room building, where the tones of voices carry from other rooms but the content of individual utterances cannot be ascertained. As the voices fade in preparation for the beginning of the play’s dialogue, Niedecker likens their muffled sound to radio static; the voices are heard only faintly as would be the low electronic buzz of a radio loudspeaker or the whirl of air in a tunnel. The radio speaker operates as analogy of an opened circuit, an electronic and circulating stillness that facilitates the hearing of dislocated voices. Out of the reverberating silence, the “action of the words comes clear” and the play’s un-italicized, attributed dialogue begins, issuing from proximate but unseen speakers, as from a radio.⁴¹

Niedecker suggests how readers might “listen” or imagine the murmuring voices through identifying the speakers with voice tags. The characters’ vocal tags function as sound cues, drawing attention to voice qualities, and require listeners or readers to track or imagine particular tones.⁴² The eight voices are identified by vocal quality and pitch, as in the “Gentleman gentle,” “Woman high,” “Woman low,” “Gentleman loud,” and “Woman husky,” and by age referents that suggest vocal qualities, as in the “Old man,” “Old woman,” and “Young girl plain.” The use of voice tags to identify “characters” challenges traditional ideas of what constitutes a character, as the play does not attempt to

construct personas who can be identified through biographical data, diction choices, plot points, or patterns of speech. It is significant that the visible “young man in study” is the only character whose voice is not described, as he is “seen.” The voice cues create offstage, unseen “characters” whose statements are only unified by their particular vocal quality.

By subverting the normative visual center of theatre, Niedecker’s play text foregrounds a sense of the overheard and anonymous. She uses the device of offstage, distinct but unnamed speakers to defamiliarize spoken language and to accent the tones of fragmentary speech. The opening sequence of dialogue in the play, which emerges from the “confused murmur” of simultaneous group speech and the “turned on” radiophonic state that the opening directions describe, reads:

Gentleman gentle – Miserly

Woman high – motion

Woman low – intensifies a goal. . . .

Gentleman loud – and a featherman’s

Woman husky – hat. (68)

This statement, like others in the play, is syntactically and grammatically standard. An event (“motion”) generates an action (“intensifies”) that produces a result (“goal”) and an object (“hat”). However, the assemblage is surprising. The elliptical form of the phrases suggests that the words/phrases are disconnected from one another whether through pauses, elided words, or spatial separation (in the text and in the imagined performance space). The sequence might be productively read as overheard bits of dialogue from multiple conversations, as heard by a roving listener at a cocktail party or one turning the

dial on a radio receiver. However, the collectively-completed and punctuated statement also indicates that the voices are in relationship. As speech is dislocated from any determined context, the sequence unfixes and rearranges normative modes of conversation, drawing attention to the features of the voices themselves and to *how* the phrases are spoken: gently, loudly, huskily, or with high or low pitch.⁴³

The offstage speakers, because they are identified by voice tone instead of visual characteristics, force us to listen closely, or, to use a term Charles Bernstein has popularized, engage in “close listening.” Bernstein uses the term as an analogue to “close reading” to indicate how readers might pay attention to elements of a text that signal sound. I would like to emphasize the “close” aspect of the term in relation to Niedecker's work, suggesting that her scripts and poems invoke proximity in order to invite readers to pay close attention to voice tones and to the subtle instances of nonstandard diction and syntax and the peculiarities of speech in her texts. In the exchanges I quote below, stage directions cue non-visual proximity and intimacy, and link the two:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Woman low— | <i>(Near)</i> When I'm alone it's an open day. I
clouded myself on him. |
| Woman husky— | But surely there is another who scenes passably? |
| Woman low— | <i>(Nearer)</i> Night that opens its puny residua unoccupied
of sleep |
| Young man— | <i>(Now back at desk, looks up quickly at curtains,
is silent.)
(Even "sound" ceases. There is now and while
young girl and man are to talk normal and absolute
quiet. Girl's voice, for she is never seen, is intimate.)</i> |
| Young girl plain— | Garden plans? I couldn't prearrange a garden.
I'd hate to come upon a flower and find I'd put it there. (69) |

When the "Woman low" speaks a line "*(Near)*," and then her next line "*(Nearer)*," the directions suggest an increasingly proximate vocal delivery, and perhaps even signal a slightly louder, though still low, tone. Such spatial organization of sound, and the movement of a voice closer to the reader or listener, suggests intimacy one might expect from a private exchange or utterance. The brief conversation between "Woman low" and "Woman husky," whose designated voice tones also indicate intimate speech, suggests that they are speaking of the end of a relationship. "Woman low," alone, experiences "an open day" in contrast to the "cloud[ing]" she experienced in relation to another person; in response to "Woman husky['s]" query if another person might enter the scene or enter into relationship with her, "Woman low" suggests instead that the night might accompany her. Their lines read as a private exchange where not all of the information is given, as if overheard. Their privacy segues to another intimate exchange, where all background noise ceases for the conversation of the "Young man" who is visible onstage and the "Young girl plain" whose voice, because "she is never seen, is intimate." Niedecker again connects non-visuality with intimacy and draws attention to the contrast between the offstage condition of the "Young girl plain" and the visible "Young man" in order to emphasize the "intimate" quality of the girl's voice. As with the previous exchange between the two women, the sound cues suggest that we understand the girl's voice to be "near" and that we pay attention to the particularities of her speech. Here, the "Young girl plain" speaks humorously, possibly misunderstanding an invitation for a rendezvous in a garden ("Garden plans?") and replying that she would rather not "prearrange a garden." Later, their dialogue suggests that they have broken off their association; the piece deals with the subtleties of characters and voices in relation. The sound cues in

“DOMESTIC AND UNAVOIDABLE” suggest postures of intimate speech and invite close listening to how phrases might be spoken. Niedecker’s invocation of the radio at the beginning of the script provides the reader with a context in which to imagine the voice tones through which the script proceeds.

Much like the way the offstage voices dominate the action in “DOMESTIC AND UNAVOIDABLE,” where only the young man is in the visual center of the play, voice tags in the script-poem “The President of the Holding Company” suggest structures of power and then subvert them. Character tags in “The President” notate relationships between the “characters” of a President, Secretary, a “Voice Outside,” and a group of “Voices Outside.” These tags indicate both a hierarchical employment relationship and a spatial one. The diction of the President and Secretary reinforces the power structure suggested by their character tags; for example, the President opens the script by stating “I will enforce it that after supper you speak about dusk,” requests that the Secretary complete tasks, and gives commands such as “Stuff and retain him,” while the Secretary responds with deferential phrases such as “Pardon sir” (71). The character tags “Voice Outside” and “Voices Outside” represent these voices as exterior to the positions occupied by the President and Secretary. However, the “Outside” voices intervene in their dialogue and complete their statements. “I consume it my dignity,” the President begins, employing the word “consume” instead of perhaps “assume” in a de-familiarizing gesture typical of the language of these plays, and then the “Voice Outside” inserts: “to go straight to the devil.” Several lines later, the “Voices Outside” interrupt dialogue to collectively speak two rhymes.

The status of the collective-speaking “Voices” as “Outside” both relegates them to a less sanctioned, unnamed position and accords them the opportunity to speak in alternate diction and to tell alternate stories. In particular, the “Voices Outside” speak nursery rhymes. Their first intervention reads:

Sylva Wergles was a warty witchwoo,
She lived by the side of a tree.
She combed the worldside for pennies and peas
And woo-ed a few sallies to sea.

O my, said the counterfeit judge, By the boo
You cost me a tendril and then a long shoot.
Get thee from me and relate
How frogs come out of the gate. (72)

Invoking the “Mother Goose” rhymes and diction Niedecker took up in the 1930s as a part of her “folk poetry” project, these stanzas narrate the relatively simple life of one Sylva Wergles, a witch who subsists on “pennies and peas.” The lines suggest that Wergles is tried and banished by a counterfeit judge (which could indicate a fake judge or a magistrate who works on cases of counterfeit). The significance of the lines rests not in their delivery of any clear moral but rather in the way the “Voices Outside” interrupt the discourse of the President and Secretary with over-the-top rhymes (“witchwoo” with “boo”) and signal that readers should understand these lines to be spoken by a collection of voices in unison, in contrast to the hierarchical and individually-spoken exchanges of the President and Secretary. Significantly, the rhymes of the “Voices Outside” also traffic in a language of economics that speak to the conditions that the President and Secretary of this “Holding Company” are invested in. A “Holding Company,” as a company that holds shares of other companies rather than providing services or goods of its own accord, is exclusively a financial endeavor. (“The last star is a bonded issue,” the

President states.) When the Secretary and President comment on the “Sylva Wergles” rhyme, they speak from their financial points of view and assess that it “lacks compulsion” and it “can’t be commercial poetry.” Their conviction that the rhymes won’t sell signals their understanding of the collectively-spoken poems as exterior to the marketplace in which they participate; in this sequence, Niedecker plays on the tensions between experimental, popular, and commercial categories of writing, none of which are mutually exclusive. It is ironic, for example, that in a cross-genre experimental poem in which a President and Secretary employ unexpected and decidedly non-literal phrases, these characters also critique “popular” rhymes for being noncommercial. Despite the dismissive commentary, the exterior, collective, marginal, rhyming language of the “Voices Outside” does successfully intervene in the dialogue at the financial institution. By the end of the poem, the “Voices Outside” effectively usurp the prominent speaking positions, speaking twelve of the nineteen lines of dialogue on the second page of the two-page script poem.

Niedecker's strategy of marking some of the voices in her scripts as “outside” or unseen signals her appreciation of the way radiophonic and nonvisual modes of communication can both generate intimacy and invite attentive listening. She develops the conditions for such listening through citing sound cues and voice descriptions in which readers may imagine the sound of the speakers. Niedecker's practice in her 1930s scripts of flagging speech as “offstage” or “outside” also, I believe, signals her interest in featuring those voices who do not circulate widely but whose speech she finds both linguistically interesting and politically important. Throughout her poetic career, Niedecker engaged “anonymous” speech as found material and gathered pieces from

letters, reading, and conversation to construct poems.⁴⁴ From the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, in particular, Niedecker transcribed speech from her local environment (in the regions of Fort Atkinson, Blackhawk Island, and Madison, Wisconsin) to form poems that both engaged modernist quotational practice *and* emphasized rural and farming experiences, poverty and labor, and the local reverberations of international conflict in the context of the 1930s economic depression and World War II.⁴⁵

Before publishing her collection *New Goose*, Niedecker published sections of her folk project in journals; in fact, in the same inaugural issue of *New Directions* (1936) in which Niedecker published her script-poem "The President of the Holding Company," she published a seventeen-poem selection of her folk poems titled "Mother Geese." Her "Mother Geese" poems, some of which were also published in *New Goose*, invoke some of the whimsical, rhyming, and rhythmic conventions of nursery rhymes, but also document, in the tradition of these same popular rhymes, political and economic conditions. The poems personalize these conditions, and move back and forth between domestic, public, and national concerns. One reads: "The land of four o'clocks is here / the five of us together / looking for our supper. / Half past endive, quarter to beets, / seven milks, ten cents cheese, / lost, our land, forever" (111). The clock striking at dinner-time finds these five hungry; the poem at first playfully and then more seriously catalogs the food at hand and the land lost.⁴⁶ In another "Mother Goose" poem, Niedecker writes "A country's economic sick / affects its people speech / No bread and cheese and strawberries / I have no pay, they say," making clear the stakes of Niedecker's project of recording and representing the speech of those in her rural region who may not otherwise be represented.⁴⁷ The people are saying, she writes, that they "have no pay."

Niedecker's folk project increasingly recorded the voices of those in her local community, participating in and dialoguing with, as I have suggested, poetics of documentary. Niedecker scholar Jenny Penberthy notes that most of the folk poems published in her volume *New Goose* (1946) are constructed "almost entirely out of overheard local speech" evidencing a method dependent on "an opportunistic ear, ready for the irregular sounds of living speech" (Penberthy *Niedecker* 43). Literary critics of Niedecker's *oeuvre* produced during this period have noted how the poems decontextualize speech and de-emphasize the position of the speaker ("Reading" Quartermain 220; Willis 101). Elizabeth Willis asserts that found "folk" material was ideal for Niedecker in particular because it allowed her to engage in anonymous and multiple-author composition (99). The folk poems set speech on the page unmarked by authorial comment or even by quotation marks or other conventions of quotation. Speakers' words are often unidentified and seamlessly combined with other found language. In this way, Niedecker documents people's experiences in their own words, but resists sensationalizing, editorializing, or augmenting the voices with comment or visual analogue. Her poems present both what is said and how it is said, and her means of presentation evidences her considered approach to documenting and communicating information about people's private, and culturally-embedded, lives.

The context of her folk poetry helps elucidate the project of deploying unseen voices to intervene in visual or public workplace arenas that Niedecker engaged in her 1930s play and script poems. In her "Mother Geese" and folk poetry she combines a documentary and what literary critic Peter Middleton has called a folklorist approach with an aesthetic interest in how language is phrased and spoken: she registers socio-

economic concerns *through* documenting the specific kinds of speech in her local environment. Both Niedecker's 1930s scripts and early folk poems are interested in enabling voices to speak, unseen and unmarked, as though from offstage. Such positioning of these (imagined and multi-toned; collective and rhyming; rural and regional) voices draws attention to their out-of-sight, marginal status and also deploys that status as a site from which voices might speak or be recorded. The radio invoked at the beginning of "DOMESTIC AND UNAVOIDABLE" is the kind of site that might theoretically circulate these voices. As a non-visually-oriented medium, radio provides Niedecker with a metaphor for how readers and listeners might tune in and pay attention to these voices.

Scripting Private Speech

Niedecker's own practices of listening no doubt contributed to her strategies for constructing texts that promote close listening and the imagining of intimate structures of listening. Her correspondence registers a sustained practice of radio listening and the ways in which speakers on the air encouraged her to both identify with and dialogue about their broadcasts.⁴⁸ Her accounts of radio listening also document radio's capacity to broadcast seemingly private moments to mass audiences. Listening to the "Third Party" (Progressive Party) presidential political speeches on July 25, 1948 Niedecker writes that she "joined the crowd (by my radio) in laughing and crying at the same time when the climax of [Glen] Taylor's appearance came – his ballad singing with his wife and mother and son" (Penberthy *Niedecker* 154). Vice-Presidential candidate Taylor's singing became most poignant for Niedecker, and likely other listeners, when he

collaborated with two generations of his family, bringing what might otherwise be a private family moment or a politician's photo-op into wide broadcast circulation in a public radio forum. Niedecker's description of "join[ing] the crowd" and sharing in an emotional moment by listening to her radio indexes the way radio broadcasts can produce conditions for sympathetic identifications with others who cannot be seen or known. Such "anonymous camaraderie," to invoke radio historian Jason Loviglio's term, occurs in part because of listeners' knowledge that others are listening at exactly the same time, and in part because of the kinds of emotionally-charged or personal addresses radio facilitates through voice and sound alone.

Niedecker's two radio plays, written in 1951 and 1952, take up the capacity of radio to enable intimate communication and reception. Niedecker's early radiophonic work, as I have shown, figured intimate communication as speech given by non-visual or unseen speakers. Her early 1950s radio plays emphasize more directly the capacity of radio to intimately communicate through foregrounding private speech and the interior thoughts of characters. They reinterpret the documentary impulse of her 1930s and 1940s work by engaging a feminist orientation and enabling female speakers to voice their experiences. The radio plays attempt to maintain the private dynamics she appreciates in print and poetic reception while they also indicate through sound cues how the characters' voices might be heard.

Niedecker's radio plays—an adaptation of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and a play about Henry, William, and Alice James titled "TASTE AND TENDERNESS"—were never broadcast, but were clearly written with production in mind.⁴⁹ She wrote the radio plays in a 1950s climate when serious radio drama had few markets;⁵⁰ her choice to

construct radio pieces rather than television or stage drama may be aligned with her concern that visual performances compromise the integrity of the spoken or sounded, and with her appreciation of the way radio enables the aural intimacy she conceived of as most productive for poetry. In both “AS I LAY DYING” and “TASTE AND TENDERNESS,” Niedecker mobilizes private speech, experimenting with radio's capacity to isolate and broadcast single voices and private experiences. Both plays experiment with drawing from multi-vocal source texts and ordering sequences of dialogue and interior monologue. Her adaptation of Faulkner's novel, like the book, centers on the death of mother and wife Addie Bundren. The extant scene of Niedecker's original radio play “TASTE AND TENDERNESS” discusses the reunion of the three James siblings due to the death of Minnie Temple.⁵¹ In both scripts, Niedecker imports and adapts speech, indicates sound effects, and chooses and arranges material to portray private moments and interior thoughts of characters in familial dramas.

Niedecker was likely particularly attracted to Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* for its form; the novel is constructed of interior monologues by fifteen distinct and continually shifting voices. In adapting Faulkner's story of character Addie Bundren's death and transport for burial, Niedecker adds and changes relatively few words of Faulkner's text aside from voice and sound cues, but her arrangement of the narrative, while following the general trajectory of the story, synthesizes larger plot points, cuts others, and puts characters in dialogue that are partitioned in separate chapters of the book. Niedecker involves the voices of most of the major characters in Faulkner's novel, including Addie, her husband Anse, their children Cash, Jewel, Darl, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman, and the regional doctor Doc Peabody. She constructs narration, sound cues, and voice

descriptions that set up the interior monologues her radio play emphasizes; in particular, the play accentuates the private speech of the two central women characters in the novel, Addie and Dewey Dell.

Niedecker's script emphasizes aural reception by including frequent sound cues, noting vocal tones, and designing sound effects that signal the environments in which voices are to be received. She scripts environmental sound to reinforce themes through repetition, emphasize plot points, and indicate shifts in location: for example, after Addie dies, the sound of her son Cash sawing and nailing her coffin weaves through dialogue (347-349); when the family's wagon crashes in the river on the days-long trip to Jefferson to bury Addie, Niedecker cues sounds of "*water swirling and logs jamming*," animal cries, and dead silence (356); when the family finally reaches town, the creaking wagon fades to street noise, footsteps, a screen door, and "*a small bell sound as of door or ringing of cash register*" (357). All of these sounds provide background to the voices by which the narrative proceeds.

Niedecker's adaptation experiments with multiple modes of address by employing narrators who speak directly to radio audiences, characters who speak as if privately, characters who address one another, and voices who speak collectively and in montage. She establishes Doc Peabody as the main narrator throughout the play, with some narration also conducted by Addie's son Darl. Doc Peabody's opening monologue introduces the central situation of the radio play. The monologue begins "Anse Bundren's wife Addie was dying . . . And I knew that if it had finally occurred to Anse himself that he needed a doctor, it was already too late," and then identifies location (a "cotton and corn farm" on "a steep hill") and establishes character names and personalities in brief

strokes (341). Niedecker's use of the narrator function draws on conventions established by radio dramas in the 1930s and 1940s, which enlist the role of the radio announcer to situate listeners in the context of particular broadcasts.⁵² While the narrator function is certainly not new or unique to broadcasting, radio narrators function in particular to connect multiple elements and speakers of broadcast programs with a recurring, familiar voice and to identify visual markers of place and action that radio listeners are not privy to. In order to provide continuity, for example, Doc Peabody notes that Darl told him the story of the family's burial journey upon their return to account for Doc Peabody's knowledge of portions of the story for which he was not present. Peabody's narration personalizes the story for a radio audience as it anticipates places where radio listeners might be confused by the multiple voices and who they are addressed to.

One of the central strategies of Niedecker's adaptation is the notation of characters speaking privately, as if to themselves. Such private soliloquies, adapted from the structure of Faulkner's novel, enable characters to convey intimate details about their lives and thoughts. In her script, Niedecker prepares a potential radio audience for the private speech so prevalent in the play and for Addie's stream-of-conscious monologue somewhat humorously: after the first line of Addie's speech on her deathbed near the beginning of the play, Doc Peabody states, "She seems to be talking to herself" (345). Here, Peabody mediates for a radio audience the potential confusion of listening to Addie's voice and introduces the conceit of the multiple first-person asides and instances of narration in the play. Niedecker engages the device of the soliloquy to capitalize on radio's capacity to broadcast voices that speak intimately to large public audiences; characters in Niedecker's radio adaptation frequently speak to themselves in both long

monologues and short sentences that enable them to disclose private information.

Niedecker introduces characters' private and interior remarks by describing speech tones and characteristics. To introduce Addie's son Vardaman's voice, Niedecker combines her cue with Faulkner's, writing "*(little child's voice, always tiny, distinctive, thin, 'talking to himself like a cricket in the grass,' Faulkner says, 'a little one')*" (347). As in her 1930s play script "DOMESTIC AND UNAVOIDABLE," Niedecker at times signals private speech by noting how a speaker drops the pitch or volume of his or her voice, as when a neighbor Samson "*(lowers his voice as if to himself)*" (354) or when a clerk at a drugstore dialogues with Dewey Dell and then speaks, still in her presence but out of her hearing, with "*(Lowered voice again as if to himself)*" (358). Radio permits such instances of private speech in a way that a staged or film version might find difficult to convincingly block; this is also true when Niedecker scripts sequences of voices speaking privately, as she does towards the end of the play when Vardaman, Darl, Cash, Anse, and Dewey Dell each speaker "*as if talking to himself*" in a "*montage of voices*" (358). Such sequences vocalize the overlapping effect Faulkner constructs through his use of multiple first-person speakers and, because they speak among one another, dramatize the public nature of these characters' private utterances for radio.

Niedecker's version of "AS I LAY DYING" investigates the mechanics and processes of private communication and the writing strategies that indicate intimate and private speech; it also examines the kinds of voices and statements such communication enables. The radio play, in particular, foregrounds two female characters speaking their thoughts about private moments in their lives: Addie is dying, and her daughter Dewey Dell is pregnant and seeking an abortion. Doc Peabody's narration signals the fact that

Addie conceives of her death as a private matter; when Addie looks at him with eyes blazing, he notes that she "probably wants [him] to get out and everybody else," adding that he has previously witnessed "that furious desire to hide that abject nakedness which we bring here with us" (344). At the beginning of Addie's monologue, just prior to her death, Niedecker cues her voice as "*(stronger, closer in)*" than her comments in conversation to her family just prior to her soliloquy. Scripting vocal proximity and, as I mentioned above, having Peabody mention that she seems to be talking to herself, produces a sense that the reader or listener is overhearing the private articulation of a woman's last words. Addie begins an abbreviated summary of her life with the words: "I was young then. I was teaching school." She recalls with disappointment and resignation the story of meeting and marrying Anse and having children, emphasizing that her experience as a mother in a family living in poverty eventually taught her "that living was terrible and that words are no good" but that "the reason for life was the duty to the alive" (345-346). While in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Addie dies in chapter eleven, Niedecker positions Addie's monologue (the longest in the adaptation) at the beginning of her radio play, signaling Addie's female, classed, and dying voice as crucial to her version of Faulkner's story of Addie's burial.

After Addie, the most significant subplot in Niedecker's radio adaptation is Dewey Dell's pregnancy. Just after Addie's death, both Doc Peabody and Dewey Dell step outside and Dewey Dell states in a "*(low, rich voice)*" that she must look for Vardaman. This voice cue indicates that she speaks this line to Doc Peabody. Before she continues to speak, Niedecker cues a shift in her voice: it becomes

(Lower, fuller, more intimate – she always speaks from the depths but now as though to herself alone): You, Doc Peabody, could do

so much for me if you just would and if you just would then I could tell you and then nobody'd have to know it except you and me and Darl and Lafe. You could help me if you would. (346)

Niedecker's description of Dewey Dell's voice cues an intimate vocalization, but in speaking "*as though to herself alone*" her lines address Doc Peabody ambiguously and in the conditional. While she speaks in his presence, she seems to speak without him hearing, stating that she "could tell" him about her pregnancy *if* she knew he would help her. It is unclear whether she means him to hear her at this time, or whether, despite her lower and more intimate voice, he overhears her. Either way, speaking "*as though*" privately enables Dewey Dell to state her predicament to Niedecker's imagined radio audience. By noting that both her boyfriend and her brother also know of her "secret" pregnancy, Niedecker also signals the blurred status of Dewey Dell's private/public speech. The intimate mode in which Dewey Dell speaks in earshot of possible listeners indexes Niedecker's understanding of the dynamics of radio communication and the way in which such communication can enable people to tell interior, and important, stories.

Perhaps because she worked on her radio scripts in tandem, Niedecker also employed the dramatic, interior monologue in her second radio play "TASTE AND TENDERNESS." Based on what we can reconstruct from Niedecker's comments about several scenes that are now missing, including an opening scene depicting happy children clinging to the father, a scene of the father's death, and a scene treating Alice's suicide, the radio play treats the subjects of loss and lost youth (189-190). The only extant fragment of Niedecker's original radio play on the Jameses is the two-page Act I, Scene 3.⁵³ The scene consists of a long monologue by William James, who begins the scene with the words, "She's gone," introducing cousin Minnie Temple's death as the central

focus of the sequence. William agonizes over Minnie's loss and meditates on the similarly transient effects of Henry's stories: "his characters touch us as she did—their orbits come out of space and lay themselves for a short time alongside ours, then off they whirl again into the unknown" (361). Following William's speech, a short conversation ensues between William, Alice, who we learn has recently considered suicide, and "Harry," who arrives from a year in England.

Niedecker's "TASTE AND TENDERNESS" asserts Alice's participation as a speaker among her famed and verbose brothers. At the end of the scene, the three siblings stand together and Henry states: "It's the living who die and the writers who go on living," to which Alice replies, "Minnie's death marks the end of our youth" (362). Niedecker adapts this final line from Henry James' *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914) where James remarks that for William and him, Minnie's death "made a mark that must stand here for a too waiting conclusion. We felt it together as the end of our youth" (James 486). By attributing this line to Alice, Niedecker documents a summary response to the event in Alice's name, and also juxtaposes Minnie's loss with Alice's impending suicide. Niedecker's awareness of Alice's intelligence, critical capacities, and wit is evident in her quoting from Alice's journal to Zukofsky at the end of her letter about the radio play. She critiques the misrepresentation of Alice by biographer F.O. Matthiessen, writing to Zukofsky that she doesn't find much material on Alice in the letters Matthiessen published in his text *The James Family* (1947); Matthiessen surmises that the lack of information on Alice is due to her being the "youngest and only girl in that over-vital family" (quoted in Penberthy *Niedecker* 191).⁵⁴ For material for her (now missing) scene on Alice's suicide, Niedecker states, she resourcefully uses three sentences Henry James

Senior put into a letter. While the script in its entirety is lost, it is clear that Niedecker's engagement of the radio dramatic genre explored the dynamics of intimate communication and took up the capacity of radio to broadcast and give voice to female characters and speakers in private and interior situations.

Reading Aloud, Silently

Niedecker's radio plays are sites in which she practices techniques of importing, adapting, and condensing speech, and of scripting sound effects in order to emphasize interior and private speech. Her construction of radio scripts offered an opportunity to "script" speech in a dramatic fashion that attends to individual utterances without much descriptive or narrative comment. Her composition of the plays at times also engaged overheard voices or material gleaned from letters she received. For example, Niedecker includes in "TASTE AND TENDERNESS" a line of Zukofsky's: "It's tough to be forced to the wall by the so-called idealistic – to be forced to admit one's a genius and an outcast" (14).⁵⁵ She also adapted and incorporated language from local speech into "TASTE AND TENDERNESS." She writes that she overheard her father's friend Walter Ladwig tell of seeing someone who was "weak physically and financially - as though financially were another category of the human body and spelled probably *ph*yancially! I'm putting it in the play" (Penberthy *Niedecker* 195). Niedecker's attention to overheard speech signals her interest in how writing can represent pronunciation and even draw attention to puns, homophony and homonyms, and other aspects of language *more* distinctly than can speech.

Niedecker understood radio broadcasting to offer an unseen, imagined space of

reception, a dispersed radio audience, where the spoken could resonate in multiple contexts. Radio provided a model of a middle mode of communication between the public stage and the private page that Niedecker took up and imagined as also available in the private reading of poems. As I discuss at the beginning of this chapter, Niedecker's attention to sound and aurality is complicated by her predilection for an interior, silent mode of reception. For example, to Kenneth Cox she writes that she doesn't approve of performing poetry aloud, as poetry reception for her

is a matter of planting it in deep, a filled silence, each person reading it a silence to be filled - he'll have to come to the poems - both writer and reader - with an ear for all the poems can give and he'll hear that as Beethoven heard tho deaf. (Niedecker "Extracts" 42).

Niedecker proposes here that both writer and reader approach a poem in silence and listen to the sound invoked in the piece in part through imagining both its sounded and communicative dynamics.

Niedecker's thoughts on performing poetry participate in an ongoing debate about the value and necessity of voicing a poetic text. Weighing in on this debate in his edited collection *Close Listening*, Charles Bernstein argues that "[u]nsounded poetry remains inert marks on a page, waiting to be called into use by saying, or hearing, the words aloud" (7). While he asserts that there can be multiple versions of a sounded / voiced poem, he maintains that such voicing is central to the production of the poem's meaning and productively challenges the primacy of the written text (8, 14). In the same volume, Peter Quartermain describes instances where voicing a poem might actually "[close] down its play of indeterminacies," ("Sound" 226) and discusses how some poems present a "dense play of possibilities . . . afforded by the eye playing with and against those afforded by the ear" (227). He describes unsayability as a poetic mode that, in its

unpredictability, holds open the unknown⁵⁶; he cites the economy of Niedecker's poetry as an example of such an unpredictable poetics (227). Niedecker signals how something spoken or sounded might be heard without closing down the play of potential soundings that a reader might imagine. Her poetry and scripts insist on the work of what Peter Middleton calls the "inner theatre" in apprehending and imagining the layered, interactive readings and soundings on the page. Middleton, however, finds the "inner theatre" inadequate, asserting that listening to a poem makes clear the "illocutionary force of the utterances in ways that cannot always be signaled by written linguistic markers" (268). Bernstein's, Quartermain's, and Middleton's statements make clear that both texts and voiced performances have the capacity to signify sound and limit such signification.

Niedecker's quarrel, however, is not with sounding a text aloud but with the live, embodied performance of poetry which she finds distracts from the language and sounds of poems. She values the aural components of poetry, the listening to speech and sound, over the public oration of them. Radio broadcasting became a productive model for Niedecker because it enabled her to articulate the conditions under which writing should be transmitted and received, and to theorize aural perception and reception. Radio provided her with a model for the kind of intimate exchange and anonymous communication she developed in her own poetic work. Broadcasting, she finds, enables the publicizing of private and intimate utterances without the necessity of public appearance, and thus can potentially circulate diverse and marginalized voices. It can also draw attention to the particular qualities of these voices and the styles of speech they engage. Radio broadcasting is a model, then, that Niedecker finds productive in her poetry as she constructs the conditions for listening to voices or speaking them aloud to

oneself while reading. Niedecker calls upon radio, in the context of her critique of poetry performed aloud, to help situate a kind of listening that she understands as also taking place interiorly, “without practical locale”.

CHAPTER TWO:

Louis Zukofsky and Mass Radio Communication

In June 1937, Louis Zukofsky took part in a nationally-broadcast radio program sponsored by the League of American Poets as a part of their conference in New York City. Whereas for Niedecker, radio became a model for ideal (intimate) aural reception, for Zukofsky, radio offered the potential to serve as a productive site for the large-scale communication of poetic and cultural ideas. Following his broadcast, Zukofsky wrote an eighteen-page letter to Niedecker in which he discussed the League of American Poets conference and radio panel and readings. Zukofsky's unpublished letter details the central debates of both the conference and the radio panel. The League conference took up questions about how poetry might best address and represent the social concerns of "the masses" in the context of 1930s political and cultural tensions. As I discuss in this chapter, I believe his participation in the radio panel was also significant in shaping his ideas about how radio can productively broadcast information about poetics, politics, and labor issues (and the connections between these components) to mass audiences. I demonstrate how Zukofsky found that mass radio communication offered potential for articulating ideas about labor, production, craft, cultural history, and popular experience to a plural audience. In his radio scripts and poem "A"-10, Zukofsky demonstrates his commitment in the 1930s and early 1940s to investigating what plural speech, speech that circulates to millions, might accomplish.

Zukofsky's participation in the League of American Poets radio panel was not his first or only interaction with radio broadcasting in the years leading up to and during World War II. He wrote of the potential for radio to offer poets access to a wide public audience after listening to William Carlos Williams read on A.M. Sullivan's program (the

same program that would host the League panel) on February 21, 1937, taking great interest in Williams's performance and the possibilities it inspired for future poetic broadcasts. He wrote to Williams⁵⁷ the day after he heard the program (and later, to Pound),

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is from Zukofsky's letter to William Carlos Williams describing Williams's radio reading and discussion, and can be found in: Williams, William Carlos and Louis Zukofsky. *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*. Ed. Barry Ahearn. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2003: 243]

Zukofsky echoed his excitement about Williams's discussion of new American poetics, and his enthusiasm for radio as a valuable mass channel for distributing poetry and poetic theory, in reports about his own broadcast three months later to Niedecker and Pound.⁵⁸

Though his radio work has received little critical attention, Zukofsky was in fact involved with a number of radio projects and positions between 1935 and 1945.⁵⁹

Reading his poetry on the air, listening to the radio, writing radio scripts, and writing technical radio manuals gave Zukofsky a great deal of experience with the medium over its most popular ten-year period. In a letter to Ezra Pound in 1935, he described his work as a

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is from Zukofsky's 1935 letter to Ezra Pound describing Zukofsky's radio work, and can be found in: Pound, Ezra and Louis Zukofsky. *Pound/Zukofsky: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky*. Ed. Barry Ahearn. New York: New Directions, 1987: 166-167.]

In this capacity, Zukofsky likely would have been involved with writing copy for both radio programs and the station announcements that aired in between programs. In the 1930s, much of his work for radio was part of his Depression relief agency employment

(between 1934-1942) with the Civil Works Administration (1934), the New York Department of Public Welfare (1934), and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Index of American Design. While employed on the WPA Index project between 1936 and 1942, he researched and wrote essays and radio scripts. He completed the scripts, which are cultural histories of American craft and design objects, in 1939-1940. Following his federal employment, he worked from 1943 to 1945 for the Hazeltine Electronics Corporation, which held a military contract; in this position, he wrote and edited technical instruction manuals for radio and other equipment.

In this chapter I argue that Zukofsky found in radio broadcasting a site through which to investigate the dynamics of mass communication and the idea of the mass in the 1930s and early 1940s. Through his observations and experiences writing for radio and speaking over radio, I believe, Zukofsky found that broadcasting offered a model of a potentially liberatory media system that could productively address plural, mass audiences. Broadcasting offered the potential to link poetics and writing with the political concerns of the contemporary popular audience. In addition to desiring a wider audience for poetry, and hoping that poetry might be relevant to readers in the particular cultural climate of the time, aims that interested many writers in the 1930s, Zukofsky was also interested in this period in speaking about issues that addresses labor and laborers. As I will show, Zukofsky approached radio in the late 1930s and early 1940s as a site that had the potential to broadcast popular ideas and voices over national and international airwaves: through quotation, through representation of historical figures and their ideas, and through people speaking directly of their experiences. The new medium of radio could potentially extend and accelerate the circulation of such voices and information.

As I will discuss with respect to Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, however, Zukofsky's investigation of radio media systems and mass media also demonstrates the capacity of radio institutions and those who control them to limit the circulation of information and diverse, popular speech.

As Zukofsky and other poets articulated their positions on radio broadcasting as a potentially productive site for cultural and poetic discourse, they participated in debates in the 1930s among theorists of media, such as critical theorists Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, about whether or not radio broadcasting and other new media systems could function in emancipatory capacities. In his well-known essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1935-6), Benjamin discusses film as a mode in which viewers can respond in potentially liberatory ways to the conditions of reproducibility and mass culture; Benjamin proposes that particular techniques of perception, learned in film, might establish equilibrium between humans and technology and politicize art by giving agency to the masses.⁶⁰ Adorno, writing from New York while working on the Princeton University Radio Research Project, responds to Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay both in letters and in his essay "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938); his essay critiques radio's emphasis on popular figures in music and its focus on "hit" pieces of music. He attributes such emphases to capitalist systems and considers the radio star phenomenon totalitarian (Adorno *Adorno* 292-93). Radio, in fact, serves as a channel for some of Adorno's most invective critiques of the political, economic, and technological systems that govern contemporary production of music and cultural goods.⁶¹

Adorno's and others' critiques of radio in the 1930s, however, often focus on the commodification of material broadcast on radio, and the embeddedness of radio programming in commercial and market systems. As Adorno scholar Richard Leppert describes, Adorno shifted his position on radio in later years; in his essay "New Music, Interpretation, Audience," (1957) he considers radio a "shelter" for new music as it is "separate from the market" (Leppert in Adorno *Adorno* 239).⁶² In a fragment titled "Reflections on Radio," (1931) Benjamin asserts that the institutional and consumer practices surrounding radio fail when they separate broadcasting practitioners from the public, since the spirit of radio is democratizing and potentially creates "expertise" in the public (Vol. 2; 543). Zukofsky's positions in relation to radio resonate with Benjamin's, as Zukofsky understands the medium to offer the potential for public engagement, making public citizens, such as Zukofsky himself, practitioners. His participation in radio broadcasts and radio projects in the late 1930s and early 1940s prompts him to advocate the medium's potential to function as emancipatory through the circulation of Marxist ideas and diverse popular voices.

In his letters, essays, radio scripts, and poems of the late 1930s and early 1940s, Zukofsky examines the potential cultural work of poetry in the era of mass communication through articulating the possibilities and limits of such communication over radio channels. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss Zukofsky's 1937 League of American Poets reading in the context of wide poetic debates about the role of poetry and cultural debates about the role of mass media in society.

[This quoted material has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is from page seven of a letter Louis Zukofsky wrote to Lorine Niedecker 7 June 1937 that describes Zukofsky's participation in a League of American Poets conference

and radio panel and reading and, here, political possibilities of radio. The letter can be found in the Louis Zukofsky Collection, Series 2: Letters. Box 19, Folder 5. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.]

Section two discusses the radio scripts Zukofsky wrote for the W.P.A. Index of American Design (1939-1940), which detail how early American craft objects circulate among multiple contexts. I propose that Zukofsky's emphasis representing the lives and work of laborers in the scripts signals his understanding of radio as a potential site for the circulation of popular history and ideas about labor. In the final section, I examine Zukofsky's poem "A"-10 (1940), which takes up the discontinuation of radio broadcasts in Nazi-occupied Paris as a departure point for a meditation on the significance of the mass in contemporary culture and the potential for mass communication to regulate and limit popular voices.

On the Masses / On the Air: Zukofsky's 1937 Radio Reading

At the morning session of the League of American Poets conference June 6, 1937, the central question under discussion was how poetry might productively address a mass audience. Drawing on Zukofsky's letter to Niedecker following his broadcast, in this section I describe how Zukofsky articulates radio broadcasting as

[This quoted material has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed describes a letter Louis Zukofsky wrote to Lorine Niedecker 7 June 1937 that describes Zukofsky's participation in a League of American Poets conference and radio panel and reading. The section removed here, from page three of the letter, refers to radio communication with large audiences. The letter can be found in the Louis Zukofsky Collection, Series 2: Letters. Box 19, Folder 5. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.]

Questions about poetry's social and public roles were vital subjects in American literary discussions in the 1930s, when the economic Depression, New Deal, labor issues, the growth of Communist Party activity in the United States, the growth of fascism in Europe, and military activity in both Europe and Asia prompted writers to consider how their work fit into the social and political contexts of the day. Questions about the potential political work of poetry were particularly central in 1937, in the midst of many writers' efforts to support the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War. Fought between July 1936 and April 1939, the Civil War was a crucial issue that catalyzed an international left; one of its most famous and highly publicized incidents, the bombing of civilians at Guernica, happened on April 26, 1937, six weeks before the League of American Poets conference. Conference attendees were among those who responded to Spanish Civil War events by fighting in battles, visiting Spain as reporters, and through writing poetry.⁶³ M.J. Benardete and Rolfe Humphries's anthology . . . *And Spain Sings: Fifty Loyalist Ballads Adapted by American Poets* (1937) is one example of poetic work meant to advocate for U.S. intervention in the Spanish Civil War, and it includes work by poets Muriel Rukeyser, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Genevieve Taggard, and William Carlos Williams. The context of poetic responses to the Spanish Civil War, among many galvanizing political contexts in the period, demonstrates the stakes of discussions about how poetry might best speak to contemporary issues and audiences. Such discussions were motivated not only by the desire to extend the audience for poetry, but also by convictions that poetry could productively participate in documenting and circulating cultural information and aid in worthy causes.

While many writers in the 1930s felt compelled to write poetry that addressed political debates and large audiences (larger perhaps than the audiences some accused earlier modernisms of addressing), poets disagreed about how to do so. For example, American Communist Party officials advocated writing proletarian realism that spoke directly about labor issues in language and forms that a majority of people might easily understand; practitioners of documentary poetics advocated writing that reported facts, so as to make people aware of particular incidents such as mining disasters or conditions of Dust Bowl poverty and also (by personalizing issues and mobilizing sentiment) to move people to action. The League of American Poets conference was attended by many with leftist political affiliations—including, among others, League organizer Genevieve Taggard, one of the editors of the *New Masses* Horace Gregory, poet Willard Maas, “Objectivist” poet Carl Rakosi, and Spanish Civil War veteran and poet Rolfe Humphries. The conference generated debate about how to address mass audiences *and* cultural and political concerns most productively.

Cultural Front discourses were central to many literary and cultural debates in the 1930, and were a key context in relation to which poets articulated their poetics. Zukofsky occupied a complicated position in the 1930s and early 1940s as a leftist, Marxist, and formally-innovative second-generation modernist “Objectivist” poet.⁶⁴ From the late 1920s, he was active in transatlantic avant-garde spheres: he regularly corresponded with Pound and Williams, responded to Eliot’s *The Waste Land* with his own “Poem Beginning ‘The’,” and published work in journals such as *transition*, *Exile*, and *New Directions*. In the later 1930s (between 1935 and 1941), however, as biographer Mark Scroggins notes, his most significant publications were in the leftist journal *New*

*Masses*⁶⁵ (Scroggins “Revolutionary” 56). His work resists stable categories or critical models predicated on a “great divide” of popular/elite or political/experimental.⁶⁶

Zukofsky’s complex relationship to modernist formal innovation and Marxist ideology is indicative of many writers of the period and also of a particular materialist orientation characteristic of “Objectivist” poetics. Literary critic Michael Davidson notes that the “Objectivist” literary emergence “during a time of massive unemployment and social unrest at home, with the specter of fascism emerging abroad, exerted powerful effects on their work” and that further, this context generated a “confrontation” with what he terms the “ideology of form” (*Ghostlier* 117).⁶⁷ In response to both the models of Pound and Eliot and those of new, surrealist-influenced work as published in *transition*, Zukofsky and “Objectivist” writers engaged a materialist approach.

Zukofsky maintained leftist sympathies from at least the late 1920s through World War II; he was a confirmed Marxist but was rejected as a U.S. Communist party member at the meeting in which he was nominated by journalist Whittaker Chambers (Scroggins “Revolutionary” 45). He was a member of the League of American Writers (the U.S. branch of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers) until at least 1938 and served on a committee organized to support striking steelworkers in 1937 (Scroggins *Louis* 154). He also took up political endeavors that were connected to writing and publishing projects;⁶⁸ for example, he published in and served as an unpaid editorial advisor for the *New Masses* (Scroggins *Louis* 154), though also critiqued their editorial endorsement of proletarian realism (Scroggins “Revolutionary” 52).

[This quoted material has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed quotes from a letter Louis Zukofsky wrote to Lorine Niedecker 7 June 1937 that describes Zukofsky's participation in a League of American Poets conference and radio panel and reading. In particular, the quoted material from pages three and four of the letter removed here details Zukofsky's account of his spoken contribution to the morning discussion of the League conference, which focused on how poetry might be relevant to contemporary audiences. The letter can be found in the Louis Zukofsky Collection, Series 2: Letters. Box 19, Folder 5. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.]

When speaking to the wide array of people constituting a mass audience,
Zukofsky proposes, speak about things that are relevant to people reading or listening.

[This quoted material has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed quotes from a letter Louis Zukofsky wrote to Lorine Niedecker 7 June 1937 that describes Zukofsky's participation in a League of American Poets conference and radio panel and reading. In particular, the quoted material from pages 3 and 6 of the letter removed here details Zukofsky's account of comments to League conference attendees about how poetry might interest or address particular kinds of audiences. The letter can be found in the Louis Zukofsky Collection, Series 2: Letters. Box 19, Folder 5. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.]

It was apropos that immediately following the League of American Poets discussion on how writing might productively address a mass audience, several conference attendees would continue the conversation on a nationally-broadcast radio program. Zukofsky shared the League of American Poets panel of poetry readings and discussion, which was hosted on poet A.M. Sullivan's regular poetry series, with poets Genevieve Taggard, Robert Fitzgerald, and *New Masses* co-editor Horace Gregory. The fact that his first radio broadcasting experience occurred in the context of a panel on contemporary poetics, in the midst of a conference where the crucial debate was how to

address mass audiences, I believe, shaped his ideas about the medium's potential to circulate poetic and cultural ideas. Zukofsky was conscious during the radio reading and the discussion that followed of the mass audience to which he spoke:

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Experiencing speaking into the microphone and imagining the audience, I believe, helped shape Zukofsky's awareness of the way radio amplifies and disseminates voices.

Zukofsky's first radio spot made him personally aware of the circumstances of speaking and broadcasting live to potentially millions of listeners.

For his radio reading, Zukofsky read a section of "A"-8 that he published the following month in *New Masses* as "The Labor Process (from "A"-8)." The section begins with an adaptation of Karl Marx's chapter "The Labor-Process and the Process of Producing Surplus-Value" in *Capital*, followed by lines that detail a contemporary New York labor context. In his letter to Niedecker, Zukofsky reports that

[This quoted material has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed quotes from a letter Louis Zukofsky wrote to Lorine Niedecker 7 June 1937 that describes Zukofsky's participation in a League of American Poets conference and radio panel and reading. In particular, the quoted material from page 10 of the letter removed here details Zukofsky's account of the distribution of information broadcasting enables. The letter can be found in the Louis Zukofsky Collection, Series 2: Letters. Box 19, Folder 5. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.]

Zukofsky is critical of the lack of direct attention to primary Marxist texts by Earl Browder, Chair of the Communist Party in America from 1932-1945, and other Communist Party members, and articulates a poetics of direct quotation. Not only was radio a productive site for reading poetry, however; Zukofsky also found it an opportunity to articulate how listeners might approach poetry.

After the segment of poetry readings, Zukofsky reports, moderator A.M. Sullivan began the radio discussion by asking

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[This quoted material has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed quotes from a letter Louis Zukofsky wrote to Lorine Niedecker 7 June 1937 that describes Zukofsky's participation in a League of American Poets conference and radio panel and reading. In particular, the quoted material from pages 12-13 of the letter removed here details Zukofsky's account of his response to A.M. Sullivan's question. The letter can be found in the Louis Zukofsky Collection, Series 2: Letters. Box 19, Folder 5. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.]

Zukofsky's comments position poets as laborers (such as craftsmen), suggesting that poetic technique is (or should be) directly embedded in the social context in which it is produced. He extends this point to suggest that poetic technique might be understood as

machinic, and that readers might come to appreciate a poem by learning about the processes by which it is made. His statements recall Williams's articulation of a poem as "a machine made of words," but Zukofsky suggests that poetry is both technical *and* is a process of labor.

On the radio panel, Zukofsky describes poetry as something that might model particular kinds of labor systems. Further, he figures *radio* as a site that, by broadcasting such poetics and ideas, might promote social change. Sullivan asks if

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Zukofsky continues, he reports,

[This quoted material has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed quotes from a letter Louis Zukofsky wrote to Lorine Niedecker 7 June 1937 that describes Zukofsky's participation in a League of American Poets conference and radio panel and reading. In particular, the quoted material from pages 15-16 of the letter removed here details Zukofsky's account of his statements on writing poetry made during the radio broadcast. The letter can be found in the Louis Zukofsky Collection, Series 2: Letters. Box 19, Folder 5. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.]

Zukofsky's formulation of cooperative writing would draw on the expertise of a group and produce a product that would not be the work of any one writer. He associates

individuality here with sentiment, possibly with the lyric “I” position, but while earlier modernists also decried “sentimental” poetry, Zukofsky’s approach to eliding individual sentiment in this instance is through collectivity, rather than personae or fractured voices. He suggests that radio broadcasting might be a tool by which knowledge could circulate and ideas could mobilize people to action.

Zukofsky’s Index of American Design Radio Scripts

Zukofsky continued to theorize and investigate what radio made possible as he wrote his radio scripts for the Index of American Design in 1939 and 1940. The radio series did not ultimately air, presumably due to funding cuts. The scripts evidence Zukofsky’s estimation of radio’s capacity to circulate crucial cultural, political, and poetic discourse to mass audiences. In writing scripts for radio, Zukofsky explores how broadcasting could widely disseminate popular voices and address and historicize labor practices. Whereas, for example, Niedecker in her scripts and poems imported unmarked speech to emphasize “overheard” and intimate strategies of listening and unique and regional linguistic samples, Zukofsky’s historical scripts mark speech in order to publicize a continuous record of craft and design practices and the people who developed them. He draws on quotations from newspapers, poems, and the archived papers of early American craftspeople to enliven and personalize his accounts. He documents the stories and statements of particular designers and of poets, traveling salesmen, immigrants, indentured and slave laborers, and those involved with transatlantic trade. The scripts demonstrate how Zukofsky understands radio to be a productive site over which to broadcast information about early American history from the perspective of artists and

laborers, suggesting that such information could be useful in contextualizing labor processes and people's appreciation of objects in the contemporary age.

Zukofsky researched and wrote his scripts while employed at the New York branch of the Index of American Design, for which he worked from 1936-1942, writing essays (1937-1938) and radio scripts (1939-1940). Zukofsky's four major, multi-sectional essays and eight radio scripts, recently published for the first time, survey the historical and cultural contexts in which art and design practices emerged in the United States between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The essays and scripts foreground the local, the regional, and the transnational embedded in cultural practices surrounding early American craft and design objects and foreground the processes and practices of labor that underwrite each object discussed. In eight concise three-to-four-page radio scripts and notes for three further scripts, Zukofsky discusses the cultural contexts and significance of objects such as a water pitcher commemorating abolition, lanterns used in political parades, and a compass-holder used to help navigate a trade ship. In the scripts, Zukofsky registers the material and cultural modes of production in which each craft object is situated and links these objects to contemporary places and audiences.

Zukofsky's radio scripts were meant to introduce to the general public the work of the Index in representing historical objects of American manual and decorative craft. The Index of American Design artists and researchers who documented and described historical objects no longer in circulation brought the craft and design objects into public consciousness through detailed, three-dimensional watercolors accompanied by historical textual data. It was the task of Zukofsky and others to research and disseminate this data.

The Index of American Design project, Federal Arts Project historian Jonathan Harris notes, was intended to function as publicity for the entire Federal Arts Project and as such, held high-profile exhibits in New York and in department stores across the nation (90-91; 99).⁶⁹ While the Index aimed to publish selections from its paintings and research in portfolios arranged around categories of objects, and distribute these portfolios in libraries, schools, and homes, the project lost its funding (in 1942) before this goal was realized (Clayton 18). Instead, exhibitions in libraries, museums, department stores, bookshops, hotels, banks, and antique stores distributed the images and information; I believe that Zukofsky's radio scripts were another intended site of “exhibition” and distribution via broadcast.⁷⁰ The scripts serve as a written record of Zukofsky's strategies for shaping the reception of early American craft objects as popular, lively, embedded in historical traditions, and relevant to contemporary audiences.

Zukofsky's approach to the scripts is aligned with both the Index's aims and his own ideas about the potential for radio to productively circulate culturally relevant information. Harris notes that the Index manual stressed the importance of research, as “the presentation of each art object involved both graphic illustration and the narration of its historical and social significance” (88; 94).⁷¹ The manual states that research history should include details and anecdotes that constitute “a link to the ‘real life of the people’ and [indicate] the objects’ utility” (88).⁷² Harris locates this “utility” in an object's contribution to national development, arguing that “the cultural and ideological functions of the Index should not be underestimated,” and that the Index participated in the New Deal project to “unite the nation and its people through the representation of an

intelligible and continuous past” (85).⁷³ At the beginning of his first radio script, Zukofsky writes:

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 150 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It quotes from Zukofsky’s introduction to the “Index” work.]

He invokes the idea of the popular throughout the script’s introductory section, aligning the project with the regional, local, folk, and labor discourses promoted by W.P.A. work and by the 1930s Depression and documentary climate. However, Zukofsky also complicates any locally or nationally-bound understanding of the formations of “American” art through his insistence on immigration, trade, and mobility as crucial to the stories of design and design objects.

Zukofsky composed his radio scripts with aural delivery in mind, scripting sound that might engage and situate listeners. By beginning each script with the music of

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed names the song indicated at the beginning of Zukofsky’s radio scripts, and can be found, for example, on page 149 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003.]

an old-time gospel song recorded in 1936 by country music legends “The Carter family,” for example, Zukofsky invokes a sonic cultural context in which the historical material might be received. The song was popular on national radio stations around 1938 and signals Depression-era, New Deal sentiments of economic and cultural rejuvenation in its chorus: “Deliverance will come!.” Each of the eight radio scripts begins with this tune and prepares the listener to receive the histories of popular art and the people who made

and used it in a musical climate evoking renewal and renewed appreciation of American craft and folk culture. The scripts appeal to imagined listeners through scripted sound effects, interview formats, folk anecdotes, and cuttings from poems and historical newspaper articles. The scripts provide historical and anecdotal context about the objects discussed; in them, a speaker responds to a scripted interviewer's brief prompts and questions with lengthier, informative discussion that engages colloquial, entertaining, and site-specific modes.

The scripts attempt to connect antiquated objects to contemporary audiences by exposing how the sites of craft production in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries are coexistent with sites recognizable by contemporary urban audiences.

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 197 and 195 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It describes addresses of early potters (1795 to 1845) in New York.]

Several lines later, he reiterates that

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 195 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It describes addresses of early potters (1795 to 1845) in New York.]

The interviewer figure in the script responds that

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 195 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It quotes describes locations of early potters and a contemporary broadcasting studio in New York.]

This filmic and palimpsestual image of the broadcast site superimposed over the site about which they are speaking collapses temporal codes to depict multiple geographical iterations occupying one space. It also designs a reception context for a listening audience who might enjoy the sense of revived history, of listening to speech coming from a site of historical craft production.⁷⁴

Zukofsky uses the scripts as a forum to tell stories about craft and artisans, labor and laborers, and consistently invokes mobility and circulation as the modes by which laborers develop and exchange goods, and by which objects take on meaning in society.⁷⁵ The radio scripts provide historical details about the production and use of each object they discuss: citing multiple locations and movements, from parades to shipping routes, is integral to their design. One script, for example, describes a handbill obtained by researchers on the Index of American Design that advertises the business of

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 169 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It names a company in New York.]

In order to demonstrate Index research practices to audiences, the script explains that the broadcast will follow the road to 69 Pearl Street. He notes that 69 Pearl Street is located in the area that is the shipping and financial district of downtown New York City in the 1930s, and is also the location where a binnacle figure (compass holder) is currently installed that would be the main subject of the program. The broadcast site then (in the script) shifts to 69 Pearl Street, where the binnacle figure can be further investigated.

Zukofsky describes the binnacle by detailing its ornamental and sculptural form, its teakwood imported from India, and the sea routes from Nantucket to China that it would have traversed. In the course of the script, 69 Pearl Street emerges as a complex site of trade and traffic. The speaker enlists shipyard doggerel, old sailor's tales, and the letters of French explorer and author of American travel narratives St. John de Crevecoeur to historically situate the binnacle's movement among these locations. He contextualizes the binnacle figure in a period of expanding American trade to make connections between the downtown New York shipping district and international ports. The mobility invoked in the radio scripts in part is designed to produce multi-faceted contexts in which, in Zukofsky's word, listeners might imagine each object discussed.

Zukofsky describes 69 Pearl Street as a site where

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 169 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It describes the broad range of historical information that can be gleaned from investigation of simple items.]

Zukofsky's scripts emphasize how international circulation of labor, materials, and ideas were critical to the development of U.S. design. In a script detailing the work of a cabinetmaker born in Scotland, Zukofsky shows how immigrant traditions directly affected styles popular in the early Federal era. In the second script, he describes a famous glass and ironwork maker's immigration to Pennsylvania from Germany and the circumstances of the first silver plate made in the American colonies by a recent Irish immigrant. In these instances Zukofsky calls attention to the international traditions

embedded in practices of art and labor. In another script discussing American stoneware, he notes that Dutch immigrants, in bringing over their tradition and knowledge of ceramics in the early eighteenth century

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 194 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It describes the contributions of early immigration to American craft.]

By indexing how objects of early American craft and design were informed by and circulated among international movements and sites, Zukofsky enlarges (and potentially complicates) the W.P.A. portrait of a national patrimony. Compositely, the examples of international design influence, trade routes, importing and exporting of materials, and distribution produce an impression of the objects circulating in multiple spheres and discourses. The multiple locations and links between objects, their makers, their sites of manufacture, and their uses portray objects and craftspeople circulating in matrices and networks of production and distribution.

Zukofsky's emphasis on personalizing historical objects and events and detailing the lives of the craft and trade laborers who constituted early American design systems indexes his sense that radio broadcasting could be a productive site for disseminating information about labor, economies, and art with a popular orientation. The scripts were invested in describing historical artifacts in order to clarify their social relevance for a contemporary population *and* to disseminate this information to a mass audience. By describing cultural contexts and historical processes among which each folk art object

travels, the radio scripts invoke the circulatory modes of broadcasting and represent the cultural networks in which artifacts and processes of making accumulate significance.

Zukofsky describes the work of the Index artists in enlarging the audience for early American craft projects by writing that an object such as a ship's figurehead

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 150 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It describes the impact of the circulation of artistic reproductions of craft items.]

Here he invokes the sense of circulation articulated by Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1935-6), where art reproduced for a mass audience has social significance as it destroys the “aura,” the immediate presence and value of “cultural heritage” of an “original” object, in its plurality.⁷⁶ In his scripts, Zukofsky extended the work of Index artists through personalizing the historical artifacts by quoting from the letters, articles, and poems of those who made, sold, and used the objects. Radio broadcasting, the scripts suggest, was an apt medium for the circulation of such popular histories.

Zukofsky's Mass: "A"-10

If Zukofsky's Index of American Design radio scripts identify the capacity of radio to broadcast quotation, direct speech, and information on artists and laborers, his poem "A"-10 points to the capacity of broadcasting systems to limit the circulation of popular and political speech. "A"-10, a section of Zukofsky's long poem "A",⁷⁷ documents the shutdown of radio communication in occupied Paris and the sequence of events that generated fascist momentum in Europe. It was composed in June and July 1940 in response to the German occupation of Paris beginning on June 10th and on the heels of Zukofsky's Index radio script work. "A"-10 opens with an instance of failed radio communication that signals the escalation of war:

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978. The removed quotation describes the disconnection of transatlantic communication.]

The lines reference the German takeover of French radio systems. Zukofsky shows how radio, which has the potential to circulate people's voices widely, is also bound up with political institutions that have the power to control whose voices circulate. The poem calls on the people of Paris and France to re-form a working government and, most importantly, to broadcast their collective voices of protest and calls for assistance to a wide international public.⁷⁸ "A"-10 interrogates the possibilities and limits of publicly disseminating information in the era of mass communication.

"A"-10 also investigates the idea of the mass and masses in contemporary discourse. In the poem, Zukofsky discusses the masses leaving Paris; he contrasts the masses of people's audible popular voices with individual whispering voices; and he

documents the mass death in Rotterdam and other European cities. As a way to contrast a structured, institutional, politicized approach that might speak *for* the people with an approach that would enable the people's own self-governing voices to speak for themselves, Zukofsky ironically writes "A"-10 in the form of a Catholic mass, with sections roughly corresponding to the *Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei*. As the poem examines how mass communication functions in the context of war, it demonstrates how radio is a site that makes evident and exacerbates the tension between the masses as empowered and the masses as controlled. His call for the collective voices of French refugees to amass and make their voices heard internationally draws on 1930s labor and Popular Front rhetoric of the collective, but Zukofsky takes up the idea of the collective in the era of the mass, interrogating the possibilities and limits of public, collective speech in a politicized era of mass communications and mass death.

Due to its explicitly political context and statements, "A"-10 has been little discussed in critical treatments of "A". In his volume reading each of the twenty-four movements of "A", for example, Zukofsky scholar Barry Ahearn devotes only three sentences to "A"-10, arguing that the piece shows the strain of global political affairs and is "much less ambitious than its companion movements" (*Zukofsky's "A"* 102). "A"-10 was indeed a departure, positioned in between two formally-complex movements of "A", the double canzone of "A"-9 and the ballad of "A"-11 (which were both inspired by poems and forms of thirteenth-century Italian poet Guido Cavalcanti). Ahearn writes that Zukofsky describes the capitalist system in the first half of "A"-9 (composed between 1938 and 1940) as a kind of "legalized insanity" and suggests, then, that "A"-10 exhibits the "malign influence of world affairs on the movement" (Ahearn 101). I read the poem

not so much as a result of malign influence as Zukofsky's engaging what he characterized in his letter about his 1937 radio broadcast as the

[This quoted material has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The quotation removed is from the page twelve of a letter Louis Zukofsky wrote to Lorine Niedecker 7 June 1937 that describes Zukofsky's participation in a League of American Poets conference and radio panel and reading and, here, contemporary resources for writing poetry. The letter can be found in the Louis Zukofsky Collection, Series 2: Letters. Box 19, Folder 5. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.]

and responding to the circumstances impacting people and laborers on an international scale. "A"-10 does employ a formal organizing structure (the mass) and invokes music as do so many of his poems; Zukofsky interprets the lack of first-hand, on-site information about people's experiences due to the halting of Parisian radio broadcasting under occupation as

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the fate of people under occupation, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

Such high stakes generate the documentary and critical impulse of "A"-10. The poem reiterates the theme of discontinued song in lines such as one directed at future readers and critics:

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the fate of the poet during a time of war, and can be found on page 120 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

“A”-10 documents how the information circulated by radio is determined by those who control broadcasting stations and equipment. The poem registers how such a system can potentially organize who speaks for and to listening audiences, and what is spoken about. Following the poem’s opening announcement of the fall of Paris and the halting of the news service, the first sequence continues by registering what can and cannot be heard over European and transatlantic broadcast. It quotes a radio voice calling for a Paris radio station to speak:

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky’s poem “A”-10, refers to a lack of transatlantic radio signals, and can be found on page 112 of “A.” Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

Republican Paris cannot be heard under German occupation, but the Nazi broadcast is circulating by the time when London tunes in. Such a description portrays the Nazi broadcast as taking precedence over London’s ability to intervene. Radio broadcasting in these lines demonstrate the force that the Nazi political-military machine had built by 1940; their efforts were impacting huge numbers of people and this, the poem later suggests, might have been avoided had nations including France intervened when they might have in the Spanish Civil War. Radio broadcasting here, then, both is representative of German and Axis consolidation of power, and indicates how radio was one means by which such power was built through broadcasts by Hitler and others in the years leading up to World War II. The silence of occupied Paris is further contrasted by the capacity of New Yorkers sitting in cafés to still get news either by newswires broadcast on speakers or by newspaper. Zukofsky’s consistent attention to sound, wordplay, and homophonic translation encourages me to hear in his phrase

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to a lack of transatlantic radio signals, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

an echo of the word "radio," emphasizing how radio broadcasting still functions to convey information about the war in some cities, but not from Parisians, who cannot

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to a lack of transatlantic radio signals, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

The crux of "A"-10 and the motivation for its form lie in the poem's meditation on the cultural and political signification of the mass and investigation into how mass communication systems function in relation to the multiple iterations of mass culture.

Zukofsky writes:

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to groups of persons gathering and to the phenomenon of the Catholic ritual, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

The concept of the mass functions in multiple ways in these lines. The opening line's reference to the

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to a specific group of persons gathering, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

introduces the first example of the poem's reference to the people and the popular voice, which cannot be heard over broadcasts and thus are not represented in news accounts of the current circumstances. If we read the first line carrying over to the second,

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to a group of persons gathering, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

functions as a verb, suggesting that people are gathering, collecting, and growing *en masse*. The second line qualifies such a mass gathering as one of exile, with the passive past tense form of mass, suggesting that situation has been forced upon the Parisian refugees. The injunction to

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the lack of a regular structure for practicing a Catholic ritual, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

is a hinge in the poem, still suggesting an action of large-scale gathering that people perform but also the Catholic ritual that people might attend. The atmosphere here functions as the open air of the roads by which the refugees leave and the bombed-out sites in which they might gather; it also recalls the radio ether invoked in the first few verse paragraphs, which call on Paris to

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the disconnection of transatlantic radio signals, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

These lines invoke the Catholic mass but emphasize the absence of a viable structure in which to practice it— with only air and

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the lack of a regular structure for practicing a Catholic ritual, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

The governing structure that the lines do acknowledge – the

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the actions of the Pope in relation to a political movement, and can be found on page 112 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

— is a corrupt and politicized one which favors the fascist elite over the popular and laboring classes.⁷⁹

Zukofsky mobilizes the structure of the Catholic mass in order to critique institutional oppression, fascism, and the control of mass communications by a conquering few, and to propose the collective expression of people's voices in articulating their circumstances and their protest. As the poem proceeds, it suggests that the voices of the masses should try to articulate themselves outside of religiously or politically-oppressive structures. In the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* sections of "A"-10, the poem emphasizes the need for people to speak collectively aloud in order for their voices to be heard. The *Kyrie* section begins

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to collective communication and its absence in contemporary urban centers during the current wartime crises, and can be found on page 113 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

It contrasts the potential for such mass vocalization with its opposite:

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the ineffectiveness of solely individual instances of communication, and can be found on page 113 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

Zukofsky again plays with the concept of the mass here, describing individual articulations as quiet and insubstantial and contrasting the individual with the choral collective; his phrases suggest a degeneration of the potential for popular mass protest into

[This single-word quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, and can be found on page 113 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]⁸⁰

Encouraging the populace to rise up, the *Kyrie* section states again,

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, calls for increased communication, and can be found on page 113 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

Here the poem acknowledges that it is individual voices that make up the popular, mass voice that has the potential to enact political change or protest. The line also marks individual bodies as the source of such potentially collective speech, but indicates that it

is the aggregate of such bodies and voices that might constitute the politically-effective mass utterance.

“A”-10 demonstrates how the potential of radio to function in an emancipatory capacity – to distribute information and multiple, diverse, popular voices widely – is dependent on who has access to the equipment necessary to generate mass communication. Whereas the *Kyrie* section focuses on a more general call for collective vocalization that recalls the rhetoric of 1930s Cultural Front activism, the *Gloria* section makes a specific plea to French people to resist Nazi occupation. The section states:

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky’s poem “A”-10, calls on those leaving occupied territories to return, and can be found on page 114 of “A.” Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

The sequence calls on the people of northern France to return and offer resistance to the occupation.

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky’s poem “A”-10, refers to the capacity of the previously governing body to reinstate itself, and can be found on page 114 of “A.” Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

Here Zukofsky suggests that the Republic requires a great deal of popular support in order to be reinstated. The section offers three concrete potential options for resistance: fleeing French people might return to the occupied north; French citizens might resist by fleeing to Britain and hiding; and a combined British-French military force based out of England could form defense strikes and

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to possibilities for military action, and can be found on page 115 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

The section reiterates the fact that

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the regulation of communication, and can be found on page 115 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

at least by French citizens, while German troops control radio broadcast distribution.

However, Zukofsky makes clear, other nations or people may broadcast *to* the people of France; for example,

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to radio broadcasting, and can be found on page 114 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

Radio still functions here as having the potential to transmit messages of resistance, even as the Nazi broadcasts demonstrate how broadcasts can serve a regulatory or oppressive function.

The *Credo* section of "A"-10 figures the mass as mass death and registers the emerging mass scale of military aggression. Instead of offering a sequence that affirms a system of institutionalized beliefs as the *Credo* would in a Catholic mass, the section offers a litany of war crimes. It names contributing factors to the militarization and heightened aggression in Europe and Asia, stating that

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the ultimately detrimental effects of large-scale transatlantic economic systems, and can be found on page 116 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

The poem also links the Spanish Civil War, and the lack of intervention by the international community, with the anti-Semitic aggression occurring in Italy and Germany, where

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the oppressive political situation in Germany, and can be found on page 119 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

Zukofsky characterizes the conflict on a global scale, emerging from the aggregate of particular offenses to individuals and communities. Anti-Semitic, anti-labor aggressors, the poem records, are

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the new strategies of war, and can be found on page 117 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

The poem discusses how entire cities have become military targets, and how the knowledge of this, through surveillance and mass communications, haunts many worldwide. Zukofsky invokes the specter, since Guernica, of new military practices of targeting civilians;

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to new strategies of war, and can be found on page 119 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

the poem states, referring to the German bombing of the city.

The *Credo* section emphasizes how the control of mass communications by Fascist leaders has been central to the escalation of aggression in Europe and reiterates the impetus for the poem: that such control is a serious cause for alarm. Zukofsky locates this threat in synecdochal alignments of the body parts that produce speech with control over people, bodies, cities, and coalitions. He writes of:

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the communication and strategies of fascist leaders, and can be found on page 118 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

These lines invoke the radio voices of Mussolini, Hitler, and other rising political party members throughout the interwar period. The isolation of their body parts, and the indication of their acting in aggressive capacities in relation to the people of Italy, Spain, and elsewhere, invokes a mechanized though dominating detachment. It is not Mussolini or Hitler, but their mouths and voices, the poem suggests, that threatens these nations and people. Zukofsky invokes here the radio broadcasting Mussolini and Hitler engaged in, and suggests the power of such public vocalization to act on other people, to dominate, and to take aim. It is also this power, the poem suggests, that might be the path of resistance, protest, redress, and retaliation by popular and civilian voices. At the same time that the poem depicts the voices of Fascist leaders and states dominating the public and threatening to conquer or invade London, Paris, the United States, and the international coalition that formed the Brigade, it also depicts the loss of the capacity for ordinary citizens to communicate. People in Prague and elsewhere, the poem reports, are:

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the disconnection of long-distance communication systems, and can be found on page 119 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

This is the situation that must be redressed, the poem suggests. Zukofsky writes that people must

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, describes and encourages communication, and can be found on page 119 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

and find ways to access allies, broadcast information, and form a resistance. The poem appeals to the people of France to take back control *through* taking back the power to speak publicly and circulate information about current conditions to mass audiences.

In the final sections of "A"-10, shorter sections that correspond to the *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* sections of the Catholic mass, the poem quotes people's voices to model how such voices might publicly circulate and again encourages the people of France to resist. The *Sanctus* section quotes a child speaking in French and English, followed by a brief dialogue at a bar in a Canadian port between French and British sailors. The lines show the example of common people talking and forming alliances; this portrayal or promotion of dialogue can be read in the context of the poem's earlier call for the French to appeal to the British for assistance and for the British to grant asylum and military aid.

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, calls for the use of radio technology to communicate, especially in light of the threats ahead, and can be found on page 122 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

The stakes of not resisting, not finding a way to circulate information, the section suggests, are high. The concluding lines of "A"-10 note that the new

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It is from Zukofsky's poem "A"-10, refers to the current political situation in Europe and calls for a change in this situation, and can be found on page 123 of "A." Berkeley: U California P, 1978.]

The sailors, who were earlier depicted in conversation at a bar far from home, have here misread the signals; the lines advise that the wrong interpretation of the situation has been made and the wrong information has been measured. The final section suggests that the circulation of accurate information, and information directly from the people of Paris and France, could help rectify the situation and help create the circumstances for peace. The final two lines of "A"-10, as literary critic Bruce Comens notes, rewrite the Catholic *Agnus Dei's* "Lamb of God . . . grant us peace";⁸¹ they propose a peace that comes directly from the work of the people: a collective mass.

Zukofsky's engagement of radio in the late 1930s and early 1940s as a speaker, script-writer, and poet prompted him to investigate the capacity of radio to function as an emancipatory media system. On his League of American Poetry panel broadcast, in his Index of American Design radio scripts, and in "A"-10, Zukofsky considered the potential for broadcasting to circulate information and popular voices. As he did so, he responded to some of the central literary and cultural questions of the period, which asked how writers might productively address political crises and speak to wider, popular, politicized masses. On national radio, as part of a panel and conference debating the relationships between contemporary poetry, mass audiences, and social consciousness,

Zukofsky spoke about poetic work as labor in a capitalist system, evidencing his sense that radio was a productive place to circulate ideas about labor and social change. In his W.P.A. radio scripts, Zukofsky wrote popular histories of objects of craft and design that relied on quotations and anecdotes from artisans and laborers; in the scripts, radio served as a model for the circulation of objects, information, and speech. In "A"-10, Zukofsky critiques the limits that the political and military control over broadcasting stations and equipment places on people's voices. However, "A"-10 also issues a sustained call for French citizens to regain control of both Paris and the airwaves. Zukofsky found that radio, as the primary mass communication medium in the 1930s and early 1940s, was in fact central to the constitution of the mass at this particular contemporary moment, as well as to the potential for the public and the poet to act in culturally-significant ways.

CHAPTER THREE: Airtime: Archibald MacLeish's and Ruth Lechlitner's 1930s Radio Drama as Cultural and Media Critique

In her essay on radio verse drama for *New Directions* 1937, poet and critic Ruth Lechlitner describes the contemporary cultural work of radio, writing that “[r]adio has created a great mass-audience” of heterogeneous listeners and that, increasingly, “ideas and tastes are shaped not by solitary perusal of book or paper, but by direct auditory contact with cultural leaders” via broadcasting (n.p.). Lechlitner suggests here that the wide availability of broadcasting has shifted the means by which individual and public opinions are formed. The mass radio audience she invokes was constructed in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s through the consolidation of radio broadcasting into centralized commercial networks that capitalized on the early popularity of radio and increasingly distributed the same programs simultaneously across the nation. Lechlitner's essay asserts that the wide scope of radio communication and the large audiences it commanded generated new modes of public education and public judgment. For example, her assertion that “direct auditory contact” influences public opinion indexes how radio broadcasts of live speeches and news enable listeners to hear immediate information delivered by the voices of well-known announcers, newscasters, elected officials, and artists. By contrasting mass radio communication with the “solitary perusal” of books, and by suggesting that radio offers more immediate contact with current events and leaders than reading newspapers, Lechlitner emphasizes the instantaneous, oral, timely, and simultaneous qualities of broadcasting. Her essay suggests that poets might take up the new medium in order to connect with the “mass-audience” and contribute to the cultural formation of ideas that radio increasingly facilitated.

Lechlitner's *New Directions* essay promotes the genre of the radio verse drama, which in the U.S. emerged in the later 1930s as poets began to write for new network dramatic series. Through her interest in verse drama Lechlitner joins the chorus of poets who in the 1930s imagined radio as a medium well suited for poetic work, including, as I have mentioned, James Laughlin and Archibald MacLeish, who was a crucial figure in the development and promotion of verse drama for radio. As I discussed in the introduction to my dissertation, broadcast radio's capacity to engage multiple and varied communities through sounded performances prompted writers to consider its potential for distributing contemporary poetry, poetics, and political comment. Poets also approached radio as a site in relation to which they could experiment with voices, genres, and sound; one key genre that poets explored was the radio verse drama. As I have shown, both Lorine Niedecker and Zukofsky engaged radio dramatic forms and conventions; Niedecker's poetic play-scripts and radio drama and Zukofsky's Index of American Design scripts are examples of the multiple kinds of radio dramatic projects that poets took up. Other poets, such as Lechlitner, MacLeish, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Maxwell Anderson, and Stephen Vincent Benét wrote radio drama that aired over network and university radio stations in the period.

Several factors contributed to poets' new interest in dramatic radio writing in the mid-1930s. Although the "radio boom" and large-scale broadcasting began in 1922, radio drama in the 1920s aired mainly in the form of adaptations of Broadway theatre, Shakespearean and other repertoire theater, and isolated original programs. The Federal Communications Commission introduced new guidelines in 1934 asking that commercial stations produce educational or public interest programming.⁸² These included public

service announcements, government-sponsored material, and network-produced, non-sponsored “sustaining” programs such as dramatic series that sought serious or literary radio work by talented writers. Technological advances in the later 1930s, such as the achievement of higher quality transmission and reception and development of sound effect capabilities, were partially prompted by and contributed to the increased number and increased estimation of non-sponsored and public-interest programs (Fink 210).⁸³

“Sustaining” dramas and verse dramas engaged the popularity of dramatic programs on radio in this period; North American radio historian Howard Fink, for example, notes that by the mid-1930s, “65% of [American] listeners preferred dramatic programmes” (191).⁸⁴

These programs included the successful Columbia Workshop series, which featured writers and actors such as Orson Welles, popular verse dramatist Norman Corwin, Archibald MacLeish, W.H. Auden, and Alfred Kreymborg, and adaptations of work by authors ranging from Ernest Hemingway to Euripides.

The second-generation modernist poets and other writers who experimented with writing for radio often yoked artistic innovation with cultural intervention. Poets’ interest in radio verse drama in part stemmed from its potential to attract new audiences and function as a site through which to participate publicly in political and cultural debates; writing for radio was in these ways a departure from many earlier modernist projects and aims. Writers such as MacLeish and Lechlitner took up specific issues (such as capitalism and Depression-era economics) and particular debates (such as whether to intervene in European military conflicts) in their radio plays, and developed dramatic and sonic techniques that represented potential responses and actions. Radio dramas in the period approach technical, formal, and compositional poetic questions about strategies of,

for example, rhythm, duration, pause, and the sounded invocation of visual images in ways that engaged and furthered radiophonic methods. Some verse dramas were politicized to the extent of functioning as propaganda, while others engaged investigatory methods and left open questions. Poets approached verse drama as a new genre and new mode of discourse well-suited to the kind of poetic innovation they found the contemporary modern scene demanded, both in terms of creating new markets for poetry and in terms of increasing the relevance of literary work. Both MacLeish and Lechlitner considered poetry to be a productive place for addressing contemporary cultural and political questions, and chose to write poetic drama for radio because they found it a promising venue through which to investigate and disseminate such timely material. Both poets were interested in radio's capacity to broadcast information immediately and simultaneously to large audiences because their work took up contemporary issues they felt were deserving of wide and "direct" public circulation.

In this chapter, I examine how in the late 1930s, both MacLeish and Lechlitner found in radio verse drama a genre that enabled them to experiment formally *and* test a new mass communicative mode of cultural and political discussion. By the 1930s, both poets were committed to leftist, antifascist causes and to writing that engaged public debates about political issues. MacLeish achieved more acclaim in his lifetime than did Lechlitner, but as I will describe in section two of this chapter, Lechlitner was well-known among her generation as a poet and poetry critic. Her essays and radio drama respond to MacLeish's work as they address the capacity of poetry to speak to cultural concerns. Radio drama became a venue for both poets' political comments on the cusp of

World War II, just as the genre of radio drama was becoming increasingly oriented toward, and at times heavily invested in, wartime issues.

Radio mass communication for both MacLeish and Lechlitner suggested a site that could model public debate and mobilize listeners to conduct further debate and conversation. In their radio plays, in statements about radio and poetic composition, and in poems that invoke radio, both poets represent public forums and evaluate public forms of dialogue and the circulation of information. Speaking and listening in their radio verse dramas take on political import, and both poets feature models of speech and listening that enact the kinds of intervention they hope to motivate. In his radio plays, MacLeish innovates the figure of the news announcer as narrator to report on sequences of debate about how to act in times of military and political crisis; his plays posit public speech and listening to diverse positions as crucial to the process of democratic decision-making. By demonstrating in his radio dramas what happens when media persona and citizens do not act on information they receive about impending military strikes, MacLeish's radio plays advocate for listening as an active endeavor, one that comes with responsibility.

Lechlitner's *We Are the Rising Wing* (1938) also models practices of public debate through play with dialogue between a singular government orator known as the "Public Mouth" and a crowd of citizens referred to as the "Great Ear." Her radio drama develops a model of choral collective speech, where members of the collective speak both in unison and singly, and deploy interruptive pauses and questions to disrupt the capitalist and centrist machinations of the governing body. Both Lechlitner's and MacLeish's radio verse dramas invoke the capacity of radio to broadcast to mass audiences as they

showcase communicative strategies for large-scale critique, intervention, information circulation, and political participation.

As MacLeish, Lechlitner, and others wrote for radio in the 1930s and early 1940s, they worked within and confronted large-scale commercial structures of network radio. The consolidation of systems of broadcast distribution coordinated by the National Broadcasting System (NBC) in 1926, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in 1927, and later the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) in [DATE], along with smaller networks such as the Mutual Network, constructed increasingly streamlined and standardized programming. This chapter investigates Lechlitner's and MacLeish's engagement and critique of commercial network radio systems at the height of their popular appeal and control over U.S. airwaves, and thus, their engagement of the (temporal) conditions and constraints of early twentieth-century broadcasting.

Writing for and working on radio in the 1930s meant working within the conditions and constraints of early twentieth-century broadcasting, when all radio was essentially live. In the words of Rosalind Roulston, recalling her work on *The Fall of the City* radio production in 1937, "sound had to be broadcast at the time it was made" (Roulston 93). Programs in this period were either broadcast directly live, or, beginning in the late 1930s, recorded for later broadcast in different time zones. However, even these recorded and replayed programs would generally have been heard just as they had been live, since it was not until the mid-1940s that tape recording methods were widely available to enable deletions, additions, recording actors out of sequence, and other new editing practices (Fink 211). Live broadcasting combined with the constraints of time allotments on radio produced attentive monitoring of timing, passing time, the schedule,

pace, and rhythm of the script or report. Roulston, for example, recalls tracking time in 15-second intervals on radio sets (93). Popular radio dramatist Norman Corwin recalls that when the pace of one of his plays picked up and left three minutes remaining at the end of a live broadcast, he had to step in with several minutes of spontaneous “thank yous” to all the cast and crew (Corwin 102). MacLeish also recalls that he knew roughly how many pages his play *Air Raid* (1938) needed to be to fit into a half hour, so that despite the fact that during the broadcast the play seemed to be moving too fast, it finished only eight seconds shy of thirty minutes (MacLeish *Reflections* 119).

The temporal circumstances such as those I discuss above emerged from the particular conditions of radio as an aural, mass, and commercial medium in the 1920s and 1930s. Time is particularly central to radio program production because of the way in which media systems began to coordinate and structure broadcasting. Networks sell “time” to advertisers and thus promote the consideration of radio segments in a temporal framework. Throughout the 1920s, 30s, 40s, newspapers printed radio schedules daily in charts organized on the half-hour, often with a Sunday weekly schedule edition. Radio broadcasting has been structured, generally, in timed segments of fifteen minutes, thirty minutes, or an hour. Coordinators of live broadcasts track timing and duration closely and attempt to eliminate “dead time” on the air (which is particularly important with no visual cues to explain unintentional or unannounced silence). Announcers and newscasters broadcast time signals as a public service and clock time to orient listeners in programming sequences, and both newscasters and radio dramatists engage clock time to set the scene for events they describe.

The centrality of time to radio performance and production, I demonstrate in this chapter, encouraged MacLeish, Lechlitner, and other radio writers in the 1930s to be attuned to time, and produced dramatic texts that engage temporal markers and temp/oral play. Both Lechlitner and MacLeish engage time conceptually, thematically, and structurally in their radio work and in sections of their prose and poetry. Time functions in their radio dramas as a means of organizing plots and constructing dramatic tension and to generate innovative ways of representing and producing rhythm and pause. In the opening sequence of MacLeish's radio play *Air Raid*, for example, he depicts a radio time signal; a gong indicates "Ten seconds past two A.M. precisely" (*Six* 99). The sequence situates listeners in a particular late-night, early-morning framework, where sleep might be interrupted for the WABC broadcast. It also engages conventions of time reporting and coordinating by announcing the gong sound to set watches by, and invokes the genre of the radio bulletin to situate listeners in a real-time scenario. The use of time in such sequences gestures toward the ways in which time is a central component to the production and, I will show, the writing, structure, themes, and poetics of the plays I discuss.⁸⁵

I also argue in this chapter that Lechlitner's and MacLeish's radio verse dramas explore how time serves as a formal constraint that informs the possibilities for public utterance on the mass medium of radio. In their dramas, essays, and poems, time serves as a marker for what forms of public discourse broadcasting permits and constructs. MacLeish's *The Fall of the City* and *Air Raid* suggest that the synchronization and mechanization of time that political and media systems employ can also promote (fascist) efficiency and limit public discussion; Lechlitner's *We Are the Rising Wing* explores how

political institutions and capitalist economic structures regulate time to control social organization. In Lechlitner's radio play, for example, a group of citizens chorally intones "[t]ime, speak with our voices," instructing or appealing to "time" to recognize the collective voices of an (as the play describes) oppressed public. The word "time" here invokes the contemporary era, as in the expression "the times," and a sense of radiophonic currency and immediacy – the voices ask that *their* concerns might be foregrounded in the present and passing time. Both poets' dramas suggest that institutional regulation of time can remove agency from individuals and work to homogenize and limit collective political debate and action. As they investigate how political and social systems mobilize time, MacLeish and Lechlitner explore how the time constraints placed on broadcasts by commercial radio networks can limit the possibilities for democratic dialogue and debate. While in "A"-10, for example, Zukofsky explores how German military and political control of French broadcasting stations limited the communication of both the government *and* the people of France, MacLeish and Lechlitner investigate what kinds of discourse and debate the temporal, commercial, and regulatory structures of American radio, and larger structures of mass communication and culture, enable and limit.

My discussions of MacLeish's and Lechlitner's radio verse dramas address the textual versions of their plays. Studying the scripts rather than recordings of aural performances is a productive form of analysis for my project because of its emphasis on poetics and how poetic texts register and respond to radiophonic concerns. It is also productive because many radio plays broadcast in the 1930s and 1940s were also published as texts. These scripts were issued in magazines, as single books, in anthology

collections of radio dramatic series or yearly annuals of the “best” radio drama. The textual representation of dramatic, sounded speech and action for radio production produces writing that is invested with, I believe, concerns of aurality, time and timing, tone, rhythm, and the invocation of vocal performance and exchange. The sonic record of early radio largely favors programs that received a very large popular audience; at times, networks released records of radio shows. Most recordings of radio programs from the 1920s, 30s, and 40s have been lost due to the fact that they were recorded on materials that have not been preserved or transferred to contemporary storage forms, or the fact that holding such recordings was not a priority for most stations, who had limited storage capabilities or did not value such preservation. MacLeish’s *The Fall of the City* and *Air Raid* were nationally broadcast over CBS network radio in 1937 and 1938; a recording of the 1937 *The Fall of the City* broadcast can be listened to online, archived at radio station WMFU.⁸⁶ Lechlitrner’s *We Are the Rising Wing* was produced over Ohio station WOSU in 1938, and if a recording was saved from this production, it was lost when the radio station archives were transferred to university archive holdings in the 1970s and the archive was cut drastically. This chapter considers the scripts of MacLeish’s and Lechlitrner’s radio plays, proposing that the textual records evidence their innovations and strategies for radiophonic, mass media, composition.

In what follows I detail MacLeish’s and Lechlitrner’s radio texts and theorizing of radio broadcasting. In section one, I examine how MacLeish’s radio dramas *The Fall of the City* (1937) and *Air Raid* (1938) engage conventions of real-time “live” radio broadcasting and the emerging genre of actuality reporting to model political debate and argue for intervention in what would become World War II. Section two investigates

how Lechlitner's *We Are the Rising Wing* (1938) takes up strategies of interruptive pause and ellipses to demonstrate the intervention of collective subjects in oppressive political structures. Through examining MacLeish's essays about governmental wartime propaganda and Lechlitner's poem "Quiz Show," which treats the phenomenon of audience participation broadcasts, both sections also address MacLeish's and Lechlitner's participation in politically-charged public debates about the constraints and possibilities of radio broadcasting.

Real-Time News and MacLeish's Radio Verse Drama

In October 1938, CBS radio broadcast a dramatic program that employed live news-style reports to describe unexpected air attacks. In the words of one contemporary reviewer, the broadcast was "shocking in its effect" (Hughes 12). This narrative may sound familiar, recalling Orson Welles and the *Mercury Theatre on the Air's* radio adaptation of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, which was broadcast October 30, 1938 at 9 PM and famously convinced a portion of the listening public that Martians had invaded New Jersey and were falling from the sky across the United States. The dramatic program I am referring to, however, is Archibald MacLeish's radio play *Air Raid*, broadcast three nights earlier, October 27, 1938 at 10 PM, which also featured a news announcer describing the aerial attack on civilians in a small, unsuspecting town. The reviewer I quoted from above, Albert D. Hughes in the *Christian Science Monitor*, wrote in fact that *Air Raid* was "more shocking in its effect" than *The War of the Worlds* broadcast and "more dreadful" because he believed that the events it describes might actually happen (12). *The War of the Worlds* has superseded *Air Raid* in popularity in critical discussions

of radio. However, in 1938 the broadcasts were discussed together in some press accounts, and *Air Raid* and MacLeish's 1937 radio play *The Fall of the City* (in which Welles starred as a news announcer) were important models for the live news structure of the more famous adaptation. Hughes' assessment of the viable possibility of civilian attack portrayed in *Air Raid* indexes the political context of heightening international conflict in which both radio plays aired; some listeners of Welles's program reported later that they thought the "Martian attack" was really a covert attack by German military forces, exposing the fear that existed at the time about this possibility. *Air Raid* depicts the urgency of acting in response to international conflict and fascism in part through invoking temporal markers and constraints that, I will discuss, characterize radio programming and live news broadcasting as it emerged in the late 1930s. This section examines how *Air Raid* and *The Fall of the City* engage conventions of real-time actuality news to articulate a fascist threat, and employ temporal codes as structural and thematic devices to argue for intervention in what would become World War II.

No genre made the element of time more apparent on radio than the live news reporting that emerged on a large scale in the 1930s. The capacity for radio to deliver news immediately contributed to the "press-radio wars" of the late 1930s, when radio surpassed newspapers for the first time as the primary source of news for a majority of the US population. Live eyewitness radio news coverage emerged in the mid-1930s with coverage of Spanish Civil War battles, including one broadcast by H.V. Kaltenborn in 1936 from the middle of a haystack in between combatants (Sterling 176), the Hindenburg crash in 1937, and the Munich Crisis, which journalist Edward R. Murrow famously covered around the clock in September 1938, just weeks before *Air Raid* aired.

Such broadcasts drew wide public audiences captivated by the immediate and vocalized transmission of unfolding events as they were listening to on-site reporters.

Live news broadcasts often employ temporal markers to help situate the events they report, and early radio news programs relied on such markers. Radio drama scholar Howard Blue describes how radio bulletins "repeatedly interrupted regular American programming, sometimes a dozen or more times a day, to bring out the latest news" during the Munich Crisis (8). Blue calls the following transmission by reporter Max Jordan of NBC onsite in Germany typical of bulletins from this time period. "In just a few moments," Jordan stated in one of his September 1938 broadcasts,

the National Broadcasting Company hopes to bring you via retransmission from Europe, from Munich, the official communiqué just released . . . We now take you across the sea.

Hello, NBC, this is Max Jordan calling from Munich, Germany. It is now eight minutes to two o'clock A.M. local time. Exactly seventeen minutes ago Premier Chamberlain of England, Premier Daladier of France and his [sic] and their delegations walked out of the assembly room at the Fuhrer's Palace here. (qtd. in Blue 8)

Along with identifying his name and the place of broadcast, Jordan uses time to situate his listeners in the unfolding action: in "a few moments" NBC will transmit live from Munich; "It is now" 8 minutes to 2:00; 17 minutes ago the meeting broke. In a similar style, broadcasting later from a rooftop during an air raid in London, radio historian Gerd Horten notes, CBS newscaster Edward R. Murrow began:

It is now 4:15 in the morning in London. There will be piles of empty shell casings around London's anti-aircraft batteries when dawn breaks an hour from now. All night, for more than eight hours, the guns have been flashing. The blue autumn sky has been pockmarked with the small red bursts . . . (qtd. in Horten 87)

In both of these news reporting examples, Jordan and Murrow report the current time in relation to the time just passed, the time in which the "news" occurred. Time is crucial to

the distribution of current events and news, and especially crucial to live radio news, where a reporter must verbally introduce all of the markers of a situation for a listening audience not privy to details such as the color of the sky at dawn. News programs in the 1930s increasingly took advantage of radio's capacity to distribute information immediately to great distances, and negotiated the immediacy, distance, and simultaneity through reporting time.

The capacity of live “eyewitness” broadcasts, direct from multiple international sites, to command the attention of audiences was not lost on MacLeish, and neither, I would argue, was the temporally-inflected means by which they conveyed their reports. Throughout the Munich Crisis and the mid-1930s, MacLeish paid close attention to unfolding events in Europe and the Pacific, and frequently wrote essays on politics, economics, and the social role of the modern artist and subject in journals such as the *Saturday Review of Literature*, the *New Republic*, the *Yale Review*, the *New Masses*, *National Poetry Review*, and *Fortune*. In fact, as a contributing editor of *Fortune* between 1930 and 1938, MacLeish wrote articles for the magazine on a near-monthly basis, treating issues as diverse as Depression-era housing, machines, social security, and the cotton industry; with the aid of a researcher, he wrote a series of articles called “Background of War” on the history of the escalating military conflicts in Spain, England, France, and Germany that ran March – August 1937. MacLeish’s radio play *The Fall of the City* aired in April 1937 on CBS’ experimental Columbia Workshop series, in the midst of his *Fortune* series. The radio drama evidences MacLeish’s sustained attention to interwar political, economic, and military shifts, as well as

highlights his interest and participation in extending the media channels by which information about such conflicts might be distributed.

Due to his multiple projects and alignments, like many writers in the interwar period, MacLeish occupies a complicated position in contemporary critical and literary studies. His work in the 1920s was modernist in character; he spent the years 1923-1928 in Paris as a literary expatriate and wrote both short poems such as “Ars Poetica” (“A poem should not mean / But be”) and long poems that literary critics such as David Barber have remarked reflected his proximity to the styles of Eliot and Pound (Barber 31). A three-time Pulitzer Prize winner, Bollingen Prize in Poetry winner, and National Book Award recipient, MacLeish was well-known nationally for his poetry. He was also well-known for his anti-fascist work and his federal employment. MacLeish was one of many writers who segued from 1930s leftist orientations and alignment with New Deal Depression relief programs into 1940s state-sponsored propaganda efforts concerned with distributing information in order to bolster support for U.S. entry into World War II. He worked as Librarian of Congress beginning in 1939 for five years, and in 1941, he directed the Office of Fact and Figures (a governmental information and propaganda department) before serving as assistant director for the Office of War Information in 1942. In his later years, he was involved with anti-McCarthy and anti-censorship activities and continued to write poetry, drama, speeches, and radio plays. As John T. Newcomb notes, MacLeish fell out of fashion in the New Critical and Cold War era, when his political-oriented work was read as socialist (Newcomb 22). Newcomb points out, at the time of his 1990 essay, that the critical reception of MacLeish has been surprisingly slight, with the only major book of criticism on his work having been

published in 1965; since Newcomb's essay, still no new full-length critical study exists (22).⁸⁷ In contemporary work on modernist poetics, MacLeish has not been received as an aesthetic innovator in the manner of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, or Zukofsky. However, neither has he been taken up in a major way by cultural-studies oriented scholars in recent years, perhaps due to his associations with "official verse culture"⁸⁸ as a national literary award winner and high-profile government employee. As a figure deeply invested in poetic, cultural, and political activities, and who produced a large volume of work that develops these interests, MacLeish indexes the 1930s and 1940s traffic and tension between aesthetic and cultural work.

As a contributing editor for *Fortune* in the 1930s, MacLeish worked under and exchanged letters with Henry Luce, co-founder of the magazine publishing giant Time Inc., and knew many in the media business through his journalism and employment connections. On May 5th, 1937, MacLeish wrote to *Time* magazine's foreign news editor Laird S. Goldsborough critiquing the magazine's coverage of the Spanish Civil War. He writes of his sense that "*Time* has never presented the war in Spain for what it was – an inexcusable and unjustifiable act of aggression by reactionary forces against a popular government." In particular, he critiques *Time*'s use of the term "Red militia" for the popular forces, noting that even the morning issue of the *New York Times* stated that the pejorative and communist-inflected phrase "Red army" was a misnomer for the Spanish Republican defense efforts following the military coup (MacLeish *Letters* 287). MacLeish's letter makes it clear that he paid very close attention to media representations of the civil war in Spain, and also that he had contact with those who set the terms by which it was being documented.

MacLeish wrote in the above-cited 1937 letter to *Time*'s foreign news editor that he wishes he had more access to the kind of information and facts that were available to Goldsborough; by October 1941, he had exactly this kind of access to information as Director of the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF). In this position, he was still very concerned with conveying the "facts," and he was still critical of media systems that limited the information distributed to the public. The OFF did not last long; by June 1942, it was superseded by the Office of War Information (OWI), for which MacLeish served as Assistant Director until he resigned in January 1943 over differences of opinion regarding policy. MacLeish wrote to James Allen, then Assistant Director of the Domestic Branch of the OWI, in October 1943 explaining his objectives while heading the OFF. He writes of his theory that "the people had a right to know precisely why they were at war, and what their enemy was like, and what they were up against" and that the OFF had hoped to convey information by providing "all the facts relevant to belief" (MacLeish *Letters* 318). This phrasing exposes a real desire to enable the American public to make informed decisions based on accurate information and hard evidence, but also suggests that the thinkers behind the OFF hoped that such information would convince the public of the just cause of the war.

MacLeish's involvement throughout the 1930s in national media outlets such as *Fortune* and CBS contributed to Roosevelt's selection of MacLeish as Librarian of Congress and subsequently for other positions.⁸⁹ Throughout his work in public office, MacLeish remained committed to the clear delivery of accurate information and critiqued those media channels which did not achieve this standard. In a letter to Roosevelt's advisor Felix Frankfurter in March 1942 while at the helm of the OFF, MacLeish

privately critiques the military's lack of casualty and ship sinking announcements despite their mandate to publicize them, expressing his frustration that "the Navy is about fifty ships behind in announcing sinkings of freighters" (MacLeish *Letters* 312). MacLeish's statements complicate any easy equation of government-sponsored propaganda at the cusp of World War II as intentionally misleading or manipulative, but also raise questions about how factual information delivered as part of efforts of national persuasion can produce the holistic and balanced portrayal MacLeish seems to advocate. His own appointment to the committee of the Office of Censorship following the attack on Pearl Harbor further complicates his role as a conveyer of facts. However, as is obvious in his October 1943 letter about the work of the OFF, MacLeish remained critical of media outlets for their failure to portray the whole picture and the multiple kinds of facts that he believes contribute to critically-informed opinions. In this letter, MacLeish critiques the attitude of media organizations who "sneered at us for concerning ourselves with the 'morale' of the people," citing the "Arthur Krock [Krock was the Washington correspondent for the *New York Times*] and the Patterson presses [a newspaper conglomerate]" and papers "as good as the *Washington Post*" for wishing to limit war coverage to "military facts" and "news for last editions" (MacLeish *Letters* 319-20). His letters and participation in war reporting projects index the complicated matrix of positions with respect to the role of communications media during national crises. As a contemporary historian, MacLeish attempted not only to refigure the project of poetic verse for a new era, but also to re-imagine the projects of news transmission and the distribution of information.

MacLeish's innovative use of the news reporter as a narrator in his late 1930s radio plays yokes the dynamics of live news to the constraints of real time to convey the urgency of contemporary political questions. As a radio verse drama, *The Fall of the City* does not deliver facts about contemporary wartime developments; instead, it depicts and promotes debate about how citizens might respond to news of impending aggression or attack. The play describes the warnings and public debates surrounding the arrival of a conqueror to a large city, and draws from historical material about Hernán Cortez's invasion and occupation of Tenochtitlán in 1521 as a model for the events of the play.⁹⁰ The play speaks to a 1930s American public who still largely adhered to isolationist positions with respect to the mobilization of Spanish, German, and Italian fascist forces in Europe. Throughout *The Fall of the City*, the news announcer reports and comments on the proceeding events and the reactions of the crowd as if they are live. That is, he experiences the unfolding events at the same time as the crowd in the square, and reports these events as they happen. His position as live "eyewitness" aligns him with news reporters such as those who described battles in Spain, and the play signals this alignment by drawing attention to the temporal markers that denote the immediate transmission of news.

MacLeish, from the very beginning of the play, represents the fact of radio's reach to multiple sites at one time, and invokes the generally "live" state of radio. The script opens with the "orotund, professional" voice of the studio director, who states:

Ladies and Gentlemen:
This broadcast comes to you from the city.
Listeners over the curving air have heard
From furthest-off frontiers of foreign hours –
Mountain Time: Ocean Time: of the islands:
Of waters after the islands – some of them waking

Where noon here is night there: some
Where noon is the first few stars they see or the last one. (*Six Plays* 69)

The studio director enlists the concept of time zones to produce the sense that listeners across the globe are tuning in simultaneously, and that an event broadcast at a particular time (here, noon) in one city may be heard at multiple hours and in multiple places all at the same time. The verse paragraph draws attention to the way in which radio summons listening audiences from a variety of time zones and distances. The sequence conveys the idea that the events in the city are unfolding at the same time as audiences are listening.

As the studio director describes how listeners across the world have tuned in for three days to hear about the "omen" of a dead woman appearing at her tomb, he states that "[t]he terror that stands at the shoulder of our time / Touches the cheek with this." His phrasing connects the present time and its terrors with the city in the play, even if listeners might associate the play with the historical crisis of North American colonization. To articulate this more clearly, by way of introduction to the announcer, whose voice guides listeners through the action of the rest of the play, the studio director states "[h]ere in this city the wall of the time cracks. / We take you now to the great square of this city" (70). The fissure in the "wall of time" functions as a kind of portal into the final moments of a city before its fall; it alerts the radio audience or reader to the fact that the proceeding action charts events that took place in the past, but that are also somehow taking place in the present time. This device of the past as present suggests that contemporary audiences might learn from the past, and also that current events (such as Germany's occupation of the Rhineland and subsequently parts of

Austria, Czechoslovakia, and France) echo those that have already occurred in other times (such as Cortez's takeover of Tenochtitlán).

Operating in the mode of a live "real time" broadcast, the news announcer acts as a link between the action in the city and the radio listening audience. In the announcer's first address, he states: "We are here on the central plaza. . . . / It is precisely four minutes to twelve. / The crowd is enormous: there might be ten thousand: / There might be more" (70). The reporting of the time creates tension as the crowd, the announcer, and the radio audience all wait for the arrival of the dead woman to the door of her tomb. The announcer describes the crowd, comprised of cabinet ministers, farmers' wives, children, cattle herders, and others from far off, all gathered in the plaza's harsh heat; he employs a visual image with a sonic analogy as he characterizes the bright light that "dazes the air as the clang of a gong does" (70). As the time approaches noon, the news announcer reports that "[i]t is one minute to twelve now" and finally "[n]ow it is twelve" (71). Twelve noon marks the beginning of the continuous action of the rest of the play, and echoes the "noon" that the studio director invoked early on, where "noon here" might be night or morning wherever listeners are. The implication is that the events of the play are happening in real time, as audiences listen to the radio broadcast. Noon marks the beginning of a series of public speeches that structure the play and are given by a prophetic dead woman, two messengers, a politically-liberal orator, priests, and a general. In between their monologues, a large crowd in a public square responds to the speeches with comments and sounds.

Through engaging multiple speakers, *The Fall of the City* raises a number of key arguments for and against intervention in the conqueror's impending arrival that were

also circulating in the late 1930s with respect to the Spanish Civil War and other emerging European and Pacific conflicts. Crucially, the news announcer figure in *The Fall of the City* experiences the “real time” proceedings that the play represents at the same time as the people in the crowded city square he describes. Literary critic Echhard Breitner discusses how in *The Fall of the City*, virtually all action proceeds as a result of the announcer’s speech, and not through character dialogue; he notes that this structural aspect differs from contemporary popular radio serials, where action tends to happen via dialogue in front of the microphone. Breitner finds that MacLeish’s use of the announcer as narrator of action produces a feeling of extreme powerlessness (308). I read the announcer figure in *The Fall of the City* instead as a tool for portraying multiple viewpoints held by the crowd as they shift, so that the radio audience is able to process different perspectives about how to react to and make decisions about a potentially impending threat.

Commentary from the news announcer-narrator frames each speech in *The Fall of the City*, and reflects both the reactions of the crowd and his own responses, as the orators sway his opinion in different directions. The announcer’s present-tense approach (and grammar) presents an almost-Socratic sequence of opposing positions about how the city should respond to the warning of an impending invader, and weighs each position as a viable, logical approach. Following the opening speeches to the crowd by the prophetic woman, who warns the city of its immanent fall, and the first messenger, who delivers news of an approaching conqueror, the announcer reports that the climate of the crowded square is one of fear, silence, and stillness. In response to these early alarms, a government orator argues against fighting the conqueror with force, asserting that force

and weapons only produce further conflict. Instead of battle, the orator proclaims, reason, truth, nonviolent resistance, and scorn would be the most powerful weapons against the conqueror. Following this speech, the announcer reports on the smiling, contented, happy state of the crowd, stating that there are flutes, picnics, and dances in the sunlit square. He proclaims:

A great speech! really great!
Men forget these truths in passion:
They oppose the oppressors with blind blows:
They make of their towns tombs . . . (*Six Plays* 80)

Here, as after other speeches in the radio drama, the news announcer identifies the logic in the orator's claims, stating that the passion of battle cries and rhetoric can cause people to forget that violence only perpetuates violence and ultimately can destroy the very towns and ways of life that people wished to preserve.

Convinced by the government orator's argument for reason and nonviolence, the announcer is as surprised as the crowd ("That's odd! The music has stopped," he states) when a second messenger interrupts the celebrations to warn of the conqueror's proximity. The crowd now is "frantic with anger and plain fear," the announcer reports, noting that you can hear their retorts aimed at the government, orators, and "liberal learned minds"; the announcer absorbs the frenzy building around him, stating "we can't move for the mob . . . crazy with terror" (80). Invoking the pronoun "we" here and other places in the text, the narrator joins with both the crowd and the listening audience as he both experiences and describes the unfolding events. To answer and appease the terrified crowd, the announcer reports, a group of priests chant a litany that implores the public to turn to their gods and save the world by surrendering it (84-5). The announcer characterizes the crowd's positive response to the priests as "a wonderful thing," and

enthusiastically reports that “[e]ven the simplest citizens feel the emotion. / There is hardly a sound now in the square. It's wonderful” (86). Again, his position changes at the same time as the crowd, shifting from terror of the conqueror to silence at the priests’ plea. Though the final speaker, a general and government minister, attempts to interrupt the quiet of the crowd by accusing citizens of taking their freedom for granted and enjoining them to fight, the crowd by this time has had enough of debate (88-89). The announcer describes how the citizens abandon their arms and retreat. When the conqueror arrives, the announcer reports with shock that his helmet is hollow; he concludes that “people invent their oppressors” (92) and echoes the crowd’s paradoxically happy shouts that “[t]he city has fallen!” with his own flat echo, “[t]he city has fallen” (93).

Through the course of the play, the news announcer-as-narrator reports the arguments and positions about how to respond to the approaching threat of the conqueror in order to set up the potential viability of all the arguments. At the end of the play, however, the tone with which the announcer echoes the crowd’s response indicates his dissonance with their final disengaged stance. He is disappointed, or surprised, that the city accepts rule by an outside force that is represented only by a set of empty armor. In performing play-by-play, “real time” analysis and reaction to the multiple speakers without prior knowledge of the outcome, the announcer also sets up listeners and readers for the surprise of the absent, mechanical conqueror. The ending portrays an invading enemy that is to some degree an empty threat, suggesting that if citizens acted early, or acted at all, the conqueror could have easily been stayed.

In *The Fall of the City*, MacLeish advocates debate *and* ultimately argues for military intervention, and he does so in the political climate of debate about whether the United States should support Republican resistance efforts in the Spanish Civil War. In his essay “The Communists, the Writers, and the Spanish War,”⁹¹ MacLeish argues against the claim that any action to aid the cause in Spain, such as anti-fascist International Brigade efforts and other off-site support, will “foment” greater war (“The Communists” 100). He critiques those who, he describes, are waiting for “declarations of war” and the formal mobilization of European armies, or who portray the Spanish Civil War battles as contained and preliminary (99). “The military vocabulary of 1914 and 1937 are not the same,” he writes, arguing that the new tactics and machinated strategies of battle render past conventions of warfare moot (100). MacLeish argues in his essay, much as he does in *The Fall of the City*, that the victories or losses against the fascist-backed Nationalist military forces are relevant to those outside of Spain, and thus, that readers should “claim the war as [theirs]” (102).

As *The Fall of the City* makes the argument for military intervention, it depicts the threat of fascist and conquering aggression in part through aligning such aggression with time as linear, efficient, and forward-marching. As MacLeish makes this connection, he invokes the contemporary radio and film documentary-drama series *The March of Time*, the popular news dramatization program sponsored by *Time* magazine that aired on the radio beginning in 1931, and then appeared on newsreel beginning in 1935. *The March of Time* presented fictional accounts of real news events, and helped to construct documentary-dramatic conventions. Toward the beginning of *The Fall of the City*, as the government orator tries to convince the crowd to act with reason instead of

violence, he states that “[t]he future is a mirror where the past / Marches to meet itself” (MacLeish *Six Plays* 78). In these lines, he is concerned with demonstrating how past and present actions prefigure future outcomes. He portrays a concept of time that is both linear and causal – that moving forward produces the future. The phrasing that the orator uses to describe time’s motion is suggestive: time “marches.” MacLeish chooses this word in three other instances to describe the approach of the conqueror: the second messenger states that the conqueror “marches . . . forward . . . [s]oon to descend” (83); the general points out the smoke of burning towns in the distance and proclaims “where will [the conqueror] march now? Onward! / The heel of the future descends on you!” (87) and at the end, the citizens give up the city, shouting “[l]et the conqueror have it! It's his! // The age is his! It's his century! // Our institutions are obsolete. // He marches a mile while we sit in a meeting” (90). By playing on the phrase “march of time,” made popular by the radio and newsreel series, MacLeish proposes that the current fascist shows of power by Hitler, Franco, and Mussolini are the new face of warfare. He connects the approach of the conqueror in *The Fall of the City* to the inevitable, marching, progression of time, and if “[t]he future is a mirror where the past / [marches],” he suggests, immediate action is crucial.

While *The Fall of the City* engages contemporary wartime discourses somewhat allegorically, MacLeish’s *Air Raid* (1938) more explicitly invokes discourses of war, Spanish Civil War events, and emerging German displays of aggression. *Air Raid* situates listeners in a real-time current event scenario in part by adopting styles of radio journalists such as Max Jordan of NBC, whose coverage of the Munich crisis I quoted from above. In an interview with Orrin E. Dunlap Jr. in the *New York Times* following

the *Air Raid* broadcast, MacLeish stated that while he wrote the play beginning in June 1938, he “had the novel experience of hearing parts of it enacted in real life, almost as he had envisaged it” while he was completing the play. Dunlap Jr. reports that MacLeish

tuned in on the September broadcasts from Czechoslovakia in which announcers described the blackout, the fear of bombers and preparations for the air attack. He heard London commentators describing feverish activity in digging bomb-proof shelters. (Dunlap “Exploring” 172)

MacLeish describes here the experience of listening to the implications of the Munich Agreement and subsequent German annexation of the Sudetenland play out. His account of his listening experience, with news coming directly from broadcasters on the ground in Czechoslovakia, foregrounds the local and civilian responses to the international crisis and decisions. This emphasis on the local and the common person’s experience of warfare forms the basis of the dramatic conceit of *Air Raid*.

MacLeish plays on audiences’ knowledge of contemporary politics in *Air Raid* to advocate for their support of anti-fascist intervention. The fact that MacLeish wrote *Air Raid* in the summer of 1938 amazed audiences who thought of the play as uncannily prescient in light of the unfolding European conflict and military preparations. *Air Raid* dramatizes a Guernica-inspired air bombing of a small town, and exposes the nature of contemporary mechanized warfare in which civilians were a target. This fact of new strategic warfare is the play’s central disgust. The play in many ways describes an already-common scenario; news of air raids in Spain and China had been circulating via multiple media channels in the recent past, making front-page news throughout 1938 with headlines such as

Barcelona Raided by Rebel Bombers, *New York Times* 17 January, 1938
Chinese Air Raids Break Up Invaders, *New York Times* 28 February, 1938

Japanese Bombs Kill 300 Civilians, *New York Times* 10 May, 1938
Air Raid Deaths 12,200, *New York Times* 1 June, 1938
Bombers over France, *Christian Science Monitor* 7 June, 1938
Vienna Blacked Out, *New York Times* 23 September, 1938

and the perhaps less expected “Air Fleet Invades Coast of Carolina: Day and Night,” *New York Times* 11 October, 1938 and “Air Raid Blackout Defends Carolinas,” *New York Times* 14 October, 1938. The latter two articles discuss the much-publicized U.S. military practice raids and air raid defense system trialed in North Carolina in October 1938, two weeks before MacLeish's play was broadcast. In a dramatized news program about a recent bombing in Barcelona produced as a part of *The March of Time* radio series on March 24, 1938, the announcer / narrator calls the most recent air attack “[a] story told a thousand times in the past year – in Madrid, in Shanghai, in hundreds of Chinese and Spanish towns” (“Bombs”). All of these media events helped to construct public knowledge of the unfolding scenes of war, and would have been part of the context in which the radio play was received.

At the beginning of *Air Raid*, the announcer guides listeners through the process of a radio station patching a connection to a distant location where a live reporter waits. A radio time signal gong sound indicates “Ten seconds past two A.M. precisely” and a voice announces “WABC . . . New York . . .” (*Six Plays* 99). The signals the time as current in New York, which the studio director soon makes clear means early morning in the town from which the broadcast will be heard. The “WABC” signals the fictional nature of the broadcast, since the play was broadcast over CBS, at the same time that it invokes an authentic call-sign. Following the time signal, the Studio Director reports:

Ladies and gentlemen:
You have only one thought tonight all of you
You who fish the fathoms of the night

With poles on rooftops and long loops of wire . . .
Will there be war? Has war come? . . .
The ultimatum you remember was for sunrise by their clock:
Midnight by ours. Now ours is long past midnight.

. . .

One moment now we'll take you through. . . .
We take you to a town behind the border – . . .
Our men are on a roof above the houses of the town. . . .
Stand by please: we take you through now . . .
The town is in those mountains: you are there
(*The station cuts out: we hear the undefined murmur and clatter
and laughing of a waking town on a fine summer day.*) (99-101)

This sequence speaks directly to radio listeners by invoking the experience of “listening in,” or tuning the dial to find clear frequencies and information about the brewing international conflicts. The director gives an update of the most current developments by noting that the deadline for action, the “ultimatum,” has passed, and signals this fact by noting the passage of time. As the radio station patches the signal through to the news announcer who is at the site in question, the script cues banal talking and laughing, signaling a contrast between the tense scenario that might be expected and what is actually occurring on the ground.

The news announcer in *Air Raid* tracks the approach of an incoming attack on a small town as did the announcer in *The Fall of the City*, but with one important difference from the earlier radio play: the news announcer in *Air Raid* has prior knowledge both that an air attack will occur, and of the exact time when it will occur. Thus, time functions in *Air Raid* as a countdown to the bombing of civilians we meet through the course of the play. The announcer's voice intervenes in the radio play's sequences of local characters' dialogue with news bulletin updates. In the first one, the announcer reminds listeners that the bomber planes should arrive in ten minutes if they left when they were supposed to.

He states:

If they left at dawn we should have heard them.
It's two hours now since dawn.
They could make it in two: they could make it under –
One and a half from their fields to the border:
Ten minutes more . . . (106)

He locates listeners in the drama by noting the time of day *and* by describing a place that could be anyplace, stating “[i]t smells of seven o'clock in the morning in / Any town they water dust in” (106-7). Several moments later, after we have heard the chatter and laughter of townspeople, the announcer juxtaposes the calm scene with the first sign of the attack he knows to be approaching; he reports hearing incoming planes and a distant alarm, noting “[i]f they're cruising a hundred and eighty it's / Ten minutes” (111). When an air raid alarm sounds in the town, a sergeant who also has knowledge of the attack exclaims “[f]ive minutes have passed. / In five minutes more they must be here” (114) and the announcer echoes soon after with “[s]ix minutes gone. / Four more as we figure it” (115). This “countdown effect” builds tension and urgency throughout the play, and conveys the immediacy with which the announcer is able to relay events to the radio audience. When the planes arrive, the announcer describes how “[t]he timing is perfect they're flying with / Perfect precision of timing / . . . They move like tools not men” (122). The “perfect precision of timing” recalls the “precise” time signal at the beginning of the play and also invokes the mechanized, fascist, efficiency that *Air Raid* critiques. In retrospect, the opening time signal seems to sound the alarm for the events to come, events that unfold, according to the announcer's description of the bomber planes, like clockwork.

As MacLeish adapts the “news announcer” or “on-site reporter” role into a narrator function in *Air Raid*, he constructs two concurrently running time frames. With

his prior knowledge of the impending attack, the news announcer is able to report the slipping time leading up to the bombing as the townspeople go about their business and hear the planes from afar. He speaks from the same location, but from a slightly different vantage point (a roof) than the citizens of the city, who hear the air raid alarms and debate how they should respond. These dual perspectives enable listeners and readers to identify with both subject positions: a "reporter" and a "citizen." The separation between the two subject positions also emphasizes how the news figure does not use his knowledge of the approaching bombing to warn the citizens whom he watches. It produces a power structure that in some way implicates those who know about the attack in the destructive effects it eventually causes. In this way, I believe, MacLeish adapts the live news format to make public comment in *Air Raid* about how public and media workers' knowledge of the military and political events unfolding in Europe and Asia should compel them to act on the part of those most affected by the new methods of warfare: civilians.

The townspeople in *Air Raid*, significantly mainly women and children, track time in different terms than the announcer: both more immediately and on a longer scale. A chorus of women's voices complain about men "[w]asting their time on wars with the / Dishes to do" and girls voices echo this statement by musing how they "never take the clock for *now* -- / For *this* -- for *here*," suggesting that men use the clock to project into the past and future, without appreciating the tasks of the immediate present (104-5). MacLeish genders the townspeople's responses to the conflict at the risk of essentializing female experiences of time and modes of action – particularly in the context of the Spanish Civil War in which women were involved (and in 1936 were both recruited for battle and fought). He risks this opposition in order to show different responses to the

conflict and set up the radio listening audience for the shock of a civilian attack upon these same women. For example, the women state “[t]hey’re always waking us up for a war somewhere. / ... It’s no news!... Can’t they run the country decent and quiet till / Eight in the morning even?” as the airplanes make their first pass (113). Late in the play an old woman explains to a policeman that soldiers aren’t interested in killing women when they capture a city; “Less than ten years you have been in this district.... You do not know the history of this neighborhood” she tells the policeman, basing her understanding of warfare on historical precedents, of “news” and knowledge on a longer chronological scale (116). While producing a problematic account of the dynamics of “women’s time,” the play conveys that what is known about prior wars will not sustain the public in the contemporary context, where women and children are civilian targets. At the end of the radio drama, an air fleet finally arrives and attacks the townspeople.

By using time to organize the play, and by contrasting the announcer's countdown with civilian responses to air raid alarms based on historical precedents, MacLeish makes the point that, as the Sergeant states, "wars have changed with the world" and the "enemy is not the usual enemy!" (117). He refers specifically here to the emerging tactics of civilian air attack made evident in the bombing of Guernica. *Air Raid*, MacLeish recalled in 1980, was inspired by Picasso's painting *Guernica*, which in MacLeish's words portrayed "[a] new and unspeakable horror of war. . . . by machines in the blind sky against cities, against the women and children of open cities" (90). The news announcer in the play functions as an omniscient narrator, one who holds information that the townspeople in the beginning of the play don't have; the play suggests the potential effects of public audiences, legislators, and media representatives' inaction despite their

knowledge. In MacLeish's estimation, the mechanical certainty, the implied fascist "[p]erfect precision of timing" with which planes can attack people prompts the urgency of the message, and the style in which it is delivered. MacLeish uses the structure of two experiences of time – the temporal countdown and the townspeople's historical experience – to critique isolationist cultural positions and the media systems that articulate these positions.

MacLeish's interventionist rhetoric, circulating on the radio in 1937 and 1938, predated the governmentally-sanctioned and widespread propaganda which was widely broadcast after Pearl Harbor. *The Fall of the City* and *Air Raid* addressed the topic of intervention in a period when networks often kept explicitly politically-positioned material off the air for fear of offending sponsors. MacLeish used the platform of the non-sponsored Columbia Workshop, CBS, and verse drama to present his ideas, and engaged generic conventions of news reporting and documentary drama to convey a sense of timeliness and urgency, to make an "authorized" (because official news-sounding) public comment. His work with the news announcer figure in his radio plays engaged the shifting functions of real-time news in public and radio dramatic arenas. For example, public outcry and cultural debate surrounding the reception of *The War of the Worlds* broadcast prompted Columbia Broadcasting Network president W.B. Lewis to declare that CBS would no longer use "techniques of a simulated news broadcast within a dramatization when the circumstances of the broadcast could cause immediate alarm" (Dunlap "Message" 184). MacLeish was deeply involved with questions of how to best convey information over new media, and debates about the effects that certain modes of distribution can have on audiences. More specifically, MacLeish was invested in how to

articulate anti-fascist discourse from within the most powerful and nationally-inscribed institutional channels. He worked in a period of great shift between Depression-era and Cultural Front activism to World War II propaganda and volunteerism, and his plays detail ethical dilemmas about information circulation and military intervention. While *The Fall of the City* and *Air Raid* carry clear messages of warning, by articulating doubts and protests of citizens through competing modes of time and interpretation, the plays also model and encourage discussion and debate.⁹² Radio became a crucial medium for MacLeish due to its wide public appeal, and his work for the medium was invested with trying to model multiple kinds of dialogue and perspectives, while at the same time advancing his own political convictions.

MacLeish was interested in the years leading up to and during World War II in the ways in which knowledge and information are deployed in the public sphere, and his literary stature and political employment enabled him to circulate his ideas widely. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, MacLeish was intimately aware of both the constraints and possibilities of media systems, and about the ways in which time factored into the constraints of these systems. Clearly aware of the constraints that the segmented limits of radio time place on artistic statement, for example, MacLeish notes in 1938 that:

Until radio discovers some way to salvage the play from the insatiable hunger of the microphone and rescue it from the fast pace set by the clock, I don't see how radio can expect to get far in developing the so-called new art form it has been seeking.
(Dunlap "Exploring" 172)

MacLeish chose to work within the problem of radio time constraints to imagine a critically and politically-engaged audience. He continued to write radio drama and deliver radio speeches, and he also chose, for several years, to work within the constraints

of government war offices in order to distribute information to wide audiences. This work reflects MacLeish's investment in working within media and institutional channels to critique cultural positions of isolationism as promoted by America First and other organizations, and to critique media systems for limiting the information they distributed.

Lechlitner's Elliptical Composition and Critique

Like MacLeish's 1930s and 1940s poetry and drama, Ruth Lechlitner's work is deeply invested in critiquing and reconfiguring public responses to current events, and she often discusses the possibility of such reorganization in terms of time. Both her radio play *We are the Rising Wing* (1938) and her two books of poems from the period, *Tomorrow's Phoenix* (1937) and *Only the Years: Selected Poems 1938-1944* (1944), register these interests. Lechlitner has not been central to typical narratives of second-generation modernist and mid-century U.S. poetry, or to histories of radio writing. A poet who began publishing in the 1930s leftist writing climate, Lechlitner's poems are often committed to documenting and discussing current public issues. Her poetic work queries large narratives of religion, the state, capitalism, communism, myth, and science, and tracks small-scale social changes. She engages topical issues ranging from Depression-era challenges to poems inspired by the Spanish Civil War efforts to interventionist World War II poems and anti-nuclear postwar pieces. Contemporary critical reception of Lechlitner's work has been slight. In *Revolutionary Memory* (2001), literary critic Cary Nelson mentions, but does not discuss, Lechlitner's publications in the "revolutionary number" of the New York journal *Alcestis: A Poetry Quarterly* (July 1935) with William Carlos Williams, Muriel Rukeyser, John Wheelwright, and Willard Maas (Nelson 150).⁹³

In *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth Century Literary Left* (2002), Alan M. Wald devotes five pages to Lechlitner, positioning her work with that of poets Genevieve Taggard and Joy Davidman in a chapter on pre-1960s socialist-feminist interventions into both dominant social structures and leftist and Communist paradigms. He describes her poetry as dedicated to “the deliverance of humanity from superstition, fear, and cheap escapist sedatives in which it has been indoctrinated by the state, religious leaders, and industrialists” (36). Lechlitner tracks in her work the potential for humans to change their situations, in part by posing questions and by documenting and satirizing contemporary events and conditions.

Lechlitner wrote and theorized radio drama, and the possibilities radio afforded for poetic work, while participating in the same kinds of innovative, avant garde, and at times socialist publishing, discursive, and poetic spheres as the other poets I discuss in my thesis. Throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Lechlitner corresponded with poets such as MacLeish, Williams, Marianne Moore, Willard Maas, Alfred Kreymborg, Kenneth Rexroth, and other writers. She published poems in journals such as *Poetry*, *The New Masses*, *New Directions*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *The New Republic*, and was a regular poetry reviewer for the *New York Herald Tribune Books* for twenty years beginning in the 1930s. Her first book of poems, *Tomorrow's Phoenix* (1937), appeared from The Alcestis Press of New York, and her second, *Only the Years* (1944), from The Press of James A. Decker in Prairie City, Illinois, the small press that published Louis Zukofsky's *Anew* and Lorine Niedecker's *New Goose* in 1946.⁹⁴ She wrote two radio dramas: *We Are the Rising Wing* aired on Ohio station WOSU in 1938 and was published in *New Directions* and “Tale of a World's End” aired on the Canadian

Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) Pacific Playhouse series as *Death and Resurrection* in 1959. Lechlitner serves as a useful counterpoint to MacLeish; they were familiar with one another's work, and at times she responds to his radio dramas in her own work. Both writers present differing techniques and approaches to the composition of texts for broadcast while working with similar political and formal concerns. Lechlitner's work differs from MacLeish's in her focus on domestic political structures and critique of capitalist economic systems; both poets decried totalitarianism in any form, but Lechlitner was more inclined toward socialist economic and cultural organization in contrast to MacLeish's sustained advocacy of democratic governance.

Like MacLeish, Lechlitner was concerned in her radio drama with taking advantage of the genre and medium in innovating poetic and rhythmic strategies that would productively address contemporary publics. Both poets were particularly interested in how verse drama on radio might be a site through which to explore, in Lechlitner's words, "the subtle rhythms of contemporary speech: its timing, its stress, its variations" (Lechlitner "Radio"). Lechlitner's essay on radio drama in *New Directions* 1937 takes up MacLeish's discussion of rhythm in his preface to the first printed edition of his verse play *Panic* (1935).⁹⁵ MacLeish discusses the problem of rhythm for contemporary verse dramatists, writing that modern dramatists, like many writers before, "must attempt to find a verse form capable of catching and carrying the rhythm of the spoken language of his time and place" (*Panic* vii).⁹⁶ MacLeish takes up the project of contemporary speech in his radio plays by constructing accentual, rather than syllabic, rhythms, and by contrasting speakers through scripting their speech in different rhythms. Lechlitner's *New Directions* essay, in concert with MacLeish, advises contemporary

poets to listen to “ordinary conversations” at the farm, shop, or street corner and suggests that poetry today should “draw its vitality from” the voice of the people (Lechlitner “Radio”). But Lechlitner’s poetry also theorizes rhythm in terms of social organization; in a poem published in her book *Only the Years*, she introduces the term “dominant rhythm” to refer to a pervasive and oppressive social schema. Her work aligns such “dominant rhythm[s]” with prevalent economic, religious, and scientific myths, and her work models strategies of questioning and interrupting such structures through designing sites of pause and reflection.

Lechlitner's *We Are the Rising Wing* depicts a city and society oppressed by a governing body which, in the course of the play, collapses, while citizens propose new, collective, modes of culture and governance. As a whole, the play critiques large-scale capitalist practices, and parodies the advertising and consumerist rhetorics that buttress capitalism. The representative of the dominant economic and political power is called the “Great I” or the “Miracle-Maker,” who represents commercial corporate economic interests, quick fixes for social problems, and the doctrine of individuality that promotes the interests of the “I” at the expense of the common good or mutually beneficial social structures and practices. The “Great I” is attended by thirteen counselors, and his spokesman is known as the “Public Mouth.” (Invoking the experience of radio audiences, the Public Mouth addresses the American masses as “The Great Ear.”) In his airplane, the “Great I” proposes to try to regenerate his power and prove to the masses that they should follow his authority by plunging his plane into the ground, to rise again in the manner of the mythological Phoenix. Throughout the play, the choruses, made up of a diversely-opinioned public, consider and interrogate the power structure set up by the

“Great I.” Ultimately, his regime fails and the possibility for a new political, economic, and social structure emerges.

Lechlitner's *We Are the Rising Wing* dramatizes public intervention in powerful institutional and mythological structures by scripting pauses that interrupt the temporal sequence of the play. *We Are the Rising Wing* figures governing bodies in the play as representing the “dominant rhythm,” and these figures in power attempt to maintain control through keeping the planned program on schedule. Lechlitner employs what I discuss as elliptical and interruptive composition to produce pauses and interventions in the rhythm of the play. The pauses enable sound effects to be heard amid dialogue, and produce and emphasize interventions in the dominant economic and cultural modes that the play represents as oppressive. Ellipses and breaks in dialogue and action also construct staccato rhythms to interrupt long lines of free verse spoken by officials in power. The play models public intervention through the depiction of an interrupted sequence of government propagandist staging. As the play progresses, shifts in speech patterns and exchanges between speech and sound effects produce a rhythm based on irregular durations of line, pause, and punctuated (accented) phrase, rather than a rhythm based on syllables and accents. The authority of the centralized power schema in the radio play unravels and gives way to a more collective social structure. Lechlitner signals this shift through elliptical composition that interrupts the status quo proceedings and through choruses made up of “the masses” that generate irregular rhythms through the formation of their spoken lines that alternate between single, overlapping, and synchronized voices.

One of the most pervasive sound effects written into the script of *We Are the Rising Wing* is the airplane, which signals the looming power of the government figurehead, the “Great I.”⁹⁷ The “Great I” travels by airplane, and at the beginning of the play, acts as a kind of distant benefactor who distributes gifts to the public by dropping them from his plane. The sound of the plane weaves in and out throughout the play. Ellipses amid the dialogue, particularly in the choruses but also in passages spoken by the “Public Mouth” and the “Great I,” create pauses in which the roar of the plane can be heard or imagined. As band music playing a “popular overture” fades near the beginning of the play, sound directions indicate that *“the hum of a plane’s motor is heard approaching, growing louder”* along with the *“tense, excited”* voices of a crowd (3; Lechlitner’s italics throughout). Voices from the choruses speak: “It’s so dark now . . . / Mother: we’re hungry!” (3) and “Dark. . . / But he promised us gifts” and “I see him. . . / (Get back, You!)” (4). Voices of Chorus One are generally more individual with some merging, whereas Chorus Two more often speak in unison, and are *“more sustained and harmonious”* (3). As the choruses hail the arrival of the “Great I” circling above, Lechlitner’s cue states that *“the shouts of the choruses die down, but the Plane’s organ note is sustained while the choruses speak further”* (4). The duration of the sustained plane sound becomes acoustically intertwined with the shifting cries of the chorus.

Lechlitner arranges the speeches of the choruses with pauses between phrases, using ellipses, extended space between words, and punctuation such as commas, colons, and exclamation points. After the “Public Mouth” instructs the crowd to “[h]old out [their] hands, America,” gifts of cellophane, silk, gilt cord, a lucky number, a house, a harrow and seeder, and a car fall from the plane; the crowd reacts. Chorus One speaks in

separate voices, broken by ellipses and spaces that signal and emphasize the multiple voices that speak individually:

I! Mine! . . . Not yours: take your
Hands off! I need it! Mine!

Back, you: the dung of the barnyard
Thick on your bootsoles. . . .

I caught that one: cellophane, silk! (5)

The sound of the plane (a sustained “organ note”) fills the pauses created by the ellipses, spaces, and punctuation.⁹⁸ Lechlitner creates small durations of non-speech that in this opening sequence function to bring the sound of the plane (and the kind of power it represents) into the discourse of the choruses. The plane momentarily departs after its dispersal of gifts, but then returns as the masses that make up the choruses realize the paucity of these gifts. “*The Plane is heard returning*,” Lechlitner writes, over the dialogue of dissatisfied members of Chorus One who speak of hunger, a lost job, picked pockets, and a house lost by flood. As dissatisfaction grows, the arrangement of the chorus’ voices becomes more elliptical:

I didn't get anything: where is
Your present?
I don't know. . . .
He gave us
Something: I saw it. . . .
Maybe you
Thought that you saw it!--
Maybe we
Thought that we saw it. . . .
Sold again!
That's it: sold. . . .
We're sold. . . .
sold. (8)

Throughout this sequence of broken dialogue, the airplane is meant to be heard approaching, emphasizing the “Great I’s” role in the disappointing outcome of the “gifts.”

Elliptical composition in *We Are the Rising Wing* also functions to indicate modes of questioning. Ellipses and elliptical constructions that create durations of pause between phrases at times suggest that pausing to think about the current state of economic and cultural affairs might produce useful changes in perspective. One of the most explicit critiques of consumerist, capitalist, and advertising structures that the play makes is through the character of Gloria Golden, who attempts to entertain (and placate) the crowd with a singsong speech accompanied by a popular jazz tune, asking the public to forget:

The bread that was tasteless, the chilly room,
The quarrel after supper, the doctor's last bill,
The unmended faucet, the soot on the sill:
My tears will cleanse you: be mine, and forget!
I am your love and the kiss for your breath,
Your June moon, your hot-shot, your daily death,
Your substitute heaven, your baby, your friend --
And always I bring you the happy end! (10)

Her monologue is echoed by Choruses One and Two together ("*softly, dreamily*"): "Our substitute heaven our baby our friend, / And always she brings us the happy end" (10).

Lechlitner uses the song-like, anapest and iambic-based rhythm to invoke a kind of commercialized amnesia. The choruses' echo of her rhythm and tone demonstrates how entertainment functions to substitute for real fixes or amends. Following the singsong choral response, a man speaks out, querying the "ghost-thighs" and shadowy romances he claims Golden invokes. The choruses respond together:

That's right: he's right!

... Are we
Ghosts, to be given ghost-gifts? ... A ghost-promise?
What's real among us? (11)

The choruses, even the more individualistic Chorus One, begin to query whose voices are able to reach those in power. The ellipses and spatial organization of the choral questions, distinctly different from the block of rhythmic speech given by Gloria Golden and the choruses' imitation of Golden, emphasize how pause and interruption can help produce critical stances.

The elliptical constructions and pauses following questions throughout the radio play help prepare readers and listeners for an interruption of the "Great I's" Phoenix-like performance in the second half of the play. As the radio play approaches its climactic scene, the "Public Mouth" and the "Great I" exchange speeches with the choruses; distinctive voices that emerge from the choruses question the symbolic power held in the tower, which rises above the public square and houses the thirteen governmental counselors that represent the "Great I." The "Public Mouth" asks for patience, for appreciation of national wealth, and invokes the rhetoric of American "freedom" of speech that allows protest, asking "Where else but in America could man speak / As you have spoken, nor have his tongue / Ripped from his throat" (14). Having swayed Chorus One (who responds "My father, thou art Power!") but not Chorus Two (who protests "We have outgrown / The fairy-tale years: / ... we call / You coward!")(16), the "Public Mouth" announces the arrival of the Miracle-maker, who lands in his plane and speaks to the crowd, proclaiming that he will crash his own plane into the tower, burn, and "rise again— . Stronger, mightier, greater!," thereby performing the mythic Phoenix function

for a national audience. Lechlitner draws attention to the staging of the “miracle” by depicting the preparatory work involved—as the “Public Mouth” directs:

Get that plane ready: stop talking! Here you: mechanics!
Swing it on the tarmac, ready for the take-off:
Test the ailerons: check on the fuel reserve: the altimeter!
Set the dome flood-lights—O.K., you'll get a bonus! —
Snap into it!

— and further by signaling sound effects of steady drums and “*the warming-up of the plane’s motor*” to be heard under a sequence of warnings and debate about the approaching event (18). The “Public Mouth” calls the proceeding events like he might a sporting event, announcing “see his broad wings / Soar higher, higher. . . . Watch for the signal, folks!” and “One minute now, folks. . . .” (19-20; ellipses Lechlitrner). As the drums and the plane sounds grow louder, Chorus One assumes the announcing role, tracking the plane’s arc. It reports:

There it is! There: the signal!
The floodlight—the beacon!
He noses in. . . he spins. . .
He's gunning it! . . .

A power dive!

He's blazing, blazing! . . . O
Fire—the fire—O heaven!
O Great I: save me! Back!
Run back, run back!
The wing breaks—it breaks—
like a brand
Over us. . .
merciless! . . .

falls (20-21)

The “Public Mouth” reassumes the announcing position in a “*confused, terrified*” tone, stating “There’s something wrong, folks: this wasn’t in the program! / Wait a moment: everything on fire here: a moment, please!” (21). His twenty-eight-line description of the ensuing chaotic events is rife with punctuated pause, containing eighteen colons,

fourteen exclamation points, nine long dashes, eight ellipses, seven commas, and a question mark. The interrupted speech of the chorus and the “Public Mouth” as they relay the ensuing events echoes the failed performance of the “Great I.”

The interruption in the scheduled program models the kind of intervention Lechlitner also calls for in her poems, as the public in the play becomes aware of the impossibility of “miracles” and calls for real, tangible political change. The Choruses in *We Are the Rising Wing* ultimately articulate the possibility of political renewal in terms of time. A “steady, persistent drum” (18) accompanies the sound of the “Great I’s” airplane warming up for its final flight. The rhythm of the drum, driven by preparations for the attempted “miracle,” interweaves among the dialogue about the approaching event. As the drum builds momentum through its increasing volume and intensity, it evokes Lechlitner’s idea of the pervasive, oppressive “dominant rhythm.” In the radio play, the dominant rhythm of the drum accompanies the approach of the “Great I’s” airplane, but the sound stops when it crashes into the tower, signifying the demise of the political and economic structures the government head represents. While just before the plane crash, Chorus One aligns “time” with the powerful myth signaled by the “Great I’s” stunt, stating “Hail I, maker of miracles: / O Time, O great event!,” at the end of the play, both choruses together cry “Time, speak with our voices” as they collectively observe the agricultural wealth – grain, fruit, wine – around them. Lechlitner articulates through the choruses an alternate, collective social schema that might replace the individualist system represented by the “Great I.” The people, rather than the plane, become the “rising wing.” She expresses the new system in terms of a different concept

of time, characterizing the shift in power structure by describing a new (collective, ecologically-based) time belonging to the public.

Lechlitner's book of poems *Tomorrow's Phoenix* (1937) develop the lines of critique that *We Are the Rising Wing* engages, and the two texts can be seen as parallel works. *Tomorrow's Phoenix* makes a sustained, and often humorous, critique of political (both "Government" and hard-line "Communist") religious, and scientific meta-narratives, particularly as they are engaged to provide false solutions to post-Depression economic problems and interwar fascist movements, or use institutional power to oppress. The persona of the "miracle maker," for example, figures in both texts: in the poem "The Miracle Makers," Lechlitner writes that they are among us:

Those who have made history a matter of
Shifting signs and substituted symbols:
Slogans for the unfed boil in their witches brew.
[. . .]
And the trick connoisseurs, the fat, silk-hatted ones
Blowing fake embers under
The boom-pot for the future unemployed:
Priests of the budget balancing recipes
While the grain rots; industrialists
Scraping the meat and marrow from the bone
And the economists
Waiting with salt in hand for tomorrow's Phoenix (24-25)

Lechlitner invokes the title phrase of the book "tomorrow's Phoenix" to compare the classical myth of the bird which rises from its own ashes with the promises and plans for better futures that charlatan economists and industrialists propose: both the bird and the quick-fix proposals are, Lechlitner suggests, "miracles" that don't adequately address real social problems. In a phrase that reverberates throughout her book of poems and radio play, Lechlitner closes this poem by suggesting that in the future, "time will not belong to the miracle makers," but will belong to people cognizant of facts "not symbol" (27; 26).

In part of her long poem "The Body Politic" in the same book, Lechlitner also critiques uncritical adherence to large-scale mythologies in both religious and scientific doctrine; she mounts a critique of the rhetoric and power dynamics of Science, God, and, combining these critiques, satirizes those who go to church and "ride home, tune in: / Hark while an unseen, well-fed Radiant Voice / Tells how he scrapes the seven mystic stains / From his algebraic teeth" (18). This sequence parodies advertising rhetoric (as the "[r]adiant" radio voice describes a remedy for stained teeth) to critique mysticism and formulaic modes of thought. It also positions the radio as channel for pundit-style, invisible voices much like the political spokesman character of the "Public Mouth" in *We Are the Rising Wing*, voices who are spokespeople for powerful persons, but also spokes in the wheels of powerful institutions.

In her satirical poem "Quiz Program / [1941]," included in *Only the Years* (1944), Lechlitner further critiques commercial radio programs for encouraging public interest in non-topical questions and for not providing the time necessary for adequate discussion and debate. The particular historical moment the poem's bracketed date invokes, "[1941]," references a period of public anxiety about the position of the United States on the cusp of a World War II in which many nations were already involved.⁹⁹ In leftist communities, the late 1930s were also a time of shifts from Depression-oriented labor movements and anti-Franco rallying to larger anti-fascist international foci, as well as shifts in socialist ideals away from Stalinist projects. Through her poem about a radio quiz show, Lechlitner satirically acknowledges the pleasures and benefits of entertainment as an hour away from more serious contemplation, but also critiques such programs for serving as escapist entertainment, suggesting that such instances of brevity

and levity do not address more pertinent political issues and questions. In this way, she critiques the way radio programs can limit critical debate.

In “Quiz Program / [1941],” Lechlitner engages the quiz show as an example of a popular program that resists real engagement with the discourses and issues it might invoke. Quiz show programs were popular 1940s audience participation programs; the acclaimed quiz series “Information Please,” for example, which Lechlitner invokes in her poem, aired between 1938 and 1951 and was voted by national newspaper editors in 1939 “the best radio quiz of 1939 and the fourth best show in all of radio” (Cox 102). While “Information Please” enlisted scholars to answer its wide-ranging questions, most quiz shows called on members of the live radio audience to answer questions. In a slightly humorous, devil-may-care (“whatever happens”), and complicit tone, the speaker of Lechlitner’s poem describes the radio quiz show as providing a period of time in which one’s cares may be forgotten. The first of five seven-line stanzas situates the reader as a fellow listener of the quiz program:

Whatever happens, let us dedicate this hour of our lives
To question and answer: tomorrow may not roll on little wheels
Into our bedroom, the future may be now, the far-off here,
We may neither guess the time that lies under our heels
During the last pretense of sleep, nor dream
A real dream in daylight: let us fear
Nothing for an hour at least -- maybe we’ll know and maybe win the prize. (46)

The stanza presents a period of fear and unknown futures: tomorrow may not come, “the future may be now,” we can’t predict how much time we have left, and the realities we encounter in daily life refuse us “real dream[s]” for better days. Enter the quiz show, which occupies a particular, finite segment – one hour – of the unknown futures and time frames that the opening stanza depicts. Lechlitner registers here the organization of daily

radio programs into time slots (that listeners can easily locate in newspaper charts) and the organization of daily living schedules partially according to which radio programs one listens. Identifying the quiz show as an hour in length gives the parameters of the program, both in terms of what can be accomplished in an hour, and what listeners might turn to in radio – in this case, the speaker proposes, an hour of entertainment.

In “Quiz Program” the speaker sets up the possibility of answers, amid the questioning climate of international war. Stanza two begins with a question “from a man in Lexington, Ky. asking who / stole his job,” but since the man didn’t specify when, the announcer moves on to the next question: “Speaking of enemies and allies, why / Are the sins of the small nations unforgivable?” (46). This question introduces war as central to the quiz show and the poem, in contrast to the first stanza in which speaker hoped to find a break from contemporary worries in the quiz show. No answers are given. Stanza three instructs the reader to “listen carefully” to a “harder” question about what happened after “three German aviators” fell on an “English shore.” The poem gives two answers to this question: the first is bracketed “[Green waves took them flaming, death grinned from their eyes]” and the second reads “— We wept in our cocktails because there weren’t four.” The bracketed answer could represent one given by a quiz contestant, or an aside by the speaker or another. The answer that rhymes with the English shore, that “we” wept that there were not four aviators, reads as a kind of wartime quip, an “answer” that sidesteps the real issues of soldier fatalities, battle, and national allegiances.

The final sequences of the poem critique the capacity of the quiz show to adequately address present-day conflict; Lechlitner registers the potential for radio’s limited time framework to limit the kinds of statements and considerations that might be

broadcast. Stanza four presents questions that continue to invoke war details to close the quiz show:

when marketing will you buy
[Wheat and corn steady, steel closing up fractions, aviation firm]
Red plum or white cauliflower or the shattered thigh
Of a woman bombed, or the torn hands of children . . .
If love overcomes all, will there be a third term?
Sorry: you lose. Be with us next week, and thank you: goodnight.

The quiz program depicted in the poem often refuses or withholds answers, and the “Sorry: you lose” of stanza four reflects a contestant who answered incorrectly. The “thank you: goodnight” phrase marks the end of the program, and in stanza five, the speaker has moved away from the playful tone that began the poem: she describes a collective “we” who is desperate, bewildered, and afraid, and searches the newspapers and radio networks for information.

Desperate for the sign, the clue, or the word our eyes comb
The headlines and bylines. Bewildered, we turned our ears
To all the great networks of the screaming air.
Why are we afraid? What name does Time have for the black years
Marching before us? Tell us, Professor Quiz and Information Please,
We don't know the answers. We only know the bare
Shape of silence among us, after the Voice in the room. (47)

Admitting that “[w]e don't know the answers,” the speaker addresses two questions to Professor Quiz: “[w]hy are we afraid,” and “[w]hat name does Time have for the black years / [m]arching before us?” This latter question, of course, alludes to *The March of Time* news dramatizations and the context of a barrage of war information available on mass media circa 1941. The capitalization of “Time” also suggests a kind of “Posterity,” as in: what name will posterity assign to these “black years”? But Lechlitner plays with the concept of time here, as the “black years” do not refer to those in the past, but those marching “before us” into the unknown futures described in stanza one. The question

asks how time might categorize or describe (i.e. “name”) the futures we are entering, and the question is directed to radio personae and programs (here, the quiz show and the news dramatization show), who engage constructs of time to categorize and describe unfolding action. As she indicates the bewilderment, fear, and “silence” that remain “after the Voice in the room,” (47) Lechlitner stresses the potential failures of such radio programs to adequately address the political issues about which listeners are ultimately concerned.

Coda: Contemporary Historians

In their radio dramas, poems, and essays, MacLeish and Lechlitner contribute to setting the terms of historical record and contemporary debate. As a way to disseminate information about the Spanish Civil War from the anti-fascist, Republican point of view, for example, MacLeish worked as co-writer and producer of the film *The Spanish Earth* (1937; dir. Joris Ivens); the project was coordinated and financed by the company Contemporary Historians, Inc., which was formed specifically for the project by MacLeish, Ernest Hemingway, Lillian Helman, John Dos Passos, and others.

“Contemporary Historians, Inc,” functions as a useful term by which we might consider MacLeish’s and Lechlitner’s texts written throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In part, the term invokes the 1930s documentary culture and its attendant concerns about factuality, collectivism, plurality, and the contemporaneous. The term also invokes, in its notation of incorporation, the institutional constraints and governmental and corporate frameworks that their texts critique and attempt to work within and around. Both poets found radio a productive medium for the communication of poetic verse *and* political ideas to a mass

audience, and both also investigated how radio temporality and the commercial, economic, efficient systems it indexes can limit public discourse.

After World War II, writing in response to the anti-Communist trials and censorship initiated by the House Un-American Activities Committee, and to the atomic paranoia of the emerging Cold War culture, Lechlitner and MacLeish again took up radio drama. MacLeish's *Trojan War* (1952) retells the Greek myth in the context of contemporary anti-Communist censorship and forced patriotism, aligning the false gift of the Trojan horse with the cloaked strategies of McCarthyist surveillance. *Trojan War* critiques the limiting of public discussion as it demonstrates what happens to those who question that the horse is a genuine gift, suggesting that the postwar political environment also functions to silence those who speak out. Lechlitner's radio play "Tale of a World's End" (which she wrote in 1956, and which an early draft sets in the futuristic year of 1971) documents world-wide destruction caused by simultaneous atomic bombs. Narrated by a man who is left alone among mass death, and who tracks the passing time in a diary, the drama sharply warns against nuclear proliferation. Significantly, neither MacLeish's nor Lechlitner's dramas were broadcast in the United States; the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) first broadcast MacLeish's *Trojan War*, and "Tale of a World's End" aired on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) Pacific Playhouse series as *Death and Resurrection* in 1959. Their engagement of non U.S. networks to broadcast their dramas illustrates how the postwar political climate impacted what kinds of programs aired. That Lechlitner and MacLeish continued to write politically-motivated radio drama in such a climate evidences their perhaps utopian

assessment of mass communication channels and the radio dramatic genre as productive sites for both modeling debate and questioning political and economic systems.

Kenneth Rexroth and the Oral Presentation of Poetryⁱⁱ

In his essay “Unacknowledged Legislators and *Art pour Art*,” collected in *Bird in the Bush* (1959), Rexroth asserts that writing does or should

presume to speak directly from person to person, each polarity, the person at the end of the communication, fully realized. The speech of poetry is from me to you . . . (12)

Poetics of direct personal communication – speech or writing that signals intimate communication or exchange, the dynamic Rexroth characterizes as the transferring of poetic information “from person to person” and “from me to you” – were increasingly crucial to Rexroth’s literary and cultural work in the interwar and postwar periods. Such poetics were rooted in both literary and political imperatives as Rexroth and others wrote against both New Critical poetics that institutionalized modernist and formalist methods and a militaristic wartime and McCarthyist Cold War culture. In developing strategies for conveying personal address and intimate speech in his poetry, essays, speeches, and radio broadcasts, Rexroth attempted to intervene in what he understood as a disconnected and violent culture.

Born in 1905, Rexroth was a contemporary of the second-generation modernist poets I have discussed in my dissertation thus far. In the 1920s and 1930s, Rexroth trafficked in avant-garde poetic circles and traveled widely; he practiced formally and syntactically experimental “cubist” poetry (and painting) in the 1920s, appeared in Louis Zukofsky’s “Objectivist” issue of *Poetry* and anthology, and corresponded with Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and James Laughlin.¹⁰⁰ He published his first collection of poems, *In What Hour*, in 1940, and continued to publish with New

ⁱⁱ A version of this chapter has been submitted for publication.

Directions throughout his career. Continually affiliated with leftist and pacifist literary and political projects, Rexroth was involved with labor groups in 1920s Chicago, contributed to the Works Progress Administration's *California: A Guide to the Golden State* (1939) and other W.P.A. works in the 1930s, and was a conscientious objector during World War II.¹⁰¹ A resident of San Francisco from 1927, Rexroth formed anarchist and literary reading groups throughout the 1930s and 1940s that, in concert with his local and national newspaper and journal articles, poetry publications, and talks and performances, established him as a touchstone for Bay Area literary activity and visiting writers. As a poet, critic, essayist, community organizer, and radio broadcaster, Rexroth was central to the formation of mid-century poetic culture. His increasingly national literary presence and influence in many ways drew on the cultural activity (and capital) he generated by choosing to reside and operate in San Francisco. He envisioned this site – a Western locale, far from Eastern U.S. literary establishments – as possessing utopian potential for creating culturally-radical communities and innovative writing. Rexroth's weekly "at-homes," the literary and cultural discussions he hosted at his house, were a central gathering place for writers throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Part of his attraction for writers circulating in the Bay Area was the bridge he provided between the scenes and figures of modernism and those emerging after World War II.

Along with Rexroth's political and literary activities, beginning in the late 1940s he became involved with radio broadcasting on listener-sponsored Pacifica network station KPFA in Berkeley. Whereas Rexroth was among those who critiqued 1930s network radio for its commercial status and standardized programming, he found that non-profit radio offered the possibility for participating in the creation of new media

structures and cultural outlets. Rexroth's work for KPFA was wide, varied, and sustained on nearly a weekly basis for over twenty years. He produced a contemporary book review radio program for which he composed and recorded reviews, recorded his autobiography for broadcast, gave and moderated poetry readings, and proposed, organized, and chaired speaker series, panels, and interview programs.

In this chapter, I examine Rexroth's long engagement with radio broadcasting in relation to his poetics. I propose that the particular practices he engaged in relation to radio contributed to the development of his oral, intimate poetics, and served as a model for the direct contact with listeners and readers that he advocated. Rexroth thought of poetry as an "art of speech," and developed composition techniques and writing strategies to convey markers of spontaneous, personal address. Strategies that Rexroth engaged to achieve a sense of immediate and intimate communication in his radio broadcasts also became central to his poetics. In the preface to the second edition of Rexroth's *An Autobiographical Novel* (1978) he writes "I have spent my life striving to write the way I talk" (x); his radio talking, I believe, assisted him in articulating and composing texts that mimic, echo, and transcribe the particular qualities of the spontaneous speaking voice he was interested in representing, and also to represent those features of such a speaking voice which he found most valuable. Some of the strategies he engages to promote the effect of immediate, interpersonal communication include: the conversational tone he maintains in both texts and broadcasts; the construction of first-person to second-person dynamics of address; and the inclusion of background noise and "site-specific" references to current events and places on his recordings for broadcast and in his writing. I propose that Rexroth's sustained postwar work for radio helped him theorize and construct the

poetics he developed throughout the 1940s, 1950s and later years: an intimate, oral, direct, personal, politically-engaged practice.

In what follows, I outline the postwar literary context in which Rexroth was a central figure, articulating how mid-century oral poetics responded to conditions of the literary and cultural moment and formed a vibrant poetic culture to which radio broadcasting contributed. In section two, I discuss Rexroth's intimate, personal, immediate poetics in relation to his work for radio station KPFA. In section three, I discuss a poetry reading Rexroth broadcast over KPFA in 1959, demonstrating how his work addresses listeners personally in part to intervene in current cultural and political crises. His broadcasts, poems, and essays mark his contribution to mid-century poetics and his combined commitment to functioning as "K.R. the 'artist,' K.R. the revolutionist, K.R. the human" (Rexroth quoted in Beer 14).

Orality and Mid-Century Poetics

Postwar innovative poets in many ways had to define their work in relation to early modernist poetics. Whereas the rhetoric of modernist manifestoes and projects attempts to break away from metronomic rhythm structures by moving toward musical phrasing and modern diction, mid-century "outrider" poets claim to break away from the formalizing of privileged modes of modern verse and from the constraints that some claimed that print places on the voice and relationship of the poet to an audience.

Literary critic David Meltzer discusses how poets associated with "Beat" and New York circles at mid-century "produced work in retaliation to the aridity of poetry's institutionalization by using a highly charged vernacular approach" ("Preface" vii).¹⁰²

Literary critic Michael Davidson, in his study of modern poetry and materiality *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* (1997), characterizes the oral impulse of the 1950s and 1960s as

a corrective to the rhetorically controlled, print-based poetry of high modernism. Whereas ‘voice’ for Eliot and Pound is a rhetorical construct produced through personae and irony, for postwar poets it becomes an extension of the physiological organism. (*Ghostlier* 196)

For his part, Rexroth saw the mid-century popularity of speech-based poetics as part of a long series of “revolutions in poetry” – he aligns Wordsworth’s 1800 *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* with the 1913 Imagist Manifesto – where “those who strive to reassert simplicity and personal directness are accused of being difficult, obscure, ‘avant-garde’” (Rexroth “The New” 185). With poets such as Olson, Ginsberg, and Duncan, Rexroth sought to reinvigorate the composition and dissemination of poetry. Davidson notes how writers such as Rexroth viewed “the creation of a new personalist, oral style of poetry as part of a larger cultural upheaval” (Davidson *San Francisco* 19). Rexroth’s and other poets’ participation in the emerging orality of postwar poetry was rooted in political and cultural orientations to liberatory and dialogic modes.

Mid-century writers interested in promoting oral, direct, personal, often narrative-based poetry were also responding to the contemporary context of the New Critical canonization of early modernist writing and promotion of formalist features of this writing. Such criticism valued allusive, metaphysical lyrics and well-crafted poems that could be analyzed with more “precise” literary strategies than prior criticisms. New Criticism began to attract supporters in universities and elsewhere in the 1940s, with the publication of John Crowe Ransom’s *The World’s Body* (1938) and *The New Criticism*

(1940) and Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938). Crowe Ransom, as literary critic James Breslin points out, called for a criticism that, "forsaking historical, ethical, and impressionistic approaches, would be 'more scientific, or precise and systematic'" (16). Poet Robert Lowell describes how New Criticism in America "was partly a continuation of Pound and Eliot and partly an attempt to make poetry much more formal than Eliot and Pound." Lowell describes the early 1950s as "the period of the famous book *Understanding Poetry*, of analyzing poems to see how they're put together; there was a great emphasis on craftsmanship. . . . and about 1950 it was prevailing everywhere in America" (quoted in Breslin 13).

Postwar writers took up many different practices in order to construct an oral and speech-based, directly communicative poetics, including "personalist," "personist," and "projective" strategies. Rexroth's engagement of what has been called personalist work involves, as I will later discuss, use of the referents "I" and "you"; O'Hara's somewhat sardonic essay/manifesto "Personism" (1959) notes that "if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born" (O'Hara 1073) as a way to write poetry that invoked communicative proximity. Charles Olson's essay/manifesto "Projective Verse" claimed that manuscript and print media had over time removed verse from the spoken voice, and that strategies such as scoring the poem by notating breath with line breaks can communicate energy from the poet directly through the poem to the reader. Diverse circles of poets participated in the emergent versions of oral and speech-based poetics, including those working in San Francisco (Rexroth, Ferlinghetti), several who hailed from Oregon (Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen), those associated with the Black Mountain network (including Robert Duncan, who lived

and worked in San Francisco in the early 1950s, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, and Charles Olson), East Coast and New York authors (Frank O'Hara, Amiri Baraka) and New York writers who traveled to and through San Francisco (Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac), and other writers. For Rexroth and many mid-century poets, the spoken performance of texts was a way to engage the mechanisms of vocal chord, breath, and speech *and* to construct modes of, in Rexroth's words, "direct, personal communication" with audiences ("The New" 185).

Poetry readings were one mode of response some mid-century poets took up in relation to what they understood as the codification of innovative poetry in critical, conservative, academic, and formalist discourses and institutions. Poetry readings have also been central to literary narratives about the postwar period. Perhaps the most famous manifestation of 1950s oral poetic performance is Allen Ginsberg's reading of "Howl" for the first time at the "Six Gallery" in San Francisco in 1955. Rexroth emceed this reading, which featured Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Michael McClure, the surrealist Philip Lamantia, along with Ginsberg; the reading has been characterized as a primary moment for mid-century, San Francisco, and "Beat generation" writing.¹⁰³ Literary historian of the period Warren French writes, for example, that the reading marked the beginning of San Francisco's emergence as "the center of the national poetry 'scene' for the last years of the decade" (13). Literary-historical narratives of the period often credit this reading with igniting a proliferation of poetry readings that followed, though, as Rexroth notes in his description of mid-century San Francisco above, readings had been a part of literary culture in San Francisco and elsewhere long before the 1950s. However, the wide popularity and centrality of 1950s readings to the poetics of the writers who read

on tours and in coffee shops, as well as the national attention such readings garnered, make them a primary component in the poetic culture of the period and in how the period is remembered. Poet-critic Charles Bernstein writes that since the 1950s, “the poetry reading has been one of the most important sites for the dissemination of poetic works in North America” (5); he characterizes the poetry reading as a “*public tuning*,” crediting “public readings in the 1950s by Creeley, Ginsberg, Olson, and Kerouac” as establishing both “the sound of their work but also the possibilities for related work” (Bernstein 6; his italics).

Orality, performance, and interest in speech-based and sounded poetry were central to mid-century counter-cultural and innovative poetics, though they were of course not entirely new approaches to writing and textual distribution. Literary critic Peter Middleton, in his article “The Contemporary Poetry Reading,” reminds us of the long and continuous practice of poetry readings and the oral presentation of writing; he supplements conventional narratives that describe “the proliferation of readings since the 1950s,” which include postwar urban readings outside of universities, Dylan Thomas’s highly popular early 1950s tours, and Beat generation-inspired performances, with the correction that “[i]n fact, poetry readings emerged from a long history of the oral performance of written texts” (Middleton 272).¹⁰⁴ The emphasis on such presentation by mid-century poets does present a shift from earlier modernist dissemination, however; while the distribution of modernist texts certainly included readings, live readings were not the central focus of presentation, and oral delivery was not often the primary principle guiding composition. For poets writing out of a modernist tradition that includes much print-based formal experiment, and writing against a mid-century New Critically-

sanctioned or “official verse” style they saw as overly academic and removed from historical and personal contexts, the development of oral venues for poetic performance and a poetics that responded to these sounded, performed, and imagined conditions was crucial.

Poets’ engagement with radio is an aspect of the oral presentation of poetry that has not been examined in either studies of mid-century poetry readings or mid-century orality. Radio readings are an under-theorized sector of poetry reading scholarship just as radio is under-theorized as a site of experiment, a model, a venue, and set of practices that poets engage throughout the twentieth century.¹⁰⁵ Early and mid-century radio poetry archives in general are difficult to obtain, often buried in non-catalogued materials or simply lost, but radio readings were part of the oral and aural environment that characterized literary networks and collectives such as those forming in postwar San Francisco. Radio was in fact crucial to the oral poetics writers such as Rexroth engaged. As I have mentioned, Cid Corman, poet and editor of the influential mid-century literary journal *Origin* (from 1951), broadcast his program “This is Poetry” from Boston and featured guest readers as well as readings by Corman and others of poetry and fiction.¹⁰⁶ Jack Spicer broadcast a folk music radio program on KPFA in 1949 and in the later 1950s articulated the role of the poet as one who acted like a radio receiver, registering and dispatching “transmissions” that dictated a poem (Ellingham 265; 337). Spicer claimed this practice removed the ego of the writer from the making of the poem. In working with radio as a communication technology and as a theoretical model in the postwar years, poets both participated in ongoing poetic engagement with the medium and developed new and diverse practices in relation to it.

Rexroth's contributions to the mid-century Bay Area poetry scene, and to larger intersections of postwar literary and cultural communities, this chapter argues, are productively approached through analysis of his radio broadcasting work. Poet Eliot Weinberger, in his obituary for Rexroth's death in 1982, writes that

there is no question that American literary history will have to be rewritten to accommodate Rexroth, that postwar American poetry is the "Rexroth Era" as much (and as little) as the earlier decades are the "Pound Era." (Weinberger)

Weinberger refers here to Rexroth's "effect on poetry . . . as a freelance pedagogue and tireless promoter," his work as a journalist, editor, anthologist, organizer of public and literary groups and programs, and his role in bringing key writers of the postwar generation, including "[Denise] Levertov, [Gary] Snyder, [Jerome] Rothenberg, [Robert] Duncan, [Nathaniel] Tarn, [David] Antin, [Lawrence] Ferlinghetti and others" to the attention of New Directions editor James Laughlin, who subsequently published their work (Weinberger).¹⁰⁷ Davidson reports that Rexroth acted as a political and aesthetic mentor and was "the focal point for practically every poet who came to the Bay Area" in the 1940s and 1950s (*San Francisco* 38).¹⁰⁸ While literary studies of the Bay Area at mid-century (though these are few) often acknowledge Rexroth's literary role, none has investigated the vital contributions to the cultural, literary, and oral poetic milieu Rexroth made through his radio work, including the "Books" review program which he broadcast weekly for over twenty years in the period when he was a central figure in the Berkeley and San Francisco literary communities and "renaissance." By 1964 the audience for this program was estimated at over a million listeners nationally.¹⁰⁹ If Rexroth was influential to a generation of emerging authors – the focal point of almost every visiting writer to the region – he was also central to the developing character of the Pacifica radio network and

its first station KPFA-FM in Berkeley. In addition, his long-term radio work enabled him to experiment with the speech-based strategies of writing and techniques for representing personal intimacy in poems.

“the living speech of person to person”: Rexroth’s Poetics and KPFA

Rexroth’s involvement with KPFA radio was part of the political and cultural context in which he developed his poetics of personal address. Whereas other writers and speakers in the period hoped to engage broadcasting in order to connect with mass audiences simultaneously, Rexroth was more interested in speaking directly to specific individuals in a given listening audience. The capacity of radio broadcasts to transmit speech directly to individual listeners was attractive to Rexroth; such a process of transmission is aligned with Rexroth’s idea that “actual poetry” is “the living speech of person to person” (Rexroth *Bird* 16). Rexroth found radio a productive medium and model for intimate, direct speech. As I argue in this chapter, he capitalized on radio’s capacity to generate the effect of intimate communication as he broadcasted, and he theorized the radiophonic intimacy he cultivated in his broadcasts in relation to the personal and private dynamics he aimed to generate in his poetry. In his poetry, as in his broadcasts and speeches, Rexroth conceived of and invoked speech that issued from a singular speaker to an individual listener. Radio broadcasting served as a productive site for Rexroth to test and imagine the possibilities for direct, intimate, interpersonal communication that might intervene in what he would characterize as a brutal, over-sanitized, consumerist cultural moment.

The radio media system – non-profit radio in the late 1940s and the 1950s – that Rexroth interacted with and that forms the context of this chapter is somewhat different from that described in my previous chapters. For example, MacLeish's and Lechlitner's work addresses the political potential of working within radio media systems prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s, systems dominated by large networks and specific program formats that were increasingly sponsored by manufacturers of consumer products or (during the war) government agencies. The radio situation changed after World War II; the postwar decline of radio's centrality in the face of television and the rise of alternative FM stations opened new kinds of possibilities for radio practices in the later 1940s and early 1950s. One manifestation of the re-opened radio field was Pacifica radio, the first listener-sponsored radio network in the U.S. Responding to the structures of network radio, Pacifica formed under the assumption that the production of diverse, open, and politically-progressive programming required a non-commercial funding structure. Pacifica's first station KPFA in Berkeley relied on a multitude of volunteers and gave out FM radios in its early days to encourage subscription. Because of its reliance on interested listeners rather than commercial interests, Pacifica promoted a wide range of artistic innovation and political discussion from its inception in 1949, from experimental music to Civil Rights sit-ins and debates. Rexroth's literary and radio work, then, emerges from a site of excited interaction between poets, activists, and a station receptive to (and proceeding from) their projects.

Established in 1946, Pacifica Foundation was the first listener-sponsored radio network in the United States; its pilot station KPFA aired its first programs in April 1949.¹¹⁰ Pacifica radio network was founded by Lew Hill, who worked in the 1940s both

as head of the National Committee of Conscientious Objectors and in 1944 as news director for the *Washington Post*-owned radio station WINX (Land 41).¹¹¹ Hill presented his proposal for a listener-sponsored FM radio station to the anarchist discussion group the “Libertarian Circle” in 1946 and several members of the group became active in working for the station, including Rexroth, who became a regular voice on the station for over twenty years beginning in 1949.¹¹² In his autobiographical writings, Rexroth describes Hill’s proposal for a non-commercial radio station as acknowledging that mass media such as radio had become more effective communication media than “street meetings and pamphlets” (Rexroth *Excerpts* 59). Rexroth’s phrasing here indexes the implicit political context of Pacifica’s formation; the station was formed with the intent to provide public service content, discussion forums, and cultural information as well as to promote anti-war discourse. Historian Jeff Land describes how Pacifica’s articles of incorporation register its pacifist orientation; the articles state that the station seeks to “gather and disseminate information on the causes of conflicts,” to “promote the study of political and economic problems” and to attempt to “contribute to a lasting understanding between nations and between the individuals of all nations, races, creeds, and colors” (quoted in Land 3).

From Pacifica’s inception, literary and musical programming was intertwined with cultural and news reporting, and these combined features produced a schedule that fomented political activism, debate, and the circulation of new artistic modes. Radio historian Jeff Land reports that from the beginning, KPFA “sounded like nothing else on the airwaves, with its range of political discussion at the height of the Cold War, its celebration of literary and musical innovation, and its refusal to adopt tightly scheduled

formats” (Land 3). Unlike commercial network radio, which writers such as MacLeish and Lechlitner critiqued in part for its temporal constraints, KPFA programs often ran over their allotted time segments. Programming at the station was largely volunteer-based, and in the first six months engaged 600 people, broadcasting a large number (half of the schedule) as live programs (Engelman 49). In subsequent years, recording technology enabled broadcasters to pre-record most programs. Programs included news, jazz and experimental as well as classical music, literary readings, panels on cultural debates and events, lectures, public discussion of issues such as Civil Rights and youth culture, and later live broadcasts of sit-ins and anti-Vietnam war demonstrations. Rexroth describes “a constant dose of poetry” broadcast from the inception of the radio station, a commitment which was aligned with the poetry readings that were part of the ongoing activities of the anarchist and literary communities he participated in (Rexroth “Kenneth” 233).

Rexroth contributed to the development of KPFA in its early years in part by helping to commission programming. He promoted readings and work by poets such as Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Amiri Baraka, Diane di Prima and others on the station, and recorded interviews with writers and musicians in New York and Europe. He recalls how at the beginning KPFA “kept pumping in stuff from all over, in German, in English, in French . . .” (Rexroth “Kenneth” 234). He writes that he “sat up night after night writing letters abroad, and this material just flooded in . . . [He] was corresponding with Simone Weil, Camus . . .” (234). While in England after the war he “taped readings and interviews and sent them back to San Francisco” for KPFA. These tapes included readings by poet Dylan Thomas and anarchist poets such as

the English author Herbert Read and the Canadian author (raised in the U.K.) George Woodcock (234). On a later visit to England in the summer of 1959, Rexroth also recorded readings and interviews with writers and poets, including poet and critic Derek Savage (Hamalian 294), and while in New York on a lecture tour the following year, Rexroth taped interviews with jazz musicians Ornette Coleman and Charles Mingus (300).

Rexroth was involved with organizing and moderating a variety of kinds of programs. He invited writers such as Robert Creeley and Charles Olson in 1956 (Hamalian 257) and Ruth Lechlitner in 1957 to record readings of their poetry for KPFA broadcast. His involvement with KPFA programming also led him to propose ideas for series and panels; for example, in 1953 he was involved in planning a series on the theme of the “Meaning of Freedom,” and in 1962 he helped plan the series “Words and Deeds,” with proposed topics such as “What’s Wrong with the Communications Industry?” and “Cultural Fragmentation of the Postwar City.” Rexroth was no doubt involved with many other KPFA programs about which the records are lost. His sustained involvement with the station signals his estimation of its cultural value. Other writers concurred; poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti characterizes the influence of KPFA on mid-century Bay Area writers and cultural workers by writing that “KPFA was really a focal point for a lot of the underground. . . . When I arrived [in San Francisco] in 1951, it was in full force. It was the center of the intellectual community right up on through the early sixties” (quoted in Armstrong 75).

Rexroth’s primary work for KPFA was his weekly book review program (called “Books”) that aired from 1951 to the early 1970s;¹¹³ for this series he reviewed thousands

of books from a broad range of genres over the course of this tenure. His wide range of texts included literary work by Henry Miller, French novelist Pierre Choderlos de Laclos (Rexroth *Selected Letters* 183), and Jack Kerouac (Hamalian 243).¹¹⁴ He reviewed largely contemporary books that discussed topics and figures such as Russian artist El Lizzitsky and poet Jerome Rothenberg's edited volume *Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas* (1972) (Pacifica Radio Archives). My research indicates that Rexroth often organized book review programs around particular topics, such as Buddhism, ecology, and African American literature (Pacifica Radio Archives). He solicited books from publishers to review, sometimes giving specific lists of new books he was interested in reading and discussing on the air.

Rexroth's "Books" program was also a forum for his literary and cultural commentary; in a discussion of KPFA's and his own commitment to ecological topics, he notes that: "There has never been a book, even a bad book, on ecology and on the environmental problem that I haven't reviewed and used the book as a peg to hang a long ecology speech on" (Rexroth "Kenneth" 261).¹¹⁵ His statement indexes the way in which he engaged particular texts in part to discuss their wider cultural implications. It also indexes the component of Rexroth's "Books" program that is perhaps most commented on: the way in which Rexroth used the program for literary and cultural comment and critique, in sometimes inflammatory ways with reference to particular authors and institutions.¹¹⁶ Rexroth's approach did not detract from his base of listeners: writing to Laughlin in fall 1958, Rexroth reports that his book review and commentary programs are "the 'most popular' on KPFA by far, more people (on check) listen to me than to any other program *including* music" (Rexroth *Selected Letters* 223; his emphasis).

No doubt partially because Rexroth did know some of his listening audience personally (some were friends, colleagues, and familiar subscribers, and others responded to his programs through letters), Rexroth approached radio broadcasting as a personal endeavor. Most of his broadcasts were pre-recorded in his own home and included background noise and spontaneous non-lexical sound, and he took care to ground his radio talks and autobiographical broadcasts with site-specific markers that presented the sense of a situated voice speaking to an intimate set of individual listeners. Rexroth's speaking voice on his "Books" program engaged conversational, casual, animated and, at times, oratorical tones. His vocal style on the program provoked both critique and praise from listeners. The means by which he composed these programs – while he was speaking into a tape recorder – produced spontaneity both in terms of diction, tone, and conversational-style tangents *and* in terms of non-lexical vocal elements and unexpected background noise. While Rexroth may not have intended coughs and other sounds to be a part of the listening experience, he did not edit these instances from the tapes that were broadcast even though such editing was now possible. He may have felt that non-lexical sounds contributed to the production of precisely the casual colloquial, intimate speech he aimed for. Rexroth's sustained practice of recording his tapes for broadcast in his own home must have produced a number of instances of non-vocal sound that contributed to a sense of spontaneity and spoken language occurring in "real-life," non-studio contexts.

Just as background and bodily noises make up parts of the sound material of Rexroth's broadcasts, his direct references to markers of place literally represent the sites from which he speaks. Both of these components of his broadcasts helped Rexroth, I believe, to set up the dynamic of personal speech that he aimed for. With these strategies

he constructed both soundscapes and narratives that provided particular contexts from which his voice would be received. For example, Rexroth recorded much of his autobiography for broadcast on KPFA while in Europe over the 1958-1959 year with his family,¹¹⁷ and he cultivated a personal mode of address in part through referring to the places he resided in or visited while abroad. For this project Rexroth spoke into a wire tape recorder (which made any editing very difficult due to the fragility of the wire tape in this device) in the intimacy of his own home, intending the broadcast to be received in individual listeners' homes. When the tapes were transcribed, edited, re-dictated with changes, and transcribed again for eventual publication as *An Autobiographical Novel* with New Directions, some of these place references remained in the text. The opening line of chapter seven, for example, reads "[h]ere in Vicenza, where we are now living as I am dictating this, the river runs under a Roman bridge, and nearby there are several waterwheels . . ." (Rexroth *An Autobiographical* 45) and an anecdote in chapter six describes "[r]ecently I went with the children into a drugstore in Vicenza" (43). Details of place and present events segue to and help illustrate the stories Rexroth tells about his past; the "mint placebo" he eats from a drugstore in Vicenza, Italy recalls childhood visits to drugstores, and the Christmas tree he and his family had "this year, when we were living in Aix-en-Provence" serves to illustrate how he has continued to provide the holiday traditions his parents provided him as a child. In this passage Rexroth also uses the discussion of his family's celebrations in Europe as a point of comparison between French, German, and American modes of holiday expression; "I am sure we scandalized our neighbors" (in France), he write of the celebrations (41). Rexroth employs details of

the places and experiences of his (or an) everyday life to situate the speaking “I” voice in these sections as on the recorded broadcasts.

During the process of forming a book from the autobiographical segments that were broadcast, Rexroth maintained his project of trying to represent personal, direct speech in text. KPFA aired the first installment of Rexroth's autobiography May 14, 1959 and *New Directions* paid for the transcription of the autobiographical tapes that Rexroth sent to KPFA. Laughlin incidentally, upon first hearing the tapes from KPFA, wrote to Rexroth that the work “may be fine for radio, but for reading it seems awfully long-winded and discursive, the remembered scenes not boiled down, or the best incidents pointed up” (Rexroth *Selected Letters* 229). The conversational, tangential mode Laughlin registers here is in part the style Rexroth wished to convey in the book version. Rexroth wished to have the tapes transcribed, he writes, in order to “preserve the spontaneous, oral character of the style and the direct simplicity of the narrative” (*An Autobiographical x*). He notes to Laughlin that he does all his own editing in order to ensure the “free colloquial rhythm and the offhand, simplistic narrative,” and describes in the preface to the *New Directions* text that he “worked over these tapes not by rewriting the transcriptions but by re-dictating them” in order to preserve “something of the character of speech” (Rexroth *Selected* 226; *An Autobiographical x*).¹¹⁸

Rexroth's practices of intentionally constructing elements that signal spontaneity and immediacy in his radio broadcasts, and then carefully dictating and re-dictating these elements in the texts that grew out of them, is also aligned with work such as Corman's on “This Is Poetry”; Corman writes that he improvises his comments about the poetry read on his program, and keeps them “short and to the point,” following advice he

received from Marianne Moore who he contacted when he began the program. Moore wrote to him, he reports: “Be spontaneous, above all.” Corman states: “No program is rehearsed,” though, “[o]f course, the poetry is” (215). Spontaneity may be seen to be at the heart of postwar oral projects, or at least the production of its effect: the construction of conditions, genres of address, styles, and diction that signal spontaneity and immediacy.

Rexroth’s communication of personal intimacy and immediacy was also motivated by ethical and political imperatives. In the text of a speech he planned to deliver at a U.C. Berkeley pacifist “teach-in,” published as one of his regular columns for the *San Francisco Examiner* 30 May, 1965¹¹⁹, he writes

I am here tonight solely because I believe in peace. I want to make it very clear that this is a personal appearance. I speak for no one but myself, I represent no one, I belong to no organization, political or otherwise, except the Sierra Club, with which I often disagree. This is a first person singular to second person singular talk. (“Column”)

Rexroth’s approach in the published talk emphasizes the pronominal grammar point to produce a sense that the “I” is speaking directly to a listening, personal, and distinct “you,” constructing an immediate connection to an individual listener in a shared current cultural context. The “I / you” mode that he describes in his speech text was central to his approach in his radio programs and his poetry. It was aligned with his understanding of ethical community practices being built on direct interpersonal exchange rather than what he saw as (Soviet-style) impersonal “collectives.” The “I / you” emphasis was also not always or only a political or theoretical position; at times Rexroth’s composition practice actually engaged the first person to singular second person while he recorded programs for broadcast on KPFA. For example, Hamalian reports that while working on

his autobiography in Italy in 1959, with the tape recorder running, Rexroth “reminisced about his childhood and adolescence to [his daughter] Mary, his captive audience” (Hamalian 292). In speaking a series of recordings for broadcast to his daughter, Rexroth enacted the “first person singular to second person singular talk” he would later describe.

Rexroth’s poems often and increasingly engage personal address, as they are directed or dedicated to specific people. Literary critic Morgan Gibson, in fact, finds that “[m]ost of Rexroth’s poetry is direct personal communication addressed to his family, friends, lovers, poets, or readers as confidants” (Gibson *Kenneth* 17; my emphasis). Certainly the second person “you” address is a common formal structure for Rexroth. One of three sections in his volume of poems *The Signature of All Things* (1949) is titled “Elegies and Letters,” many of which were written for specific persons; fifteen poems in the book address a personal subject using the word “you.” Some of the people addressed in poems in *Signature* are also subjects of poems in other books: Rexroth’s mother Delia Rexroth, his first wife Andrée Rexroth, his second wife Marie, and poets William Carlos Williams and Yvor Winters. *Signature* also includes poems addressing San Francisco poet William Everson (Brother Antoninus), Chinese actress Gardenia Chang, actress Geraldine Udell, Federico Garcia Lorca, poet Kathleen Raine, and others. In previous books, Rexroth wrote poems to and for poets Louis Zukofsky (*Complete* 90), Horace Gregory (95), Dorothy Van Ghent (98), Tristan Tzara and André Breton (83), Nancy Shores (82), Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler (72), and Leslie Smith (66). These poems engage the personal relationship as a point of departure for observation, memory, narrative development, cultural comment, and reflection. For example, one of the poems for his mother in *Signature*, “Delia Rexroth,” recalls “a book of poems / That you used to

like, that you / Used to sing to music I / Never found anywhere again . . .” (284), and this occasion of memory precipitates reflection about the speaker’s own life in relation to his mother’s, that “life has cost / Me more years, though much less pain, / Than you had to pay for it” (284).¹²⁰ In “A Letter to William Carlos Williams,” Rexroth writes about a poet as one who “creates / Sacramental relationships / That last always” (293). Poems of personal address are one way Rexroth seems to try to articulate, create, and model such relationships.¹²¹

Often Rexroth’s poems that engage in personal address are also, like much in his *oeuvre*, grounded in particular places. This site-specific aspect of Rexroth’s work functions in his work for radio, as I discussed above, as a way to locate listeners in the particular place from which the “I” voice speaks, in order to help facilitate listeners’ imagining of where the voice is situated, and to help create the intimate and immediate dynamics, regardless of distance in space or time. Often details of place also function in Rexroth’s poems to delineate multiple places, to differentiate one place from another place, to signal a memory, or to operate as a point of shift *between* places. For example, the poem “Climbing Milestone Mountain, August 22, 1937,” from *In What Hour* (1940), moves back and forth between descriptions of being in Boston and hearing anarchist Bartolomeo Vanzetti’s words before his execution and a scene ten years later when Rexroth is climbing in the Sierra Nevada range in California. “I told Marie all about Boston, how it looked / That last terrible week, how hundreds stood weeping,” Rexroth writes, beginning the narrative of the poem by recording the act of story-telling to someone listening. The following sections of the poem detail both the mountain scenes – the “cold transparent lake,” the “brilliant mile-square meadow / Illuminated with asters

and cyclamen,” the “melting snow and broken rock” (*Complete* 151-2) – alongside memories of Vanzetti, until both the mountain extremities and the anarchist historical moment are described in the present-tense of the narrative:

One cheek pressed against the rock
The wind slapping the other,
I saw you both marching in an army
You with the red and black flag, Sacco with the rattlesnake banner.
I kicked steps up the last snow bank and came
To the indescribably blue and fragrant
Polemonium and the dead sky and the sterile
Crystalline granite and the final monolith of the summit. (152)

These lines merge the ascent to a finally dead, sterile summit with the public efforts of Sacco and Vanzetti, and the poem closes with commemoration of their cultural work by supposing that one day mountains might be named after them. While the poem opens with the moment of describing the story to his wife Marie, it describes this particular moment directly to Vanzetti, who is addressed as “you” in the text. The details of place in this poem serve to situate the speaker in a particular difficult, remote terrain in part to use this terrain as a site in which to situate and remember the finally fatal struggle of the two men.

Rexroth’s “Autumn in California” makes a similar move of aligning disparate places, depicting an evening walk near the San Francisco Bay in view of Mt. Diablo, where the speaker hears

the clocks in Barcelona strike at dawn
And the whistles blowing for noon in Nanking.
I hear the drone, the snapping high in the air
Of planes fighting, the deep reverberant
Grunts of bombardment, the hasty clamor
Of anti-aircraft. (156)

The speaker's present-tense listening ("I hear") to the sounds of bombs in Spain and China *while* walking in California portrays an awareness of the military events happening oceans away, and depicts these events as simultaneous with the position of the speaker who walks and hears. It is the situation of the speaker and listener *in* California that produces the disjunction of the scene, as, except by radio broadcasting over a loudspeaker, the speaker could not hear the actual bombs. The noises from distant places echo in the "[l]oud, wiry, and tremulous" cries of birds overhead at the close of the poem, both in concert with and in contrast to the sounds occurring in distant skies (157). The description of the speaker's position, walking in California, communicates to the reader both the distance from and proximity to the sounds of war. Rexroth would make a similar, but more general, comparison in his poem "The American Century" from his book *In Defense of the Earth* (1956), describing blackbirds and willows in the "emerald hills" with his daughter who is learning the names of flowers while "Overhead in the deep sky / Of May Day jet bombers cut long / White slashes of smoke. The blackbird / Sings and the baby laughs, midway / In the century of horror" (574). This and other poems engage details of place – the names of flowers that only grow in particular mountainous regions, street names in San Francisco – in order to present the effect of direct, personal narrative.

Rexroth On Radio

Now [clears throat] I'll read from my own uh recent poems. A book called *In Defense of the Earth*. Both of these books by the way are published by New Directions. [um] Also this is Kenneth Rexroth reading his own poetry [laughs] the uh midway in the program.

— Kenneth Rexroth "Poetry" on KPFA January 13, 1957

On January 13, 1957, KPFA broadcast Rexroth reading from his two new books of translations and original poems: *100 Poems from the Chinese* (1956) and *In Defense of the Earth* (1956). His reading was part of a weekly series that broadcast local poets reading their own work. Rexroth's mid-reading check in with his audience in the broadcast, in my transcription above, indicates a transition from reading a group of translations to reading poems from *In Defense*. Rexroth read from several series in this book, including poems from "Seven Poems for Marthe My Wife," "The Lights in the Sky are Stars," "A Bestiary / for my daughters, Mary and Katherine" and "Mother Goose" as well as the poem "Xmas Coming." Poems in *In Defense* range from reflective observations of natural scenes to love poems to folk-inspired socially-critical sequences to memory-based narratives and memorials. Many poems engage in personal address, from dedications to his wife and advice for his daughters to the use of a more accusatory "you" to advance social critique about the threat institutionalized and commercial structures pose to individuals and communities. In poems dedicated to his daughters, Rexroth makes some of his most potent comments on contemporary socio-economic and political conditions. His radio reading, recorded at KPFA studios in the first week of 1957, vocalizes speech-based mainly-narrative poems of varied lengths. I hear the recording of Rexroth's radio reading as part of the fabric of a KPFA day of broadcasting,

part of the radio oeuvre of a popular broadcaster, part of a sustained critique of oppressive cultural forms, and part of the articulation of an oral, direct poetics.

The poetic series “The Lights in the Sky are Stars,” from which Rexroth read three poems on his radio reading, employs syntactically-standard, sentence-based syllabic lines that in their storytelling mode invoke the spoken word he was interested in achieving in text.¹²² He notes on the recording that he has also read poems from this series on another radio station, suggesting that he considered these poems to be particularly suited to radio delivery. The poetic series, written for his daughter Mary and often addressing her specifically, describes sightings of stars, eclipses, and constellations that lead to both reflection on Mary’s youth and life and to warnings about what may await her as she grows up in the, in Rexroth’s view, debased and dangerous current cultural landscape. One of the poems he read from this series, “The Great Nebula of Andromeda,” depicts a simple back-country narrative in plain language. By opening with the active phrase “[w]e get into camp after / Dark,” the poem immediately sets up a scene and a mode of description that produces the sense that readers and listeners enter a story that is already in the midst of being told. The poem describes a family camping trip “high on an open ridge / Looking over five thousand / Feet of mountains and mile / Beyond mile of valley and sea” where a lantern, stars, and waxing moon all cast light on a macaroni dinner eaten before sleep (*In Defense* 19). The conversational narrative tone describing the telescopic observations shifts in the last half into a reflection on potential threats to the future of a young daughter figure.

In Rexroth’s reading of “The Great Nebula” for radio broadcast, his delivery style rolls onward in continuous phrases. Non-lexical sounds, pauses, and brief laughter are

interspersed throughout the recording in introductions to the poems, as in the spontaneous-sounding announcement I quote from above, which is meant to cue in listeners who had recently tuned in to who was speaking. Rexroth's casual tone in these non-poetic segments helps set the tone for his reading of the poems. His style of reading poetry on this recording provides a different example of performed speech than the listeners of his "Books" program report, and suggests that, as Corman reported of his radio poetry program, the poems were rehearsed. In many of the poems on the recording, Rexroth keeps a relatively fast pace. The lines of "The Great Nebula" are organized around a roughly seven-syllable count, Rexroth's characteristic form from the later 1940s, though the voiced rendition rarely registers the breaks generated by syllabic schema. Rexroth generally pauses for breath at the ends of sentences whether they occur mid-line or at the ends of lines.¹²³ He regularly carries over line breaks and punctuation, as when he voices the two lines

The night is windy and clear. The moon is three days
Short of full (19)

in one continuous phrase without breath separating sentence or line. He moves from the "e" sound of "clear" to the "oo" of moon, yoking the "r" and "th" of the adjoining "clear [period]" and "[t]he," and then connects "days" to "short" over the line break with a single "s" sound. The carrying-over of most enjambed lines and some commas and periods contribute to the sense of continuous pacing in the poem.

Rexroth's well-paced delivery is somewhat contrasted by his style of held vowels; by extending the duration of vowel sounds, he produces an oratorical tone in some phrases. Such a tone is consistent with Rexroth's speaking voice at least for public contexts, as when discussing or introducing poems on other broadcast recordings. His

pronunciation of the “ar” combination throughout “The Great Nebula,” as in the phrase “star-filled dark,” and in recurrences of the words “dark,” “stars,” and “far,” lingers on the ä sound. The duration and repetition of this sound throughout the poem emphasizes this assonant thread. The final eleven lines of “The Great Nebula of Andromeda” repeat the word “far” twice, and extend its sound into the penultimate line’s warning. They read:

If you are lucky and the
Nations let you, you will live
Far into the twenty-first
Century. I pick up the glass
And watch the Great Nebula
Of Andromeda swim like
A phosphorescent amoeba
Slowly around the Pole. Far
Away in distant cities
Fat-hearted men are planning
To murder you while you sleep. (*In Defense* 20)

This closing address of the poem employs repeated sound combinations, as in the “I” sound interchanged with the “you” addressed in the first two lines quoted above: if “you are lucky,” if they “let you,” and “you will live.” However, the repeated word “far,” with its sound fractured and echoing in the adjective “fat-hearted,” resonates more clearly on the recording of the radio broadcast because of Rexroth’s vocal emphasis. Such emphasis forms an analogy between the proximity of the “far” stars as seen through the telescope and the potential for a real, proximate threat by the “far” men in distant cities, as seen in a moment of critical reflection. Prompted by the sight of starlight which has traveled great distances, the lines spatialize time (i.e. the daughter figure might live “far” into the next century) to articulate how such a future is threatened by those now-distant ones planning to cause harm.

Rexroth's reading of the final lines of "The Great Nebula of Andromeda" contrast the fast-paced, carried-over delivery enacted in most of the poem: he pauses after each of the last three lines, after the words "cities" and "planning," slowing the poem slightly. The final lines ("Far / Away in distant cities / Fat-hearted men are planning / To murder you while you sleep") are perfectly broken into seven syllables each, the line-breaks functioning as a musical or poetic score in the manner of the Black Mountain-style breath-based poetic line of Duncan or Olson. By punctuating with breath the final three lines, Rexroth signals a shift that prepares for the note of the last line warning of murderous men, which he voices with a slightly lower pitch and volume than the rest of the poem, accenting the words "murder" and "sleep." This articulation of threat, set apart by breath and lower pitch and volume, strikes a different note than the rest of the poem – it is a far cry from the intimate camping scene set up in the first part of the poem, with stars "cluster[ed] / Around our table like fireflies" (*In Defense* 19).

To listen to "The Great Nebula of Andromeda" in concert with other of Rexroth's poems from *In Defense of the Earth* is to hear it speaking to the cultural contexts of the aftermath of war, the deaths of writers and activists, postwar McCarthy-era surveillance, and what Rexroth discussed in essays, radio programs, and poetry as a commercialized, socially-rigid, lethal system. The form of the personal address that Rexroth employs in the final lines of "The Great Nebula of Andromeda" resonates with other poems of his from this period that similarly respond to systems of social oppression he finds intolerable. The threat articulated in "The Great Nebula" surfaces in the fifth poem in "The Lights in the Sky" series, "A Sword in a Cloud of Light,"¹²⁴ which contrasts the neon signs of commercial culture and their "Messages of avarice, / Joy, fear, hygiene"

with the site of the constellation Orion, advising his daughter Mary never to trade such sights as the constellation “For the blood-drenched civilized / Abstractions of the rascals / who live by killing you and me” (*In Defense* 23). Here, personal address to his daughter also functions as an accusatory, public, spoken declaration of the oppressiveness of Capitalist “civilized” social norms, actions, and common public (here, advertising) messages. The narrative, observational, and rhetorical format exhibited in “The Lights in the Sky” and many other poems in *In Defense of the Earth* – that of describing a set of events or particular scene (urban or back-country) and then punctuating that scene with a comment on threatening contemporary social structures – also recalls Rexroth’s style on his book review and autobiography radio segments. As I have described, in his book reviews, Rexroth used the discussion of books to segue into social commentary, and for his autobiography, details of place are often used to mobilize memories, histories, and sometimes discussions of cultural elements or comparisons.

Rexroth engages in direct commentary about human culture and in further warnings to his children in the series “A Bestiary / for my daughters, Mary and Katherine”; this series defines and describes animals, man, “Uncle Sam,” and “you” to present ideas about social relationships and systems. He read several of these poems on his January 1957 KPFA broadcast, including “Deer.” It reads:

Deer are gentle and graceful
And they have beautiful eyes.
They hurt no one but themselves,
The males, and only for love.
Men have invented several
Thousand ways of killing them. (*In Defense* 61)

Rexroth’s voicing of this poem maintains a continuous articulation, resting on the “s” of “themselves” and “males” slightly to indicate the separated clause, and pausing for breath

only at the periods. The oral presentation of “Deer” is matter-of-fact, stating the simple diction and concise lines with the direct approach Rexroth advocated. His voice even trails off slightly at the end, so that the phrase “killing them” is voiced more quickly and more quietly than the rest of the poem, which strikes more of a conversational than rhetorically-punctuated tone. Contrasting the practice of species-only harm attributed to deer with the practice of cross-species killing by humans, the poem comments on the scale of human brutality. This scale – the “thousand ways of killing” – is voiced quietly and directly.

“Deer” also echoes several other poems in the series, such as “Horse,” which issues a similar statement on the human and political capacity for violence; it both speaks about and *to* the “body politic.” It reads:

It is fun to ride the horse.
If you give him some sugar
He will love you. But even
The best horses kick sometimes.
A rag blowing in the wind
Can cause him to kill you. These
Characteristics he shares
With the body politic. (62)

Making the connection between the body politic and the behavior of horses at the very end of the piece enables the poem to use analogy rather than metaphor: the poem talks concretely about the characteristics of horses, and then draws a connection between these characteristics to the political, perhaps national, body. The lack of complex figurative modes in Rexroth’s poetry from this period contributes to his direct presentation. Poems such as “Deer” and “Horse” also draw on folk traditions and the language of aphorism, aligning them with another section of the book that gives a sequence of “Mother Goose” translations and adaptations. The engagement of such a folk mode also shifts the

understanding of whom the poems are addressed to: while the alphabetic “Bestiary” series is addressed to his daughters, one of the entries widens the intended, addressed audience. The entry “*You*” reads: “Let Y stand for you who says, / ‘Very clever, but surely / These were not written for your / Children?’ Let Y stand for yes” (67). The “you” in these lines is the reader/listener, quoted as asking the Rexroth speaker figure if the “Bestiary” poems are truly written for his children. The answer, “Y” for “yes,” is ambiguous in its simplicity; by not finishing out the statement “Let Y stand for yes they are,” (my addition) the poem indicates a double possibility: both that yes, the lines are for the children, or yes, they are (surely) not. By invoking a dialogue with “you” as audience of the poem, and by opening the poem to addressing such a “you” through the ambiguous answer about the poems’ dedication, “*You*” indicates to the body politic that the “Bestiary” series and other poems are also addressed to individual readers and listeners beyond Rexroth’s family.

What Rexroth discusses as a poetics of immediacy contributes to his attempt to write poems in the manner of direct speech *and* to his attempts to speak to contemporary audiences about current cultural issues. A longer and major poem of *In Defense of the Earth*, “Thou Shalt Not Kill,” for example, uses the context of popular poet Dylan Thomas’ death to articulate the threat that postwar social and economic conditions pose to individuals, especially writers and artists. While in “The Lights in the Sky” and “A Bestiary” series the personal “you” is used to invoke speech and indicate warnings to a daughter figure while addressing a larger reading and listening public, in “Thou Shalt Not Kill” the speaker directly addresses and critiques arbiters and practitioners of oppressive “official” public culture (“[t]hou”): those who kill “[t]hrough the proper channels” (*In*

Defense 58). Written as a memorial for Dylan Thomas, the poem situates Thomas' death in the context of a cultural war. Beginning with the line "They are murdering all the young men" (52) and moving to the accusatory "You killed him!" (59), "Thou Shalt Not Kill" employs anaphora throughout four sections to reiterate the dangers of contemporary social falsities and economic hierarchies. Echoing Rexroth's poem "Deer," "Thou" states "[t]hey know ten thousand ways to kill them," about a generation lost to war and oppressive postwar, McCarthy-era conditions. While neither poet confirms it, "Thou Shalt Not Kill" (written in 1953) has been cited as influencing Allen Ginsberg's composition of "Howl." Both poems were written out of an early 1950s social context and oral poetic climate, and both address the public in lament and with a catalogue of public offenses. Like many of Rexroth's poems, "Thou Shalt Not Kill" circulated in many contexts: it was published as a pamphlet by Goad Press in 1955 and in book form in 1956; performed with jazz music at the Cellar club in San Francisco by Rexroth throughout spring 1957; recorded with Ferlinghetti's jazz-poetry for LP release by Fantasy Records; and broadcast on KPFA in fall 1957.

Rexroth's sustained work with multiple media in the oral presentation of poetry is integral to his poetics of intimate, immediate, and direct speech. It provided a context and methods through which to practice the mechanics of representing and invoking speech, including the use of personal address, site-specific markers, discursive language, simple diction, and conversational tones. The recording of Rexroth's broadcasts serve as a record of his participation in innovative oral practice and his contributions to a mid-twentieth century and ongoing public, cultural, forum.

CONCLUSION: Radio Poetry Communities

When MacLeish advocated radio as a productive place for poetry in 1939, he proposed that poetry magazines could assist writers in approaching the new medium by facilitating the study of radio. He hoped that such study would encourage writers to broadcast their poetry and write texts for radio distribution, and that broadcasting could be a way to reinvigorate and enlarge the community of poetry readers and listeners, making poetry relevant to the contemporary age. “No one has yet discovered the limits of [the radio] audience because no one has yet explored the limits of verse on the air,” he writes, suggesting that radio offered poets a wide field for investigation and experiment (1-2).

My dissertation has addressed how poets studied and theorized radio in texts written both for and in relation to the medium and how radio projects enabled poets to develop writing strategies and practices that examine oral communication in the context of the mass and intimate dynamics of the medium. Radio also provided theoretical and practical frameworks in which writers considered aesthetic, cultural, and political questions. As they considered poetic communication and the potential productiveness of “verse on the air,” poets investigated both what radio broadcasting makes possible and what it limits. In this concluding section, I will summarize Niedecker’s, Zukofsky’s, MacLeish’s, Lechlitner’s, and Rexroth’s radio poetic contributions and assessments of broadcasting. I will also gesture towards an under-researched area of literary radio study – the radio poetry series – to indicate how such poetry series also offer examples of the possibilities for poetry and poetic communities throughout the twentieth century.

As Niedecker, Zukofsky, MacLeish, Lechlitner, and Rexroth considered strategies and styles of radiophonic and sounded address, they engaged in critical analysis of the

cultural work of radio communication. As Niedecker explored, radio broadcasting enables regional and local voices to circulate alongside nationally-known voices on mass communication channels, intervening in homogenizing aspects of mass culture; however, radio also excludes some voices and has the potential to standardize speech. As Zukofsky found, radio has the potential to circulate information about labor, history, and political events so that listeners can make informed decisions about issues, but broadcasting can also be regulated and controlled by a few with centralized political power, entirely silencing the voices of people and laboring classes. Broadcasting, as MacLeish and Lechlitner demonstrate, can model democratic debate and emancipatory forms of community organization, but the time-based and commercial structure of network radio can also limit productive dialogue, and create a system where both broadcasters and listeners act as passive bystanders by reporting and listening to current political issues without taking action. Radio technology has the capacity to enable many speakers to broadcast outside of mass network systems, whether on non-licensed "pirate" radio or on listener-sponsored co-operative radio; as Rexroth's work for Pacifica radio network demonstrates, the broadcasts of ordinary citizens can potentially intervene in dominant cultural and literary discourses by publicizing radical and innovative ideas.

While the poets in my study examined the limits of radio broadcasting for poetic innovation and public discourse, radio ultimately was a productive site in relation to which they developed poetic techniques and theorized relationships between listening, speaking, and writing. In response to their understandings of broadcasting, they wrote poems and multi-generic texts that emphasize and examine intimate speech and listening, direct and spontaneous address, and oral markers of live mass communication.

Niedecker found radio's non-visual delivery a useful metaphor for concentrated listening and a potential auditory context for imagining the intimate, private, and anonymous speech in her poetry; Zukofsky found radio a productive model for the way broadcast voices can animate and circulate "historic[al] and contemporary particulars"; MacLeish found in the sounded and live situation of broadcasting the impetus to experiment with the dramatic function of the announcer and with choral and temporal conventions; Lechlitner took up radio's potential to emphasize speech rhythms and elliptical pause in designing her radio scripts of political critique; Rexroth engaged radio as a venue over which to test and develop strategies for the direct, intimate, personal, and spontaneous dynamics of speech that constituted his poetics.

As Rexroth's broadcasts also demonstrate, poets' readings and talks on the air can both command wide audiences and, through facilitating connections between poets, assist in forming literary communities. Poetry radio programs throughout the twentieth century have been sites wherein poets have continued to test the "limits of verse on the air" and the possibilities of sounding and broadcasting poetry. Such poetry series are a largely undocumented area of literary radio scholarship, and further research on how these programs functioned in both poetic and more generally public communities would be a valuable contribution to twentieth-century poetry studies. Radio historian Susan Douglas argues that the simultaneous listening to spoken words over radio can produce in listeners "a strong collective sensibility." When people listen to the same broadcast at the same time, she writes, "[t]hey become an aggregate entity—an audience—and whether or not they all agree with or like what they hear, they are unified around that common experience" (*Listening* 29). Radio broadcasting has the potential to contribute to

community-formation both in terms of writers' interactions on panel and interview programs and in terms of writers and others listening, responding to, and dialoguing about poetry programs.

Radio became a venue over which poets could read and discuss poetry at first in isolated programs and then in regular series. My dissertation invokes such series in chapter two, noting Zukofsky's and Williams's broadcasts on poet A.M. Sullivan's radio show. Sullivan hosted his series, "The New Poetry Program," from 1932 to 1940 over New York station WOR, which was a part of the early nationwide Mutual Network.¹²⁵ Poet Eve Merriam's early 1940s series was another poetry program well-known to writers in the New York area. Merriam, who published in journals such as *New Directions* in the 1930s, was awarded the Yale Series of Younger Poets book prize in 1946,¹²⁶ and worked as a scriptwriter for the CBS radio network in the late 1930s, hosted her program from 1942 to 1946 over New York station WQXR. Sullivan's, Merriam's, and Corman's program "This is Poetry," which I note in relation to Rexroth's radio programming in chapter four and which serves as the title of my thesis, all featured readings and poetic discussion. Radio series such as these also became sites of regular interaction between poets on the programs and their listeners, facilitating the exchange of ideas on poetics.

Radio continued to be a productive site for poetry readings and poetic discourse in the postwar years. Just as Corman's radio series proved productive in the formation of the Black Mountain literary community by broadcasting new poetry by Charles Olson and Robert Creeley and facilitating Olson's and Creeley's meeting, other postwar radio series contributed to the construction of poetic communities. For example, New York

poet Paul Blackburn, who was instrumental in founding the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church on the Bowery in New York City in the mid-1960s, hosted a radio poetry program from 1964-1965 on which he featured poets and promoted poetry readings. New York and Beat-affiliated poet Anne Waldman ran a poetry series on radio station WRVR in New York in the 1960s; literary critic Ann Vickery reports that Waldman's program enabled her "to meet with writers whose work she admired and to engage in dialogue with them" (78). Language writers Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian, and Kit Robinson similarly found radio productive in facilitating discussions between poets and about literary production and cultural discourse. Howe's radio series "Poetry" aired weekly from 1975 to 1980 over New York Pacifica station WBAI, featuring readings and interviews with contemporary poets ranging from Charles Bernstein to Adrienne Rich, and some programs that focused on historical literary figures such as Dorothy Wordsworth and Virginia Woolf. The radio program, in Vickery's words, "gave Howe a social context for her work" as it enabled her to meet other writers¹²⁷ and publicize debates about feminism and Language writing techniques that were emerging in literary circles in the 1970s (79). Hejinian and Robinson's weekly poetry program, titled "In the American Tree: New Writing by Poets" after poet Bruce Andrews's influential anthology of postwar innovative writing, aired in 1978 over Pacifica Berkeley station KPFA. Like Howe's program, it featured readings and interviews and facilitated Bay Area poetic conversation.

As poets continue to investigate and take up the sounding of poetry and radio broadcasting in the United States, new poetic and critical work might also productively address poetry recordings and podcasts (downloadable audio files of readings and

discussions) on websites. The websites PennSound (<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound>) and UbuWeb: Sound (<http://www.ubu.com/sound>), for example, both host a large number of recorded readings, radio series, talks, and panel discussions by poets. Such web-hosting marks a different chapter in the continual reinvention of the ways media systems can record, store, represent, and circulate sound and the speaking voice. Poets and critics investigating sounded poetry on the internet will have to approach similar questions about poetics, media, and cultural context as poets in the interwar and postwar decades did as they studied how poetry and poetics could function in relation to radio. For example, do web-based sound programs enable poetic and cultural conversations and contribute to forming poetic communities in similar ways as radio poetry series have? Do the time-based, “live,” or simultaneous conditions of radio broadcasting and listening produce a set of circumstances more or less conducive to the interaction between poets and poetic ideas than print or internet publication? Just as radio broadcasting informed the possibilities for poetics in the interwar and postwar periods, investigations into the kinds of communication, cultural projects, poetic experiments, and literary communities new sound media permit and limit will contribute to the constitution of poetic discourse in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

¹ Laughlin also offered to publish a critical survey of radio poetic experiments in the 1940 *New Directions* volume, a proposal which was not realized. His and others' excitement about radio participates in the early-twentieth century climate of utopian claims for radio, and in a long series of literary statements about wireless and broadcast radio's potential for igniting poetic experiment and generating new audiences. Utopian claims were in fact central to the characterization of the emerging mass medium, as recent cultural historians of radio Susan Douglas, Michelle Hilmes, Jason Loviglio, Cliff Doerksen, and others have described.

² Prior to this period, technicians and hobbyists experimented with wireless radio-telegraphy and radio sound signaling from 1899. Between 1913 and 1915, radio historian Michelle Hilmes notes, radio voices and music became more common, though were only received by those few with radio receivers, most commonly amateur radio enthusiasts and government or university-sponsored experimenters (*Radio Voices* 41). Such experimentation was largely restricted (especially for amateur participation) during World War I when the military cordoned the airwaves, and emerged with increased vigor after the war, when radio emerged as a widely-popular broadcast medium.

³ In 1921, inspired by the efforts of a few stations which experimented with broadcasting music and voices in 1920, twenty-eight new stations were licensed to broadcast; in 1922, over 550 new stations were licensed (Douglas *Listening* 54).

⁴ See also Harry Levin, *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction*. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941: 176.

⁵ Wilson also writes of race as a problematic element of Stein's engagement of radio discourse in her work, asserting that Stein's work does not challenge the representations of (and exclusions of) African American voices that circulated on the radio broadcasting models that she took up (272-274).

⁶ Archibald MacLeish, born 1892, was a decade older than the rest of the poets in my study, and was 30 when radio "boomed" in 1922. The 1920s, however, were the period in which MacLeish committed to the work of poetry, leaving his law firm in 1923 (after years at Yale, Harvard Law, World War I military service, serving as editor of *The New Republic*, and practicing law) to live as an expatriate among writing communities in Paris. He returned to the United States in 1928.

⁷ For recent work on the political, leftist, and Communist-affiliated writing in the first half of the twentieth century, and the way this work operated in tension with and in conjunction with modernist experiment, see Cary Nelson, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945* (1990) and *Revolutionary Memory: Recovering the Poetry of the American Left* (2001); Mark W. Van Wienen, *Partisans and Poets: The Political Work of American Poetry in the Great War* (1997); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1997); Robert Shulman, *The Power of Political Art: The 1930s Literary Left Reconsidered* (2000); Nancy Berke, *Women Poets on the Left: Lola Ridge, Genevieve Taggard, Margaret Walker* (2001); Michael Thurston, *Making Something Happen: American Political Poetry Between the World Wars* (2001); Alan M. Wald, *Exiles From a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth Century Literary Left* (2002); and Mark Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945* (2006).

⁸ My project draws on recent cultural histories of radio, participating in the emerging field of radio studies, in its understandings of the continual transformations of the medium and the ways it both drew from and contributed to cultural discourses. I understand radio as a medium that emerged through the development of socially- and technologically-constituted systems of broadcasting, listening, industry networks, and economies of production and advertising. Communications scholar and radio cultural historian Michelle Hilmes's seminal *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (1997) makes a distinction between historical narratives of radio that focus on "the seemingly natural and heroic march of technological progress" and an approach that examines radio "as a social practice grounded in culture, rather than in electricity" (xiii). Hilmes's and radio historian Susan Douglas's work, among others, have been crucial to

the “cultural turn” of radio research, and to the development of the (cultural studies-oriented) field of radio studies. In her description of “radio studies” scholarship, cultural historian of radio Susan M. Squire writes that from the early 1990s through the present, “the field of radio research shifted from a consideration of radio on its own technological and institutional terms to a new attention to the social context of radio, and then gradually to its symbolic, political, and theoretical implications” (3). This critical work still examines “electricity” and technological questions in relation to radio, but alongside cultural questions. From diverse angles, a number of recent theorists of radio (Douglas 1987, 1999; Smulyan 1994; Hilmes 1997, 2002; Squier 2003; Walker 2004; Doerkson 2005; Loviglio 2005; Lenthall 2007) investigate the practices and programming that emerged from and alongside the cultural contexts of sound technologies and media. Their work and mine is also indebted to recent scholarship on the cultural contexts of the formation and reception of radio and sound media. Such work develops models of media that account for cultural modes of development, and includes the work of cultural and literary theorist Raymond Williams (1992), sound historian Jonathan Sterne (2002), and other recent theorists of media (Thompson 2002; Gitelman 1999). Williams situates his work on television in terms of “symptomatic” rather than determinant technology, and critiques any non-reciprocal understanding of relations between technology and society. Recent work by Sterne in *The Audible Past: The Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2002) on the cultural origins of media defines media as “recurring relations among people, practices, institutions, and machines (rather than simply machines in and of themselves)” (223). Work by Sterne and by literary critic Lisa Gitelman on media systems as plural, de-centered, and reciprocal rather than simply “causal agent[s] of change” (Gitelman 2) reinforce Williams’s assertion that technology emerges in concert with the cultural contexts in which it is articulated for specific roles (Williams 13).

⁹ Each of the poets in my study, for example, situated their own work in relation to both past and present poetries, but in documents such as Louis Zukofsky’s “Objectivist” manifesto in *Poetry* in 1931 and essays by Archibald MacLeish and Kenneth Rexroth, these poets clearly positioned theirs and others’ contemporary writing as a departure from earlier poetics.

¹⁰ The shift from early to later modernisms has also been articulated in terms of second-generation modernists writing less “monumental” or “monumentalizing” work, developing instead serial poetics that, as Charles Bernstein argues, form collage rather than montage. Bernstein characterizes montage as a desire (as in Pound’s *Cantos*) “for the parts to cohere” (Bernstein “Introduction” *Louis Zukofsky* xiii; xxi).

¹¹ These two sections of his long *Cantos* sequence, which literary critic Guy Davenport refers to as a “deliberate incoherence of particulars” (Davenport 204), assemble details from various speakers and sources on the economy of weapons manufacture, business fraud, and ideas on revolution. In 1941, upon receiving a radio receiver as a gift, Pound wrote that instead of the perhaps more obvious example of the cinema, anyone writing for stage or theatre now had to measure their work against the radio: “the personae now poked into every bleedin’ [h]’ome and smearing the mind of the people.” He also claimed of radio that he “anticipated the damn thing in the first third of the *Cantos*” (Pound *Letters* 442). Pound’s comments are interesting in several ways: they demonstrate how he understands radio – as an assemblage of multiple, juxtaposed voices, and as analogous to a major modernist mode of composition that he helped to promote. They also register that he understood radio as analogous to his project, rather than “influential” to his work. Whether or not we take Pound at his word, these lines suggest that the traffic between writers’ texts and radio broadcasting is complicated and doesn’t follow any single model. Finally, Pound’s comments register his sense that, in its incessant production of sound and noise, radio was a cultural phenomenon that could not be ignored.

¹² Coyle contextualizes Eliot’s ideal of cultural unity in discussions of Eliot’s broadcasting to European and global wartime and postwar audiences; Coyle gives the example of Eliot’s BBC broadcast following the allied powers’ military liberation of Rome where, instead of adopting a victorious tone, Eliot gave a four-minute talk on the “European debt to Roman literature” in an effort to insist on the repair of cultural bonds in the postwar period (Coyle “The European” 345).

¹³ For differing perspectives on the debates surrounding commercial radio in the United States, see Susan Smulyen, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (1994); Susan

Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922* (1987); and Cliff Doerksen, *American Babel: Rogue Radio Broadcasters of the Jazz Age* (2005).

¹⁴ Taylor worked as the "Assistant to the Vice President in Charge of Broadcasts," Bonner notes (281).

¹⁵ Taylor's position was held by many others of the period who found that radio enabled what Walter Ong and others would later call secondary orality, and who thought that poetry might capitalize on the capacity of broadcasting to extend the reach of their work. Taylor's statement, in the context of his position at CBS, also indexes the way in which the (radio) market was increasingly linked to social significance.

¹⁶ Wheelwright's conviction that poetry serves a productive informational and political role recalls William Carlos Williams's statement in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" (1955) that "[i]t is difficult / to get the news these days from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there" (Williams *Selected Poems* 150).

¹⁷ MacLeish qualifies his assertion by stating that there are exceptions such as *Poetry* magazine, where poetry is read by larger audiences. However, he maintains that most poetry magazines are read only by poets reading their own published poems and by critics: "poets, because they have no other audience, write for an audience of critics," he states (MacLeish "Letter" 1).

¹⁸ In the preface, or radio poetic "manifesto" (in the words of radio historian Eric Barnouw) to his radio play *The Fall of the City* (1937), MacLeish also champions the suitability of radio for poetic projects. Verse dramas produced on radio "will reach an infinitely greater number of people," he writes, than those produced either on Broadway or in radical theaters (MacLeish *The Fall of the City* x; xii).

¹⁹ Writers such as Niedecker, Lechlitner, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Orson Welles, Stephen Vincent Benét, Alfred Kreymborg, and many others wrote radio drama in the years leading up to and during World War II. For recent work on radio drama written during World War II, see Howard Blue, *Words at War: World War II Era Radio Drama and the Postwar Broadcasting Industry Blacklists* (2002) and Albert Wertheim, *Staging the War: American Drama and World War II* (2004).

²⁰ The literary conversation about the value of politically-inflected writing versus the value of de-politicized literary work was of course not new to the period I am discussing; in fact, some of the seeds of the 1940s and 1950s New Critical de-politicizing rhetoric were sown in the 1920s with essays by Eliot and others that valued poetry that did not overtly take a political position or function as propaganda; by statements by Auden and others in the 1930s on the ineffectiveness of poetry in effecting social change; and by the publication of the first New Critical volumes of criticism. My dissertation focuses on the 1930s-1950s, and thus primarily treats the particular political, literary, and cultural conditions of these decades, but acknowledges that the central debates arising from interactions of literature and politics reiterate similar debates in other periods.

²¹ In a letter to Niedecker about his own 1937 radio broadcast, Zukofsky also compares himself twice to President Roosevelt, both in terms of his delivery and his discussion of labor issues. By 1937 when Zukofsky compares Williams' voice to "the President's," Franklin Delano Roosevelt had been speaking nationally over the radio for four years. New York State residents such as Zukofsky would have been familiar with Roosevelt's voice since 1929, when he began broadcasting speeches two to three times a month as governor of the state until 1933 (Buhite xiv). Roosevelt's gubernatorial work spanned the difficult years of the 1929 Stock Market crash and subsequent economic Depression; his presidential work responded to mass unemployment and bank crises through social and economic federal reform (and later through military mobilization in World War II).

²² On March 4, 1933 Roosevelt gave his inaugural Presidential fireside chat, which was peppered with rhetoric of restored national confidence and "nothing to fear but fear itself," on March 12, he publicly negotiated the crisis of mass bank failures by announcing a national bank holiday, and on May 7 he began to outline the New Deal program.

²³ The practice of sending letters in response to radio broadcasts was encouraged by early network radio in part to collect data about who was listening and what they were interested in. Mail was addressed to announcers, program participants, stations, and, at times, program characters. Loviglio reports that nearly two-thirds of NBC's radio programs, in the early 1930s, "explicitly requested listeners to write to the station," and that by 1931, NBC received 7 million pieces of listener mail, and CBS 12 million, per year (Loviglio xxiv).

²⁴ Lenthall notes that the ratio of individuals listening to nationally broadcast network radio (NBC, established in 1926, and CBS, established in 1927) over local stations in the 1930s was 9:1 (Lenthall 13).

²⁵ Critics of radio such as Theodor Adorno articulated this position in the later 1930s and 1940s. See Adorno's essay "On the Fetish-Character in Music" in *Adorno: Essays on Music* (2002) and, with Max Horkheimer "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" in *The Dialectical of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (2002).

²⁶ While the mediated interaction between radio voices and listeners does not constitute the kind of interpersonal communication we may think of as optimal or even productive, it did offer ways of keeping up to date with the simultaneous and immediate global information broadcast to an increasingly interconnected nation and world. It offered the possibilities of taking positions in relation to this information, imagining communities, and, for interested parties, contributing to what was broadcast through involvement in audience participation shows and through writing for or speaking on the air.

²⁷ Murray Schafer's work in *The Tuning of the World* (1977) theorizes the "soundscape" as "any portion of the sonic environment regarded as a field for study" (Schafer 274).

²⁸ In the years prior to and during World War II, war-related radio dramas proliferated, many initiated by government departments such as the Office of War Information. Poets such as MacLeish and Lechlitner participated in and anticipated this proliferation, writing radio dramas beginning in the late 1930s that helped develop dramatic codes suitable for aural reception *and* engaged current, timely issues.

²⁹ Her assertion that it "*should* be a good medium for poetry" implies that it could be utilized more often; she acknowledges later in the letter that one of the reasons it is not taken up by more poets is that it "doesn't pay" (191).

³⁰ Her appreciation of non-visibility as a productive condition for attentive listening is likely partially due to her poor eyesight. The progressive deterioration of Niedecker's vision forced her to stop working as a proofreader for her local paper *Hoard's Dairyman* in 1950 (Niedecker 6). In a letter to friend Ronald Ellis in the 1960s, Niedecker comments on the difficulty throughout her life of a "noticeable failure in eyesight" (Niedecker "Letters" 97).

³¹ For example, her letters evidence the precision with which she isolated and characterized specific bird calls; in 1937 she writes to Zukofsky of hearing the "vigorous echo" of a whippoorwill (124), in 1952 of a Baltimore Oriole whose "sound seems tunneled in" (195), and in 1962 of being "tuned" to a night of "frog trills and barred owl's scary noise" (310).

³² Niedecker's induction into the late modernist scene, by finding *Poetry's* "Objectivist" issue in 1931 exciting and resonant with her poetics, writing to Louis Zukofsky, and investigating avant-garde literary and artistic culture on visits to New York between 1933 and 1939, has been well-documented. For a useful introduction to Niedecker's early years and poetic practice, see Jenny Penberthy's introduction to *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky, 1931-1970*. Ed. Jenny Penberthy. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 3-56. See also Glenna Breslin. "Lorine Niedecker: Composing a Life." In *Revealing Lives: Autobiography, Biography, and Gender*. Eds. Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom. New York: State University of New York Press, 1990. 141-53. Niedecker's choice to reside in rural Wisconsin most of her life afforded a wealth of local poetic material, and wide reading and correspondences with other poets fed her cross-genre writing and experiments with form. She exhibited an

early interest in surrealist technique, wrote “script” poems and prose in the 1930s, wrote “folk” poetry in the late 1930s and 1940s, constructed two radio plays in 1952, developed a “reflective” haiku-influenced poetics in the 1950s, and wrote research-based historical poems in the 1960s. In her lifetime, she published five books of poetry, including two that collect a span of works: *New Goose* (1946), *My Friend Tree* (1961), *North Central* (1968), *T&G: The Collected Poems* (1969), and *My Life by Water: Collected Poems, 1936-1968* (1970). Note that all citations to Niedecker’s work in this chapter refer to Jenny Penberthy’s edited collection *Lorine Niedecker: Collected Works* (2002). All information regarding publication sites of Niedecker’s work is also drawn from Penberthy’s notes in this volume.

³³This quotation comes from a letter to poet Ronald Ellis in 1966 where she describes her work at the “WPA – Writers Project in Madison which led to a program of my own at WHA” (reprinted in Penberthy *Woman and Poet* 97).

³⁴ For example, Niedecker wrote to Charles Tomlinson in 1966: “Biographical note: ‘Born 1903. Permanent home 3 miles from Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, on a river at the point where it empties into a lake (and we have spring floods!), educated Beloit College and forever thru reading at home. Jobs: library, radio and hospital cleaning” (Tomlinson 7). To Kenneth Cox on Dec. 10, 1966, she writes of “Madison [Wisconsin] where I worked for a time in the university’s radio station. Other jobs: library assistant and when eyes went a bit bad hospital floor washer, dining room helper etc . . . Retired now at 63” (Niedecker “Extracts” 36).

³⁵ Corman was a proponent of reading aloud and recorded the only tape recording of Niedecker reading poems aloud in 1970, which is held in the Contemporary Poetry Collection at the W.A. C. Bennett Library of Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., Canada.

³⁶ See Niedecker’s letters about reading aloud to Bob Nero in *Truck* 16 (1975): 138-139, and to Cid Corman in “*Between Your House and Mine*”: *The Letters of Lorine Niedecker to Cid Corman, 1960 to 1970*. Ed. Lisa Faranda. Durham: Duke UP, 1986. 121-123. She reports discussing poetry reading aloud with Basil Bunting to Corman after Bunting visited in July 1967 (127).

³⁷ Poets affiliated with the “Objectivist” circle include Louis Zukofsky, Basil Bunting, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, and Lorine Niedecker. “Objectivist” poetics, characterized by Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain as “non-symbolist, post-imagist . . . historical, realist, antimythological” (DuPlessis *Objectivist* 3), produced quite varied writing and publishing ventures. These included Zukofsky’s guest-edited “Objectivist” issue of *Poetry* in February 1931, George Oppen’s “To Publishers,” and Zukofsky, Williams, and Oppen’s Objectivist Press in the early 1930s. “Objectivist” projects that engage documentary approaches include, for example, Charles Reznikoff’s *Testimony* (written beginning in the 1930s and published in two volumes in 1978), which quotes directly from court documents to publicize social injustice from the perspective of victims, Carl Rakosi’s “Americana” series that constructs multiple voices and folkloric characters (published in *Amulet* 1967), and Niedecker’s folk poetry.

³⁸ Other examples of 1930s documentary efforts include Dos Passos’s documentary novel *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), John Steinbeck’s novel on Dust Bowl migration *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), films such as *The Spanish Earth* (1937), written by Hemingway and funded by MacLeish, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Lillian Hellman, and leftist poetry by Kenneth Fearing, Edwin Rolfe, Sol Funaroff, and Muriel Rukeyser (known as the “Dynamo poets” for Funaroff’s “Dynamo Press”); these works participate in documenting the 1930s social milieu with the intent of influencing opinion on public policies. Literary critic Cary Nelson asserts that between 1910 and 1945, poetry “became one of the most dependable sources of knowledge about society” and one’s place in it, and for some, “poetic discourse was capable not merely of talking about but actually substantially deciding basic social and political issues” (*Repression* 127).

³⁹ Niedecker published both the play script “DOMESTIC AND UNAVOIDABLE” and the script-poem “The President of the Holding Company” in journals in the mid-1930s; the cross-genre experiments play with theatrical conventions but function as poetic texts rather than records of performances. “DOMESTIC AND UNAVOIDABLE,” published in *Bozart-Westminster* (Spring/Summer 1935), is most commonly

identified as a play predominantly for voices but was also at one time envisioned by Niedecker as a “series of ‘print stills’ projected on a screen” (Penberthy “Life and Writing” 5). “The President of the Holding Company” was published alongside another script poem “Fancy Another Day Gone” under the heading “TWO POEMS” in *New Directions* 1 (1936). Both poems were also published in a special section edited by James Laughlin and titled “New Directions” in *New Democracy* (May 1936) prior to their publication in *New Directions*.

⁴⁰ Their casting shadows on the walls in the study at the beginning of the play gestures towards Niedecker's vision of the text being performed by projecting “print stills” of the speakers' lines. In this way, the voices could be “read.”

⁴¹ In her essay considering Niedecker's work and listening as composition in the context of sound technologies, Lisa Robertson writes that the “turned-on but still” radio in this passage “gives meaning to the drifting, delocalized voice” (12). The radio in “DOMESTIC AND UNAVOIDABLE” can also be likened to Niedecker's later sense of radio as facilitating “speech without practical locale” (Niedecker quoted in Penberthy *Niedecker* 191).

⁴² The tracing of characters by voice qualities also recalls the necessary tracking of voice tones in radio plays and radio speech. Niedecker's 1930s scripts are not radio plays, but certainly the invocation of radio in the stage directions for “DOMESTIC” suggests that radio is a promising site in which to imagine the kind of vocal delivery the play describes.

⁴³ The three-page play proceeds in short “conversations,” some of which also proceed through echo and sound association, as in the following exchange.

Old man—	They don't have a minister; they have a doctor.
Woman husky—	Oh, do you think we should indoctrinate at certain points?
Gentleman loud—	Well, one thing
Woman low— announces a fabricoid
Woman high— and another
Gentleman gentle— assembles a divinity. (68-69)

Here as in other exchanges, frequent semantic and subject shifts draw attention to the acts of speaking, interactions and associative resonance between lines (“doctor,” “indoctrinate”), and voice qualities.

⁴⁴ Niedecker's decision to keep her status as a poet “anonymous” to many in her local community, partly so as to glean material from them and partly due to her tendency toward a quiet, unobtrusive lifestyle, has led to critical discussions about her position as a rural, “anonymous” woman writer. Jenny Penberthy discusses Niedecker's “anonymity” in her introduction to *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky, 1931-1970* (1993). In her article “Lorine Niedecker, the Anonymous: Gender, Class, Genre and Resistances,” Rachel Blau DuPlessis also situates Niedecker's “anonymous” position within class, gender and literary contexts, arguing that such a position was chosen as it offered Niedecker a “non-elite, non-hegemonic literary career” (118).

⁴⁵ Niedecker's folk project can also be contextualized in her research work for federal and state Writers' Projects, which afforded opportunities to research and write about Wisconsin history and culture; her work enabled her to sift through accounts of lives and quoted speech that she could also incorporate into her own writing, including among her folk poetry. She participated in an effort that produced a number of projects including the state guide *Wisconsin: A Guide to the Badger State* (1941), entries for a proposed Encyclopedia of Wisconsin Biography on historical figures, guidebooks of major cities in the state, and radio scripts that dramatized nineteenth century life in Wisconsin and figures of interest such as naturalists Increase Lapham and John Muir, and suffragist and author Zona Gale.

⁴⁶ Another example from the period again invokes the rhyming play of "Mother Goose" rhymes but makes clear that the "Poor" in the two characters' names is an accurate description of their financial states. It reads:

Jim Poor's his name
and Poor Jay's mine,
his hair's aflame
not worth a dime
or he'd sell it (86).

⁴⁷ An example of the speech transcription and arrangement she engaged in some of her later folk poetry reads:

Here it gives the laws for fishing through the ice—
only one hook to a line,
stay at the hold, can't go in to warm up,
well, we never go fishing, so they can't catch us. (98)

This selection presents a situation where a speaker paraphrases the rules for ice-fishing at an unnamed body of water. Because the circumstantial details – the location, the relation of the speaker to the listener – are not given, the emphasis turns to the rhythms and diction of spoken language, the pauses and colloquial "well," the imbedded anti-authoritarian critique of the "laws" that refuse a fisher a chance to "warm up," and the humor of the final admission that "we never go fishing" anyway.

⁴⁸ In Niedecker's published letters to Zukofsky, for example, there are twelve references to radio programs. Several instances paraphrase or index radio speech: April 29, 1945 she writes "Did you hear [Soviet Foreign Commissar] Molotov's voice on radio? If only the translator's voice had been as strong and convincing as M's" (Penberthy *Niedecker* 134); December 15, 1952, she "caught it fast over the radio with one ear – it seems this horse in one of the southern states writes with his foot . . ." (202); June 26, 1957, she writes, "Philadelphia had 100 heat and New York's pretty bad, I heard on radio" (237); November 6, 1961 she reports: "Heard Nehru on radio on Meet the Press. The Leader of the Neutrals! I've always thought the world of him" (295). These accounts of listening isolate particular fragments of broadcasts for written report, demonstrating how radio is subject to Niedecker's habit of notating live and written speech that she finds compelling, humorous, or distinctive. On another instance, Niedecker demonstrates a different kind of listening, attentive to both the commentary and the pronunciation used on a weekly CBS literary discussion program; she details the program and her responses to it in a letter to Zukofsky dated October 26, 1949:

This morning it was Don Quixote (Quixot, [Mark] Van Doren said, and Qeehoty, Howe said) with the two regulars, Van Doren and Howe and there's always a visiting third, this time, Samuel Putnam . . . Today Samuel Putnam said (or Putnum? - the one who used to write for the Daily Worker?) said he supposed the greatest adventure of man is to find God. Van Doren: Yes, Don Quixote is going with all haste where he knows he'll find God, I suppose, but remember what Sancho said: "You can't make a worse mistake than dying while you're still alive." Perfect? I wish when they use God they'd take just three minutes to define – maybe then they'd forget the word. (162-63)

In her letter, Niedecker transcribes, paraphrases, and comments on the radio discussion. Her notation of differing pronunciations ("Quixot," "Qeehoty") registers the interaction, and occasional dissonance, of multiple voices. Her critique of the unqualified or undefined term "God" situates her as a critical participant in the discussion, demonstrating an engaged listening practice. This passage anticipates Niedecker's arrangement of speech in her own radio scripts, which also employ multiple voices as they "script" speech in a dramatic fashion that experiments with individual and collective utterance.

⁴⁹ In the letter to Zukofsky accompanying her radio adaptation of Faulkner, for example, Niedecker writes that she'd "like answers to the following questions as to marketing" (Penberthy *Niedecker* 188). Clearly envisioning "TASTE AND TENDERNESS" for the airwaves, she writes to Zukofsky that it could be kept to a tight half hour but will "call the whole an hour but only so if it's done without hurry, pauses between given due consideration and commercials beginning and end and even in between" (*Niedecker* 190). The

half hour slot was the most common length for radio drama in this period (Kaplan 84).

⁵⁰ As radio historians such as Howard Fink and Bruce Lenthall describe, literary radio drama enjoyed less popularity in the 1950s and later years than it did in the 1930s and early 1940s. The postwar rise of television shifted radio sponsorship and markets, and popular programming, music, and news replaced much of the avenues for serious dramatic work on radio (Fink 193; 219).

⁵¹ With their themes of loss, the plays might further be contextualized in terms of Niedecker's own grief for the loss of her mother in July 1951. Niedecker sent drafts of both of her radio scripts to Zukofsky in early 1952.

⁵² Archibald MacLeish, in fact, in his radio play *The Fall of the City* (1937) was one of the first to employ the radio announcer figure as narrator, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

⁵³ The extant scene was sent to novelist and essayist Edward Dahlberg in 1955 in response to his request for material for a proposed but never published anthology (Penberthy Niedecker 191). Niedecker sent a draft of the entire play to Zukofsky in early 1952, but no complete draft remains. The brevity of the extant scene of "TASTE AND TENDERNESS" conceals the extensive reading⁵³ Niedecker undertook in order to glean particulars of the figures' thought processes, speech patterns, and biographical incidents to render an accurate drama of their lives and work. Niedecker writes that she had to "imagine the actual scenes tho [sic] the mass of material from letters," particularly found in F.O. Matthiessen's *The James Family* (1947), gave her "plenty to work on" (Penberthy Niedecker 190). The radio play format lends itself to concision, sketches, suggestion, and succinct or fast-paced monologues and dialogues. Niedecker employs methods that both participate in and test conventions of radio drama. On January 23, 1952, she writes to Zukofsky: "I don't write a terribly conventional radio script (not good radio, they'll say) because I like to take hunks from the printed page and plunk em down in radio" (Penberthy Niedecker 188). I believe that the process that Niedecker engages while designing "TASTE AND TENDERNESS" for radio – accreting and then dramatically condensing research material – forms an important precursor to her later research-based long poems on Jefferson, Charles Darwin, William Morris, Lake Superior, and the Wintergreen Ridge wildflower preserve. Niedecker's comments about composing the James play suggest a similar process to that which she engaged in composition of her late poems. Writing to Cid Corman in July 1966 she comments that her recent journey with husband Al Millen around Lake Superior "was a great delight if I can make the poem. Traverse des Millens! A millennium of notes" (Faranda 94) and later states that she has produced a draft "after much culling" (Faranda 101).⁵³ Writing to Kenneth Cox on February 2, 1970 of the composition of her poem on Thomas Jefferson, she writes:

Up very early mornings – nearly killed myself – and all that reading
beforehand (until I realized what am I doing? – writing a biography or
history? No, all I could do is fill the subconscious and let it lie and fish up
later). The hard part is to keep some quotes but not too many. (Niedecker "Extracts" 40)

⁵⁴ Niedecker also notes to Zukofsky, "Alice, did I tell you before? – made an entry in her journal only a couple weeks before her death [in 1892], about Emily Dickinson: 'It is reassuring to hear the English pronouncement that Emily Dickinson is fifth-rate – they have such a capacity for missing quality; the robust evades them equally with the subtle. Her being sicklied o'er with T.W. Higginson makes one quake lest there be a latent flaw which escapes one's vision'" (191).

⁵⁵ Penberthy notes that this line is a part of a portion of Niedecker's James script included in the Zukofsky letters. She writes that "Zukofsky evidently liked the comment and in the margin asked for its source. Below his query, Niedecker writes: 'LZ forgetting he was the one who said it!'" (Penberthy Niedecker 14).

⁵⁶ Quartermain describes how such unpredictability "has important ethical and political implications, for it leaves us uncompromisingly face to face with the unknowable and different" (227).

⁵⁷ By 1937, Zukofsky and Williams had been corresponding regularly for several years (upon being introduced by Pound) and maintained their friendship through visits in New York and Rutherford, and through exchanging work.

⁵⁸ Zukofsky would also read his poetry over radio in 1938 in New York and in 1954 over Pacifica station KPFA in Berkeley.

⁵⁹ Two essays on Zukofsky's WPA radio scripts mark the only substantial criticism treating Zukofsky's work for this particular radio project: see Barry Ahearn's "Zukofsky, Marxism, and American Handicraft" in *Upper Limit Music: The Writing of Louis Zukofsky*. Ed. Mark Scroggins. Tuscaloosa: U Alabama P, 1997: 80-93, and Ira Nadel's "'A Precision of Appeal': Louis Zukofsky and the Index of American Design," 112-26 in the same volume. The recent publication of Zukofsky's radio scripts in *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design* (2003) will no doubt generate further research on his radio projects.

⁶⁰ Film can "train" people in "*the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily*" (Vol. 3; 108, his italics). The mass audience can also engage in collective laughter, which Benjamin asserts acts as a preemptive "immunization" against mass psychoses that new technology can also enable, (118) and the audience can approach film through "distraction" (119). Distraction, rather than concentration, involves experiencing the tactile, shock effects of "percussive" changes of scene and focus, as in cinema, and involves an active but gradual making sense of the art (120). Benjamin also writes that the mass audiences of films witness the actors preserving their humanity in the face of contemporary technology and conditions of production (111). He aligns cultural shifts in the production of literature toward the end of the nineteenth century, which made writing more accessible as a tool for a wide public, and produced the conditions where "at any moment, the reader is ready to become a writer" (114), with the conditions of contemporary film. Actors in films can potentially portray themselves, he writes, and the masses can use the medium as a tool for understanding themselves (115).

⁶¹ Adorno questions the liberatory potential of cinema by arguing that Benjamin romanticizes the idea that the masses can rise through a medium (film) that is also marked by capitalism and the cults of stars (*Complete* 130). Far from being liberatory, Adorno asserts, radio and market forces commodify music. In "On the Fetish-Character" Adorno identifies a tendency for radio to repeat pieces and "quote" musical phrases out of context of a whole piece and finds that distracted listening to music produces an "atomized listening" for sound bites rather than a revolutionary form of perception. Adorno values an aesthetic of the musical whole, as he demonstrates in his essay "The Radio Symphony" (1941) by outlining the atomizing and reductive effects of radio transmission on Beethoven's Symphony No. 5. As Adorno scholar and editor Richard Leppert notes, the "radio" that Adorno refers to is the AM band broadcast; Adorno's judgments of radio sound, therefore, are based on the poor quality of early radio transmission, and he finds that such technology does not produce a neutral or transparent channel for sound (Leppert in Adorno *Adorno* 218). Adorno suggests in "The Radio Symphony" that radio flattens "the experience of symphonic space," (Adorno *Adorno* 257) compresses the dynamic range and so makes repetition ornamental, (259) and closes off the fluent dynamics of the dialectical symphonic "theme" by making themes definite (264).

⁶² Adorno also wrote material for a radio broadcast in 1965 called "Beautiful Passages" with fifty-two recorded musical examples interspersed with commentary (Leppert in Adorno *Adorno* 239).

⁶³ Literary critic Cary Nelson positions Spanish Civil War poems as directly influential in the fight against fascism, producing support for the Spanish Republic abroad and becoming an integral part of the construction of resistance and morale in Spain. He argues in fact that poets "were not responding to the war; they were part of it" (*Revolutionary* 191). Nelson writes that Spanish Civil War poetry was part of the culture of the War in Spain—he reports "mass poetry readings attended by soldiers and working people" in Spain (196)—and in the culture of interventionist efforts in United States and other nations, as demonstrated when "loyalist poets read their work aloud in the trenches, when Republican planes scattered poems over enemy troops, when soldiers from numerous countries tacked their poems up on battlefield or training area wall newspapers, when editors put poems into political journals here [in the United States] or

battalion newspapers in Spain, when Americans read translations of Spanish wartime romances to audiences here [in the United States] and helped build support for the Republic" (191).

⁶⁴ Although the name "Objectivist" that he introduced in his guest-edited issue of *Poetry* (February 1931) has stuck to the loosely affiliated poets Zukofsky, Basil Bunting, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, and Lorine Niedecker, many of these poets, including Zukofsky, were ambivalent about the term. The poets associated with "Objectivist" work were also engaged with leftist political activities; Oppen, for example, stopped writing poetry by 1935 and joined the Communist Party in response to the Depression and fascist threats and didn't write or publish again until 1962. Rakosi also took a hiatus from writing in the postwar period and became employed as a social worker.

⁶⁵ The *New Masses* (1926-1948), a leftist literary journal edited by Michael Gold and Joseph Freeman, and *transition* (1927-1938), an international avant-garde literary journal edited by Eugene Jolas that initially hailed from Paris but relocated to the U.S., published an array of different poets and artists. However, writers such as James Agee, Ernest Hemingway, Josephine Herbst, Archibald MacLeish, Carl Rakosi, Genevieve Taggard, Muriel Rukeyser, and Louis Zukofsky published work in both *The New Masses* and *transition*, demonstrating the cross-fertilization that generated both dialogue and conflicting positions in the period.

⁶⁶ The critical reception of Zukofsky's work—like other writers in the period, such as Kenneth Rexroth or Charles Olson—has been influenced by a post-Cold War sanitization of the radical impulses characteristic of not only work written explicitly in the service of political ends (such as organized by Communist Party organs or writers' organizations that issued political propaganda) but also what has been bracketed as formally and linguistically innovative work of the period.

⁶⁷ By using the phrase "ideology of form," Davidson indexes the potential conflict produced when second-generation sons of Jewish immigrants (a situation shared by Zukofsky, Reznikoff, Oppen, and Rakosi) attempted to employ "in the service of progressive social views," the modernist attitudes and writing techniques Pound and Eliot established if, Davidson notes, "Pound's ideogrammatic method could be placed in the service of Mussolini's Fascism," or Eliot's "impersonality could be used to legitimate cultural imperialism and classist anti-Semitism" (*Ghostlier* 117). Davidson notes that his deployment of the term is similar to Frederic Jameson's usage in Jameson's discussion of Burke (*Ghostlier* 117).

⁶⁸ As late as 1940, Zukofsky was trying to weld literary and political concerns while planning to edit with friend and author René Taupin a new journal, *La France en Liberté*, which was to be in part a publishing venue for French anti-fascist exiles (xx). Several of his poems from the 1920s explicitly treat communist material, and parts of his long poem "A" written in the 1930s and early 1940s treat complicated Marxist economics and politics ("A"-8) and WWII ("A"-10).

⁶⁹ In his radio script number two, Zukofsky quotes from nineteenth-century poet Emma Hart Willard's poem celebrating the launching of a tin enterprise and writes that the lines

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 157 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It describes the potential effect Willard's lines might have on a contemporary commercial writer.]

As he suggests, Willard's tin endorsement could be useful to a contemporary ad copy writer; he might have in mind here a site in which audiences might have encountered Index material (and might, tongue-in-cheek, be referring to Index writers who wrote texts for exhibitions in stores).

⁷⁰ The Index archives at the National Gallery of Art indicate that Zukofsky's radio scripts and an Index radio program in California were the only two substantial radio projects the Index was involved with. However, it may have also used radio as a means to promote its projects and exhibitions, as its umbrella organization, the Federal Art Project, did. Federal Art, Theatre, Writers', and Music projects engaged radio

to develop, distribute, and advertise their artistic and documentary work to large and varied audiences: the Federal Art Project promoted their art exhibits and distributed historical information about American artists on radio; the Radio Division of the Federal Theater Project produced nationally-broadcast radio plays; some Writers' Project state divisions such as Wisconsin wrote and produced radio documentaries, plays, and biographies; and the Federal Music Project broadcast concerts.

⁷¹ Harris writes that "objects not belonging to a legitimate portfolio were to be avoided because they lacked a discernible history" (88).

⁷² Such details and anecdotes could consist of: "personal history of the craftsman," "local economic development," a "detailed item of interest relating to the materials themselves," or personal anecdotes about the objects (88).

⁷³ Nadel's essay "A Precision of Appeal": Louis Zukofsky and the *Index of American Design*," (1997) situates Zukofsky's Index pieces in the context of the poet's early "Objectivist" poetic tracts and in relation to William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain* and Henry Adams's *Mont St. Michel and Chartres*. A recent reassessment of the Index project by curator Virginia Tuttle Clayton, as part of a major National Gallery of Art exhibit of Index work, discusses how the project also intended to encourage new, modern artistic directions.

⁷⁴ In designing the radio scripts, Zukofsky is interested in making links or connections for a listener; these links generate tangential relation, and awareness of the simultaneous and palimpsestual in historical processes of production as well as in contemporary process of reception that media such as radio enable. In a parenthetical note included in the research notes for Zukofsky's final intended broadcast, for example, he writes that

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 221 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It quotes from Zukofsky's discussion of structuring the Index scripts.]

Zukofsky's note demonstrates how he might construct a script based on both U.S. and Mexican cotton crafts, by linking the two through a detail of simultaneous dates. This strategy of linking dates, places, persons, and events also serves in the scripts to widen the cultural contexts in which objects were produced.

⁷⁵ The scripts also demonstrate how objects of design are implicated in and tell stories about early American and transnational and oppressive social and economic systems. The third broadcast script,

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 162 and 166 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It quotes from a discussion of slavery and colonial indenture.]

Zukofsky acknowledges the history of slavery in New York in order to explain the cultural significance of the pitchers. In script number five, after detailing lanterns used in political parades and festivals (two other kinds of movement of people in social spaces), and, in particular, lanterns used to marshal support for abolition, he describes the antebellum lighting ceremony for torchlight parades. They began in complete darkness until a cannon boomed and, according to a newspaper from the period,

[This quotation has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed can be found on page 178 of *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*. Ed. Kenneth Sherwood. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003. It quotes from Zukofsky's description of a parade.

⁷⁶ Reproduction removes an object from a context wherein it retains cult value and distributes it to multiple contexts wherein it achieves exhibition value (Vol. 3; 108).

⁷⁷ Zukofsky wrote twenty-four sections of "A" between 1927 and 1968; the series of movements comprises 800 pages in total, treats diverse subjects, and engages in a number of innovative formal experiments. While the poems shifted in focus throughout the decades, early sections of "A" are characterized by attention to labor issues, Marx, Bach, experiments with fugal form, and historical research, while later sections (largely beginning with the second half of "A"-9, written in the late 1940s) take up familial, autobiographical, dramatic, and musical subjects and forms.

⁷⁸ As I will discuss in Chapter Three, live radio news broadcasts directly from sites of conflict, catastrophe, or incident emerged in the later 1930s, and real-time broadcasts from European cities on the brink of war would have been very familiar to, and indeed expected by, radio audiences in 1940. Radio news in the late 1930s and early 1940s surpassed the popularity of newspaper coverage because of its capacity for immediate, real-time, sounded, broadcasts.

⁷⁹ The black-shirts, an Italian fascist group active in the interwar period and World War II, were particularly against labor groups and unions. That Pius, potentially indicating both the current and former Pope as well as a kind of piety, as in "the pious," sanctions and blesses an anti-labor fascist group demonstrates how institutions such as the Christian Church are implicated in the oppression of the masses.

⁸⁰ Zukofsky's phrase also invokes an unrealized form of (popular, secularized) transubstantiation (the Catholic idea of communion in which the bread literally becomes the material of Christ's body).

⁸¹ The Roman Catholic *Agnus Dei* reads:

Agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.

In translation:

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace.

⁸² The guidelines encouraging commercial stations to produce public interest programming were a concession the Commission made following great debate over the future structure of radio. Legislative controversy over the passing of the congressional Communications Act of 1934 required the newly established Federal Communications Commission (which replaced the Federal Radio Commission) to consider whether to grant educational and non-profit groups access to a specific portion of the airwaves. The Act largely maintained the commercial broadcasting structure that had been sanctioned and regulated by the Radio Act of 1927, and the Commission decided not to designate such a portion. While the regulatory structure of U.S. radio remained largely commercial, networks did introduce more non-sponsored programming.

⁸³ These programs, including CBS's Columbia Workshop, Mercury Theatre on the Air, and Silver Theatre, and NBC's Radio Guild and Lights Out, did not garner direct profit to networks and stations through sponsored advertising, but were crucial forums for the development of new techniques for radio production and helped to promote the public images of the networks. Since often the writers and production staff employed by the networks for serious dramatic programs were the same as those employed for popular, sponsored, dramas, the innovations of serious radio dramatic series were influential and useful to the commercial sector (Fink 210). Fink reminds us that in the U.S. (as opposed to in Canada or the U.K., where the centralized structure of broadcasting had promoted more technical advances), "the technical development of studios, microphones, broadcasting and reception equipment was still in a relatively primitive state even as late as the mid-1930s" (210).

⁸⁴ Radio historian Michele Hilmes also notes during "radio's heyday" between 1937 and 1946, dramatic programs and comedy/variety programs were the two most popular genres (*Radio Voices* 184); radio news programs would emerge in the late 1930s as a further extremely popular genre.

⁸⁵ In developing my framework of reading radio verse drama through concerns of time, I enlist several theorists and critics. As I researched radio drama in the context of time, several literary critics helped shape my approach, and affirmed that time was indeed a useful, formative, and under-theorized component of radio drama studies. Elissa Guralnick, in her study of radio drama by Beckett, Pinter, Stoppard, and others, discusses Lawrence Kramer's work on poetry and music, in which he writes that music and poetry are distinct from narrative (even when they include narrative elements) because they engage "the other major way to organize time" through "structural rhythms" (Kramer 10). Literary critic and radio historian Frances Gray writes about what she terms the characteristic features of British radio drama, including intimacy, interiority, and the construction of a relationship between listener and speaker, in her essay "The Nature of Radio." She also draws attention to the way in which writer and director Tyrone Guthrie's experimental radio plays exhibit how "Guthrie grasped that radio does not move in space but almost wholly in time, even though it can, by sounds and descriptions, give the illusion of place" (51). Gray goes on to note that "Radio's true element is rhythm," and shows how Guthrie imposes an order on a chaotic character through a "simple rhythmic pattern" (51). Another literary critic, Mary Louise Hill, in her essay "Women's Time, Radio Time: Time, Translation, and Transgression," discusses how Austrian writer Ilse Aichinger's radio play *The Sisters Jouet* (1967) critiques linear time and thus rejects the imposition of time as a narrative, patriarchal structure. In conducting this analysis, Hill states she critiques radio scholar Andrew Crisell's assessment that "radio signs use narrative time as their primary structuring agent" (qtd. in Hill 26). Hill finds instead that radio writers experiment with temporal structures, and that "radio time" for listeners is more accurately represented by the idea of "time that is captured intensely, by snatches, in isolated moments" (39). Working from a feminist approach that draws from Kristeva's 1981 text "Women's Time" and work by Irigaray and Butler, Hill demonstrates how Aichinger's radio play produces a "feminist reimagining of time" (43). Each of the literary critics I have named here work on radio drama in a British or continental context.

⁸⁶ The recording of MacLeish's *The Fall of the City* was replayed and is archived at the Playlist for Andrew Listfield's program on WFMU November 8, 2004. It can be found at: <http://www.wfmuplaylists/shows/13098>

⁸⁷ The book Newcomb mentions is Signi Lenea Falk's *Archibald MacLeish*, New York: Twayne, 1965. For more recent work on MacLeish, see: Lawrence Martin, "'To Disarm Democracy': The 1940 Hemingway-MacLeish Exchange on Modernism as Subversion," *North Dakota Quarterly*, 66.2 (1999): 85-92; John Haislip, "Archibald MacLeish: 'Ars Poetica' and Other Observations," in Dorothy Z. Baker, ed. *Poetics in the Poem: Critical Essays on American Self-Reflexive Poetry*, New York: Peter Lang, 1997: 132-48; Peter Buitenhuis, "Prelude to War: the Interventionist Propaganda of Archibald MacLeish, Robert E. Sherwood, and John Steinbeck," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 26.1 (Winter 1996): 1-30; and Bernard A. Drabek et al, eds., *The Proceedings of the Archibald MacLeish Symposium May 1982*. Landham, MD: UP of America, 1988.

⁸⁸ Charles Bernstein deploys this term to indicate authorized or sanctioned, often mainstream, poetic culture.

⁸⁹ As Peter Buitenhuis discusses, Roosevelt turned to writers such as MacLeish, Robert Sherwood, and John Steinbeck in the late 1930s to assist him in promoting "an interventionist policy that he could not himself advocate without continuing political costs" (Buitenhuis 1).

⁹⁰ MacLeish was familiar with details of this colonial conquest from onsite research he conducted in Mexico while writing his long poem *Conquistador*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1933.

⁹¹ This essay was published in *New Masses* in June 22, 1937, two months after *The Fall of the City* aired and just two weeks after the League of American Poets broadcast that Zukofsky participated in aired.

⁹² This kind of promotion of public discussion is consistent with MacLeish's other work, including his book *Poetry and Opinion: the Pisan Cantos of Ezra Pound, A Dialog on the Role of Poetry*. Urbana: U Illinois P,

1950, a fictional debate about art, politics, and freedom of speech published after Ezra Pound won the prestigious Bollingen prize in 1948 for his controversial *Pisan Cantos*.

⁹³ Nelson also cites her publication, along with poets Millay, Rukeyser, Taggard, and Williams, in the 1937 New York anthology published to show support for Loyalist efforts in Spanish Civil War . . . *And Spain Sings: 50 Loyalist Ballads* (Nelson 198).

⁹⁴ Lechlitner published two further books of poems, *A Shadow on the Hour* (The Prairie Press 1956) and *A Changing Season* (Brandon Press 1973).

⁹⁵ *Panic* deals with the Depression-era banking crisis of 1933, and was first written for the stage and performed amid some controversy about the interpretation of its messages. The play marks MacLeish's transition to radio drama, as he wrote a condensed version for radio broadcast in 1934. Orson Welles acted in the lead role in both the stage and radio versions of this verse play, and also delivered a portion of the script on a *The March of Time* broadcast in 1935, just following the stage production.

⁹⁶ He discusses blank verse as an example of a past achievement that still dominates the stage, and states that while it remains great poetry, "as a vehicle for contemporary expression it is pure anachronism" (*Panic* vii). He theorizes why this is so: blank verse rhythms, "spacious, slow, noble, and elevated," are opposed to what he characterizes as the rhythms of contemporary American speech, "nervous . . . excited . . . vivid." MacLeish finds that instead of dialogue rising toward stressed syllables as in Shakespeare's plays, contemporary speakers "in the offices or the mills are on the streets of this country *descend from* stressed syllables" (viii).

⁹⁷ While we cannot "hear" the sound of the airplane in the publication of *We Are the Rising Wing* in the published version in *New Directions* 1938, Lechlitner's sound effect cues, and descriptions of the voice qualities and tones of the choruses, make clear that the play should be read with an awareness of how it might be sounded.

⁹⁸ Time periods in which plane and other ambient sound effects would be heard in a radio production would of course shift depending on the radio production and actors. Readers can ascribe their own time lengths to the indicated pauses.

⁹⁹ Lechlitner's positioning of the bracketed 1941 beneath the title underscores the scenario that begins "Whatever happens. . ."; whether the poem was written before or after December 7, 1941 (the date of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that led to U.S. declaration of war), U.S. military action in the course of the war in general was a subject of great debate throughout 1941.

¹⁰⁰ Rexroth's poetics developed from early experiments with line length, cubist poetics, and modernist collage and paratactic strategies into a mid-century roughly seven-syllable line in poems with complete sentences, capitalized letters at the beginning of every line, and a conversational narrative tone and approach.

¹⁰¹ This politically-inflected base includes Rexroth's participation in the Libertarian Circle, an anarchist reading and discussion group that also included Muriel Rukeyser, William Everson (Brother Antoninus), Robert Duncan, and Jack Spicer.

¹⁰² The institutionalization of poetry that Meltzer refers to is one governed by New Critical canons, but the "vernacular approach" Rexroth and others adopted was also a response to postwar political and cultural constrictions such as those typified by work of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Meltzer distinguishes the alternate poetic formation of the "dissident egalitarian poetry of the postwar fifties" from the "formalist monasticism of the academy" (*San Francisco Beat* x). Michael Davidson situates mid-century literary San Francisco as participating in a "much larger group of writers attempting during the 1950s to provide an alternative to the rhetorically dense metaphysical lyric advocated by the New Critics" (Davidson *San Francisco* 17).

¹⁰³ While, as Davidson notes, the San Francisco scene was “by no means unified” and did not “necessarily revolve around the figures who read at the Six Gallery,” (*San Francisco* 3) poetry readings were aligned with the increasing emphasis on performance (20).

¹⁰⁴ Middleton cites public reading clubs from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century, pedagogical training in elocution and rhetoric, and the early-twentieth-century “emergent college-reading platform” as prior models, noting that despite a long cultural history of formal oral performance, the public practice of reading aloud did decline after World War I in favor of new kinds of entertainment (272-277).

¹⁰⁵ Poetry readings on radio were not an entirely new thing in the late 1940s, but had been a part of radio broadcasting since the medium’s rise to popularity in the early 1920s. However, as I discuss in earlier chapters, the engagement of modernist-oriented writers with radio reading and speaking increased in the later 1930s, when the radio technologies had been improved and programming expanded, and the postwar period saw more instances of innovative poets choosing to conduct radio programs as a way to promote the work of contemporary poets.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Creeley (received narratives describe) heard Corman’s program, wrote to him, and was invited to read his own poems on a broadcast to which Charles Olson listened, and which instigated the correspondence between Corman, Creeley and Olson; Creeley also wrote a radio play titled *Listen* and sent poems at Rexroth’s invitation for broadcast on KPFA.

¹⁰⁷ American literary history has not yet been rewritten to accommodate Rexroth’s roles in postwar poetic spheres, though the Copper Canyon Press publication of his *Complete Poems* in 2003, followed by a special feature in the online literary journal *Jacket* in 2003 and a centenary portfolio in the *Chicago Review* in 2006, have broadened the field of Rexroth study. Multiple reasons have been given for the elision of Rexroth from narratives of postwar poetries. Rexroth scholar Ken Knabb cites generation-bound literary models, suggesting that Rexroth’s generation would need to appear in an anthology titled “*Poets of the Post-Classic-Modernist Pre-Beat Era*” (Knabb in Gibson “Remembering” 267). Rexroth’s apparently sometimes-difficult personality, or what Rexroth scholar Morgan Gibson calls his “arrogant” countercultural position (Gibson “Remembering” 269), caused rifts and distancing of some writers who supported him. Weinberger and *Chicago Review* portfolio editors John Beer and Max Blechman cite the poet’s (postwar) direct, conversational, readable style as part of the “difficulty” of Rexroth; Weinberger asserts this style subverts and thus falls outside the attention of the “postwar university-literary complex” and Beer and Blechman find the style challenges contemporary readers who might query Rexroth’s faith in “the intelligibility of experience and the adequacy of the poet’s art to communicate that experience” (Beer 12). The direct, personal style to which these writers refer is characteristic of and central to the postwar poetics Rexroth participated in and promoted.

¹⁰⁸ Rexroth biographer Linda Hamalian also documents that by 1950, Rexroth was a primary contact for “first timers” interested in the San Francisco literary scene (266).

¹⁰⁹ By 1959, the audience might have included up to 400,000, comprised of subscribing listeners from the Bay area (KPFA), the Los Angeles area (KPFK) and non-subscribing listeners who tuned in.

¹¹⁰ Stations were added in Los Angeles (KPFK, 1959), New York City (WBAI, 1960), Houston (KPFT, 1970), and Washington, D.C. (WPFW, 1977).

¹¹¹ Interestingly, Pacifica radio network founder Lew Hill also chose the San Francisco Bay Area to launch Pacifica and its first station KPFA-Berkeley, because, as radio historian Ralph Engelman writes, “it was a haven for pacifists, anarchists, and other nonconformists” (46).

¹¹² Rexroth helped found the anarchist discussion group the “Libertarian Circle” just after WWII, which was made up of some of the same people that participated in the related Randolph Bourne Council during the war (Rexroth “Kenneth” 233). According to Rexroth, he helped explain Hill’s initial proposal to the Libertarian Circle (Rexroth *Excerpts* 59).

¹¹³ Rexroth broadcast “Books” programs at least into 1973, before he left for a year in Japan and further trips to Japan in the later 1970s.

¹¹⁴ Rexroth biographer Linda Hamalian writes that on one of his KPFA book review programs, Rexroth “praised Kerouac’s ‘Jazz of the Beat Generation’ (excerpts from his manuscripts *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody*), recently published in *New World Writing*. He ranked Kerouac’s prose with that of the misanthropic invective of Louis-Ferdinand Céline and compared Kerouac’s perspective to that of the absurdist French dramatist Jean Genet” (243). Rexroth and Kerouac later did not have an amiable relationship.

¹¹⁵ Gregory Knapp, in his paper “The State is the Great Forgetter: Rexroth and Goodman as Antecedents of Cultural Ecology, Political Ecology, and the New Cultural Geography,” notes that Rexroth’s “Books” program around 1970 “contain[ed] a wide range of book reviews, on Asian art, communitarian and utopian communities, anthropology, religion, urbanism, and ecology. He reviewed Harner’s book on the Jivaro of Ecuador, in the same broadcast with books on the Tupamaro guerrillas of Uruguay, Ann Swinger’s book on land above the trees, and Saint Simon’s anarchism” (Knapp).

¹¹⁶ For example, Hamalian reports that in the late 1950s, the Poetry Center that Rexroth was involved with founding paid out of town poets such as W.H. Auden and Charles Olson larger honoraria than local poets, and Rexroth thought that the fees being charged for local readings (such as Rexroth’s own) were going to pay these visiting poets as well as the salaries of poetry center employees like Robert Duncan. Hamalian writes that “[w]hen Duncan tried to explain how the Poetry Center allocated funds, Rexroth responded by declaring on KPFA that Marianne Moore was a racist, and that Charles Olson, a great admirer of Pound’s *Cantos*, carried a Fascist Party Card” (Hamalian 274). Other letters indicate the tone and kind of comment Rexroth at times engaged in on his program. For example, James Laughlin wrote to Rexroth Nov 29, 1959 about how California poet Kenneth Patchen complained to him about something Rexroth said on radio about Patchen (Rexroth *Selected Letters* 220).

¹¹⁷ He did this in part because it was more difficult to receive books to review while abroad (Hamalian 292). Hamalian notes that Rexroth’s former wife, now friend to him and his new wife Marthe, reported that “everyone listened to Kenneth’s KPFA reports on life in Provence, and that the ‘main topic of conversation at the Ferlinghettis’ [sic] Friday night’ was the ruckus caused by the first broadcast: the difference in electric voltage in American equipment accelerated the tape and made Rexroth sound like ‘Harry Truman in a high voice’” (289).

¹¹⁸ Rexroth also dictated essays for publication at times – his process often involved directly speaking aloud in a manner that simulated personal address whether or not he was the only person in the room while recording.

¹¹⁹ Rexroth wrote weekly and sometimes biweekly or tri-weekly columns for the paper from 1960 to 1967.

¹²⁰ These lines echo an observation Rexroth makes in another poem, also titled “Delia Rexroth,” in which the speaker discusses his status as a son older than his mother was when she died (*Complete* 219).

¹²¹ Such poems of personal address at times become occasions for articulating more communal memories and milieux; Rexroth’s “A Christmas Note for Geraldine Udell,” for example, describes a rare lightening storm “[I]n this statistically perfect climate,” where “doors banged, glass broke, the sea smashed its walls” (*Complete* 302). While listening to this storm, the speaker recalls the noise of earlier postwar celebrations and wartime sounds, and the emptiness after:

I, in my narrow bed,
Thought of other times, the hope filled post war years,
Exultant, disheveled
Festivals, exultant eyes, disheveled lips,
Eyes dulled now, and lips thinned,
Festivals that have betrayed their occasions.
I think of you in *Gas*,

The heroine on the eve of explosion . . .
Here in the empty night,
I light the lamp and hunt for pad and pencil.
A million sleepers turn,
While bombs fall in their dreams. The storm goes away,
Muttering in the hills. (302-3)

¹²² The title of the series “The Lights in the Sky are Stars” is drawn from Frederic Brown’s popular science fiction novel of the same name, Rexroth notes by inserting the author’s name after his use of the title in *In Defense of the Earth*. Brown’s novel (1953) details the work of an astronaut who, after the government cuts funding for space exploration (including to Mars and Venus), embarks on adventures to reinstate the program; the novel also discusses the economics of development of the atom bomb and postwar political events in the fifties and sixties surrounding Communism and counter-revolutions (Brown 112-113). It is possible that Rexroth reviewed this book for KPFA; he notes in an interview: “In the McCarthy period when the only expression of any kind of radicalism was confined to science fiction, I used to review science fiction for KPFA” (Rexroth “Kenneth” 238).

¹²³ Until the end of the poem, he only pauses twice for breath at the end of an unpunctuated line. This occurs when the sentence runs more than four lines; he pauses for breath after the words “mile” in line four and “amoeba” in line twenty-seven.

¹²⁴ A recording of Rexroth reading “A Sword in a Cloud of Light” appears on the LP *The Spoken Arts Treasury of 100 Modern American Poets*, Volume IX, edited by Paul Kresh and produced by Luce Klein.

¹²⁵ The frequency of Sullivan’s series varied over this period from monthly or bi-monthly programs to weekly Sunday afternoon broadcasts. Some of the other poets to read on his diverse series include Stephen Vincent Benét and William Rose Benét, Mark VanDoren, Harriet Monroe, and Edgar Lee Masters (*New York Times* June 11, 1980: B10).

¹²⁶ Incidentally, MacLeish was the judge for the Yale award the year Merriam won.

¹²⁷ For example, Howe first met Language writers Lyn Hejinian, Kathleen Fraser, Charles Bernstein, and Bruce Andrews by hosting them on her radio program; these writers would become key to Howe’s and one another’s poetic community.

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