



The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics

By Sara Danius

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In *The Senses of Modernism*, Sara Danius develops a radically new theoretical and historical understanding of high modernism. The author closely analyzes Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, and James Joyce's *Ulysses* as narratives of the sweeping changes that affected high and low culture in the age of technological reproduction. In her discussion of the years from 1880 to 1930, Danius proposes that the high-modernist aesthetic is inseparable from a technologically mediated crisis of the senses. She reveals the ways in which categories of perceiving and knowing are realigned when technological devices are capable of reproducing sense data. Sparked by innovations such as chronophotography, phonography, radiography, cinematography, and technologies of speed, this sudden shift in perceptual abilities had an effect on all arts of the time. Danius explores how perception, notably sight and hearing, is staged in the three most significant modern novels in German, French, and British literature. *The Senses of Modernism* connects technological change and formal innovation to transform the study of modernist aesthetics. Danius questions the longstanding acceptance of a binary relationship between high and low culture and describes the complicated relationship between modernism and technology, challenging the conceptual divide between a technological culture and a more properly aesthetic one.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Danius's historical analysis of the complex relationship of technology to literary/aesthetic modernism (emphasizing the years 1880-1930) provides a new and challenging view of high classical modernism. . . . Danius bases her observations and conclusions on a solid survey of past critical thought; 37 pages of detailed notes and a 13-page index make the study especially useful for advanced scholars. Summing Up: Recommended."?Choice, March 2003

"In her persuasive, well-written exploration of technology's essential yet underestimated role in high modernism, Danius establishes a vivid picture of the modernist landscape as one where technologically enhanced means of perception became a prominent component of the aesthetic discourse. . . . Danius's ability to utilize a wide body of theory and to draw adeptly on examples from film, painting, and photography to support her close readings of three pioneering modernist novels makes this a provocative, rewarding study from a variety of vantage points."?Tim Harte, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature 4:1, Summer 2003

"In this book, Sara Danius examines the ways that new technologies influenced the arts of classic modernism from 1880 to 1930, with a concentration on high modernism, in the 1920s. . . . I found the book intriguing and fascinating. It is certainly an important contribution to our understanding of the intersection of perception and technology, and provides important insights about the role that technology can play in the arts."?George K. Shortess, Lehigh University, Leonardo

"The central aim of this accomplished and lucid study is to dispel the notion that perception in modernist texts can be seen as a flight from the world of modernity and technology into subjectivity and particularity. . . . Danius's assertion that the senses become technologically mediated in modernity is supported by discussions of visual theory as it is implicit in various optical devices, in Sander's photo-archive, Marey's work, and the conceptualization of cinema in Vertov and others."?Tim Armstrong, University of London, Modernism/modernity

"Overall, this is a challenging and rewarding analysis by a literary scholar who is deeply immersed in the aesthetic categories of High Modernism. It may be well to note that she is interested in technologies such as X-rays not as artifacts but insofar as they affect the perceptual apparatus of the modern subject."?Barry Katz, California College of the Arts, Technology and Culture Vol 44, Oct 2003

"In *The Senses of Modernism*, Sara Danius balances high literary texts and technological matters to give us a nuanced account of how texts and technologies interrelate. New inventions?the x-ray, the movie camera, the telephone?spurred Proust, Joyce, and Mann to produce texts that show how the senses lead to knowledge. *The Senses of Modernism* is extremely timely, well written, and elegantly formulated."?Enda Duffy, University of California, Santa Barbara

"*The Senses of Modernism* is an extraordinary investigation into the emerging audio and visual technologies of the late nineteenth century, particularly phonography and the cinema. Danius finds that they infiltrated and restructured the perceptual senses of the human subject. They also had a profound effect on modern modes of narrative perception."?Michael Wutz, Weber State University

"Sara Danius provides a wonderfully fresh approach that casts the aesthetics of European high modernism in a new light."?Michael Hardt, Duke University

"As the literary history of modernism comes to terms with the full impact of technological modernity on aesthetic invention, books such as *The Senses of Modernism* provide a crucial critical framework. Situating itself critically between the theoretical influences of Walter Benjamin and Friedrich Kittler, this lucidly argued comparative study of Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, and James Joyce shows how new technologies- from the x-ray to the gramophone-transformed the representation of sensory impressions even as they became 'naturalized' within modernist aesthetics."?Emily Apter, University of California Los Angeles

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