Introduction
Three Black Boxes

Modernism was traversed by strange transmissions. In 1919, the Viennese psychoanalyst Victor Tausk published an article entitled, "On the Origins of the 'Influencing Machine' in Schizophrenia," describing a delusion that he found to be common among his patients.[1] These troubled psychotics believed that they were persecuted by a machine operated by a cabal of conspirators. The precise nature of the mechanism exceeded the patients' technological understanding, but they consistently felt that their thoughts had been transmitted to them from the apparatus via electromagnetic rays. For some, these transmissions would produce auditory and visual hallucinations; others would complain that the machine induced unpredictable sexual reactions that they could not control.

In 1933, the year that Tausk's case study appeared in English, an article appeared in *The New Yorker* that describes "an automatic suggestion machine that enables you to direct the vast powers of your unconscious mind during sleep."[2] This "Psycho-Phone" was a modified phonograph designed to play a series of audible messages throughout the night in order to insert messages of self-improvement into the unconscious of its sleeping users.[3] The programs that could be played on the machine promised improvements in the areas of "Prosperity," "Inspiration," "Normal Weight," "Mating," "Normality," "Life Extension," and "Health, Happiness, and Harmony." The "Prosperity" recording included the lines "I desire to prosper. I have complete confidence in the Psycho-Phone. It lulls me to sleep, but my unconscious mind hears and is deeply impressed by these affirmations."[4]

In 1927, the year the Psycho-Phone was trademarked, the British writer, artist, and cultural critic Wyndham Lewis wrote, "People feel themselves being influenced, but their brain and not their crystal set is the sensitive receptive instrument [. . .] Ideas, or systems of ideas, possess no doubt an organism, as much as a motor-car or wireless set."[5] The observation opens *Time and Western Man*, a monumental attempt to measure the social,

psychic, and philosophical transformations that defined the modernist era. The treatise constitutes one volume among several major works of cultural analysis and experimental fiction that Lewis composed in the late 1920s in an ambitious effort to make these transformations available to conscious scrutiny and to renew capacities for self-control and psychological sovereignty against the era's new techniques of unconscious influence. As in the schizophrenic delusions that Tausk describes and that recur in many memoirs of mental illness of the period, Lewis frequently traces those unconscious influences to the effects of new media technology and to emerging, mechanistic accounts of the mind. In a companion volume, *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), Lewis observes, "The contemporary European or American is a part of a broadcasting set, a necessary part of its machinery [. . .] at the pressing of a button, all these hallucinated automata with their technician-trained minds and bodies, can be released against each other."[6]

How might we understand such uncanny echoes across the discourses of psychotic delusion, technological media, and literary modernism? All three texts describe remarkably similar versions of a "suggestion apparatus" that exerts an obscure influence on the unconscious of its user or victim, and these examples are hardly unique. Technological thought transmission recurs in many psychotic memoirs across the twentieth century and in many works of experimental fiction. The goal of this book is to open this archive in order to trace the form and logic of a technological paranoia that becomes especially articulate in late-modernist culture. I argue that the fiction of Wyndham Lewis, Mina Loy, Anna Kavan, Evelyn Waugh, Muriel Spark, Flann O'Brien, and Samuel Beckett registered and responded to a convergence of technology and psychology that reconstructed the mind as an informatic machine. Psychoanalytic notions of unconscious "mechanisms" along with early neurological accounts of the mental processes converged toward a view that thought was not fully under conscious control or available to introspection but was governed by automatic systems. The notion these systems could be manipulated by outside influences becomes a prevailing anxiety that recurs in much modernist and psychotic writing.

If it had once been regarded as the seat of human judgment and rational self-control, the mind had been reconstructed as merely another "black box" – an object of technoscientific inquiry that was subject to causal laws not unlike the many information machines that began to appear in the early decades of the twentieth century. Precisely how these machines functioned was often a mystery to their users, and the uncertain status of such "black boxes" made them phantasmatic resources for the work of fiction and delusion. In the novels of Loy, Waugh, Spark, and Beckett,

radio often appears as both metaphor and material cause of a new form of passivity to which the human subject had been reduced. In Waugh's *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957), a novelist suspects that his thoughts are monitored and transmitted to him by strange boxes that may have undisclosed connections to both the BBC and new psychotherapeutic methods. Other writers, such as Samuel Beckett, actively pursued the radio's cultural and phenomenological associations with psychopathology; his BBC radio drama, *Embers* (1959), uses the formal resources and limitations of the medium to reproduce for the audience the hallucinated voices that plague the play's central character. Pamela Thurschwell demonstrates links in the popular imagination between modernism's emerging audio technologies and magical thinking, arguing that, "the possibility of telepathy, legitimated by comparisons to the telegraph and telephone, focused erotic fantasies of minds and bodies merging, as well as utopian hopes for better communication."[7] However, in the logic of utopian fantasies, possibilities of minds technologically merging often manifest as dystopian nightmares.

By the 1930s, several studies of the psychological and sociological effects of radio appeared. Princeton's Radio Research Project produced cultural analyses of the new medium, including essays by Theodor Adorno, who argued that radio had produced "A New Type of Human Being."[8] This new type was the product of a new technological influence that "suffocates the ego and eats away at its innermost constitution through realistic fear."[9] Elsewhere, Adorno writes, "The radio voice, like the human voice or face, is >>present<<. At the same time, it suggests something >>behind<< it. In listening, one lacks a precise and clear consciousness of what this something is."[10] Such suspicions of "something >>behind<<" or beyond the threshold of consciousness bear the structure and valence of paranoia that often recurs in modernist writing about radio. In another prominent study, *The Psychology of Radio* (1935), Hadley Cantril and Gordon W. Allport describe radio as "an agency of incalculable power for controlling the actions of men" and "preeminent as a means of social control and epochal in its influence upon the mental horizons of men."[11] The early media theorist Rudolf Arnheim strikes an equally ominous note in a chapter on "The Psychology of Radio," where he writes, "wireless has absolute mastery and kills all mental initiative,"[12] and "we must speak of the danger of wireless estranging people from life, firstly by making them contented with images instead of the real things in their proper places."[13] Arnheim describes mass acceptance of sensory illusion and an uncanny estrangement from "real things" – language that might describe the forms of auditory hallucination that distinguish extreme mental illness.

Historian Asa Briggs recalls the pitched cultural debates over the pernicious effects of the BBC upon its listeners, particularly a growing concern that "Radio would make people passive."[14] Debra Rae Cohen shows that the BBC's companion serial publication, *The Listener*, managed such anxieties by instructing its audience to listen critically and in groups in order to reduce "the danger of mechanizing thought through broadcasting."[15] Cohen goes on to recount the strange case of Harold Nicolson, a BBC announcer who withdrew from his position because he felt that his voice had taken on a life of its own through the uncanny effects of the medium, claiming that "this broadcasting business creates a strange semblance, an unhealthy *eidolon*, of oneself."[16] The reaction to his statement was so strong that he was forced, "in a letter to the editor after two weeks of such reactions, to attribute his own wireless ailment to individual pathology rather than the contagion of the medium."[17] The strange incident demonstrates the ways in which radio became shrouded in the uncanny valences of psychopathology. If radio's early emergence and adoption prompted such anxious responses, the association of the medium with propaganda during the Second World War only amplified its paranoia-inducing effects.[18]

Cultural responses to new media such as radio constitute only one legible source of the technological delusions that appear in memoirs of mental illness and in modernist fiction. While engineers such as Guglielmo Marconi and A. B. Saliger designed global radio networks and psychological suggestion machines, psychiatrists and neurologists emerged as the new technicians of the mind who claimed to map the dysfunctioning mechanisms of the brain. By the turn of the twentieth century, the foundations of modern neurology had been established: electrical levels were measured in the brains of animals; nerve cells were stained and visualized; several language disorders were correlated with the regions of the brain now known as Broca's Area and Wernicke's Area; the mental disorder associated with syphilis had been linked to the presence of a bacterium in the brain. These developments promised to establish the study of the mind and its disorders on objective, empirical, and materialistic grounds. Lisa Blackman writes, "The orthodoxy within mid-nineteenth- to late twentieth-century psychiatry, was that the psychoses were directly linked to structural dysfunction(s) within the brain, often viewed as progressive, which produced symptoms which could only be addressed through biological processes."[19] However, progress slowed, and early phenomenological psychiatrists, such as Karl Jaspers, dismissed the hope of finding a single neurological cause for complex conditions such as schizophrenia: "[W]e do not know a single physical event in the brain which could be considered the identical counterpart

of any morbid psychic event. We only know conditioning factors for the psychic life; we never know *the* cause of the psychic event, only *a* cause."[20] Historian of psychiatry Wayne Shorter writes, "In the 1880s and after, an absolute craze for studying psychiatry with the microscope took possession of the German, Austrian, and Swiss universities. It is generally agreed that this craze led to a dead end, and that the first biological psychiatry died because it detached itself too completely from patients and their world."[21]

This lack of attention to the patient's lived world by an increasingly positivistic and materialist neurology constitutes another source of modernist anxieties of mechanistic depersonalization. The redescription of mental life as the mere epiphenomena of particular neurological systems all but abandoned subjective, first-person perspectives in favor of strictly verifiable, objective, third-person accounts of scientific experimentation. This subordination was especially pronounced in cases of subjects whose self-reports were regarded as manifestly unreliable, such as psychotics. The delusions of such patients often tell the story of the depersonalization that their doctors' positivist epistemology rendered. In modernist delusions of thought broadcasting via some form of radio waves, it is often psychiatrists and neurologists who operate the obscure influencing machines. In Chapter 2, I argue that Mina Loy's novel *Insel* represents a psychotherapeutic relationship as an experience of thought transmission via electromagnetic brain waves.[22] Read in combination with the fiction of their contemporaries, these case studies and memoirs of psychosis reflect the technologization of the mind that had taken hold by the early-twentieth century. The written records of psychotic delusions therefore provide a hermeneutic horizon within which late-modernist fiction may become newly legible.

At the same time, memoirs of mental illness offer more than simply context for understanding works of literature. Psychosis is often marked by failures to maintain fundamental ontological distinctions between self and other, inside and outside, the human and the nonhuman. Memoirs of schizophrenia offer rich accounts of the phenomenology of psychosis as well as attempts to reinstall these fragile ontological distinctions through the ordering work of narration. The graphomania that psychotics often exhibit is spurred by an effort to reestablish these fundamental categories of experience and to reconstruct a livable world – precisely the kind of work that has often been overlooked by reductive forms of psychiatry that, as Shorter puts it, "detached itself too completely from patients and their world."[23] I argue that similar acts of narrative worlding are performed in modernist novels that represent homologous ontological crises. During the composition of *Time and Western Man*, Wyndham Lewis wrote his

most formally experimental novel, *The Childermass* (1928), a text that is in many ways the fictional counterpart of his works of cultural analysis.[24] This largely forgotten late-modernist fantasy describes an uncanny afterworld in which undead characters are reduced to behaviorist reactions and mechanical automatisms and show no capacities for volition, agency, or judgment. The epistemic and ontological confusions suffered by these minimalist figures are reproduced for the reader through discursive techniques that render uniquely dysphoric experiences. It is perhaps not surprising that this intractable work has been mostly ignored by scholars, but I argue that the novel comes into focus when read in concert with several memoirs of mental illness and late-modernist fictions that manage similar confusions. Texts such as Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903) and *An Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl* (1951) not only provide invaluable records of a technologically encoded ontological confusion; they also teach us to read novels such as Lewis's *The Childermass*, Loy's *Insel*, and others as attempts to construct narrative solutions to ontological problems.[25]

The notion that storytelling may perform foundational phenomenological work necessary for subjectivity has been proposed by philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur, who argues that narrative renders a "humanization of time,"[26] and Charles Taylor, who writes that self-narrative provides "the inescapable structural requirements for human agency."[27] Cognitive neuroscientist Antonio Damasio argues that an "autobiographical self" is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for selfhood, and much of his research has been directed toward determining how self-narrating processes fail in extreme pathological conditions.[28] The German philosopher and cognitive scientist Thomas Metzinger has similarly reimagined the ego as nothing more than a useful narrative fiction – a "tunnel" through which phenomena are focalized, organized, and stabilized.[29]

I argue that a repeating chorus can be discerned within a heterogeneous collection of voices that includes novelists, mental patients, psychologists, philosophers, and engineers. Such a search for hidden patterns within these cultural transmissions will inevitably resemble the orderly systems that many psychotic subjects create. This mimetic relation between paranoia and attempts to theorize it has been elegantly articulated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who writes, "paranoia refuses to be only *either* a way of knowing *or* a thing known, but is characterized by an insistent tropism toward occupying both positions."[30] Perhaps a more productive strategy would be provisionally to acknowledge and affirm this resemblance between cultural analysis and paranoia. That is, we might instead ask, if our cultural analysis

begins to resemble certain paranoid sources, might the paranoid sources be read for unacknowledged insights into culture? In this way, the influencing machine delusion may be conceptualized as both symptom and theory: an instance of technologically encoded paranoia that also attempts to explain its own working parts.

Modernism and Madness

Such formal and thematic resemblances between mental illness and modernist literature have drawn the attention of several scholars who have proposed a variety of explanations for these points of contact. Eric Santner finds in Schreber's paranoia the psychological blueprints for the rise of German fascism: as populist movements released repressed social energies, they also produced a crisis of centralized authority by which these forces had been organized, understood, and controlled.[31] In this analysis, both Schreber and German culture more broadly suffered a crisis of "symbolic investiture" – in Lacanian terms, a failure of the paternal function through which social relations had been made coherent and meaningful.[32] The rise of fascism as well as efforts to "cleanse" the nation of supposedly pernicious foreign bodies reflects the paranoiac's need to project outward those intolerable elements that are both internal and threatening. David Trotter similarly identifies the social reorganization of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as the cause of a modern paranoia running through the work of several British novelists.[33] For Trotter, the rise of the professional class meant that one's status and place within the social order were no longer simply given but had to be demonstrated through one's work. Social strata were scrambled by this transition from aristocracy to meritocracy in which the potentials for upward and downward mobility made the classification of bodies increasingly difficult. Trotter identifies in the literature and art of the period a will to abstraction and classification that aims to resist this loss of social order.

Santner and Trotter therefore agree that modernist paranoia was motivated by a failure of social hermeneutics – an inability to interpret a person's status. The threat to masculine distinction and respectability posed by universal suffrage and the entrance of women into professional roles contributed to the displacement of a long-standing paternal order and produced a crisis of interpretation. The predominantly male canon to which these critics adhere suggests that paranoia is the burden of modern masculinity and is perhaps the male counterpart to the female hysteria that displaced neurasthenia as the fashionable pathology of the early-twentieth

century.[34] However, as I demonstrate in the chapters that follow, many of the most fascinating memoirs and fictions of mental illness were composed by women whose singular accounts of mechanized madness must be incorporated into our histories of both psychiatry and modernist literature.

The rise of modernism was virtually contemporaneous with the emergence of modern psychiatry and its taxonomy of mental illness. Emil Kraepelin first established the nosological category of "dementia praecox" in the late 1890s, and Eugen Bleuler reconceptualized the condition as "schizophrenia" in 1911.[35] While this core psychiatric concept has largely persisted into the present, it was also an unstable and contested category from the very beginning whose scope and rate of incidence expanded and contracted significantly in the last century. Richard Bentall argues that historical rates of mental illness are notoriously unreliable because diagnostic criteria have been inconsistent over time and across national contexts.[36] The very scientific status of "schizophrenia" has been the target of critiques by many psychiatrists, sociologists, and historians of mental illness. Most famously, Michel Foucault argues that for many centuries medical, legal, and psychiatric regimes deployed the notion of madness as an instrument of biopolitics rather than as part of a scientific procedure of treatment or description. He claims that, beginning in the late-eighteenth century, the Age of Reason required the category of "unreason" – a poorly defined stigma that was applied to nearly all nonnormative or undesirable bodies. This would include sexual "deviants," the physically or developmentally disabled, as well as those whom we might now recognize as schizophrenics, all of whom served as scapegoats to be removed and confined so as not to contaminate a rationally ordered social field with their "errors of judgment."[37] While Foucault directs most of his critical attention toward the early-modern era of psychiatry, others have argued that the use of vague and shifting diagnostic categories as blunt instruments of biopolitics continues within contemporary psychiatric systems. Mary Boyle has given reasons to doubt whether "schizophrenia" names a single disorder or natural kind, arguing instead that it has served as a catch-all for a variety of syndromes that may present a broad range of intractable symptoms whose etiologies still have not been clearly established.[38] Similarly, Lisa Blackman writes, "Even when psychiatry operates in its most biophysical mode there is no unified explanation, and many of the causal mechanisms are contested and are far from gaining validity within the discipline"; yet despite this conspicuous lack of empirical explanation, the category of schizophrenia has acquired "the status of 'science-already-made.' "[39] Angela Woods argues that, "psychiatry frames schizophrenia as its sublime object or disciplinary

limit point" – it is a condition that has never been properly explained, and it therefore constitutes the perennial problem of the discipline.[40] The weak coherence of the diagnostic category remains evident in the primary psychiatric guide, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). Psychoanalyst Darian Leader observes that

> Today, the *DSM IV-R* defines schizophrenia via a selection process: you need to exhibit at least two from a list of five main types of symptoms, including delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, disorganized or catatonic behaviour and so-called "negative symptoms", such as lack of affect or volition [. . .] Critics of *DSM* have pointed out how the diagnostic criteria here are hopelessly vague, as they entail that two people can have schizophrenia without sharing any symptoms.[41]

If this lack of consensus or confidence in diagnostic procedures persists today, things were even less certain in the moment of modernism. Boyle and Bentall have suggested that the number of patients diagnosed with schizophrenia in the early-twentieth century was dramatically inflated due to the common misdiagnosis of the condition *encephalitis lethargica* – a neurological disorder that presented symptoms similar to those of schizophrenia, may have been caused by a virus, and swept across Europe from 1915–1927, affecting as many as five million people. Bentall writes: "So varied were the long-term symptoms observed following the epidemic, that *encephalitis lethargica* originally received a variety of other names, including 'epidemic delirium,' 'epidemic disseminated sclerosis,' 'atypical poliomyelitis' and '*epidemic schizophrenia*.' "[42] While these patients may not have suffered from schizophrenia, the outbreak helped to bring severe mental illness to the forefront of cultural attention and made schizophrenia appear to be a widespread and perhaps even contagious disease.

The historical and cultural picture we have of madness in the early-twentieth century is therefore a cloudy one, made more opaque by shifting diagnostic methods. What is clear is that madness was at the center of late-modernist attention. A 1937 article in *Harper's Magazine* announces "The Age of Schizophrenia" as a new era of "overcrowded asylums and prisons" and links this epochal epidemic to overwhelming technological and scientific developments: "For the mind of man has created a dazzling world of bright light and swift movement and flashing communications in which the man of flesh and blood finds it impossible to make himself at home."[43] The cultural fascination and even identification with mental illness was nowhere more evident than in the experimental literature of the modernist era. While writing *Finnegans Wake,* James Joyce consulted Morton Prince's *A Dissociation of a Personality* – a case study of dissociative

personality disorder that may have provided a model for the many voices that divide and combine throughout the *Wake*.[44] At the same time, Joyce's daughter, Lucia, exhibited signs of mental illness, was observed briefly by Carl Jung, and was diagnosed as schizophrenic. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* provides perhaps one of the most memorable fictional renderings of psychotic experience and its inept treatment through the character of Septimus Smith, whose auditory hallucinations were evidently drawn from Woolf's own experiences. Ezra Pound's notorious, paranoid experiments with radio broadcasting are well known. Examples of modernist writers' struggles with mental illness are numerous, and several will be examined in the chapters that follow. Some, such as Anna Kavan, Evelyn Waugh, and Muriel Spark, drew upon their experiences of mental illness to create their most experimental works of fiction. For others, such as Loy and Beckett, encounters with the mentally ill seem to have inspired efforts to narratively reproduce the worlds that psychiatry often dismissed as beyond understanding.

While the works of each of these writers assume unique relations to experiences of auditory hallucination, thought insertion, depersonalization, and paranoid delusion, they share an effort to represent and perhaps manage the similar forms of ontological crisis through the synthetic work of narrative. Therefore, while I would not dispute claims made by Trotter and Santner that radical social transformations produced anxieties over class status and authority, these are not the prevailing concerns of the texts that I discuss. Instead, I argue that the works of Lewis, Loy, Kavan, Waugh, Beckett, and others confront a problem that was perhaps more fundamental than one's location within a shifting social field. What their novels and antinovels share is a radical uncertainty over ontological differences between the human and the machine, the living and the dead, and self and world. These are symptoms not of the low-level status anxiety that Trotter detects in the work of Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and T. E. Hulme; rather, such symptoms manifest in subjects who struggle to determine not only what kind of person they are but also what is meant by "person."

Of course, technological dehumanization has been a perennial concern in literature since well before the twentieth century, and modernist and contemporary iterations of the issue have been well observed.[45] However, I argue that in the writings of psychotics we may find a way to reframe this fundamental issue. Read in concert with certain modern and contemporary fictions, these memoirs and case studies prove to be unlikely resources for understanding how the being of the human becomes uncertain and