

# Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science - Phonoscopic Modernism

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## *Introduction* *Phonoscopic Modernism*

The reason people marvel at works of art and say: How in Christ's name did he do it?—is that they know nothing of the physiology of the nervous system.  
—William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All*

The title of my introduction derives from the *phonoscope*, a device invented in France at the turn of the twentieth century to monitor the rhythmic changes in the metabolism of a person as he or she speaks. Strapped to the throat of the speaker, who also held a tube in one nostril, the phonoscope registered the vibrations of the vocal apparatus, producing a picture of sound—hence *phono/scope*—in the form of a wavy line incised onto a metal drum cylinder (see figure 0.1). This cylinder provided the phonologist with a chart of the sound of a particular language as spoken by a particular person. The thesis of the present study is that these pictures—and more importantly, the body of scientific work that produced them—motivated many of the formal innovations of Modernist poetry.