

Fake Music Re-Anticipations

Mary Hallock-Greenewalt - Nourathar

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"Nourathar" is the name Mary Hallock-Greenewalt gave to the art form she developed between 1909 and the 1930s, in which she accompanied concert music with colored light projections. Hallock-Greenewalt's experiments were technical: she received several patents for her inventions, including a notation system for light compositions, a phonograph synchronized to colored lights, and her *Sarabet*, a "light color instrument" with a table interface of sliders and dials that controlled the relative intensity of projected lights with multiple colored bulbs.

For Hallock-Greenewalt, correspondences between specific colors and specific musical notes are not fixed or metaphysical, but rather subject to individual volition: "There is nothing autocratic about this choice of intensity and hue for any given work; no more so than that each person should wear but one color dress." So while Nourathar requires an extant musical composition and performance, Hallock-Greenewalt understood her work as an art - in that it entails expression - rather than a science based on formulae.

Nourathar is an ambient medium and as such has gone atmospheric. Even in the technical diagrammatic form of patents, the work can't be kept hold of: Hallock-Greenewalt was entangled in lawsuits throughout the 1930s, from which she emerged without legal claim to and hence remuneration for the application of her inventions. And ambient in its practical form as well: her lights supplemented rather than engendered music and conformed to rather than generated the architectural details of the concert halls on which it was projected.

Atmosphere though, was Hallock's object; she produced not compositions but intensities. While today we can hear the musical compositions she accompanied, we cannot hear Nourathar on its own and we are in no position to reissue what we cannot hear. While we can cite an intensity, we cannot repeat it.

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