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## **“All is hubble-bubble, swarm and chaos”: The cognitive contingencies and possibilities in Virginia Woolf’s “The Cinema”**

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History is written very well through the lens. It is clearer and understandable.

No painter is able to see on canvas what the camera sees.

— Lenin [1]

In her fascinating work on the evolution of spectacular visuality through the Praxinoscope, Vanessa Schwartz argues that the growth of cinema must be studied through “a visual culture that included such phenomena as the mass press, the morgue, panoramas, dioramas and wax museums.”<sup>[2]</sup> “The Cinema”, an essay that first appeared in June 1926 in *Arts*, is Virginia Woolf’s study of a newly emerging episteme of visual expression and cognition. Written at a time when new visual modes were re-configuring the emerging vocabulary of popular culture, “The Cinema” appears as the perfect *reflexus* to much of Woolf’s fiction that interrogates the location(s) of the agency of percipience. Studied as a diachronic text, Woolf’s essay yields a rich reading into the problematic modes of gaze and visuality in twentieth century cultural modernity.<sup>[3]</sup> In her remarkable book on Woolf’s personal association with the visual culture of her day, Maggie Humm argues how “The years from Woolf’s birth in 1882 to the publication of her essay . . . in 1926 were the ones in which photography became a career option for women”<sup>[4]</sup> and how Woolf’s writing was deeply inflected by the visual modes of her day. The Cinema in Woolf’s essay appears both as an incipient art form corresponding to the primal curiosity of human imagination as well as a massive machine exponentially overdetermined by the consuming market and its corresponding technology of exchange. The scopic and the haptic anxieties of

modernity were accentuated by the transforming technologies of power, production and replication whereby the perceiving subject was problematized by a network of discursive strategies that inflected the human body and its sensory field. Cinema theorists often study the metonym of mimetic evolution in linear and causal correspondence with the growth of hegemonic materialism in an increasingly technocratic Europe. Woolf's "The Cinema", however, posits an epistemic ambivalence with its notion of the cinema as a "savage art" that satisfies a primal urge; a statement with which the essay opens

People say that the savage no longer exists in us, that we are at the fag-end of civilization, that everything has been said already, and that it is too late to be ambitious. But these philosophers have presumably forgotten the movies. They have never seen the savages of the twentieth century watching the pictures.<sup>[5]</sup>

Woolf's depiction of the cinema-gazing public as a collective savage race and her assumption of cinema as a savage art-form have interesting connotations in the context of cinema's birth and subsequent growth into a massive mass spectacle.<sup>[6]</sup> In his reading of demographic and collective behaviourism in early twentieth century, Gustave Le Bon analysed how the individual mode of observation is subsumed in a crowd<sup>[7]</sup> and how the power of theatrical and cinematic spectacle in constructing a collective attention attains hypnotic heights. Woolf's depiction of the anarchic spectatorship characterising cinematic visuality also bears interesting resonances with Georg Simmel's depiction of the nervous condition of the metropolitan life. Cinema as a public spectacle for visual consumption could thus be "characterized by the superordination of a plurality or social collectivity over individuals or other collectivities."<sup>[8]</sup> As a direct progeny of technocratic modernity, cinema was an obvious construct of the machine automatism that threatened to condition human senses through its affective stylistics seeking to bridge human perspicacity and technology.<sup>[9]</sup> Woolf's account of cinema clearly probes into its formless formative phase

All is hubble-bubble, swarm and chaos. We are peering over the edge of a cauldron in which fragments of all shapes and savours seem to simmer; now and again some vast form heaves itself up and seems about to haul itself out of chaos. Yet at first sight the art of cinema seems simple, even stupid. (“TC” 268)

Jonathan Crary’s study of the diachronic development of the structures of spectacles reveals that the epistemological contingency of modernity was chiefly characterised by the cognitive fragmentation in post-Kantian visual culture.<sup>[10]</sup> In the section titled “European Nihilism” in *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche lamented the deplored state of the European man against the forces that stimulate him incessantly in the cultural condition he inhabits. Such a state, Nietzsche affirms, weakens man through a process that coarsens as well as enlarges, through systematic depersonalization and disintegration.<sup>[11]</sup> The crowd of eager eyes waiting for a feast of “simple, even stupid” visual sensation in Woolf’s essay corresponds to the Nietzschean version of the conditioned modern man overexposed to stimuli. The catalogue of films Woolf presents corresponds to the footage quality of early cinema that had not yet invented its generic plot of progression; instead offering a spectacle that draws attention to its own metonymic visuality:

There is the king shaking hands with a football team; there is Sir Thomas Lipton’s yacht; there is Jack Horner winning the Grand National. The eye licks it all up instantaneously, and the brain, agreeably titillated, settles down to watch things happening without bestirring itself to think. (“TC” 268)

Woolf’s depiction of the “documentaries of the pre-war world”<sup>[12]</sup> is a gaze at cinema in its embryonic inception; the formative phase which carried little more than fodder for visual consumption and sensationalism. As Liam O’ Leary postulates, the aesthetics of early cinema were often hinged on visual stereotypes

that provided parodies of human movements through comic excesses and crude caricatures:

The first efforts of the early film-makers might be divided into three categories. One consisted of actuality films, recording topical events, visits to strange places and other exotic phenomena . . . Another was that of the popular trick film which consisted of action run backwards, people being decapitated by motor-cars, transformations and disappearances. The third comprised comedy films—mainly slapstick with an element of the chase.<sup>[13]</sup>

The topicality of the films mentioned further accentuates Woolf's informed analysis of the popular cinema of her day.<sup>[14]</sup> The negation of the thinking ability of the brain that Woolf depicts is the fear of exponential automatism of the camera eye that carried the possibility of the rupture of percipient organs, locating the spectator "at the interstices of the mechanical and the psychical."<sup>[15]</sup> Woolf here seems to zoom on one half of the Benjaminian notion of the cinema spectator, a construct of passive absent-minded reception divorced from the possibility of dissonance arising out of shock.<sup>[16]</sup> Benjamin studied the cinema in terms of its affective aesthetics which constituted a hyposensitized state of facing a massive machine of spectacular visuality and also the hyperacuity born out of the condition of "shock" the same machine was capable of constructing:

Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true mode of exercise. The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway. The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.<sup>[17]</sup>

"The Cinema" is remarkable not only for its anxious gaze into the mode of mass spectatorship and the media of visual exchange, but also for its pointers to the

prosthetic aesthetics of cinema that found itself overdetermined—at least in its formative phase— by the narrative logic of literature. As Tom Gunning argues, “Writings by the early modernists (Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists) on cinema follow . . . [an] enthusiasm for this new medium, and its possibilities; and disappointment at the way it has already developed, its enslavement to traditional art forms, particularly theatre and literature.”<sup>[18]</sup> Woolf is unequivocal in her essay that cinema must invent its unique operational logos uncontaminated by the verbatim adaptations from literature. The vocabulary of the literary novel is, in Woolf’s view, thoroughly incongruous with the directions the cinema must follow to emerge as a fully formed art. Critiquing the cinematic adaptation of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*<sup>[19]</sup> for its over-dependence on visual/symbolic synecdoche, Woolf attacks the compulsive correlations early cinema seeks with the literary novel:

A kiss is love. A broken cup is jealousy. A grin is happiness. Death is a hearse. None of these things has the least connexion with the novel that Tolstoy wrote, and it is only when we give up trying to connect the pictures with the book that we guess from some accidental scene—like the gardener mowing the lawn—what the cinema might do if left to its own devices. (“TC” 270)<sup>[20]</sup>

Woolf seems to cry down the reductionist tendencies adapted by certain filmmakers in their bid to translate literary novels into cinema using stock symbols of signification, a tendency that clamps cinema down from its potential to become a unique art form. In an essay titled “Word and Image” that takes up fascinating resonance when read with Woolf’s “The Cinema”, Sergei Eisenstein studies the possibilities of the dialogue between word and image while adapting *Anna Karenina* into film. Discussing the episode including Anna’s confession of her pregnancy and Vronsky’s agitated stare at the watch on the Karenins’ veranda, Eisenstein states how the mere visual symbol of the clock-dial would be grossly insufficient in itself to communicate the psychic phenomena dialectically associated with an image. It is thus the task of the film-maker to arrive at the aesthetic condition whereby an image transcends its associative metonym and

becomes the bearer of the psychic situation truest to life without resorting to hypermimesis. Writing as a filmmaker, Eisenstein states: “These ‘mechanics’ of the formation of an image interest us because the mechanics of its formation in *life* turn out to be the prototype of the method of creating images in art.”<sup>[21]</sup> Woolf’s advocacy of the freedom of cinema from the signification of the semiotic word is in tune with the attempts and the apprehensions of the film-makers and critiques of early cinema. The mimetic purity of the cinema was often an index of its dissociation from the diegetic quality of the narrative; a concern that also corresponded with the idiom of the industry that sought to supply visual fodder to the scopophilia of modernity.<sup>[22]</sup> Elsewhere in her essay titled “Craftsmanship”, designed for a radio broadcast on April 20, 1937, Woolf had explored the slippery semiotics of the word-sign while pointing at the possibilities of words assuming a prosthetic significance through a metonymic mode. In “Craftsmanship”, Woolf’s concern again is to propose a new order of significance that would break away from the compulsive utilitarianism that characterises much of discursive communication. Taking up data and warning signs in metro stations and railway carriages and studying how their semiotic significance is subject to change when tied to words alone, Woolf states: “Thus we may look forward to the day when our biographies and novels will be slim and muscular; and a railway company that says: ‘Do not lean out of the window’ in words will be fined a penalty not exceeding five pounds for the improper use of language.”<sup>[23]</sup> The most defining characteristic of early cinema — according to Woolf’s study of the art form — was its anarchic movement that problematized the spatio-sensorial locations of the human agencies of reception:

The eye is in difficulties. The eye wants help. The eye says to the brain, ‘Something is happening which I do not understand. You are needed.’ Together they look at the king, the boat, the horse, and the brain sees at once that they have taken on a quality which does not belong to the simple photograph of real life. They have become more beautiful in the sense in which pictures are beautiful, but shall we call it (our vocabulary is

miserably insufficient) more real, or real with a different reality from that we perceive in daily life? (“TC” 268)<sup>[24]</sup>

The dislocation of the semiotic ramifications of the visual mode at the turn of the twentieth century and a drive towards a pure opticality was at work in many of the major Modernist writers, most significantly, in James Joyce, whose writing was often a series of visual negotiations and rebounds that constructed a complex paradigm of scopic semiotics.<sup>[25]</sup> Such aesthetics were not unacquainted with and divorced from the scientific theories of light, energy and optics at the turn of the twentieth century, most notably, Albert Einstein’s revisionist extension of Max Planck’s notion of the light as a quanta of particles which possessed mass and was affected by gravity. As its contemporary cultural records show; Einstein’s theory of relativity and his notion of the fourth dimension of time were massive influences on the artists of his day.<sup>[26]</sup> Woolf’s depictions of the anarchy of sentience and the rupture between the brain and the eye allude to the unavailability of referential discourses in the language of early cinema, in contrast to the semiotic structure of words in page.<sup>[27]</sup> In his fascinating analysis on the difference between the language of poetry and that of cinema, Pier Pasolini explored the discursive difference between the two forms of expression, a difference that he attributes to the diachronic /epistemic dissimilarities between the language of cinema and that of literature. Thus

Whereas literary languages found their poetic inventions on the institutional basis of an instrumental language, quite common to all who speak, cinematic languages seem not to be founded on anything like this. For their real basis, they do not have a language whose primary objective is communication. Thus literary language appear immediately as distinct, in their practise, from the pure and simple instrument which serves to communicate; while communication by means of cinema would seem arbitrary and devious, without such an instrumental basis used normally at all.<sup>[28]</sup>

It is this lack of objective discursive referentiality in early cinema that caused Woolf to define cinema as a savage art and a monstrous machine that appropriated the market of mass visual culture. However, Pasolini's essay, like that of Woolf, traces the growth and possibilities of cinema from being a "monstrosity, a series of insignificant signs" to that of a structure of mnemonic and oniric significance, as Woolf put it, in her phrase "dream architecture."<sup>[29]</sup> Both Woolf and Pasolini seem to agree on the possibilities of cinema to attain a unique order of significance through shadows and photoplay, whereupon a shadow across the screen, as described by Woolf in her viewing of *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, can communicate that which words alone would fail to structure or signify. Woolf's vision of the mighty possibilities of cinema finds its resonance in Pasolini's description of the ideal film-maker:

The cinema author has no dictionary but infinite possibilities. He does not take his signs, his im-signs, from some drawer or from some bag, but from chaos, where an automatic or oniric communication is only found in the state of possibility, of shadow. Thus, toponymically described, the act of the filmmaker is not one but double. He must first draw the im-signs from chaos, make it possible and consider it as classified in a dictionary of im-signs (gestures, environment, dreams, memory); he must then accomplish the very work of the writer, that is, enrich this purely morphological im-sign with his personal expression. While the writer's work is esthetic invention, that of the filmmaker is first linguistic invention, then esthetic.<sup>[30]</sup>

As a "veritable theatre of metamorphoses and permutations,"<sup>[31]</sup> the cinema sought to open up a new order of signification and its associated aesthetics to the gazing public increasingly drawn to the new spectacular visual mode. Woolf seems to make a demarcation between two different strands of perceptive mode; the photographic and the cinematic. Although "the simple photograph of real life" was not without its constitutional complexities,<sup>[32]</sup> the moving picture with its extended vocabulary of visuality was capable of constructing a "hyper-reality"

that could be subversive with its illuminations. I would argue that Woolf's wonderment at the "defamiliarizing" power of cinema connects her fascinatingly with the Russian Formalists and more so, with the Russian film-makers who advocated a cinema of subversion rather than consumption. Viktor Shklovsky's account of the cinema as a "conversation prior to the alphabet"<sup>[33]</sup> bears fascinating resonance with Woolf's notion of a medium of communication awaiting cinema that does not belong to the logos of linguistic-discourse. This accounts for the complex ontology of the new order of beauty and reality born out of cinema that Woolf observed with a mixture of fascination and envy. In the wake of the Russian revolution, Shklovsky's theory of the *ostranenie* was appropriated by the later filmmakers such as Vertov who sought to deconstruct the traditional fictive film and promote the birth of a new cinema of hyperkinesis whereby "the chaos of visual cinema . . . [carried] the possibility of making the invisible visible, the unclear clear, the hidden manifest, the disguised overt, the acted nonacted; making falsehood into truth."<sup>[34]</sup> Such aesthetics were corroborated by the radical transformations of art from Futurism to Formalism whereby a new vocabulary of visuality emerged as a pointer to the Formalist theories of laying bare the objectivity of the art object and constructing it through deliberate difficulties; theories which found immediate resonance in the works of contemporary filmmakers and photographers.<sup>[35]</sup> Woolf's status as a writer further problematized her sightline into cinema; as was the case with Maxim Gorki who narrated his experience of cinema show at the Nizhni-Novgorod fair screening the first Lumiere films. Both Woolf and Gorki seem to attest to the defamiliarizing aesthetics of cinema that appeared to transcend the signification of words. Writing of his first cinema experience, Gorki charted his psychic transition as a spectator of the cinematic visuality in a passage remarkably resonant to that used by Woolf later in her essay:

When the lights go out in the room in which Lumiere's invention is shown, there suddenly appears on the screen a large grey picture. *A Street in Paris*—shadows of a bad engraving . . . you anticipate nothing new in

this all too familiar scene, for you have seen pictures of Paris streets more than once. But suddenly a strange flicker passes through the screen and the picture stirs to life. Carriages coming from somewhere in the perspective of the picture are moving straight at you, into the darkness in which you sit . . . All this moves, teems with life, and, upon approaching the edge of the screen, vanishes somewhere beyond it.<sup>[36]</sup>

The sudden and strange flicker across the screen becomes the bearer of a new signifying mode; one that dissociates itself from the vocabulary of visuality in literature and becomes a pointer to a systematic disorder.<sup>[37]</sup> Woolf's essay carries the remarkable passage of her own viewing of one of the most influential films in the history of cinema; Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*; a cinematic spectacle of horror that was immediately associable with the growth of Fascism after the First World War. Woolf's unequivocal rejection of the cinema of adaptation and mindless consumption also connects her to the political premise of Russian Formalism with its tenets of transformative and subversive aesthetics.<sup>[38]</sup> The cinematic techniques of close-up and slow motion have been studied by film-theorists and cultural theorists alike as the aesthetics of the epiphany connected with the automatism of the moving camera. Thus Benjamin states: "With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot . . . reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject . . . The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses."<sup>[39]</sup> Thus cinematic aesthetics were capable — with their corresponding technology — to transmute the ontology of space-time, and to dislocate the percipient observer in a state of contested control. Woolf's deliberately dramatic depiction of the fission between the brain and the eye before cinematic visuality is suggestive of the violence on the order of sentience corresponding to the new visual subject that emerged with the turn of the twentieth century. Gilles Deleuze's analysis of the dialectical development from Romanticism to Expressionism underlined the scopic shift of the subject that could no longer perceive from the frame of an organic totality but had to be

constantly conscious of the “continuities which seem false to the eye of the sensible.”<sup>[40]</sup> Woolf’s depiction of the dramatic schism as “Eye and brain are torn asunder ruthlessly as they try vainly to work in couples” (“TC” 269) is the reaction to cinema’s aesthetics of automatism that was a subversion of the totality of organic perception in an age of mechanical reproduction. The ambivalent relation between literature and the machine is a theme that runs throughout Woolf’s oeuvre and the depiction of cognitive contingency as depicted in “The Cinema” is best read with its epistemic and materialist contexts. Woolf’s statement on the failed synchronicity between the eye and the brain while facing the cinematic gaze is in interesting correspondence with the works of the late nineteenth century cognitive scientists experimenting on the nature and epistemology of visual reception. William Wundt, writing on the varyingly sensitive receptive points in the retina of the eye, had distinguished between the two terms *Blickfeld* and *Blickpunkt*; corresponding respectively to the general map of visual perception and the localized point of maximum attention in the retina of the human eye; the point where Wundt located the *apperception*, the “focalization of some content in consciousness.”<sup>[41]</sup> Breaking away from the model of the camera obscura proposed by Locke and Leibniz, Wundt’s model of spatial topology of the eye was a massive influence on many later theorists of cinema and the dialectics of perception, including Hugo Münsterberg and William James. Woolf touches upon the theme of shifting semiotics of signification in an anecdotal account in her essay “Walter Sickert” where a conversation about traffic lights and the semiotics corresponding to their colours becomes a pointer to the emerging urban condition characterising cultural modernity whereby “in the eyes of the motorist red is not a colour but simply a danger signal.”<sup>[42]</sup>

The significance of *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* with reference to Woolf’s own writing is manifold. On the one hand, the film carried the visual sensation of shock and shudder that often found its counterparts in the narratives of repression in Woolf’s own writing, especially with the backdrop of the war and its corresponding collapse of the standardised signifiers of sentience. *Caligari* was

and has been one of the most disturbing depictions of the disordered dialogue between magic and madness in a world increasingly consumed by the spectres of totalitarianism and war. It was a world where hypnotism and mesmerism became the metaphors for totalitarian control that extended over the mind as well as the body with an evil enchantment not very distant from the trauma of technology that pervaded the mind of modernity.<sup>[43]</sup> But more importantly; and on a formalist level, *Caligari* was remarkable for its architecture of the uncanny that structured itself with its deliberate deconstruction of the cognitive constants. Thus with its “oblique chimneys on pell-mell roofs, its windows in the form of arrows or kites and its treelike arabesques that were threats rather than trees,”<sup>[44]</sup> *Caligari* became the cinematic construct of the aesthetics of anarchy with its never-ending merry-go-rounds and chaotic fairgrounds. Woolf’s allusion to *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* in “The Cinema”, although tangential, carries within it the vision of the possibilities of cinema, a vision that a writer cannot gaze at without undergoing the vacillations between awe and envy. At a screening of the film,

A shadow shaped like a tadpole suddenly appeared at one corner of the screen. It swelled to an immense size, quivered, bulged, and sank back again into nonentity. For a moment it seemed to embody some monstrous diseased imagination of the lunatic’s brain. For a moment it seemed as if thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than by words . . . in fact the shadow was accidental and the effect unintentional. But if a shadow at a certain moment can suggest so much more than the actual gestures, the actual words of men and women in a state of fear, it seems plain that the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression. (“TC” 270)

Woolf’s reference to a shadow in the context of *Caligari* carries a very specific significance corresponding to the history of the making of the film. Directed by Robert Wiene and designed by the Expressionist artists Hermann Warm, Walter Röhrig and Walter Reimann, *Caligari* was an ambitious exhibition of excess through its *mise-en-scènes* and non-linear architecture. As Giles Deleuze

enunciates in his theses on cinematic movement-image, much of avant-garde early cinema sought to break away from organic/spatio-temporal linearity by arriving at a “pre-organic germinality, common to the animate and the inanimate.”<sup>[45]</sup> With its stylized visual vocabulary and angularity of architecture, *Caligari* embodies Pasolini’s cinema of poetry. In her fascinating work on German Expressionism, Lotte H. Eisner attributes the uncanny in *Caligari* to the props used in the film in order to accentuate its angularities:

The depth comes from deliberately distorted perspectives and from narrow, slanting streets which cut across each other at unexpected angles . . . The three-dimensional effect is reinforced by the inclined cubes of dilapidated houses. Oblique, curving, or rectilinear lines converge across an undefined expanse towards the background: a wall skirted by the silhouette of Cesare the somnambulist, the slim ridge of the roof he darts along bearing his prey, and the steep paths he scales in his flight.<sup>[46]</sup>

What Woolf depicts in her reference to the film is a series of visual excrescences and hyperkinesis that assumes different signifiers of perceptions at different points in space-time. Through its vacillations between becoming violent velocity and non-entity, the shadow witnessed by Woolf assumes the epistemic contingency of a formative expression that automatically appropriates a higher order of signification than that of words in page. The shadow constitutes the movement of the new visual vector of cinema. Woolf’s response to the ‘movement’ assumes an interesting ambivalence; as an astonished creative mind viewing a new planet swim into its ken as well as that of a writer of words who faces the fear of castration with the emergence of a new structure of signification across the screen. In the historical context of *Caligari*, “Woolf’s ‘accidental’ shadow could thus be seen as the truly Expressionist element of a film that has come to define German Expressionist cinema . . . the shadow as the metonym for Expressionist cinema itself”<sup>[47]</sup> that Woolf as a creative writer gazed at with a complex mixture of fascination and envy. The dialectic of light and shadow, illumination and darkness; through an intensive montage<sup>[48]</sup> of visual kinesis; finds in Woolf’s

words, the “speed and slowness, dartlike directness and vaporous circumlocution” (“TC” 271) in the vocabulary of cinema alone whereby “the most fantastic contrasts could be flashed before us with a speed which the writer can only toil after in vain” (“TC” 272).

Woolf’s essay analyses the immediate and immense plasticity that cinema can achieve over space and time whereby the “past could be unrolled, distances annihilated, and the gulfs which dislocate novels . . . could by the sameness of the background, by the repetition of some scene, be smoothed away” (“TC” 272). Woolf’s remarkable statement of cinema being born “fully-clothed” becomes a powerful pointer to the culture of the commodity with its compulsive idiom of newness and replication.<sup>[49]</sup> This also becomes a sightline into cinema’s loci within the market of modernity and its specular/liminal economies.<sup>[50]</sup> Woolf’s essay, with its perspectival shift from a cinema of anarchy to a cinema of possibilities, becomes an assiduous analysis of the mass phenomenology and cognitive culture of modernity. It is a study of the syntax of cinema informed by industrial technology as well as the phenomenological promises cinema bore as a new art form. The Cinema, as it emerged in early twentieth century cultural modernity, proposed the power to render both space and time into a liminal dialectic of prosthesis and kinesis that blurred the borderlines between externalization and interiority. It thus authored a scopic/cognitive complexity that evidently entailed an ambivalence of reception among Modernist writers who readily acknowledged cinema’s manifest transcendences despite its reductions and excesses.

### Endnotes

<sup>[1]</sup> Quoted in Daniela Mrázková and Vladimir Remes, “Soviet Photography between the wars“, *Early Soviet Photographers* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1982) 6.

<sup>[2]</sup> Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 89-148.

<sup>[3]</sup> See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990) and Jed. Z. Buchwald, *The Rise of the Wave Theory of Light: Optical Theory and Experiment in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>[4]</sup> Maggie Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003) 18.

<sup>[5]</sup> Virginia Woolf, “The Cinema”, *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966) 268. Subsequent references to this work will be made parenthetically within the text as “TC”.

<sup>[6]</sup> See Serge Moscovici, *The Age of the Crowd: A Historical Treatise on Mass Psychology*, trans. J.C.Whitehouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 158.

<sup>[7]</sup> Gutave Le Bon, *The Crowd* (New York: Viking, 1960) 42-43. See also Patrick Bratlinger, *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) 154-83.

<sup>[8]</sup> Georg Simmel, “Subordination under a plurality”, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt. H.Wolff (New York: The Free Press, 1950) 224.

<sup>[9]</sup> See Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 3: ‘Modernity, then, brings both a fragmentation and augmentation of the body in relation to technology; it offers the body as lack, at the same time as it offers technological compensation. Increasingly, that compensation is offered as a part of capitalism’s fantasy of the complete body; in the mechanisms of advertising, cosmetics, cosmetic surgery, and cinema; all prosthetic in the sense that they promise the perfection of the body.’

<sup>[10]</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999) 14.

[11] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kauffmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kauffmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968) 27.

[12] Laura Marcus, “Virginia Woolf and the Cinema”, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 108. For a reading of how cinema was paradigmatically inflected by the First World War see Andrew Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

[13] Liam O’ Leary, *The Silent Cinema* (London: Studio Vista Limited, 1965) 17

[14] For an illustrative detail of the actual films Woolf is most likely to have referred to in her accounts, see David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) 165: ‘Jack Horner, ridden by Billy Watkinson, trained by Jack Leader, won the Grand National in 1926. A Pathé Gazette newsreel released on 29 March includes shots of the race, and of horse and jockey enjoying their triumph. George V had been the first reigning monarch to attend an FA Cup Final, in 1914, but the only football matches at which he put an appearance in March 1926 were of the rugby variety . . . Topical Budget’s 29 April release featured the launch of the yacht Shamrock at Southampton, in the presence of the proud owner, Sir Thomas Lipton, and a certain Captain Sycamore.’

[15] Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body* 218.

[16] Along similar lines, Sigfried Kracauer studied the dialectic of boredom and shock as the condition of modern existence, determined exponentially by the technologies of perception such as the radio and the cinema, which had the potential of depicting a “fragmented sequence of splendid sense impressions.” See Sigfried Kracauer, “Cult of Distraction: On Berlin’s Picture Palaces”, *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) 326.

[17] Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973) 242-43.

[18] Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde”, *Early Cinema: Space, frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI Publishing, 1990) 56. See also Robert Stam, *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic and the Art of Adaptation* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 1-17.

[19] As Maggie Humm states, despite the many cinematic adaptations of Tolstoy’s novel that had already arrived by the time “The Cinema” was written, Woolf’s allusion is most likely to the 1915 film directed by Gordon Edwards and produced by American Fox Film. See Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures* 188.

[20]. See Michael Tratner, “Why Isn’t *Between the Acts* a Movie?”, *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. Pamela L. Caughie (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000) 127. Analysing Woolf’s aversion to the easy symbolic synecdoche adopted by the film-makers to communicate meanings, Tratner states, ‘These “fragments” are easily readable by an “illiterate” populace, and as such they do not cause any “shock” effects at all: their effect is not progressive, but supportive of the status quo.’ See also David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* 164-69.

[21] Sergei M. Eisenstein, “Word and Image”, *The Film Sense*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1942) 20-22.

[22] Thomas Elsaesser, “Early Cinema: From Linear History to Mass Media Archaeology”, *Early Cinema* 6. See also Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960) 179-80: ‘Determined to strip film of all theatrical and literary elements that threatened to overlay its substance, the artists of the ’twenties conceivably felt the urge to build from the ingrained properties of their medium. They aimed at telling whatever they wanted to tell in a language peculiar to the cinema.’

<sup>[23]</sup> Woolf 247. The essay is an interesting parallel to the anticipation of the semiotic shift hinted in “The Cinema” as in it Woolf studies the sign language that was fast replacing the normal written word in popular hotel advertising and picture reviews that had begun to use the star system to structure signification: ‘We are beginning to invent another language—a language perfectly and beautifully adapted to express useful statements, a language of signs.’

<sup>[24]</sup> For a systematic study of the relation between vision and its psychic registration, see R.L.Gregory, *The Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 64 and Gilles Deleuze *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) 211. For a socio-cultural study of the late nineteenth century anxiety of the inadequacy of the retinal cognitive mode see George Trumbull Ladd, *Elements of Physiological Psychology: A treatise of the activities and nature of the mind from the physical and experimental point of view*(London: Longmans, 1887).

<sup>[25]</sup> For an excellent reading of Joyce’s use of cinematic aesthetic and its aural/visual semiotics, see Luke Gibbons, “Visualizing the Voice: Joyce, Cinema, and the Politics of Vision”, *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 171-88. See also David Trotter, “The Relevance of Ulysses”, *The English Novel in History 1895-1920* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 1993) 95-107.

<sup>[26]</sup> See Eleanor M. Hight, *Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimer Germany* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1995) 72-73: ‘By the 1920s Einstein had obtained a kind of cult status, and his “General Theory of Relativity” was popularized in the press. Ideas about the movement of objects and light through space over time became topics of intense interest in intellectual circles.’

[27] For a film-maker's sightline into the synchronicity of the spectator's senses wrought through the use of montage editing, see Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* 60-91.

[28] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry", *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976) 543.

[29] For a socio-historical study of the affective aesthetics of cinema on a collective consciousness, see Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947) 6: 'What films reflect are not so much explicit credos as psychological dispositions—those deep layers of collective mentality which extend more or less below the dimension of consciousness. Of course, popular magazines and broadcasts, bestsellers, ads, fashions in language and other sedimentary products of a people's cultural life also yield valuable information about predominant attitudes, widespread inner tendencies. But the medium of the screen exceeds these sources in inclusiveness.'

[30] Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry" 545. For a brilliant analysis of how the narratives of twentieth century fiction; from that of Flaubert to that of Joyce, increasingly appropriated the cinematic spatiality through their contingent positioning of the perceiving subject, see Alan Spiegel, *Fiction and the Camera Eye: Visual Consciousness in Film and the Modern Novel* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1976) 53-68.

[31] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 56.

[32] See Kracauer, *Theory of Film* 15. 'The ideal photographer is the opposite of the unseeing lover. He resembles the indiscriminating mirrors; he is identical with the camera lens. Photography, Proust has it, is the product of complete alienation.'

[33] Quoted in Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body* 227. For a film-maker's analysis on the laws of defamiliarization or the Formalist *ostranenie* as an

operating principle in cinema editing and its associated aesthetics see Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949).

<sup>[34]</sup> Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1984) 41.

<sup>[35]</sup> See Eleanor M. Hight, "The New Vision, Language of Modernism", *Picturing Modernism* 197-207.

<sup>[36]</sup> Maxim Gorki, "The Kingdom of Shadows", Gilbert Adair ed. *Movies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999) 10-11.

<sup>[37]</sup> See Mike Featherstone, "Postmodernism and Aestheticization", *Modernity and Identity*, ed. Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 284.

<sup>[38]</sup> See Tom Gunning, "Non-Continuity, Continuity, Discontinuity: A Theory of Genres in Early Films", *Early Cinema*, 88: 'Writing in the 20s, the Formalists were primarily concerned to establish what genres were uniquely cinematic as opposed to those "parasitically" taken over from literature and drama.'

<sup>[39]</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations* 229-30.

<sup>[40]</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London, New York: Continuum, 2005) 55.

<sup>[41]</sup> Kurt Danziger, "Wundt's Theory of Behaviour and Volition", *Wilhelm Wundt and the Making of a Scientific Psychology*, ed. R.W.Rieber (New York: Plenum, 1980) 89-115. For a historical study of the sentient shift of the perceiving subject at the turn of the twentieth century with the advent of the new notions of psychology and Woolf's location in the map of such cognitive shift, see Judith Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 190-206.

<sup>[42]</sup> Woolf 233.

[43] See Pamela Thurschwell, “Wilde, hypnotic aesthetes and the 1890s”, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 37-64. For a more recent and detailed study of magic and the machines of modernity, see Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media into the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[44] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* 69. Kracauer’s account of the film is further interesting as it studies its historical growth from an avant-garde and essentially anti-Fascist screenplay by Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer to an eventually compromised commercial film by Robert Wiene that made significant changes in order to conform to the census of authority. The film went to Robert Wiene after Fritz Lang, originally approached to direct it, had to withdraw from the project in order to complete his serial *The Spiders*. However, as Kracauer further analyses, despite the conformation, *Caligari* the film remained revolutionary by emphasizing and visually stylizing the content of the madman’s fantasy rather than the ambiguous message of healing and diagnosis from the seemingly benevolent doctor with which the film ends.

[45] Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 76. See also Ronald Bogue, “Frame, Shot, and Montage”, *Deleuze on Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003) 41-64. It is particularly interesting to study, as Bogue does, German Expressionism in cinema through the colour theory of Goethe that Deleuze uses in order to corroborate his notion of the Bergsonian *durée*. Under such analysis, black and white constitute two ends of the spectrum of opacity with colour being a construct of the addition of shadow to colourlessness.

[46] Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969) 21. Eisner’s book is remarkable in its study of German Expressionism as an aftermath of the First World War in a world all too permeable to the effects of destruction and apocalypse not to devise for itself the transgressive aesthetics whereby the

structure of the subconscious was continually exteriorized in painting, theatre and cinema.

<sup>[47]</sup> Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse* 123.

<sup>[48]</sup> See Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 77.

<sup>[49]</sup> See David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985) 36. For a study of how an aesthetic appearance assumes the condition of a commodity through its performance as phantasmagoria, see Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1981) 90.

<sup>[50]</sup> See Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body* 239-43.

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### **First Response**

The study of cinema and photography has recently opened up exciting new possibilities for scholars of modernist literature and culture. The article published here is a striking addition to our knowledge and understanding of how modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce responded to the new art of the cinema. What the article does especially well is to articulate the essentially divided response of Virginia Woolf in her 1926 essay, 'The Cinema', showing how it reveals both fascination and envy, both appalled recognition of the 'savage', anarchic dimensions of popular mass culture and a simultaneous awareness of the vast experimental possibilities of a new artistic medium. I wonder, however, if it is entirely fair and apt to suggest that Woolf 'deplores' the 'savage' appeal of cinema, even if her response to the spectacle of mass cinema audiences betrays something of the Bloomsbury bohemian *hauteur* that we find elsewhere in her writing. The 'savage' quality surely represents something altogether more complex – that paradoxical modernist preoccupation with the primitive and the archaic that characterises *The Waste Land*, for instance, or Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Overall, this is a very stimulating essay and it provides a wealth of insights and ideas, including some excellent observations on the early filming of *Anna Karenina* and on the ways in which Woolf's response to cinema might be understood in relation to the theories of defamiliarization advanced by the Russian formalists. It would be very good to see some new work on cinematic techniques in Woolf's novels and stories.