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COMPOSING WOMEN: INTERSECTIONS OF TRANSATLANTIC MODERNIST  
LITERATURE AND VISUAL MEDIA

by

MEREDITH ZARING

Under the Direction of Audrey Goodman, PhD

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores transatlantic modernist literature's methods of representing the material female mind and body in light of photographic and cinematic composition and analysis. The ongoing and often concurrent transatlantic development of photographic and cinematic technology invites a broad historical trajectory: from stop-motion photography to cinematography to the transition from silent to sound film. As photography and film manipulate time and space by halting and resuming perpetual motion, so my investigation crosses time and space, freezing provocative moments and posing enlightening encounters. Through interdisciplinary associations, I aim to reframe and reanimate our critical perception of the multiplicitous modernist scene. Each chapter thus views literary works from the primary era of

cinematic development, the 1920s and '30s, through the proverbial lens of visual media works or analyses, such as stop-motion photograph series or feminist film theories. Rather than attributing a literary method to a media technique, or vice versa, I investigate their various intersections and deviations, their various possibilities and limitations. These explorations ultimately discover the potential of modernist narratives to engage the compositional methods and subjects of photography and film in the expression of otherwise unsanctioned, unseen, and unspoken female identity.

INDEX WORDS: Modernist novel, Feminist film theory, Narrative voice, Female embodiment, Willa Cather, Zora Neale Hurston

COMPOSING WOMEN: INTERSECTIONS OF TRANSATLANTIC MODERNIST  
LITERATURE AND VISUAL MEDIA

by

MEREDITH ZARING

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018

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Meredith Anne Zaring  
2018

COMPOSING WOMEN: INTERSECTIONS OF TRANSATLANTIC MODERNIST  
LITERATURE AND VISUAL MEDIA

by

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May 2018

**DEDICATION**

*To Lucille “Granny” Zaring and John “Pa” Zaring,*

*who always wanted me to become a doctor.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In *The Secret Agent* (1907), Joseph Conrad's demonstrably male narrator describes the primary female character's epistemology in visual—even cinematic—terms, anticipating the complex associations between twentieth-century modernist narratives and visual media technology, particularly in the composition of female minds and bodies. Set in 1886 London, the novel tells the story of Adolf Verloc, an agent of pornography and anarchy who elicits his wife Winnie's simple-minded brother in an attempt to bomb the Greenwich Conservatory, inadvertently killing the young man. Winnie comes to realize that her husband is responsible for her brother Stevie's death in an extended, cinematic scene, which includes the "freezing" of time, the conflation of seeing and understanding, the obstruction of the male gaze, and the silent projection of the female memory. Unable to translate this visual knowledge into language, for which the male narrator/writer takes full credit, Winnie ultimately kills her husband and herself, dramatizing turn-of-the-century depictions of women as psychological and cultural threats. Although Winnie cannot express herself productively, her visual epistemology suggests the potential of modernist narratives to engage the compositional methods of cinematic technology in the literary expression of female experience.

As Winnie comes to knowledge through a prolonged series of images, repeated descriptions of her eyes reflect her thinking in visions and suggest the conflation of seeing and understanding. In a state of "frozen contemplative immobility," she stares at "a whitewashed wall with no writing on it," processing Stevie's death through the visual memories of her life with him (198). The narrator describes this scene in cinematic terms, aligning Winnie with

feminized mass spectator culture.<sup>1</sup> Her “motionless head” becomes a film projector, “roll[ing] a series of thoughts” that her husband cannot see (198). Winnie has no agency in this experience but is “forced” by her female “temperament” (198). Her memories are “imagined” but not “expressed,” which emphasizes her limited skill with language. The depiction of her “visions” as “lack[ing] nobility and magnificence” likewise suggests her limited artistry (198). Although the narrator uses figurative language to present these visions in sensory detail, he repeatedly reminds the reader that while the thoughts and feelings are Winnie’s, the words are his, for Mrs. Verloc “was a woman of very few words” with “no sufficient command over her voice” (201).

Conrad’s early-twentieth-century cinematic depiction of Winnie Verloc invites the next two decades of modernist narrative explorations of the female mind and body. As the progressive images of Winnie’s epistemology recall the still motion of stop-motion photography, her silent projected memory foretells the depiction of embodied female voice during the transition from silent to sound film. Although Winnie remains incapable of productive, embodied agency, her experience suggests the potential of visual media compositional methods to inspire new literary expressions of female identity, particularly by female authors and for female audiences.

As the “1920s and ’30s gave rise to the first generation of people to consume images in a great number on a daily basis” (Campany 63), the composition of these images affected contemporary literary depictions of embodied, gendered identity. While this period saw

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring here to Andreas Huyssen’s important work, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986). Huyssen considers “how the political, psychological, and aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities” (47). This association creates what he refers to as a “chain effect of signification: from the obsessively argued inferiority of woman as artist to the association of woman with mass culture to the identification of woman with masses as a political threat” (50).

increased experimentation in the tangibility of language—that is, the image that the printed word makes on the page—it likewise bore witness to new methods of creating and critiquing visual representation in literary subject and form. These works mimicked, mocked, and manipulated contemporary visual media and its evolving techniques, calling attention to literature’s continued engagement in the composition of a cultural movement and moment.

This dissertation explores specifically transatlantic modernist literature’s methods of representing the material female mind and body in light of photographic and cinematic composition and analysis. The ongoing and often concurrent transatlantic development of photographic and cinematic technology invites a broad historical trajectory: from stop-motion photography to cinematography to the transition from silent to sound film. As photography and film manipulate time and space by halting and resuming perpetual motion, so my investigation crosses time and space, freezing provocative moments and posing enlightening encounters. Through interdisciplinary associations, I aim to reframe and reanimate our critical perception of the multiplicitous modernist scene. Each chapter thus views literary works through the proverbial lens of visual media works or analyses, such as stop-motion photograph series or feminist film theories. Rather than attributing a literary method to a media technique, or vice versa, I investigate their various intersections and deviations, their various possibilities and limitations. These explorations ultimately discover the potential of modernist narratives to engage the compositional methods and subjects of photography and film in the expression of otherwise unsanctioned, unseen, and unspoken female identity.

This study intersects the fields of transatlantic modernist literary criticism, media studies, and feminist theory. In “The New Modernist Studies” (2008), Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz summarize the now established emphasis on “transnational exchange” and the

perhaps more transient interest in “mass media rhetorics” in modernist literary studies.

Chronicling significant transnational modernist studies, Mao and Walkowitz acknowledge, “One element of early-twentieth-century transnationalism that bore heavily on literary modernism was the development of novel technologies for transmitting information: telegraph, radio, cinema, and new forms of journalism not only reconfigured culture’s audiences but also helped speed manifestos, works of art, and often artists across national and continental borders” (742). I specifically consider how these technologies “reconfigured” depictions of gendered identity in modernist literature. Given what Mao and Walkowitz refer to as the current “crisis of information” (746), my intersectional study seems prevailingly relevant.

A continued rise in modernist literary criticism concerning new visual media of the time—that is, photographic and cinematic technology—has paralleled the continuing rise in current visual media-driven culture. In *Cinema and Modernism* (2007), David Trotter productively summarizes the field:

The great majority of the enquiries into literary modernism’s relation to cinema undertaken during the past thirty years have been committed implicitly or explicitly to argument by analogy. . . . recent criticism has been at once too loose, in its attribution to the modernist literary text of just about any cinematic technique going (including some which were not going at all when the work in question was written); and too tight, in its insistence on one particular kind of montage as that text’s primary method. (1, 2)

Therefore, he has called for a historically specific “model of parallelism”: “the literature of the period and the cinema of the period can best be understood as constituting and constituted by

parallel histories” (3). Rather than promoting anachronistic or generic “analogies” between media, I explore their “parallel histories,” allowing for specific intersections and divergences.

Following the rejection of a corporeal female identity debased since the Cartesian divide, recent feminist scholarship has focused on bringing the historically specific female body back into feminist studies. Elizabeth Grosz, for example, adapts Foucault’s use of the Mobius strip to describe the interconnectedness of the mind and body. My study likewise brings the female mind and body into conversation with the media that compose female identity. At the intersection of feminist and media studies, film theorist Laura Mulvey, in her foundational work “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), distinguishes between cinematic techniques and their resulting representations of male and female bodies: As the male protagonist “articulates the look and creates the action,” the female figure’s “visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (13, 11). While this “active male figure . . . demands a three-dimensional space,” the woman appears as “fragmented body,” creating “flatness, the quality of a cut-out of icon rather than verisimilitude” (12-13, 12, 12). This “woman as icon,” however, threatens the male viewer, who reacts by devaluing or fetishizing the female figure (12). Mulvey’s work remains foundational in her field and for my project, which explores these gendered representations in literature.

Liliane Louvel’s “Photography as Critical Idiom and Intermedial Criticism” (2008) suggests a method of reading literature via “the visual” that inspires my study:

What I propose . . . is to reverse the relationship between word and image. We would accordingly use a pictura to read poesis when the former appears in fiction, be it overtly or covertly, instead of the traditional recourse to literary or linguistic tools to read an image, a painting, a photograph evoking the ‘language’ of the



visual. Furthermore, when an image appears in a text, criticism must consider its specificity, on pain of reducing it to a linguistic construct. Thus the particular features of painting, of photography, of the iconic or the visual artifact, help to open the text and enable the viewer/reader to take into account the pictorial turn of a literary text when informed by the visual. The issue at stake is then how can pictorial or visual elements ‘expose’ a literary text? This constitutes an intermedial way of reading texts, a kind of intermedial criticism. How can pictura’s signifiers and modes of action help reading poesis? (44)

Privileging “pictorial or visual” composition, I have selected key “modes” of photographic and/or cinematic “action” for each chapter identified by corresponding title “signifiers”: freezing, animating, projecting, and synchronizing. These modes correspond with progressive photographic and cinematic technologies or forms: stop-motion photography, cinematography, silent film, and sound film. Through these visual modes, close reading becomes “intermedial” reading, thereby “opening” readers to new ways of seeing the modernist period and “exposing” texts to new visions of female agency.

The chapters focus on formally experimental fiction from the primary era of cinematic development, the 1920s and ’30s, conducting a progressively “intermedial” reading of this profound period, rather than following a trajectory through its literary history. Each chapter appears in three sections. The first section contextualizes the chapter’s visual/technological mode, establishing the historical situation and the critical perspective. The second and third sections read works from different authors, genres, and/or media in light of this context. In Chapter 1: Freezing the Female Frame, I employ Eadweard Muybridge’s late-nineteenth-century stop-motion photography to inform literary depictions of “still motion” in novels by William

Faulkner and Djuna Barnes. In Chapter 2: Animating the Female Form, I examine visual art by Zelda Fitzgerald and modernist literature by Willa Cather through the lens of cinematography in narrative film. In Chapter 3: Projecting Female Consciousness, I employ the contemporary film theory of Dorothy Richardson, particularly her considerations of the transition from silent to sound film, to investigate literary depictions of the female mind in novels by Nella Larsen and Jean Rhys. In Chapter 4: Synchronizing the Female Voice, I consider the interdisciplinary work of Zora Neale Hurston, including her multimedia ethnographic recordings and her influential novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), in light of sound film studies. My aim in crossing literary time and space along the broad trajectory of visual media technology is to compose a study that is both historical and thematic, both located and dislocated, both limited and suggestive.

In Chapter 1: Freezing the Female Frame, I consider how the modernist narratives of Faulkner and Barnes revise the techniques of Muybridge's late-nineteenth-century stop-motion photography to depict otherwise unsanctioned desire and behavior between women.<sup>2</sup> The chapter introduces Muybridge's photograph series, in which sequential images compose "still motion." These studies seem to fulfill the contradictory late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century desires to advance and arrest the technological "annihilation of time and space" (Solnit 3). While the individual photographs arrest movement, their cinematic animation resumes it, allowing the artist to—albeit temporarily—manipulate time. In *Animal Locomotion* (1887),

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term "stop-motion photography" rather than the similar—and somewhat simpler—"chronophotography" for two reasons: First, Muybridge's French contemporary, Étienne-Jules Marey, coined the term "chronophotography," so it is often associated specifically with Marey. Second, the phrase "stop-motion" aligns with "still motion," reinforcing the connection that I make between the two.

Muybridge's composition and staging of seemingly clinical photographs collapses and erotizes his human subjects, particularly women. These series seem to "call for a narrative" that visual media cannot tell (Williams 43).

I read scenes from progressive Faulkner novels and Barnes's *Nightwood* (1937) in concert with Muybridge's photographs in both composition and content. My study of Faulkner culminates in an arrested encounter between women that explores a scene Muybridge could only stage. *As I Lay Dying* (1930) introduces the tableau, or arrested image, of Jewel Bundren on a horse, inciting a progressive intersection with Muybridge's photograph series. In *Light in August* (1932), this image becomes a paradoxical study of still motion in an uncanny literary representation of Muybridge's horse in motion and running man, as Joe Christmas flees the scene of his adopted father's murder. The running man becomes the running woman halted by a violent female encounter as Rosa Coldfield literally confronts her lineage in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). My examination of this extended encounter between women suggests the potential of modernist narratives to embody female identity through the compositional methods of stop-motion photography. Barnes's *Nightwood* then expands upon Faulkner's introduction to the arrested female encounter by extending repeated scenes of still motion between the women comprising the novel's central love triangle. These cinematic scenes halt and sever the women's bodies, simultaneously arresting and allowing their otherwise prohibited violence and eroticism. Barnes's novel ultimately informs Muybridge's photograph series of female encounters by using the compositional methods of stop-motion photography to tell the narratives that the photograph series can only suggest.

In Chapter 2: Animating the Female Form, I consider how Fitzgerald and Cather explored intersecting cultural and technological developments, including advancements in

cinematography, through depictions of women in visual art and modernist narratives. The chapter establishes the critical and historical context through the figures of the film star, the paper doll, and the dressmaker. Mulvey's psychoanalytic, feminist film theory explains how cinematography aligns the viewer's perspective with the male gaze, collapsing, fragmenting, and fetishizing the female film star. Ann Hollander's clothing studies then show how the appearance of clothing as costume reinforces these cinematographic effects. Popular paper-doll versions of film stars likewise dramatized the objectification of women's bodies, but also encouraged girls' imaginative play, which the Progressive play movement ironically sought to confine to women's domestic work. At the same time, technological innovations in the garment industry threatened independent dressmakers, who inspired creative careers for girls. Young women were, however, recruited as Hollywood costumers and writers in the same middle-class women's periodicals that promoted women's labor as girls' play and printed movie-star paper dolls.

I then consider how Fitzgerald's visual art, particularly the paper dolls that she created for her daughter, Scottie, exaggerate the effects of cinematography and costuming on the female body, ultimately inspiring creative female production from within the domestic space. Fitzgerald's depictions of human figures, particularly women, in drawings and paintings often appear collapsed and distorted, suggesting the objectification of women in narrative cinema. Her paper dolls expand on these cinematic aspects by conflating gendered forms and costumes from fairy tales and historical literature. By resituating and reimagining these characters, Fitzgerald calls attention to the performance of gendered identity and encourages her daughter's creative storytelling and artistic production.

Finally, I examine Cather's progressive experimentation with gendered performance and perspective, particularly in her early modernist novel, *My Ántonia* (1918). Cather's personal and

professional experiences assuming male roles, as a young actor and a successful editor, prefigured her literary exploration of embodied, gendered identity. In *My Ántonia*, Cather revises the nineteenth-century framed narrative, which like “realist” narrative cinema aligns the reader’s viewpoint with the male narrator, calling attention to the limitations of the singular male perspective, or voice. She likewise revives the figure of the nineteenth-century independent dressmaker in the character of upwardly mobile Lena Lingard, belying contemporary Progressive play movement messaging and encouraging girls’ and women’s independent, creative work.

In Chapter 3: Projecting Female Consciousness, I read modernist narratives spanning the transition from silent to sound film in light of Richardson’s contemporary film theory. The chapter introduces the important role that women played as consumers and critics of film through both popular and scholarly periodical publications. In her columns for *Close Up* (1927-33), an intellectual, international “little magazine,” Richardson considers the transition from silent to sound film from the perspective of the typical female filmgoer. She argues that the silent-film theater, enhanced by music, provides women, particularly mothers, with “a sanctuary” and “an escape” (“Continuous Performance” 160). The silent film “by reason of its power to evoke, suggest, reflect, express, from within its moving parts and in their totality of movement, something of the changeless being at the heart of all becoming” is, like memory, “essentially feminine” (“Continuous Performance: The Film” 206). This “intimate” space may ultimately allow women to reach a state of “creative consciousness” (“Continuous Performance” 161). Sound film, however, features synchronized speech, which Richardson associates with patriarchy, calling the talkie “the film gone male” (“Continuous Performance: The Film” 205). Despite the post-modern problematics of identifying either a medium or a gender in essentialist

terms, Richardson's film criticism locates a provocative space for potential female agency in silence.

I interrogate this potential in Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) and Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). *Quicksand* engages cinematic composition and experience to represent interracial, female protagonist Helga Crane's subjective consciousness. Although Helga's objectification recalls the fetishizing effects of cinematography on the female form, her cinematic mind suggests the feminine space of Richardson's silent-film theater. This cinematic consciousness is, ultimately, her only respite from her reproductive body. Although Helga fails to embody the agency that her cinematic mind projects, Larsen succeeds in writing a modernist narrative that engages silent-film composition and experience to represent otherwise unspeakable female consciousness. Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* dramatizes the embodied consequences of the cinematic mind. Protagonist Sasha Jansen's fractured "film-mind" reflects the fragmented and fetishized bodies of models and mannequins at the Paris fashion house where she works (176). The cinema appears to be an escape from the haunting cityscape, but the sound film provides little comfort, and Sasha's cinematic consciousness distorts reality, resulting in physical violence. Despite these corporeal consequences, Sasha's modernist narrative dramatizes the potential of silent-film composition and experience to express female interiority.

In Chapter 4: Synchronizing the Female Voice, I explore Hurston's work as an anthropologist and an author in the context of the transition to sound film. The chapter establishes the historical and critical alignment of sound film with the objectification of the "black voice," which seemed to promise success for African Americans in film. Hollywood studios, however, made few substantive changes, and depictions of African Americans shifted from static stereotypes to states of interiority, conditions that recall representations of women in

silent and sound film. Despite these circumstances, contemporary filmmakers like Dorothy Arzner explored the potential of sound film technology to depict dynamic, particularly female, identity, suggesting a compositional alignment with modernist narratives.

I consider the potential of “synchronized” image and voice to embody women in Hurston’s ethnographic and literary work. As one of the first female, African American filmmakers, Hurston pioneered audio and visual recording techniques, documenting rural black culture for various influential and academic audiences. Unfortunately, technical limitations often impeded her ability to represent embodied identity. In her modernist narrative *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, however, Hurston intersperses visual epistemology, free indirect discourse, and dialogue in dialect, in scenes from the front porch to the courtroom, to depict her female, African American protagonist, Janie Crawford. In order to communicate her story and be understood, Janie must synchronize her visual mind and embodied voice. That is, she must make her listener see. As Janie explains, “’tain’t no use in me telling you somethin’ unless Ah give you de understandin’ to go ’long wid it” (7). Hurston privileges an intimate, female, African American audience, telling and showing a modernist narrative that fulfills the promise of sound film.

Across these chapters, I discover how modernist narratives find new ways of making women visible and audible. These explorations suggest connections beyond the visual media modes that frame each chapter. As the study progresses, we see how female artists and authors compose their own dynamic gendered identities as they communicate their desires and document their cultures, ultimately inspiring new expressive relationships between women across time and space.

## CHAPTER 1: FREEZING THE FEMALE FRAME

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
 Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
 But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
 Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
 Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
 There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

T. S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton* II.16-21

In these lines, T. S. Eliot evokes the paradoxical process and production of stop-motion photography. Severed by caesura and framed by end-stops, these fragmented lines form their own repetitive sequence, like the sequence of images in a photograph series. Each phrase requires the next in order to make meaning, as each image requires the next to make motion. Like the space between each frame, the space following each caesura embodies the necessary time lapse, giving form to the limitations of the static medium, and indeed the corporeal capacity for vision. The process of reading these lines then mimics the process of viewing a photograph series, the process of reconstructing the artistic remnants of an always already lost embodiment. In Walter Benjamin's terms, reproducing a static image will attempt and necessarily fail to reproduce the "aura" of the original, as reviving moving images will attempt and necessarily fail to revive the motion. Or in linguistic terms, the word can never be the thing, and the reanimation of a dancer in images can never recreate the dance. It seems no mere coincidence that Eadweard Muybridge's iconic stop-motion photographs of the female form show a woman dancing. "Neither flesh nor fleshless," Muybridge's dancer is suspended in time and space, over and over again. Eliot seems to locate "the dance"—the original form, ritual, or aura—at the "still moment" of observation. But what of the dancer? And the text? While Eliot may fail to revive "the dance," he does succeed in composing a poem. At this cultural and historical "turning point," attempts to



recover the past may seem to provide only distorted reflections, but they also create new forms, providing time and space for contemporary revelation. We may consider not only what is lost in aesthetic translation, but also what may be recovered, or even discovered, in the process of reconstruction—or recomposition—across media. This chapter will examine these inquiries through the lens of Muybridge’s stop-motion photography and fictional modernist depictions of women in still motion.

### ***1.1 Eadweard Muybridge: Staging a Modernist Narrative***

The “freeze frame shot” that this chapter title suggests is, perhaps quite aptly, an anachronism—a term used to describe not the photograph itself, but the effect of still photography in film. This use of the latter technology to create the earlier effect begins to suggest the complex and interrelated histories of these media and their designers. It is difficult to chart a broad technological progression, as features of photography, cinematography, and synchronization were, in fact, developed rather simultaneously across the Atlantic and the turn of the twentieth century. As a visionary transatlantic figure, an academic, and a celebrity of sorts, Eadweard Muybridge spans these temporal, technological, and geographic fields. Known for his still-motion photography studies, he created his own projection device, the zoopraxiscope, and envisioned motion pictures synchronized with sound decades before “talkies” would actually reach audiences. But he primarily published books of his photograph series. These series were captured by multiple cameras, shooting successive images around or alongside the subject. In the period of unprecedented literal and metaphorical movement spanning the turn of the twentieth century, Muybridge’s photographic technology paradoxically advanced human progress by arresting time and space. Rebecca Solnit explains the significance of this technology: Muybridge

“had captured aspects of motion . . . , and he had found a way to set them back in motion. It was as though he had grasped time itself, made it stand still, and then made it run again, over and over. Time was at his command as it had never been at anyone’s before” (3). Commissioned by Leland Stanford in 1878, Muybridge’s first of these photograph series is still his most famous: “The Horse in Motion.”<sup>3</sup>

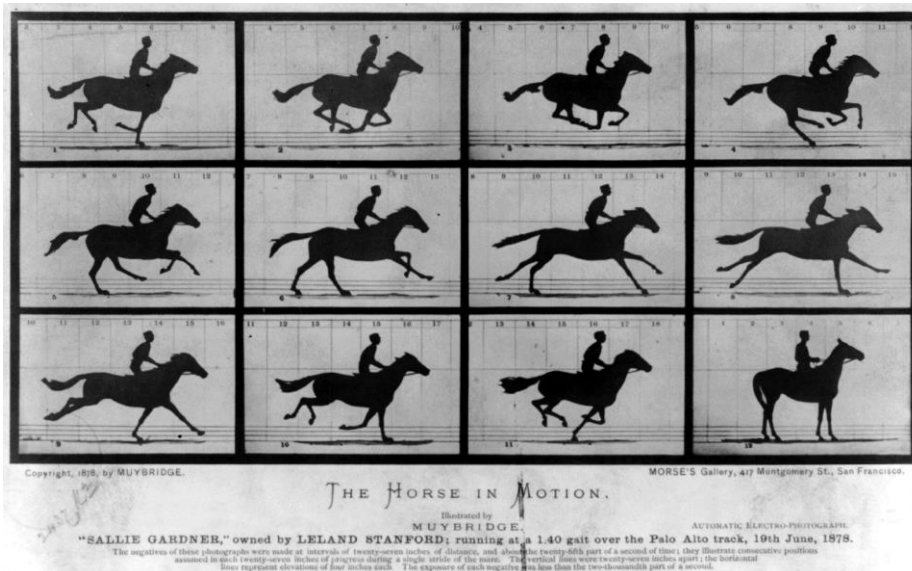


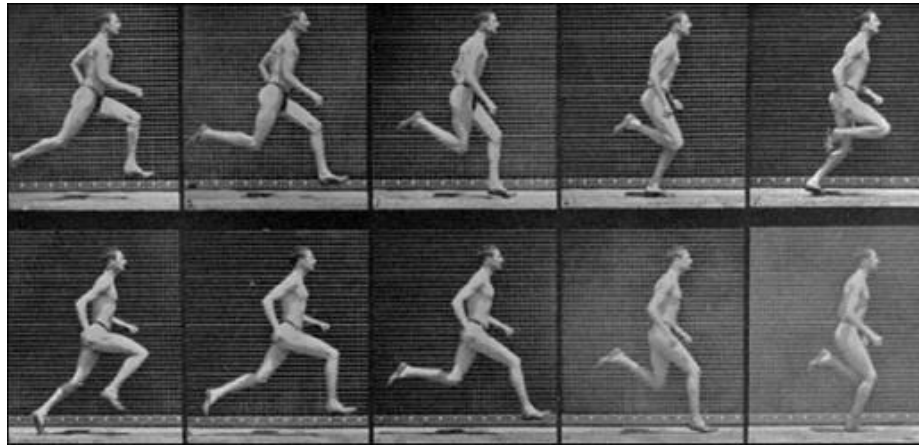
Figure 1 “The horse in motion”

Inciting international intrigue, this series not only addressed the question of whether or not a running horse ever has all four legs in the air, but also inspired Muybridge’s continued work in stop-motion photograph studies of human subjects. These succeeding series likewise continued to explore the intersection of science and art. As the caption here notes specific scientific details, including time, distance, and exposure intervals, the graphic presentation of the images as an

<sup>3</sup> The digital images of Muybridge’s work included in this chapter are in the public domain and are available as cited through the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog or the USC Digital Library.

“illustration” suggests their artistic composition. Such staging, presentation, and classification will become increasingly significant in analyzing these later photograph series.

Muybridge’s subsequent studies at the University of Philadelphia resulted in the publication of his groundbreaking *Animal Locomotion* in 1887. These progressive images allowed artists and scientists alike to reconsider the fundamental condition of man and/as animal. Bridging this gap is the foundational series from this work, “Nude man running at full speed”:



*Figure 2 “Nude man running at full speed”*

The graphic presentation of these images bears a striking resemblance to “The Horse in Motion,” but the specific setting is important. While the horse and rider are photographed at the racetrack, the studies of *Animal Locomotion* are set in relatively clinical locations, removed from and yet reflecting their “natural” time and place. This technological alienation and simultaneous reclamation of the body as image is, according to Solnit, “the paradox of Muybridge’s work”:

He was using his state-of-the-art equipment to feed that ravenous appetite for place, for time, for bodies. . . . His inventive technology was depicting the place and the bodies that seemed ever more alienated by technological change, as though what been lost as direct experience could be . . . recovered as imagery.

The speed of Muybridge's invention allowed real motions to be recovered at their own pace, though watching them meant stepping out of one's own time. (23)

There is, however, necessarily something, or *sometime*, missing in the "recovered" production. That is, the time between the "real motions" of the body and the "imagery" of the photographs manifests as both the literal space between the frames and the metaphorical presence of the "real motions" that have been "lost" in aesthetic translation. In linguistic terms, we might relate this distance to Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance*, the space between the signifier and the signified. Therefore, the still-motion photography process simultaneously "deconstructs" the "real motion" and *reconstructs* "still motion" via the production of sequential static images. The literary process likewise produces "imagery" and meaning through sequential signifiers in the form of the sentence and the narrative. As the presence of the photographs necessarily indicates the absence of the "real motions," the "body" of the text necessarily stands in for the "real" body. It would take a generation, however, for the literary community to realize the potential of the nonlinear narrative to reimagine the time and space between these images of bodies in still motion.

Despite, and to some extent because of, their explicitly unnatural settings, the bodies in Muybridge's studies are not only naturally, but also artificially gendered, calling Muybridge's clinical and artistic purposes into question. Although his work has generally been received as scientific, Marta Braun notes that he "conceived of and promoted himself as an artist rather than a scientist," having "had no training in any scientific field and no knowledge of medicine, anatomy, or physiology" ("Muybridge's" 4). In fact, Muybridge primarily appealed to the transatlantic "artistic community" as a photographer and "entertainer," garnering skepticism from the scientific community. A University of Pennsylvania Commission was even "appointed

to supervise” his *Animal Locomotion* work in order to “insure its thoroughly scientific character” (qtd. in Braun, “Muybridge’s” 4). Braun suggests that this relatively extreme step may have indicated “concern about using nude human beings as subjects for either scientific or artistic investigations,” as well as “reservations about Muybridge’s character,” given “his unsalubrious personal history,” which included the infamous murder of his wife’s lover (“Muybridge’s” 4). As we will see, Muybridge’s studies, particularly of women, go beyond the accepted boundaries of aestheticism into the realm of spectacle, and perhaps even the “imaginative world of private fantasy,” despite the University’s oversight (Braun, “Muybridge’s” 18).

Although Muybridge staged many of the same actions and scenes with men and women—he photographed, for example, a nude woman running—his iconic female series depicts a woman dancing:



*Figure 3 “Semi-nude woman dancing (fancy)”*

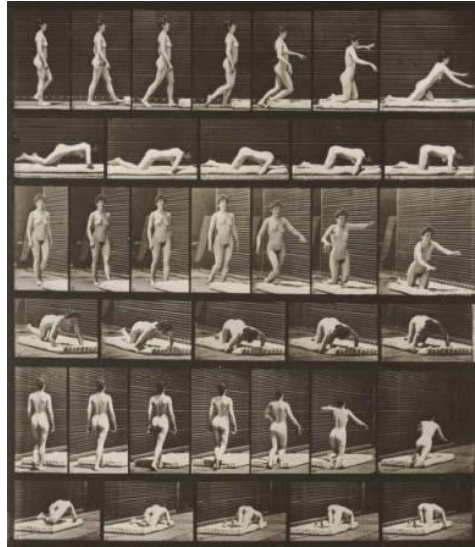
Entitled “Semi-nude woman dancing (fancy),” this series captures not only the female body, but also her “fancy” garment in “motion.” Therefore, her clothing adds to both the scientific and the aesthetic purposes of stop-motion photography, bridging the gap between technology and art. Clothing, or the lack thereof, however, often seems to stray from the scientific and aesthetic into

the sensational. A lesser-known series entitled “Nude woman turning around in surprise and running away” depicts a nude woman covering her eyes and her groin:



*Figure 4 “Nude woman turning around in surprise and running away”*

Beyond merely clinical, or even strange, this series suggests circumstances of sexual shame. The images, however, do not encompass the inspiring actions. The implied unsanctioned behavior occurs prior to and outside of the frame. While Muybridge’s murder of his wife’s lover perhaps suggests a personal desire to shame women, the series in and of itself intersects clinical study and erotic spectacle. Studies of a nude woman falling on a mattress and a nude woman crawling likewise trouble Muybridge’s scientific *and* artistic claims by attempting to normalize the degradation of women:



*Figure 5 “Nude woman stumbling and falling on the ground”*

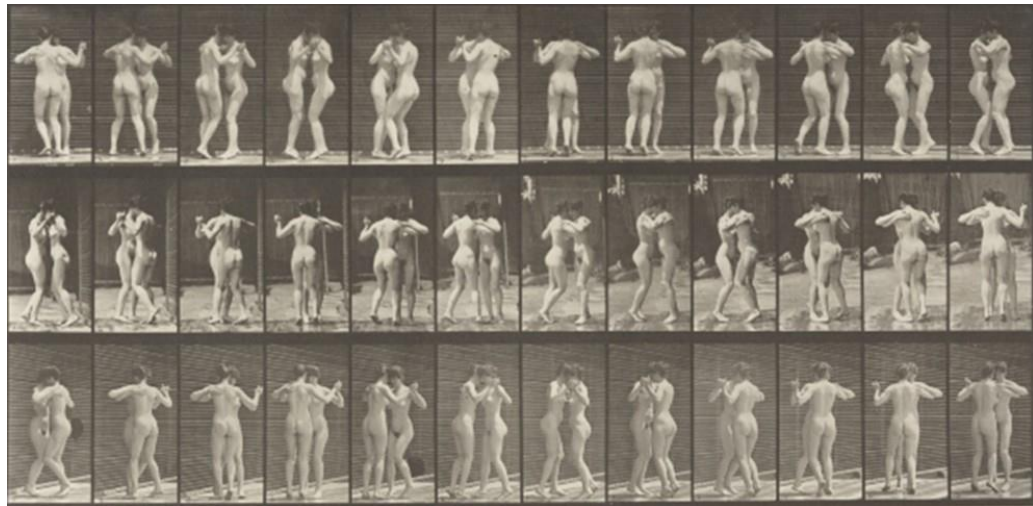


*Figure 6 “Nude woman crawling”*

It is plausible that scientific studies of motion would include falling and crawling, and that a mattress would break a model’s fall, but it does not stand to reason that only women would be documented performing these actions. While children were also—relatively appropriately—shown crawling, men were not photographed in such demeaning situations or positions. If the previous series suggested a woman fleeing sexual shame, then these series seem to enact corporeal punishment for her unknown transgression. Relegated to her hands and knees, she recalls Muybridge’s animal studies. Rather than metaphorically enlightening the female form,

these images literally debase it, as they frame provocative and disturbing scenes from narratives that they cannot fully render.

While the series' clinical settings and scientific titles suggest academic work, their often strange circumstances and costuming, or lack thereof, evoke a sense of erotic violence, particularly between women, whose prescribed actions are less explicitly violent. While it is easy enough to see the violence in series subjects like "Two nude men sparring without gloves," or the eroticism in series subjects like "Nude woman pouring a bucket of water over another nude woman," the medium itself enhances such erotic or violent subjects. The act of freezing the motion creates a new image in which seemingly distorted, strained, and stilted bodies come into forced contact. A waltz, for example, becomes a wrestling match in still motion:



*Figure 7 "Two nude women dancing a waltz"*

Despite its absurdity, the series subject is relatively clear in its totality, particularly when preceded by its scientific title: "Two nude women dancing a waltz." A single frame, however, distorts the series and misleads the viewer, or rather, reveals the inherent violence in the encounter and the seemingly documentary medium. In a still moment, the transfer of weight required by the dance could easily indicate a struggle. Furthermore, any necessarily incomplete



attempt to recreate the movement by reanimating the images only recalls the strange circumstances of their staging, as the lapses in time create an interaction more spasmodic than graceful. While the subjects' nudity certainly enhances the dance's eroticism, even seemingly innocuous series have the potential for such violent voyeurism, due in part to their careful costuming and staging. For example, despite its socially acceptable, even banal, situation, the series entitled "Two women walking, meeting and partly turning" likewise evokes a sense of embodied tension between the women. In still motion, the otherwise appropriate interaction seems suspenseful and almost lascivious, perhaps even more so than its companion series, "Two nude women shaking hands and kissing each other":



*Figure 8 "Two women walking, meeting and partly turning"*



*Figure 9 "Two nude women shaking hands and kissing each other"*

In the first series, the costuming of the women suggests the public situation of their meeting and, therefore, the suitability of their greeting. However, the individual frames extend the moment of their “partly turning” as they walk away, insinuating an inappropriately intimate attachment, or even animosity, between the women. In the second series, the women’s nudity seems to indicate the strange and, therefore, scientific situation of their interaction. The moment of their encounter, however, is extended and shown from increasingly evocative angles. While the still frames on the first row clearly indicate an approach and initial handshake, the images on the second and third rows collapse the space between the women, literally reiterating the impression of an intimate embrace. These series confirm that the dramatic situating and mechanical arresting of female bodies, rather than the bodies themselves, produce potentially threatening scenes.

That Muybridge’s titles specifically indicate nudity but not clothing—that is, “nude women” versus “two women”—suggests that being clothed, or costumed, is the “natural” state for women, while being nude is “unnatural,” or requiring explanation. In order to remain within the realm of social acceptability, as opposed to threatening spectacle, the female subjects must be labeled and situated as such. Linda Williams, who has traced the origins of narrative cinema back to Muybridge’s motion studies of interactions between women, argues that such staging, particularly the use of props including mattresses, cigarettes, and baths, suggests an “incipient narrative”: “Again and again the woman’s body appears to be embedded in a *mise-en-scene* that places her in a more specific imaginary place and time” (43, 40). While “[m]en’s naked bodies appear natural in action”—boxing, for example—“women’s must be explained and situated,” especially when they come into physical contact (43). Muybridge has, therefore, in attempting to locate women’s bodies, ironically created a site that “seems to *call* for a narrative,” an intimate, domestic narrative (Williams 43). In other words, he has literally set the scene for illicit or

unsanctioned behavior between women, using a medium that likewise creates time and space for such female agency in still motion. It seems then that this illicit or unsanctioned behavior between women not only has the potential to occur, but perhaps will *necessarily* occur “between the frames” of such interactions. While we might see this technology as a so-called “new medium” for distorting female bodies and situating female encounters, we may see stop-motion photography as providing, perhaps even *demanding*, time and space for female agency that would otherwise remain prohibited—agency that can be realized through narrative.

At the height of the modernist era, narratives—especially literary narratives—can break free of sequential order to explore this time and space between captured moments; to compose unsanctioned desire and behavior, such as sex and violence between women and between races; and to allow for the agency of imagination, rather than the automation of corporeal sight and the mechanics of visual technology and even linguistics. While Muybridge aims to minimize the temporal space between images in order to make action visible, the text can elongate these spaces to explore the actions that should not—or cannot—be made public. While “real motions” prescribe, and therefore limit, Muybridge’s “imagery,” no such “reality” dictates the literary text’s illustration (Solnit 23). Considering the relationship between these media, Braun aptly likens Muybridge’s necessarily deliberate composition of static images into readable sequences to a literary narrative or “plot,” specifically a realist narrative (*Picturing* 246): “Muybridge’s artistic language, the syntax of conventions he uses to portray his narratives, is realism. In the conventions of realism, the real is equated with the visible; the goal of a realist artist was to represent visible reality in such a way as to seemingly efface any artistic mediation between it and its representation” (*Picturing* 252-53). The modernist narrative, however, dramatizes the mediation of composition by exploring that which the photograph series can only suggest. If the

photographic “sequence invites us to cooperate in creating the illusion of motion” (Braun, *Picturing* 237), then the modernist narrative disrupts that illusion, challenging us to read between the frames, as it were. While even the sentence, like the photographic series, relies upon logical sequence, the narrative does not. Created in a specific time and space but unbound by an original temporal and spatial “reality,” the modernist narrative is both static and progressive, both located and imaginary, both historic and modern.

As icons of so-called “high modernism,” William Faulkner and Djuna Barnes compose literary narratives that manipulate time and space through the techniques of stop-motion photography to complicate and elucidate illicit desire and behavior, particularly in interactions between women. The temporal and spatial scope of their novels is both wide and deep. That is, they tell the stories of generations and of moments, of regions and of salons. Published in 1936, Faulkner’s *Absalom Absalom!* is set in the years surrounding the US Civil War (1861-65) and in 1909-10. Barnes’s *Nightwood* was published in 1937, but begins “Early in 1880,” immediately reaches back to the previous generation, and primarily takes place in the 1920s (3). These authors, therefore, have the benefit of hindsight in their engagement with the compositional processes of visual media, which makes their allusions to stop-motion photography all the more intriguing. Like the modernist narrative, stop-motion photography suggests technological progression in and of itself, as it harkens back to the tableau while foretelling cinematography. We can trace Faulkner’s explicit adaptation of the tableau in *As I Lay Dying* (1930) to his embodiment of stop-motion photography in *Light in August* (1932) to his explication of the female encounter in still motion in *Absalom Absalom!* (1936). Then, in Barnes’s *Nightwood*, published the following year, we find a literary study of the *mise-en-scène*, a novel situated in extended moments between women. If Muybridge’s stop-motion photograph series, particularly

those staging interactions between women, “call for a narrative,” then these quintessential modernist texts answer that call by reviving and revising technological processes from the early stages of cinema to explore the time and space between frames, to tell the narratives within mise-en-scènes of female interaction, and, ultimately, to allow for female agency that would otherwise remain lost.

### ***1.2 William Faulkner: From Running Men to Arrested Women***

William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* introduces the tableau, or arrested image, of Jewel Bundren on a horse, inciting a progressive intersection with Muybridge’s stop-motion photography. In *Light in August*, this image becomes a paradoxical study of still motion in an uncanny literary representation of Muybridge’s horse in motion and running man, as Joe Christmas flees the scene of his adopted father’s murder. The running man becomes the running woman halted by a violent female encounter as Rosa Coldfield literally confronts her lineage in *Absalom, Absalom!* By reading these scenes in concert with Muybridge’s photograph series, in both composition and content, I will establish a correspondence across media and begin to examine these passages of narrative still motion, ultimately arguing that Faulkner’s engagement with Muybridge’s prominent photograph series suggests a new space for unsanctioned behavior between women.

Critics have long been intrigued by Faulkner’s use of photographic and cinematic techniques and the ways in which these techniques dramatize his study of temporal and spatial motion, particularly the still—or arrested—moments within or between such motions. To explain this paradoxical and cinematic rendering of static movement, Richard Pearce distinguishes between “*pictures of motion*,” which “portray movement for its own sake,” and “*pictures in*

*motion*,” in which “the subject is static and a sense of movement is imparted by the medium” (486). These “*pictures in motion*,” Pearce argues, “are not images of arrest but of resisting arrest” and “may be compared to the movement *within* and *between* film shots” (486, 488). Therefore, the photograph series or “film sequence” provides an apt “model” for “understanding” Faulkner’s narrative image of still motion: “Movement is the basis of narrative in film and fiction. And succession is the basis of narrative movement” (495). Stuart Burrows likewise later asserts “that people and things in Faulkner’s work are held suspended not in a tableau,” as “artifacts” like Keats’s Grecian urn, “but *between* the stillness of a tableau and the ceaseless movement of film” (136). While Burrows argues that Faulkner “was interested in the camera’s ability to depict the ways in which in the past is lost,” Peter Lurie finds a sort of “literary historiography” in Faulkner’s photographic techniques (118, 230). Lurie asserts that the 1935 release of the Kodachrome marked a shift in Faulkner’s photographic “representational practice . . . from a highly colorful pattern of description in novels like *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, . . . to a method that resembled the formal and chromatic properties of an arguably more historical photographic mode” in 1936’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (230). If, however, this retroactive gesture toward nineteenth-century photographic techniques indicates Faulkner’s concern with temporality, then the successive allusions to Muybridge’s photograph series in *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* suggest a more obscure progression in Faulkner’s visual representations. I will trace these series of images through select still moments in these defining texts, not only highlighting an engagement between Faulkner’s and Muybridge’s compositional techniques and subjects, but also suggesting the progressive potential of the modernist narrative to locate and explicate these moments of still motion, finally and particularly in the female encounter.

The arrested images of Jewel Bundren and his horse in *As I Lay Dying* act as still shots or freeze frames of their interactive motion, alluding to Muybridge's images and anticipating the extended series of still motion in *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Although the novel spans the Bundren family's journey to bury their matriarch, the narrative progresses in halted scenes, perhaps epitomized by this striking encounter. When Jewel calls his horse, they approach each other in suspended movements and moments: "He moves. Moving that quick his coat, bunching, tongues swirling like so many flames. With tossing mane and tail and rolling eye the horse makes another short curvetting rush and stops again, feet bunched, watching Jewel. Jewel walks steadily toward him, his hands at his sides. Save for Jewel's legs they are like two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun" (12). Like Muybridge's horse and rider in motion, Jewel and his horse move in successive surges, framed like still images. The rupture of the horse's rearing mimics the weightless suspense of a single photograph: "For an instant before the jerk comes onto his arms he sees his whole body earth-free, horizontal, whipping snake-umber, until he finds the horse's nostrils and touches earth again. Then they are rigid, motionless, terrific . . ." (12). Even the sequence of adjectives culminating this description—"rigid, motionless, terrific"—dramatizes the stop-motion technique. These adjectives are repeated as the conflated bodies become one in the final scenes of their encounter:

They stand in rigid terrific hiatus, the horse trembling and groaning. Then Jewel is on the horse's back. He flows upward in a stooping swirl like the lash of a whip, his body in midair shaped to the horse. For another moment the horse stands spraddled, with lowered head, before it bursts into motion. They descend the hill in a series of spine-jolting jumps, Jewel high, leech-like on the withers, to the fence where the horse bunches to a scuttering halt again. (13)

Like the “instant” before, the arrested “moment” of this scene suggests the stasis of a single image, while the repetitive diction of “another,” “series,” and “again” creates the contradictory sensation of sequential motion akin to Muybridge’s series. This albeit brief sequence foretells the similarly photographic progressions in *Light in August*, in which Joe Christmas appears as Muybridge’s rider *and* (then) running man.

Fleeing the scene of his adopted father’s murder, Joe reprises the role of Muybridge’s rider, but at the risk of revealing his “mulatto” identity and of losing his life. In this proto-cinematic description, the reader feels the tension of their inertia, simulating the operation of a film reel: “Though the horse was still going through the motion of galloping, it was not moving much faster than a man could walk. The stick too rose and fell with the same spent and terrific slowness, the youth on the horse’s back leaning forward as if he did not know that the horse had flagged, or as though to lift forward and onward the failing beast” (210). Like Muybridge’s horse in motion, Joe’s horse is “still” in “the motion of galloping,” moving only as quickly as his (re)animation. The following reference to film reinforces this reading, as Joe and the horse move paradoxically “toward” a place to “wait”: “It—the horse and the rider—had a strange, dreamy effect, like a moving picture in slow motion as it galloped steady and flagging up the street and toward the old corner where he used to wait, less urgent perhaps but not less eager, and more young” (210). Like Jewel, Joe becomes one with the horse in the suspended moments of their successive motion, as the repetition of “terrific” likewise recalls the scene from *As I Lay Dying*, suggesting a progression—rather than a shift—between the texts.

The occasion of the horse’s physical collapse similarly evokes the framed moments between motions in *As I Lay Dying*, dramatizing the threat of Joe’s situation. The “arrested” image of Joe and his horse repeats the diction—“terrific,” “groan”—and even the syntax from



Jewel's scene: "Yet still the rider leaned forward in the arrested saddle, in the attitude of terrific speed, beating the horse across the rump with the stick. Save for the rise and fall of the stick and the groaning respirations of the animal, they might have been an equestrian statue strayed from its pedestal and come to rest in an attitude of ultimate exhaustion . . ." (210). Clearly mimicking the depiction from *As I Lay Dying*—"Save for Jewel's legs they are like two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun"—this description reinforces the successive photographic narrative within and between the works. The scene continues in another arrested moment recalling the "tableau": "Again they were motionless: the spent beast and the youth, facing one another, their heads quite near, as if carved in an attitude of listening or of prayer or of consultation" (211). When Joe realizes that he cannot revive the horse, he flees again, "already in full stride," running "as completely out of the life of the horse as if it had never existed" (211). As the movement itself can be reanimated but never recreated in a photograph series, so Joe's horse seems to have "never existed" when it leaves the field of narrative vision.

When he abandons his horse, Joe becomes Muybridge's running man, but embodied by the narrative situation with a paralyzing fear for his life that culminates in a physical beating. Despite the presumption that Joe is moving toward safety in "real" time, he appears to the reader in seeming still shots of dramatically arrested narrative time: "He had almost a mile yet to go, so he ran not fast but carefully, steadily, his face lowered a little as if he contemplated the spurned road beneath his feet, his elbows at his sides like a trained runner" (211). His "steady" progress here suggests the regular rate of the camera gradating the movement. Like the photographs of the running man, he seems in perpetual motion: "Joe was already moving toward the door which he knew, very nearly running again, if he had ever actually stopped" (213-14). The occasion of his arrival marks the separation of his conscious self and his moving body, suggesting the

photographic “alienation” of identity and image: “He was running now; that is, as a man might run far ahead of himself and his knowing in the act of stopping stock still” (214). In the “instant while thought went faster than seeing,” Joe remains arrested in the running man’s paradoxical state, a state interrupted only by contact with another body, the white owner of the diner and brothel where Joe’s girlfriend, Bobbie, works: “Though Joe had not moved since he entered, he was still running. When Max touched his shoulder he turned as if he had been halted in midstride” (214). That Joe “actually moved now” suggests the significance of not only intervening, but also threatening bodies in the progress of “still” motion, for Max’s subsequent attack will temporarily stall, but ultimately spur, Joe’s continued flight (214). Shawn Michelle Smith argues that the threatening implications of depicting violence between black and white men, such as the potential disruption of “racial hierarchies,” likely affected Muybridge’s decision to photograph Ben Bailey, a “mulatto” man, “striking a blow” in isolation and white men “boxing,” but never a black man and a white man striking each other.<sup>4</sup> She muses, “Perhaps Muybridge, or his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania, prohibited intimate physical contact across the color line. Or perhaps they *implicitly* understood that a scene of physical violence between a black man and a white man would prove too sensational for viewers” (85, emphasis added). While Faulkner certainly crosses this line of color and sensation in *Light in August*, he primarily does so in scenes of explicit violence enacted by and between men. In the space of the succeeding modernist domestic narrative, however, Faulkner is able to stage a provocatively *implicit* encounter between a “mulatto” woman and a white woman by adapting

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<sup>4</sup> While S. M. Smith refers to Bailey as “black,” Elspeth H. Brown cites Muybridge’s notebooks as racially classifying Bailey as a “mulatto,” an important distinction in connection to Faulkner (637n). For an extended examination of the racial and gendered implications of Muybridge’s studies, particularly of male models, see Brown.

the techniques of still-motion photography. Joe's pursuant beating, which is incited by Bobbie's revelation of his racial identity but occurs primarily outside of the text, foreshadows this photographic study of an otherwise private female interaction in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Our look at Faulkner's progressive engagement with stop-motion photography, and particularly Muybridge's photographic studies, culminates in Faulkner's staging of a violent and erotic encounter in still motion between Rosa Coldfield and seeming house slave Clytemnestra, or Clytie. Narrated from Rosa's perspective, this particular encounter occurs as Rosa realizes that Clytie is, in fact, the daughter of an unnamed slave and the family's tragic patriarch, Thomas Sutpen. The violent eroticism of this scene embodies the incest, miscegeny, and even homoeroticism that plague the Sutpen family in the seemingly innocuous form of two women passing. Following the interfamilial murder of Sutpen's "mulatto" son, Charles, Rosa runs to her niece Judith, Charles's fiancé and secret half-sister. Her stunted epistemology in this paralyzing moment recalls the fragmented frames of stop-motion photography, mimicked by the body in still motion. The impetus of her apprehension, however, requires the presence of a threatening body, as Clytie arrests the moment of Rosa's hurried entrance to the family plantation, Sutpen's Hundred: "*—the face stopping me dead (not my body: it still advanced, ran on: but I, myself, that deep existence which we lead, to which the movement of limbs is but a clumsy and belated accompaniment like so many unnecessary instruments played crudely and amateurishly out of time to the tune itself) . . .*" (109). The parenthetical division of the italicized text dramatizes the separation of the conscious self from the moving body in a physical enactment of arrested time that replicates the time and space between still shots in a photograph series. That Rosa stops as her body continues to run once again suggests the paradoxical position of Muybridge's running man—or woman. This state continues in the successive still shot, as Rosa approaches but does

not yet collide with Clytie: “—and I (*my body*) not stopping yet (yes, it needed the hand, the touch, for that); —I, self-mesmered fool who still believed that what must be would be, could not but be, else I must deny sanity as well as breath, running, hurling myself into that inscrutable coffee-colored face . . .” (110). Once again, the body becomes a parenthetical prosthesis of the “I,” the self-reflective identity that recognizes the body’s “need” for “touch.” As the repetition of “instant” emphasizes the manipulation of narrative time through photographic technique, the violent diction of “hurling” foreshadows their impending impact.

The arrested moment of their collision suggests and surpasses the staging of several of Muybridge’s photograph series of female encounters, and reflects the violence of the medium in the visceral motion that Faulkner describes between Rosa and Clytie:

*Then she touched me, and then I did stop dead. Possibly even then my body did not stop, since I seemed to be aware of it thrusting blindly still against the solid yet imponderable weight (she not owner: instrument; I still say that) of that will to bar me from the stairs; possibly the sound of the other voice, the single word spoken from the stair-head above us, had already broken and parted us before it (my body) had even paused. (111)*

The heavy diction here emphasizes the burden of the physical body, as the word “still” suggests the simultaneously continuing and arrested motion of the photograph series. Although each individual frame appears in arrest, the motion between the frames culminates in the women’s encounter. The narrator’s singular perspective likewise obscures the interaction, as the relatively fixed perspective of the cameras allows one body to literally block the other from sight. However, while Rosa’s denying Clytie’s “will” seems to reduce them both to “instruments” in the composition of their interaction, this extended depiction of an apparently banal, domestic

encounter in fact creates a narrative space for otherwise unspoken and unsanctioned female behavior. The blatant physicality of their pursuant encounter similarly mimics the suspended aggression of Muybridge's notably black-and-white photographs, but also embodies and explicates a scene that Muybridge could not have staged: In the "*shocking impact*" of Clytie's "*monstrous and immobile*" body—her "*black arresting and untimorous hand*" against Rosa's "*white woman's flesh*"—Rosa realizes that "*there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering*" (111-12). In this description, Rosa aptly identifies the potential, or perhaps necessity, of the female encounter in still motion to reveal the latent desires and behaviors that threaten social "ordering."

That this extended scene is, in fact, an excerpt from Rosa's largely excluded testimony of the novel's central narrative confirms the enduring impact of transgressive touch between women. In 1909, forty-four years after the interaction, Rosa is telling her version of the story to Harvard-bound, aspiring writer Quentin Compson, hoping that he will document it one day. Quentin struggles to concentrate during Rosa's initial monologue, which reveals the narrative that the novel reconstructs in a nonlinear series of extended scenes from various perspectives. The encounter with Clytie is the passage from Rosa's perspective. Their impact is the impetus for Rosa's epistemology in 1865 and her memory in 1909. Printed in italics instead of quotation marks, the scene is entirely hers, unfiltered by another perspective. In fact, we discover that Quentin is not even listening to her, but the modernist novel provides the time and space for her narrative, which develops during a female encounter in still motion.

We have begun to see in these select, progressive scenes from Faulkner how the literary text can recall and revise the compositional techniques and subjects of visual media and how the

modernist narrative can not only stage, but also explore the scenes that stop-motion photography can only suggest. These brief stops along the trajectory of Faulkner's canon invite an extended examination of the modernist narrative's embodiment of unsanctioned desire and behavior through the compositional processes of stop-motion photography. That this series culminates in a female encounter in still motion reinforces the particular potential of such situated interactions between women to inspire, and perhaps even *demand*, narratives that challenge the reader's instinctive impressions of reality. In this sense, Faulkner has set the critical scene in *Absalom, Absalom!* for the defining novel of both modernist style and female desire that would be published the following year.

### ***1.3 Djuna Barnes: Composing the Female Encounter***

Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1937) expands upon Faulkner's introduction of the arrested female encounter, staging repeated scenes of still motion between the women comprising the novel's central love triangle: roaming American expatriate Robin Vote, American salon hostess and sometime fellow expatriate Nora Flood, and perpetual widow and transatlantic "squatter" Jenny Petherbridge. These photographic and proto-cinematic scenes halt, sever, and collapse the women's bodies, simultaneously arresting and allowing otherwise prohibited female agency. By explicating these scenes separately and consecutively, we can elucidate the narrative engagement with these specific visual media processes.

A quintessential modernist novel, *Nightwood* challenges its reader to remain located in narrative time and space, spanning the Atlantic, the Continent, and the dreamscape alike in the turn of a page or a phrase. T. S. Eliot, the poet of still motion, considered the definition of the "novel" in his 1937 introduction to the work:

Unless the term “novel” has become too debased to apply, and if it means a book in which living characters are created and shown in significant relationship, this book is a novel. . . . A prose that is altogether alive demands something of the reader that the ordinary novel-reader is not prepared to give. To say that *Nightwood* will appeal primarily to readers of poetry does not mean that it is not a novel, but that it is so good a novel that only sensibilities trained on poetry can wholly appreciate it. (xvii-xviii)

Eliot’s comment on genre is apt, as the high modernist novel recreates literary novelty by revising—literally re-envisioning—the so-called “realist” narrative. This novel “demands” not that its reader merely follow a plot, but that its reader resist the illusion of progress and surrender to stasis. Rather than colluding in the relatively passive reconstruction of “natural” motion, the reader must join the exploration of the *mise-en-scène* and the experience of the interaction between bodies. For it is in these extended moments of still motion that the medium becomes “altogether alive” and that its subjects become “living characters.” Recalling our introductory close-reading of Eliot’s *Burnt Norton*, which was published just two years before *Nightwood*, we can understand his introductory allusion to poetry. That is, this novel “demands” an active engagement in the process of reading, a conscious awareness of the compositional form.

While critics have noted *Nightwood*’s compositional intersections with the still motion of visual media technology, they have yet to explore the particular connection to Muybridge’s staging of a modernist narrative through the processes of stop-motion photography. Calling the novel “intermedia art,” Brian Glavey, for example, uses arrested diction from the novel’s early description of two faux family portraits, as he notes that “all of *Nightwood*’s characters develop more like Polaroids than people. These ekphrastic descriptions rely on a rhetoric of still

movement, according to which a figure is ‘caught’ in a ‘falling arc’ between ‘expect[ation]’ and ‘execution,’ that resonates throughout” (751, 754). Glavey’s description of the “rhetoric of still movement” is affirmative, and his comparison to photography is apt, but his allusion to Polaroids is both anachronistic and generic. Polaroid cameras debuted in 1948, and while a Polaroid picture develops slowly over time—fading into image and ultimately fading out again—stop-motion photography, as we have seen, halts a scene in a more violent and repetitive manner. As we examine the text, I will argue that the visceral eroticism that characterizes the extended scenes of arrested female encounters in *Nightwood* suggests such an extended process of creating multiple images, as the expansion of the time between these sequential images provides a narrative space for the women’s unsanctioned behavior.

Glavey recognizes, but seems to misplace, the potential of this narrative space in his continued consideration of the “family” portraits: “The description of these portraits is thus emblematic of the novel as a whole. Appearing in the work’s opening pages, they hold narrative time in stasis—that is, they freeze time into space. This ekphrastic interruption risks overriding the novel’s plot and threatens to arrest the story’s forward momentum from the outset” (754). Glavey’s productive explanation of so-called “ekphrastic interruption” elucidates the novel’s engagement with the compositional processes of visual media, particularly stop-motion photography. The “threat” of this engagement, however, lies not in the temporary cessation of the progressive narrative, but in the female desire and behavior that we discover in these “narrative spaces.” As the “dark bands” interrupting the photograph series stand in for lost motion (S. M. Smith 79), the “ekphrastic interruptions” make visible those actions which must otherwise remain unseen. Therefore, the particular medium of stop-motion photography continues to provide a productive means of considering depictions of the otherwise prohibited



narratives of female desire and agency.<sup>5</sup> As Faulkner uses stop-motion photography techniques not only to stage, but also to examine an otherwise unsanctioned interaction between two women, so Barnes expands not only upon this scenario, writing a series of such interactions between the novel's female characters, but also upon the engagement with stop-motion photography by further foretelling cinematography and its effects on the female body.

We first see Robin Vote through a series of comparisons to visual art, focalized through the perspective of faux-Baron Felix Volkbein, whom Robin will quickly marry and abandon after the birth of their son. This initial vision of Robin establishes the novel's engagement with progressive visual media. Felix first sees her suspended, as if in a painting that becomes a *mise-en-scène*:

Like a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau, she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room (in the apprehension of which the walls have made their escape), thrown in among the carnivorous flowers as their ration; the set, the property of an unseen *dompteur*, half lord, half promoter, over which one expects to hear the strains of an orchestra of wood-winds render a serenade which will popularize the wilderness. (38)

Part ekphrastic allusion and part imaginative, narrative setting, this depiction casts Robin as both woman and animal, both domestic and exotic, both natural and unnatural. The violent diction of

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<sup>5</sup> Victoria L. Smith similarly considers how “the discourse of melancholia in *Nightwood* reveals the ways in which Barnes deploys a culturally sanctioned mode for the purpose of exploring particularly marginalized narratives” (202). The novel's recuperation of loss through speech, as V. Smith describes it, often recalls the recovery of loss through still motion. Susan J. Hubert likewise considers the significance of language in the novel's representation of lesbian relationships and in the context of Eliot's introduction. Glavey uses the term “queer ekphrasis,” but in a theoretical sense, to describe the novel's “tense and trembling vibration between motion and stasis that aestheticizes moments of loss and withdrawal” (750).

“trapped,” “escape,” “thrown,” “carnivorous,” and “strains” dramatizes the visceral compositional process of setting such a scene. Only the nascent narrative of the love song can “popularize the wilderness”—that is, make readable the strange situation and its female subject. This process of translating the scene into a readable—or realist—narrative, however, ironically belies the reality of the central female character: “The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a ‘picture’ forever arranged is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person’s every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience . . .” (41). This impression of Robin seems to embody the “danger” of the compositional illusion of stop-motion photography. That is, the “arranged” photograph series that appears to represent the original “movement” in fact collapses the always already lost “experience” into stilted, still motion. In this case, the agency of “presentation” is said to lie with the character “herself,” rather than the composer, the “unseen *dompteur*,” or the “spectator,” but the modernist use of ambiguously focalized narration calls this agency into question. Rather than perpetuating the compositional illusion of the realist narrative, the modernist narrative embodies the danger of such an image in the character “herself”—as a heartbreaker. Such an embodiment allows readers not only to see, but also to empathize with the forbidden desire that would threaten our sense of narrative reality, challenging our own “contemplative minds” to resistance.

Although the reader is kept at a physical and emotional distance in Felix’s aesthetic depictions of Robin, the same cannot be said of Nora Flood’s photographic impressions of Robin, which embody her visceral, unsanctioned desires in the extended space between static images. Like the movement that a stop-motion photograph series attempts to capture, Robin’s love is always already lost to Nora, who knows that Robin will eventually leave the domestic

scene of their relationship, “the museum of their encounter” (61). This unspoken knowledge creates a sense of suspended grief that finds corporeal form in still motion: “sometimes, going about the house, in passing each other, they would fall into an agonized embrace, looking into each other’s face, their two heads in their four hands, so strained together that the space that divided them seemed to be thrusting them apart” (63). Reminiscent of the arrested photographic encounter, this depiction conflates the women in a simultaneously violent and erotic collapse of their bodies. Both “together” and “apart,” they are held, as the motion of “passing” becomes a static “embrace.” When Robin wanders the city at night, the emotional presence of her absence likewise becomes corporeal in Nora’s contemplative reflection. Compelled to follow her, Nora attempts to revive their connection in time-lapsed encounter:

Robin’s absence, as the night drew on, became a physical removal, insupportable and irreparable. As an amputated hand cannot be disowned because it is experiencing a futurity, of which the victim is its forebear, so Robin was an amputation that Nora could not renounce. As the wrist longs, so her heart longed, and dressing she would go out into the night that she might be “beside herself,” skirting the café in which she could catch a glimpse of Robin. (65)

The composed stop-motion photograph series, in which successive images literally appear side-by-side, dramatizes Nora’s emotional state of being “beside herself.” Once again, the conflation of their bodies allows simultaneously for their “irreparable” separation and their contiguous connection, as Nora’s own severed body stands in for Robin’s “absence.” In adapting the compositional processes of stop-motion photography, the modernist narrative gives form to Nora’s inevitable desire, embodying her elusive loss in the text.

Robin and Nora's tragic affair climaxes with Nora's realization of Robin's infidelity at the sight of Robin and Jenny Petherbridge in an intimate moment that reads like a stop-motion photograph series. Rather than composing the illusion of naturally progressive movement and epistemology, however, Barnes halts the scene in order to explore Nora's visceral emotions and Robin's unsanctioned behavior. Waiting for Robin to return from her nightly walk, Nora restlessly paces their house, eventually seeing Robin in an extended passage of still motion:

Waking, she began to walk again, and looking out into the garden in the faint light of dawn, she saw a double shadow falling from the statue, as if it were multiplying, and thinking perhaps this was Robin, she called and was not answered. Standing motionless, straining her eyes, she saw emerge from the darkness the light of Robin's eyes, the fear in them developing their luminosity until, by the intensity of their double regard, Robin's eyes and hers met. So they gazed at each other. As if that light had power to bring what was dreaded into the zone of their catastrophe, Nora saw the body of another woman swim up into the statue's obscurity, with head hung down, that the added eyes might not augment the illumination; her arms about Robin's neck, her body pressed to Robin's, her legs slackened in the hang of the embrace. (69-70)

Simultaneously "motionless" and "straining," Robin and Nora are once again literally held in an emotional state, but "another" body has replaced Nora's in the physical "embrace." The repetitive diction of "again," "multiplying," and "double" dramatizes the sense that the scene is "developing" through repeated still images. Photographic diction likewise enhances this impression, as the "light" of multiple "eyes" slowly develops the "illumination" out of "darkness." Although Nora and Robin "gazed at each other," Nora's perspective dictates the

scene's depiction: An embrace between two women becomes a frightening and almost violent "catastrophe" when the women are betraying the viewer. Dependent upon each other's weight, Robin and Jenny are severed by Nora's line of sight, reduced from wholeness to synecdoche. Nora's vision, therefore, becomes the camera eye that creates still images from motion, for only by halting time can she make sense of this scene; only by stopping the motion can she read it. Therefore, Jenny remains an "obscure" subject who cannot be named. She appears rather as "another" "double" of Robin. While stop-motion photography provides the compositional process for expressing this arrested female encounter, the specificity of character allows the modernist narrative to embody the female subjects and engage the reader in their acute experience.

Nora subsequently embodies the violence of the compositional process when she experiences her epistemology as a literal collapse and seeming death. Having composed and processed the scene, she remains enthralled and must surrender to her own corporeality in order to break the line of sight: "Unable to turn her eyes away, incapable of speech, experiencing a sensation of evil, complete and dismembering, Nora fell to her knees, so that her eyes were not withdrawn by her volition, but dropped from their orbit by the falling of her body" (70). Silenced and severed, Nora has become the compulsory subject of compositional collapse, continuing the stilted trajectory of still motion. She hopes that the scene itself will fracture with her own abandon, "thinking, 'Now they will not hold together,' feeling that if she turned away from what Robin was doing, the design would break and melt back into Robin alone" (70). That the "design" of the scene depends upon Nora's experience, rather than the "reality" of the situation, dramatizes the visionary composition of the modernist narrative. Having accepted the inevitable, Nora suffers a paradoxical sensation of "awful happiness," for "Robin, like something dormant,

was protected, moved out of death's way by the successive arms of women; but as she closed her eyes, Nora said 'Ah!' with the intolerable automatism of the last 'Ah!' in a body struck at the moment of its final breath" (70). In such a strangely violent image, the ironic embodiment of "protection" as the "successive arms of women" once again recalls the still motion of a photograph series. While "successive" camera shots "protect" their subjects by preserving them in time, they simultaneously sever the body and its motion. As the mechanism of photographic vision, Nora loses her humanity in the "automatism" of seeming death. As the subject of the modernist novel, however, Nora is able to experience an illicit *mise-en-scène* in her own narrative time and space.

The events of Jenny and Robin's first encounters likewise occur in still motion, exposing and engaging the reader in the experience of their unsanctioned attraction. In a seeming "flashback," we learn that Jenny came "to know" Nora as an extension of Robin, and that she "appropriated" Nora's love for Robin, inciting the "catastrophe" of Robin's betrayal (75). Both recalling and foretelling the event of Robin's infidelity, Barnes historically locates her disorienting narrative by specifically setting the timeless scene in modernity: "From that moment the catastrophe was inevitable. This was in nineteen hundred and twenty-seven" (75). Simultaneously past and prescient, this statement epitomizes the stop-motion photograph series and the modernist narrative. The *mise-en-scène* of Jenny and Robin's repeated meetings likewise recalls Keats's Grecian urn and foretells the cinematic "freeze frame," as the narrative composition severs movement into stasis:

Jenny leaning far over the table, Robin far back, her legs thrust under her, to balance the whole backward incline of the body, and Jenny so far forward that she had to catch her small legs in the back rung of the chair, ankle out and toe in, not

to pitch forward on the table—thus they presented the two halves of a movement that had, as in sculpture, the beauty and the absurdity of a desire that is in flower but that can have no burgeoning, unable to execute its destiny; a movement that can divulge neither caution nor daring, for the fundamental condition for completion was in neither of them; they were like Greek runners, with lifted feet but without the relief of the final command that would bring the foot down—eternally angry, eternally separated, in a cataleptic frozen gesture of abandon. (75-76)

As the still-motion photograph series simultaneously approaches and resists “completion,” so this single sentence progresses in fragments, severed by punctuation and ironically culminating in “abandon.” As in the previous scenes’ embraces, the “balance” of still motion in this relatively domestic situation requires two female bodies, held in “frozen gesture.” The repetitive and dramatic diction of “eternally angry, eternally separated” reinforces the intensity of an otherwise banal situation, as the comparison to a flower’s futile longing to bloom suggests both the sensuality and the unnatural condition of the scene. Indeed, the image of “cataleptic” bodies is both scientific and grotesque. Both “beautiful” and “absurd,” this scene certainly recalls the stop-motion photograph series’ staging of the female encounter. Despite its temporary stasis, this *mise-en-scène* suggests a potentially threatening female agency that the modernist narrative, if not the Grecian urn or the photograph series, can embody.

The female characters enact this threatening potential in a violent encounter that simultaneously resists and seeks completion in still motion. During a gathering at her home, Jenny becomes unnerved by Robin’s flirtatious interactions with other women and insists that the entire party take the air in her private, open carriages. In the semi-private space of the carriage,

which is both exposed and enclosed, both crowded and intimate, Jenny's jealousy mounts, as she continues to seek Robin's attention and Robin continues to ignore her. Finally, in an almost implausible display of illicit female emotion and behavior, Jenny attacks Robin, "scratching and tearing in hysteria, striking, clutching and crying":

Slowly the blood began to run down Robin's cheeks, and as Jenny struck repeatedly Robin began to go forward as if brought to the movement by the very blows themselves, as if she had no will, sinking down in the small carriage, her knees on the floor, her head forward as her arm moved upward in a gesture of defense; and as she sank, Jenny also, as if compelled to conclude the movement of the first blow, almost as something seen in retarded action, leaned forward and over, so that when the whole of the gesture was completed, Robin's hands were covered by Jenny's slight and bending breast, caught in between the bosom and the knees. (83)

Once again, the extended sentence structure here mimics the composition of the extended scene. Simultaneously progressive and arrested, the "gesture" develops in jarring phrases and static images that dramatize the violent encounter. That Robin reacts "as if she had no will," and Jenny proceeds "as if compelled," suggests their relative submission to the movement. The visceral embodiment of Jenny's jealousy is, in and of itself, however, an experience of female agency that continues from the previous scenes of still motion, perhaps finally "completing" the "whole" movement that began with Nora's initial vision of Jenny and Robin's encounter. These repeated scenes of still motion are, in fact, reflected between the characters and across the novel. Therefore, we have read each scene as a series of images in still motion, but these scenes also create their own series within the text, as Faulkner's scenes of still motion occur within and



across his works. The text then becomes a study of the female encounter “compelled to conclude the movement,” each character “caught in between” these *mise-en-scènes*. Glavey argues that “The overall structure of the book is in a sense ekphrastic, attempting to fill with an endless profusion of words the void left by a black hole of images” (757). As we have seen, however, a series of repetitive images leaves narrative time and space between, but does not leave a limitless “void.” The tangible pieces of character remain, if ultimately collapsed upon the floor, or the page.

Having returned to America separately, Nora and Robin are simultaneously brought together and held apart in their uncanny final encounter, which culminates Barnes’s revision of the compositional processes of stop-motion photography. Following her inevitable break from Jenny, Robin has been wandering closer and closer to Nora’s home, sometimes sleeping in a “decaying chapel,” where one night, she awakes abruptly to the sound of Nora’s dog barking frantically nearby. Nora, unnerved by the dog’s strange behavior, is drawn into the woods to the chapel, where, having “plunged into the jamb of the chapel door,” she sees Robin (178). Upon Nora’s entry, Robin’s emotional breakdown finds physical form in still motion as she collapses onto the floor with Nora’s dog, inverting the image of the “woman who is beast turning human” (41):

at the moment Nora’s body struck the wood, Robin began going down. Sliding down she went; down, her hair swinging, her arms held and the dog stood there, rearing back, his forelegs slanting; his paws trembling under the trembling of his rump, his hackle standing; his mouth open, his tongue slung sideways over his sharp bright teeth; whining and waiting. And down she went, until her head swung against his; on all fours now, dragging her knees. The veins stood out in

her neck, under her ears, swelled in her arms, and wide and throbbing rose up on her fingers as she moved forward. (179)

The conflation of Robin's body with the animal renders a grotesque scene that not only embodies the compositional processes of stop-motion photography, but also challenges the reader's acceptance of staged reality. As the repetition of "down," "down," "down" emphasizes the halted motion of her fall, the visceral description creates a simultaneously erotic and violent image. Rather than composing order in the form of a realist narrative, Barnes embodies the enigmatic and unsanctioned depths of female desire and despair in her literary translation of still motion. Rather than merely staging a scene that suggests the debasement of the female body, as in Muybridge's series of women falling and crawling, she composes a modernist narrative that allows—and indeed requires—the reader to experience otherwise threatening and, therefore, prohibited female behavior.

Although these novels remained under the jurisdiction of obscenity law, as Muybridge's work had remained under university surveillance a generation earlier, their revisions of the subjects and processes of stop-motion photography reinforced the potential of modernist narratives to compose transgressive encounters between women. In the case of *Nightwood*, for example, T. S. Eliot not only wrote the novel's introduction, but also carefully edited its content. Although we might read Eliot's review as censorship, Leigh Gilmore convincingly argues that his particular editing of male homosexual content, in addition to his introduction's emphasis on the work's literary experimentation, in fact allowed the novel to avoid obscenity charges that could have prevented its publication (617-19). Unlike homosexuality or sexual "inversion," lesbianism remained outside of legal and scientific discourse, so long as it remained "unintelligible" (623, 610). Thus the modernist narrative, as opposed to the stop-motion

photograph series and the realist narrative, resists intelligibility as it represents female agency that would otherwise remain unseen.

These modernist novels are therefore capable of telling the female narratives that Muybridge's photograph series can only pose. These adaptations of the provocative encounters and compositional processes of stop-motion photography likewise suggest progressive cinematic techniques that we will discuss in the next chapter. As our visual lens rotates, so will our investigation of the composition of women in literature and media, as we consider what happens when artists and authors reanimate or restage the *mise-en-scène* and its female subjects, and how modernist narratives recall and revise the cinematographic compositional processes of narrative cinema.

## **CHAPTER 2: ANIMATING THE FEMALE FORM**

The early decades of the twentieth century marked the intersection of several significant and somewhat contradictory moments in women's identity and artistry: the rise of the film star, the height of the paper doll, and the decline of the independent dressmaker. As the technological shift from stop-motion photography to cinematography reframed women's bodies on the theatre screen, the resurgence of the centuries-old paper doll reenvisioned the female form in magazines and newspapers nationwide and, indeed, across the Atlantic. To the local girl near a burgeoning city, who attended the cinema regularly and collected promotional paraphernalia, film actresses—and their wardrobes—were simultaneously larger-than-life and handheld. While the American “play” movement recast women's domestic work as girls' productive play, paper dolls both supported and subverted the Progressive narrative that aimed to bolster middle-class, urban values of domesticity and family life. On the one hand, paper dolls appeared to reinforce

narrative cinema's fetishization of women's bodies and to encourage girls' engagement in domestic work as play. On the other hand, the dolls seemed to invite girls' imaginative narrative play and to inspire creative artistry that could lead to an independent career in dressmaking. At the same time, however, technological advances in the garment industry saw such independent female dressmakers increasingly replaced by factories owned and managed by men. In this historical situation, Willa Cather wrote *My Ántonia* (1918), a modernist novel that reflects upon "women's work" in the previous generation while engaging contemporary questions of women's and girls' evolving representations and identities. These complex and often contradictory responses to shifting technologies and narratives across media invite our next investigation of representations of female embodiment.

### ***2.1 The Film Star, the Paper Doll, and the Dressmaker***

Although Eadweard Muybridge used his zoopraxiscope to reanimate and project his stop-motion photograph series in the late nineteenth century, he struggled to create a sense of temporal and spatial verisimilitude, or realism, for the spectator. In fact, the glass disks that displayed the photographic silhouette or image often had to be painted or revised by hand. By the 1920s and '30s, however, advances in cinematography allowed for manipulations of time and space that would define decades of narrative cinema. Laura Mulvey's foundational essay of feminist, psychoanalytic film criticism, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," provides a productive lens through which to consider the effects of cinematography on representations—and animations—of the female form and, correspondingly, embodiments of women across media. In her consideration of the role of women in "narrative fiction film," she argues that cinematography allows the camera lens to mimic the male gaze, collapsing the frightening

female form into a two-dimensional icon, a sexualized object. Recalling the anachronistic use of the term “freeze frame,” Mulvey’s description of narrative cinema evokes my analyses of Muybridge’s photograph series: “The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (11). We can imagine the halting reanimation of Muybridge’s still images having just such an effect. Once again arrested in narrative time and space, the woman becomes an “alien presence,” who “then has to be integrated”—or reintegrated—“into cohesion with the narrative” (Mulvey 11). That this process occurs in “normal narrative film” suggests its ubiquity in the eyes of both female and male, subjective viewers.

Although Muybridge used staging and costuming to compose stop-motion spectacles of the female form, his photographic technology, albeit proto-cinematic, lacked the sophistication of cinematography that would allow filmmakers to manipulate multidimensional space in cinematic time. That is, a male subject appears just as collapsed or arrested as a female subject in a stop-motion photograph series; it was Muybridge’s particular *treatment* of women that provoked the violent and erotic effects of the technology. Advances in cinematic technology, however, provided a means of controlling these effects mechanically. In terms of cinematography, “the function of film is to reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception. Camera technology (as exemplified by deep focus in particular) and camera movements (determined by the action of the protagonist), combined with invisible editing (demanded by realism) all tend to blur the limits of screen space” (Mulvey 13). Of course, these advancements likewise allowed for deliberate disparities in the spatial and temporal representations of female and male characters, primarily by male film directors.

Mulvey finds that “In contrast to woman as icon, the active male figure . . . demands a three-dimensional space . . . . He is a figure in a landscape. . . . The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action” (12-13). Thus while cinematographic technology provides new, “natural” agency to the male figure, it simultaneously reinforces the previous medium’s manipulation and fetishization of the female form.

Having observed this gendered effect in narrative cinema, Mulvey investigates its psychological impetus and consequence for the viewer, finding that cinematography creates the *appearance* of realism by aligning the viewpoints of the male protagonist and the audience member:

Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen. . . . [As the] woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. For a moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man’s-land outside its own time and space. (11-12)

Thus the “spectator within the auditorium,” whether male or female, becomes complicit in the male gaze, which arrests narrative time and space in the fetishization of the female form. This effect often occurs through the ubiquitous “close-up”: “conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism. One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the

narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen” (12). This “integration” of the metonymical body part into the seemingly realist narrative not only distorts the female form, but also presents this distortion as realism, making the subjective appear objective. Mulvey argues that such a (mis)representation arouses the sexual anxiety that provokes the male gaze, ultimately perpetuating the fetishization of the female figure and creating the film star:

Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of film noir); or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence over-valuation, the cult of the female star). (13-14)

In other words, the technology simultaneously creates and mitigates the threat of female sexuality through objectification. This psychological and mechanical objectification then manifests across female consumer culture—in magazines, cosmetics, recreation, and fashion—reinforcing and recreating the distorting effects of cinematography in the ubiquitous image of the “female star.”

The appearance of clothing as costume contributed to these effects, belying the ostensible realism of film and ultimately revising “natural style” (Hollander 344). Anne Hollander explains

this *appearance* of realism: “The kind of serious domestic drama created for film, . . . which purports to reflect real life at close range, nevertheless offers ordinary clothes whose common look has been magnified and distorted out of proportion, simply by their appearance as costume” (239). Hollander recalls Mulvey in her description of these disfiguring effects and their impression upon the viewer: “Modern film audiences see extraordinary stars in ordinary clothes like their own; but the glow of the stars, and of the screen, transforms both sets of plain garments into extraordinary clothes” (Hollander 240). In other words, the costuming of the film star—even in “ordinary clothes”—reinforced the fetishizing effects of narrative cinematography on the female form. In fact, Hollander evokes Mulvey again when she notes that movie stars were “fashion plates,” who “exemplified an existing ideal” (344). Hollander’s comparison of the movie star to a static, two-dimensional illustration is apt, as narrative cinema collapsed and fragmented the female form in order to highlight ideal body parts. As with cinematographic effects on the body, the technology created the distorted appearance of clothing on the screen, but it also altered fashion outside of the theatre. As audiences gazed upon the film stars’ “stylized versions” of their own clothes, they too wanted to appear naturally extraordinary, for “artistic style, when it is the vessel for the acceptable look of reality, becomes natural style” (Hollander 344). And so the garment industry complied, and life outside of the theatre imitated art on the screen: “The copying done by audiences, with the help of clothing manufacturers and merchandisers, [took] the form of references or allusions to those crystallized images” (344).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Alluding to Muybridge’s horse in motion, Hollander credits the appearance of movement made possible by photography with rising hemlines, which literally liberated the female body: “It took modern fashionable amusements to make the public aware of women’s legs, and it took photography to catch them in action—to show, as in the famous case of the galloping horse, how they really work” (340). This revelation, however, likewise allowed for the metonymical fetishization of women’s legs, as in the case of Marlene Dietrich (Mulvey 12).



This embodiment of the fetishized female form—made possible on a large scale by technological advances in the garment industry—certainly threatened to reinforce narrative cinema’s objectification of women, but it also provided an opportunity for individual women to revise this fabrication through fashion.

As in the case of costumes and clothing, the widespread embodiment of cinematographic effects outside of the theatre had the potential to both reflect and reform the image of women across media. Linda Williams, who aptly suggests that Muybridge’s *mise-en-scènes* of propped and costumed women “*call* for a narrative,” compares the seemingly contradictory implications of stop-motion photography and narrative cinematography: “Muybridge’s motion studies may only appear to contradict Mulvey’s notion that fetishization of the female body retards narrative: if there is not yet a narrative, then the female body may act to promote it. The important point is that fetishization of the woman provokes a disturbance in the text—whether (as in Muybridge) to create a narrative or (as in classical narrative) to retard it” (43). That is, “the fetishization of the female body” creates an opportunity for a provocative response. In literary texts that engage the compositional methods of stop-motion photography, we found that such a “disturbance” provides the time and space for modernist narratives of otherwise unsanctioned female agency. The question remains, however, of the possibilities of reanimating these arrested forms, of resuming—or restaging—their suspended narratives. If removed from the context of the cinema narrative, the female body fetishized by costuming and cinematography, may, like the female figures in Muybridge’s series, call for a new narrative of female agency in an alternative, perhaps even historical, medium. As historically and culturally reflective representations of women’s bodies and stories, paper dolls provide a productive visual text for considering this potential.

Although manufactured paper dolls dated back to the early nineteenth century, these model figures perfectly reflected the effects of early-twentieth-century cinematography, bringing the fetishized film star into the traditional home. The 1920s and '30s were the era of the movie-star paper doll: “the paper-doll book with a star or group of stars on its cover and a lavish wardrobe clustered closely on its inside pages was a prized possession for almost every American girl” (Wallach 49). These paper dolls were published not only as children’s books, but also as features in women’s and celebrity magazines. In 1919 and 1920, for example, *Photoplay* magazine published a series of movie-star paper dolls called “Movy-Dols” (J. Johnson). The magazine used the following excerpt to advertise the series:

Beginning with the next, the June, issue, Photoplay Magazine will contain a beautiful page of “Movy-Dol” cut-out figures—paper-doll size likenesses, in colors, of motion picture favorites. This forthcoming Photoplay feature will have an irresistible appeal to every child in America. “Movy-Dols” will become a playroom favorite in thousands of homes. . . . All of the subjects of this series are the best known screen favorites, popular because of their constructive appeal to children. (“Movy-Dols”)

Although the “constructive” role of the stars and their “likenesses” in children’s play remains obscure, each month’s page did include instructions for how to cut out and match the full-size doll, an extra head, and various costumes and props. In 1925, *Woman’s Home Companion* published a similar series of movie-star paper dolls called Hollywood Dollies (J. Johnson): “A series of paper cutout dolls of famous motion picture stars in original costumes worn in pictures” (“Hollywood Dollies”). As two-dimensional icons of the female form, these ubiquitous paper dolls seemed to embody—and therefore reinforce—the fetishizing cinematographic effects that

Mulvey describes. Literally collapsed and held in a static pose, they encouraged girls to recreate images seen on the screen, but they also inspired girls to design their own clothing and accessories for the dolls. As cinematographic effects manifested outside of the theatre, so paper-doll play affected girls' development outside of the home: Girls not only "adored their paper dolls," but also "learned from them, and often put their knowledge to use in adult careers" (Wallach 48). This technical and creative "knowledge" could even apply to a financially independent career as a dressmaker.

Dressmaking transferred many of the skills, and even the terms, of paper-doll preparation into three-dimensional forms and spaces, providing fulfilling work for trained and talented women. When she "cuts" a pattern or sews along the "lines" of a dress, the dressmaker recalls the work of paper-doll preparation. In fact, the "most difficult part of [dressmaking] . . . was cutting, that is, fashioning a shape that would fit the wearer—a skill that distinguished dressmakers from seamstresses, tailoresses, and other needlewomen who typically stitched together garments that had been that had been cut from the cloth by male tailors" (Gamber 129). While the typical girl carefully cut two-dimensional, static paper dolls and their costumes along guiding lines, the capable dressmaker "draped and pinned paper or inexpensive fabric . . . about the 'form' of her client" in order to create customized patterns that would fit "like wall paper" (131, 129). In her professional work then, the dressmaker brought embodied form to creative paper-doll play, moving these two-dimensional, static figures into multi-dimensional, dynamic space. And for this production, she was uniquely rewarded: "Dressmakers . . . enjoyed advantages that many of their wage-earning sisters did not: skilled work, high wages by female standards, and the chance, perhaps, to open shops of their own. But as discussions of the trade's artistic aspects make clear, it bestowed a less tangible benefit on its practitioners: creative labor"

(Gamber 133). Such “creative labor” provided dressmakers with not only professional and financial opportunities, but also domestic and social options. If “the experience of wage work routinely crushed women’s ambition, ‘reinforcing’ their commitment to marriage,” then “dressmaking presented a compelling alternative to domesticity” (Eisenstein qtd. in Gamber 133, Gamber 133). Such an “alternative” would sanction individual female agency, but it would also threaten the domestic and industrial values of national programs like the American play movement.

A hallmark of the Progressive Era, the play movement distinguished between appropriate boys’ and girls’ play, ultimately attempting to usher girls back into the home. In his history of the movement in American literature, William A. Gleason explains, “Contemporary girls’ play could include vigorous ‘boy’ games, but the play theorists tended to recommend more domestic and nurturing activities, such as playing house and taking care of dolls. These play forms, it was believed, would develop the essential ‘feminine virtues’ and thus would best prepare young girls for the duties of adult womanhood” (Gleason 157). In the case of paper dolls, the same skills that applied to independent dressmaking careers could likewise apply to domestic labor. Playing with paper dolls required tedious and delicate work within the home and, as with any dolls, the seemingly “feminine virtues” of caretaking: “A little girl could spend a day or two of real work cutting out every piece [of costume and accessory], and real attention was needed for the tiny extras. A slip of the scissors could spoil a favorite gown” (Wallach 49). Therefore, the “patience and small-muscle practice” required for sewing naturally “transferred” to the work of playing with paper dolls, reinforcing the corporeal connection between women’s work and girls’ play (Wallach 18). The same magazines that published celebrity paper-doll series that could inspire girls to become dressmakers outside of the home also published advertisements that dramatized

domestic epistemology. For example, Gleason references a 1919 Ivory soap advertisement that depicts a young girl pinning doll clothes to the screen in front of an ornate fireplace. A small tub and washboard sit at her feet on a floral rug, her dolls propped against the screen. The print reads, “After her make-believe has changed to real housekeeping, a girl *unconsciously* does things by the methods acquired in her childhood’s play. The things she learned while she was a child are the things she remembers. Realizing this, you make your child’s play-hours as valuable to her as they are enjoyable” (qtd. in Gleason 169, emphasis added). Employing the ideology of the American play movement, this advertisement instructs women to inculcate their daughters as domestic workers and consumers.

The gendered messaging of the Progressive Era likewise applied to women’s own pursuits inside and outside of the home, as “play progressivism sought consistently to contain women’s liberating experiences within a larger ideology of domestication” (Gleason 158). This “containment” included otherwise independent work, like dressmaking. In fact, the burgeoning garment industry took a page from the Progressive playbook by using gendered messaging to conflate the professional dressmaker’s workplace skills with the homemaker’s “natural” talent for domestic work. Bolstered by technological developments, “such as pattern drafting systems and proportional patterns,” these messages undercut the independent dressmaking profession and, therefore, an important source of female agency:

Shrewdly manipulating the popular notion that garment making was an ability that *all* women naturally possessed, the proponents of new dress-cutting techniques sought to replace female craft traditions with ‘scientific’ methods made and marked by men. . . . By marketing their creations to ‘ladies’ and dressmakers alike, the proponents of new techniques employed a particular

definition of women's work that ignored the very real distinctions between the dressmaker's workshop and the middle-class home. (Gamber 128)

Unlike the typical homemaker, however, the "typical tradeswoman, a single woman of working-class origins, had spent years perfecting her craft—in the workshop, not in the home" (135). This movement aimed then to return women's creative work to the private, domestic space and turn public sites of female production, like the independent dressmaker's shop, into sites of mass consumption, like the department store, marketing previously intimate and individualized domestic products to women nationwide (Wallace 145-46, 152). These political and economic forces limited—or shifted—opportunities for talented working-class and middle-class girls, who were inspired into creative careers by paper-doll play.

Although this intersection of celebrity culture, girl's play, and women's consumerism promoted "unconscious" epistemology, it also provided a space for conscious resistance. To the extent that they appeared to align with the goals of the nationalist project, paper dolls likewise animated girls' resistance to the "ideology of domestication" (Gleason 158). By inspiring imaginative design and storytelling—from within the accepted female domains of domestic work and celebrity culture—paper dolls motivated girls to explore alternative means of female artistry and production, even within the film industry. Although they required tedious preparation that aligned with women's domestic work, paper dolls also allowed and encouraged creative play and writing. Wallach explains, "the cutting was only the beginning of the fun, the start of imaginative play for most girls of the 1920s and 1930s" (51). Whether or not the preparatory work was indeed "fun," it is important to consider that this work was "only the beginning" of a girl's paper doll play. While the collapsing of the female form into a two-dimensional paper icon mimics the fetishizing cinematographic processes of narrative cinema, the doll seems—in the words of

Linda Williams—to call for a new narrative, a narrative written by and about girls and women. As we have noted, the dolls were typically printed with costumes from familiar films, which would initially recall the films’ narratives. Ultimately removed from the narrative contexts of the films, however, these costumes have the potential to inspire not only new costumes, but also new narratives. In this sense, paper dolls allowed girls to literally cut the female form free of the static space and time of the screen. In doing so, girls become the agents of their own alternative forms of female artistry and production.<sup>7</sup> Unlike a baby doll, whose care instills traditionally female skills with little need for creativity or artistry, the paper doll provides, perhaps even demands, an opportunity for the development of creative artistry outside of domestic labor.

Working in film fittingly—and somewhat ironically—provided just such an opportunity for young women throughout the country. We might even say that the talented, independent dressmaker moved to Hollywood, for as her local shop was threatened by garment industry technology and department stores, her creative skills were increasingly demanded in the film

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<sup>7</sup> As a tangible, moveable medium, paper dolls have historically facilitated gendered instruction and simultaneously disrupted such teaching. For example, Hannah Field examines early nineteenth-century paper doll books that paired a doll with a storybook, whose narrative aligned with a series of costumes (41). Field finds that the narratives, when read sequentially, sanction the “gendered moral message that girls must learn the error of their exhibitionist vanity and love of finery, while boys,” who are similarly costumed, “need no such rebuke” (49). When “read” outside of—or entirely removed from—the prescribed sequence, however, the doll and her costumes allow for narrative disruption and even creation:

The format of these books works against a stable narrative configuration of words and pictures since the images that should sequentially accompany each development in the story are readily visible (and physically manipulable) at any time. As a result, the reader has a number of choices of how to make meaning, all of which influence the space and time of the reading experience. . . . Violating narrative time and space . . . radically, one could absent the dolls entirely from their own storybook, using them either to illustrate another text or as toys unconnected to a pre-existing story. (51)

studio. Anne Walker explains this phenomenon in her May 1921 *Woman's Home Companion* profile of two “successful” costume designers, “Dressing the Movies” (24). The piece begins as Walker accompanies “screen star” Elsie Ferguson to “an ultra-smart New York shop,” for “screen stars buy more clothes—and more expensive clothes—than any other group of women in America.” In fact, “Any successful screen star will tell you that every hour of freedom from studio work is given to shopping and fittings . . . .” Walker even compares a “day’s shopping with a popular motion picture actress” to “an orgy of spending.”<sup>8</sup> Given this increased demand for specialized clothing, “every motion picture producer of prominence has had to solve the problem of dressing actors by means of a costume department,” and although some actresses prefer to do their own shopping, “many other stars and popular leading ladies of the screen find in the studio designer and workroom a service which saves time and conserves strength, physical and nervous.” Like the dressmaker, the costumer is distinguished from the skilled tailor, milliner, or “draper” by her individual insight:

the motion pictures have opened up a most fascinating field for the man, woman, or girl who is clever at designing and making clothes, particularly if she be able to express personality, character, and emotions through clothes. . . . This means something more than mere facility with pins and needles, than practical training in dressmaking and millinery. It requires imagination and temperament, sympathy, and the power to visualize roles and how they can be expressed in fabrics and lines. (24)

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<sup>8</sup> In Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House* (1925), Professor Godfrey St. Peter compares a day of shopping with his daughter in Chicago to “an orgy of acquisition” (135). For more on the economic and cultural context of St. Peter’s comparison, see Wallace.



These qualifications may seem limiting to the local girl, but Walker promises—in the inspiring second person—that “if you have a special gift, or if you develop a specialty of any sort, your talent will be recognized, because the need and the demand for originality is great.” By way of example, she interviews two “pioneers of dressing the movies,” women of varying education, experience, and “method,” “in the motion picture world of Los Angeles”: “One is Claire West, who designs and personally supervises the making of every garment worn by women in the Cecil de Mille productions. The other is Sophie Wachner, chief of the costuming department at the Goldwyn studios in Culver City.” Walker emphasizes their differences in order to “prove to you that distinctly different types of women can succeed in this new industry”: “Miss West is a college graduate who sold fashion sketches to a magazine for women when she was still wearing her hair in a braid. She studied art along various lines in Paris, where she became one of a group of fashion artists.” Conversely, “Miss Wachner was educated in the public schools and studied costuming with New York producers of musical comedy . . . .” The women also vary in their “temperaments”: While West has an “emotional temperament and practical moments,” “Miss Wachner is a practical workwoman, with a vision and emotional moments.” Their variances likewise create opportunities for various young women: “Miss Wachner’s workrooms offer the best opening for the average seamstress, milliner or embroiderer who feels a trifle timid about her talent as a designer. Miss West’s workrooms tempt and fascinate workers possessing special gifts” (24). Having established this wealth of opportunities, Walker provides a guide for girls across the nation to “get [a] start in this fascinating industry,” including getting “practical experience” in a local shop, saving money to move to the “nearest city,” studying “costume plates” in the “local library,” writing to costume department heads, and advertising for related positions in the “local paper.” She even offers to “send you a list of the principal producers and

the location of their producing studios, on receipt of a self-addressed stamped envelope.”

Ultimately, Walker encourages girls to “Be willing to start in a small way, knowing that if you have any special gift . . . someone will find it out—and your progress will be certain. For the motion picture industry is really a land of opportunity to any and all who may possess what the movies need—ideas” (24).<sup>9</sup>

The film industry did, in fact, provide many employment opportunities for young women—albeit often low-paying, laborious positions—but “apart from acting, one strand of female film employment flourished above all others—that of writer” (Lant and Periz 551). Once again, women’s and celebrity magazines, despite their publication of Progressive gendered content and advertisements, were an important source of inspiring and practical materials for the aspiring, independent young woman: They published “How To” employment guides akin to Walker’s “Dressing the Movies” and “feminized” Horatio Alger stories of women who began as stenographers and advanced in the industry, and, perhaps most importantly, they published advertisements and contests for film “scenarios,” or story outlines (555). In fact, “Floods of submissions from amateur writers poured in, in response to company advertisements in fan and trade magazines . . . . Most of the contests run in magazines were won by women, their primary readership, women who might well have drafted stories at the kitchen table” (552). Although this “freelance market” declined in the 1920s as studios “established scenario departments,” women remained significant contributors to these writing departments (552). In fact, despite the ultimate

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<sup>9</sup> Although Walker’s explicit audience is white, middle-class homemakers and their daughters, *Ladies Home Companion* reached millions of women across the country, and Walker begins to address more diverse economic and geographic concerns here. She does not, however, consider race: “Jobs were not as accessible to black women, and the work of black women was rarely covered in the white press” (Lant and Periz 556). For more on this discrepancy, see Lant and Periz.

effects of cinematography on women's bodies, "Half the scenarios written in the silent film era were by women" (549). These types of contests that initially inspired film scenarios likewise extended to girls and even engaged their movie-star paper dolls. In 1917, for example, women's magazine *The Delineator: A Journal of Fashion, Culture, and Fine Arts*, which included works by women writers like Edith Wharton, published a paper-doll contest that awarded cash prizes for "a letter, not more than 200 words in length," identifying the unnamed movie stars depicted on a page of paper dolls and "telling us what you think about this page." The assignment noted that "decisions will be based on the information, style and originality of the letters" and that "children must be under fifteen years of age" to be considered ("Who Are They? Number Four"). In its openness, this contest encouraged the kind of creativity and insight that would inspire girls to seek out fulfilling careers in film, fashion, or fiction.<sup>10</sup> To the extent that the magazine aligned with "feminine virtues," it provided a sanctioned space for women's and girls' creative writing inspired by visual media. Contemporary celebrity Zelda Fitzgerald would model such creative artistry not only through writing, but also through her often dysmorphic and displaced paper dolls, which dramatized cinematographic effects and encouraged her daughter Scottie to reimagine the embodied female form and character.

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<sup>10</sup> The contest was revised over the course of several months. The first contest in March requested a letter "telling us what you know about these actors." It also included a "set of prizes" for "the children who send in the most original and attractive dresses which they themselves have designed for one or both of these dolls" ("Who Are They? Number One"). Although images of the contest pages are widely available online, these pages appear to be missing from each of the issues in the Hathi Trust Digital Library, suggesting that the dolls were removed and used by initial readers (*The Delineator*).

## 2.2 *Zelda Fitzgerald: Reimagining the Paper Doll*

As a Southern belle, a flapper, and a ballerina, Zelda Fitzgerald was no stranger to costume and performance, which influenced the gendered content and cinematic style of her visual art. In fact, Kathryn Lee Seidel, Alexis Wang, and Alvin Y. Wang argue that “Zelda was a performance artist”—“first as a belle, then as a celebrity, and later as a dancer”—before she found her “individual and solitary self” as a painter (138). She certainly found creative agency in visual art that she struggled to find in other media. Despite her debilitating dedication to ballet, she began training too late in life to excel, and despite her recognized talent as a writer, she necessarily competed with Scott, who commanded larger readerships and sums from publishers. Therefore, the Fitzgeralds and their publishers often printed their collaborations, and sometimes her work entirely, under his name. They likewise competed over the material of their own lives. Scott was infamously furious with Zelda for secretly submitting her only novel, *Save Me the Waltz* (1932), for publication, as its autobiographical foundation overlapped with the novel he was writing, *Tender Is the Night* (1934). In visual art, however, Fitzgerald found an alternative medium for expression, often drawing upon and intersecting with her experiences of ballet and writing.<sup>11</sup> She is perhaps best known as an artist for her drawings and paintings of dysmorphic ballerinas, which, like her writing, invite biographical criticism.<sup>12</sup> These ballerinas, with their

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<sup>11</sup> Although critics typically refer to Zelda Fitzgerald as “Zelda,” I will refer to her as “Fitzgerald” and to her daughter, Scottie Fitzgerald Smith, as “Smith” whenever appropriate.

<sup>12</sup> In *Zelda, An Illustrated Life*, Eleanor Lanahan, Fitzgerald’s granddaughter, presents *Ballerinas Dressing* (1941) and *Ballet Figures* (1941) alongside corresponding quotations from “Zelda’s autobiographical novel,” *Save Me the Waltz* (42, 43). Seidel, Wang, and Wang similarly trace “the development of her identity as an artist” as they “look for intersections of Zelda’s writings on art and the art that she produced,” arguing that her paintings after 1932—the year her novel was published—“act as visual memoir” (136).

disproportionate parts, flattened figures, and exaggerated features, likewise engage contemporary cinematic representations of the female body. *Three Ballerinas* (1933) and *Ballet Figures* (c. 1941) exemplify Fitzgerald's style.<sup>13</sup> In pencil on paper and oil on canvas, respectively, these figures appear nude, aside from ballet or pointe shoes and tutus held or worn to the side. They lack spatial depth but have extended hands, arms, and legs, with dramatically muscular calves and thighs. Their small heads are faceless and hairless or have generic features with loose hair, and their breasts resemble ribs or muscles. Like the actress fetishized in narrative cinema, these grotesque figures dramatize the simultaneously erotic and frightening female form. Critics also suggest these cinematographic effects, even as they reference "the stage." Seidel, Wang, and Wang, for example, compare Fitzgerald's human subjects to "dehumanized objects" (152) and observe that "Zelda's paintings depict her concern with performance": "They look as if they were staged, as evidenced by the shallow picture plane which lies parallel to the background . . . they do not recede into space with classical perspective, but are all out front, with the canvas as a proscenium. The figures are arranged in the foreground, always frontally, always seeming to address the viewer, just as an actor addresses the audience on stage" (145). These observations echo Mulvey's description of the "fragmented" female body in narrative cinema, which "destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth" by creating "the quality of a cut-out or icon" (12). This cinematographic representation of male and female characters and/as objects alike suggests not only Fitzgerald's "concern with performance," but also her conscious engagement with contemporary representations of gendered bodies. Even before these paintings

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<sup>13</sup> Print images of Fitzgerald's visual art appear with permissions in Lanahan's *Zelda, An Illustrated Life*. Digital images of these works are, for the most part, widely available online without permissions.

dramatized such representations, however, her paper dolls animated the pervasive image of the fetishized, female form.

That Fitzgerald chose the medium of the paper doll for such provocative work suggests the significance of girls' play, for she made the dolls for her daughter, Scottie. In fact, Livingston notes that "Much of Zelda's best work was done with the excuse of entertaining and educating her daughter, Scottie. . . . From the mid 1920s onward, Zelda saw to it that Scottie had her own, custom-made paper dolls and storytelling pictures" (82). Whether or not Fitzgerald considered Scottie's entertainment and education an "excuse," she clearly dedicated significant talent and time to the careful creation of these two-dimensional characters, which were intended for play, rather than display. According to Scottie Fitzgerald Smith's Forward to *Pieces of Paradise* (1973), the final published collection of her parents' "previously uncollected writings," she unearthed the dolls from her attic in a "sentimental" search for the "bits and pieces of the child's paradise which [her] parents created" (S. F. Smith 1, 2). Rather than recreating readily available celebrity dolls, Fitzgerald made personalized family dolls and characters from fairy tales and history. Like film stars, however, these characters were, according to Smith, "familiar to all little well-instructed boys and girls of that time" (3). Some of the dolls even resembled film stars of the day: Smith particularly remembered "an Errol Flynn-like D'Artagnan" in *The Three Musketeers* series (3). She likewise recalls the creativity and intricate work that went into the dolls, all for the sake of girls' play:

Once upon a time these dolls had wardrobes of which Rumpelstiltskin could be proud. My mother and I had dresses of pleated wallpaper, and one party frock of mine had ruffles of real lace cut from a Belgian handkerchief. . . . It is

characteristic of my mother that these exquisite dolls, each one requiring hours of artistry, should have been created for the delectation of a six-year-old. (2-3)

That Smith uses the fairy-tale trope “Once upon a time” in her recollection reflects not only the genre of the characters and the nostalgia of memory, but also the illusion of the American dream that saturated her family’s reality, which even the family paper dolls reflect. Among Scott’s paper doll garments, for instance, is an angel costume that splices fantasy and reality by pairing wings and a robed skirt with the shirt, tie, and accessories of Scott’s day suit, including a burning cigarette in his hand. These family figures, along with Smith’s personal reflections, show how the paper doll, as a medium, reflects both the intimacy of the domestic space and the influence of the social, political, and historical situation.

Smith first shared the paper dolls for publication in the March 1974 issue of women’s magazine *Mademoiselle*, which was initially published in 1935; became known for its “guest editor” competition; and included works by women writers like Flannery O’Connor, Sylvia Plath, and Joyce Carol Oates.<sup>14</sup> As in *Pieces of Paradise*, Smith reflects in *Mademoiselle* upon the dolls’ intersection of high art and domestic trifle: “I did have a great deal of fun with them . .

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<sup>14</sup> Connie Ann Kirk considers Plath’s childhood love of paper dolls and her 1953 summer as a “guest editor” at *Mademoiselle* magazine, which became the basis for her novel *The Bell Jar*: The diaries tell that Plath was an avid fan of paper dolls as a child and not only collected the popular versions modeled in the forms of movie actresses of the day such as Shirley Temple but also designed and drew her own paper dolls with vibrantly colorful clothing and accessories—dozens of which still exist in the archives. In a July 21, 1944, entry she describes . . . spending the day using a *Mademoiselle* magazine with her paper dolls. . . . Less than a decade later, as guest editor in college, she and the other guest editors would become “paper dolls” themselves for the magazine as they were not only expected to produce first-rate, publishable work as intern editors but they also had the additional burden of appearing in the same issue as fashion models and at events around New York City as publicity props. (27)

. but the trouble is that I almost never dared play with them because even as a child I could see that they were such works of art—and that’s why they’re so perfectly preserved today” (qtd. in Lerman 168). Livingston parenthetically notes “that a great quantity of dolls and costumes made for Scottie . . . no longer exist,” suggesting alternatively that the dolls were not merely “preserved” (83), but the extent to which Smith, and eventually her own children, in fact “played” with the dolls is not important. Rather than diminishing the value of the dolls as playthings, Smith’s observation calls our attention to the potential of a commonplace, domestic medium to engage contemporary conceptions of female identity and art. As the American play movement aimed to return women’s work to the domestic space, and to inculcate girls in this labor, Fitzgerald turned the home into a productive place for female creativity. She did, however, like the white, middle-class audience of many women’s magazines, have an economic and political advantage that afforded her the time and space for such alternative work. Although the paper doll as a medium transcended class in its accessibility and popularity, Fitzgerald was uniquely talented and situated to create personal and provocative paper dolls for her daughter.

As Fitzgerald’s paper dolls imagine and embody alternative gendered forms, they also invite new narratives for familiar characters. Livingston dates the paper dolls to 1927, which coincides with Smith’s memory of being six years old, with the earliest dolls depicting members of Louis XIV’s Versailles court (34). Like the fantastic realm of the fairy tale, the historical setting of Louis XIV’s court, in which ladies *and* courtiers dressed in elaborate costumes that often included makeup, heels, and wigs, allowed Fitzgerald to create simultaneously verisimilar and distorted figures, literally re-envisioning the seemingly docile, historical medium (“Louis XIV”). The ladies and the courtiers strike similar, modelesque poses fit for displaying their elaborate costumes: one knee bent and turned slightly toward or away from the body and arms



slightly raised to the sides and bent at the elbows. Although the costumes include matching shoes, the undressed ladies and courtiers alike also wear high-heeled, if somewhat less embellished, shoes with their undergarments. The courtiers' shoes even match their brightly colored tights or briefs, if not their seductive and somewhat sinister facial expressions. With wide shoulders, protruding ribs, and muscular legs, the ladies' and the courtiers' figures are overtly similar. It is important to note that the costumes are appropriately gendered for the historical time period, particularly in the context of the Versailles court. The distorted figures, however, accurately reflect neither their historical period nor the period of their creation. That is, the bodies are distorted and obscured, and the costumes reflect these distortions as they fit the bodies. Both historically located and literally displaced, these dolls call attention to the potential of the paper doll medium to transcend contemporary, gendered images.

These characteristics continue to appear in Fitzgerald's later dolls, encouraging Smith's revision of familiar characters and narratives. Fitzgerald's dolls depicting *The Three Musketeers*, Alexandre Dumas's 1844 novel set during the seventeenth-century reign of Louis XIII, conflate historical fact, narrative fiction, and even film adaptation, as many film versions appeared in the early decades of the twentieth century ("The Three Musketeers"). D'Artagnan, for example, resembles Errol Flynn, who starred in the 1935 film (S. F. Smith 3), and Cardinal Richelieu spans two historical series, appearing with the earlier Louis XIV figures while in fact serving under Louis XIII, as depicted in Dumas's novel (Lanahan 35). Livingston's description of *The Three Musketeers* series likewise recalls our observations of the Louis XIV Versailles court dolls:

Their gender is sometimes barely identifiable. Males and females alike are heavily muscled, with exaggerated shoulders and torsos, slim waists swelling into

powerful thighs, enlarged calves and the familiar oversized feet. The artist signals the femininity of her characters with rather formulaic features — ladylike hairdos, spherical breasts, and occasionally upturned chins. The men, in turn, sometimes display startlingly effeminate attributes: one musketeer has ruby lips and rouged cheeks. Others have wavy locks, and stand with their feet in a distinctly balletic position. (83)

This conflation of masculine and feminine attributes may have encouraged Smith to imagine herself playing any role in the story, as the elaborate costumes allowed these characters to perform their historical roles. Like the ladies and courtiers of Louis XIV's Versailles court, these characters are appropriately attired for their dramatic situation: "The entire androgynous cast of Zelda's musketeers tableau is costumed in highly decorative fashion, taking full advantage of the trappings and flourishes with which members of both sexes dressed on Alexandre Dumas's imagined eighteenth-century stage" (Livingston 83). While Livingston seems to misplace both nineteenth-century Dumas and his seventeenth-century musketeers in time, her description of the series of dolls as a "tableau" is both fitting and misleading. The modern presentation of Fitzgerald's dolls as drawings arranged on white pages accurately reflects the static images, but misrepresents the mobile medium. The characters are, indeed, motionless, but in their final form—cut, dressed, and propped—they literally hover on the edge of motion, requiring physical interaction as they invite creative storytelling. Some of Fitzgerald's paper doll drawings were, in fact, found in her sketch books. In these cases, even the modern viewer must use her imagination to locate the figures within a narrative. Because it not only allows for, but also invites creative play, the historical medium of the paper doll provides the time and space for new images and narratives of the female form. These historical figures likewise provide the opportunity not only

to reflect upon, but also to retell history and its literary and cinematic adaptations in a newly reclaimed domestic setting.

As the Louis XIV court and *The Three Musketeers* dolls exaggerate historical spectacle and narrative, the “Little Red Riding Hood” dolls dramatize the fairy tale genre through distorted, cross-dressed, or androgynous figures. While the historical periods provide a realist setting for such figures, the story of Little Red Riding Hood, in which the Wolf dresses in women’s clothes and “plays” the girl’s grandmother, provides a realist, or at least recognized, narrative for Fitzgerald’s grotesque dolls (“Little Red Riding Hood”). Sinewy, dark, and sinister, the presumably male Wolf, which Fitzgerald spells “Wolff,” appears in a red, off-the-shoulder undergarment with scalloped edges. His costumes include a black, cloaked garb equipped with metallic weapons, which is captioned, “The bigger and badder of wolves.” He also, however, has a white gown with elbow-length gloves and floral accents, simultaneously bridal, angelic, and veiled, with the cheeky caption “who also owns a party dress.” These costumes suggest both romantic and violent stories for a male *or* female wolf outside of the traditional narrative. Little Red Riding Hood also has two hooded garments, one “in academic vein” and one “haute-coutour [sic],” which allow her to play a student or a dressmaker in alternative tales of independent girl/womanhood. It is, of course, playful for the Big Bad Wolf to have a “party dress” and for Little Red Riding Hood to have an haute couture hood, but it is also indicative of the medium’s potential. Removed from the context of their traditional narrative, these characters become pliable and, therefore, dynamic. In each of these series, Fitzgerald seems not only to explore, but also to enjoy the subversive potential of play in creating dolls from traditional narratives, particularly those meant for the edification of children.

Fitzgerald seems to have created few discernible self-portraits, which perhaps speaks to her persistent preoccupation with distortion. Distortion calls attention to the space between reality and representation, and while the self-portrait aims to collapse this space, Fitzgerald seems more interested in animating it. While her eponymous doll, like the others in the Fitzgerald family series, appears undistorted, we can perhaps see Fitzgerald's alternative image of herself in some of the more ambiguous character dolls. For example, the presumably male Woodcutter from the "Little Red Riding Hood" series, rather than Little Red Riding Hood herself, bears a striking resemblance to Fitzgerald's approximately contemporary self-portrait. In the gouache on paper self-portrait, Fitzgerald has blunt bangs, a wavy bob, large intense eyes, and tight lips (*Self-Portrait*). Also gouache on paper or poster board, the Woodcutter has blunt bangs, a brown bob, straight eyes, and a small red mouth ("Little Red Riding Hood"). The handwritten caption describes the Woodcutter, who almost appears to be made of wood himself, as "stalwart," which seems to characterize the self-portrait as well. Although critics are naturally drawn to Fitzgerald's ballerinas as distorted representations of herself, the figures in fact embody her dynamic experience of performance: When asked, "Why do you paint all your characters with exaggerated limbs?," Fitzgerald reportedly responded, "Because that's how a ballet dancer feels after dancing" (qtd. in Livingston 80). Not all of her *characters*, however, are ballet dancers. In fact, most of them are not. We could suggest that she projected her personal experience as a dancer upon all of her human figures, or we could widen our scope to consider the illusory nature of all performance, including the performance of gender. If the distorted ballerina represents how Fitzgerald "feels" physically, then perhaps the "stalwart" Woodcutter represents her emotional state. Whether or not she consciously identified with her paper-doll characters, Fitzgerald certainly created figures that embody—even caricature or parody—the

illusion of performance, calling attention to the composition of gender identity, and foretelling the foundational feminist work of Judith Butler.<sup>15</sup> Because these figures are designed for play, they invite the viewer not only to recognize, but also to participate in the subversion of seemingly objective representations of girl/womanhood. Therefore, Fitzgerald's paper dolls dramatize the political potential of the tactile, domestic medium.

### 2.3 *Willa Cather: Rewriting the Female Form*

From childhood into adolescence, Willa Cather developed a lifelong love of costume, theatre, and performance—in short, of play. The theatre actresses of the late nineteenth century were the stars of their day and foretold the cult of the film star in their widespread print images, including paper dolls. Cather, however, “was not a child who cared for dressing up dolls. She would rather dress herself up and pretend” (qtd. in Wolff 202). And so she did, often dressing as a boy—as was the “theatrical craze” by the 1880s—and performing in her hometown of Red Cloud, Nebraska (Wolff 203, 202).<sup>16</sup> Between the ages of 15 and 20, from 1888 to 1893, Cather

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<sup>15</sup> In her groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler explains her concept of “gender performativity” and considers how drag and cross-dressing parody and thereby undermine the myth of “essentialist gender identities” (176). When a viewer recognizes the distinction between perceived gender “reality” and illusory gender “appearance,” he or she calls into question the existence of “gender reality” itself (xxii). In light of Michel Foucault’s “redescription” of the body as a surface for social inscription, Butler re-describes “gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body’s surface . . .” (172). By calling attention to the inherent instability of gender “construction,” drag can deconstruct this “regulatory fiction” through parody (172, 175): “*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself . . .*” (175, emphasis in original).

<sup>16</sup> French actress Sarah Bernhardt “was profoundly influential in enlarging the range of possibility for all actresses because it was she who so firmly established a female’s ‘right’ to perform in male attire.” Her “theatrical innovations were imitated almost immediately,” “perhaps

even cut her hair short, wore men's clothing, and called herself William Cather, M.D. (198). Cynthia Griffin Wolff finds that Cather's so-called "masquerade" "became 'play' in the most dramatic sense of the word," as "most of [her] mannish costumes stepped directly off the contemporary stage" (201). Wolff even recalls Fitzgerald and Butler in her assertion that Cather "was engaged in a kind of *parody* of society's dichotomous definitions of 'masculine' and 'feminine'—lampooning polarity itself" (200, emphasis added). Calling Cather's adolescent years spent experimenting with cross-dressing her "season of play," Wolff argues that "it proclaimed her desire, as a woman, to search for something . . . 'other' . . . something as yet undefined. Audacious and ambiguous: it was a clarion call—the prologue to change and a demand for some *space of possibility*" (208, emphasis added). Coming back to this phrase, Wolff reiterates that Cather's "experiment signified neither some 'desire to be a boy' nor an affirmation of the binary code by which society had defined sexuality. Instead, it signified the demand for a 'space of possibility,' a vague and indefinable demand for the time to explore talents, roles, and the potential for power without being prematurely locked into the prison of late-nineteenth-century 'femininity'" (212). Cather would ultimately find this "space of possibility" in writing modernist novels that experimented with narrative voice and form, and created characters who engaged contemporary issues of gendered identity and consumer culture, which, as we have seen, were largely informed in the early decades of the twentieth century by narrative fiction film and the American play movement.

Before she became a full-time novelist, however, Cather worked in magazine writing and editing for more than a decade, learning the periodical trade, which eventually influenced both

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most" notably by American actress Julia Marlowe (Wolff 204). Late-nineteenth-century paper dolls depicting Marlowe even included the costume in which she played Robin Hood.

her critique of feminized culture and her experimentation with narrative voice. Her first position after college was as the managing editor of the short-lived, Pittsburgh women's magazine *Home Monthly* (1896-1900), whose publishers were inspired by the national success of the *Ladies Home Journal* (Benson 227). Epitomizing the "new woman," Cather "bicycled vigorously to and from her job, and often stayed at her desk until 1:00 a.m.," enjoying her personal "freedom" (Benson 232). Despite her personal independence, however, Cather, as the administrator of a women's magazine supported by advertising from local department stores, oversaw—if not wrote herself—columns, editorials, and articles instructing middle-class women in their roles as wives, mothers, homemakers, and consumers (Bradley 41-42, 45-56). Fictional contributions to the magazine, including Cather's own, often likewise bolstered the Progressive image of women and girls fulfilled only by traditionally feminine lives. Jennifer L. Bradley recognizes Cather's contradictory complicity in such imaging, but also finds that in her short fiction, which often employed the liberating—if also commercialized—bicycle, "Cather complicates the *Home Monthly*'s message about the proper role of women and suggests that those women willing to sacrifice relationships with men can find new independence" (58). These women likewise seem to suggest the characters that Cather would later craft in her novels. After leaving *Home Monthly*, Cather went on to write and edit for many magazines and journals, including serving as an editor for *McClure's Magazine* in New York from 1906 to 1911.<sup>17</sup> Elsa Nettels argues that this editorial work, particularly at *McClure's*, continued Cather's adolescent experimentation with male personas, as she "easily assumed the perspective of the writers whose work she edited . . ." (166). Even after leaving her position at *McClure's* to concentrate on her literary career,

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<sup>17</sup> Just one year after Cather left *McClure's Magazine*, in 1912, McClure Publications acquired *The Ladies' World*, a women's magazine that would publish a series of movie-star paper dolls from 1916 to 1918 (J. Johnson).

Cather agreed to write S. S. McClure's autobiography, which challenged her to compose *his* life in *his* voice and which was published in 1914 with the title *My Autobiography*. This progressive experimentation with gendered perspective in journalism foreshadows Cather's literary concern with narrative voice, as the overtly similar titles particularly suggest her assumption of a male point of view in *My Ántonia*.<sup>18</sup>

Through her editorial work, Cather developed a savvy understanding of the publishing industry, and although she set many of her novels at the end of the previous century, she was not only aware of, but also involved in the booming 1920s and '30s film market, primarily through the silent and sound film adaptations of her 1923 novel, *A Lost Lady*. As novels were widely adapted for the screen and writers embraced the lucrative film industry, the cult of the film star intersected with the novelist: "Indeed, literary reputation became a complex site of competing images projected to the public by critics, writers themselves, publishers, and now Hollywood marketing departments" (Schueth 114). Cather published *A Lost Lady*, the story of a nineteenth-century *lady's* fall from grace through the eyes of a younger man, in 1923, between *My Ántonia* (1918) and *The Professor's House* (1925), and subsequently sold the story to Warner Bros. for a silent film adaptation, which was produced the following year (Faling 69).<sup>19</sup> It was the 1934

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<sup>18</sup> Critics likewise cite Cather's May 20, 1919 letter to Will Owen Jones as evidence of *My Autobiography's* influence on the character and perspective of Jim Burden (see Nettels 166, Thacker 124).

<sup>19</sup> Although it was never adapted for film, *The Professor's House* engages issues of contemporary cinematic representation, particularly the effects of cinematography on the female body. In the novel, Professor Godfrey St. Peter shares his workspace with the family's seamstress, Augusta, and her dress "forms." The Professor describes these metonymical female figures in simultaneously erotic and frightening terms that suggest the fetishization of the film star. In her insightful analysis of these scenes, Carol Steinhagen echoes Mulvey's theory of narrative cinema: "These forms symbolize the only kind of femaleness with which St. Peter feels



sound film adaptation of *A Lost Lady*, however, that cast Cather as a literary icon, including her name beside film star Barbara Stanwyck's on marquees and marketing materials nationwide (Schueth 113).<sup>20</sup> Despite this promotion, the film ultimately bore little resemblance to Cather's novel, and thereafter, she declined all propositions to adapt her work, no matter how lucrative. She even amended her will to include "a prohibition on stage productions, motion pictures, radio broadcasts, and other reproduction methods discovered thereafter" (Schueth 123). This dramatic response suggests that, despite the dearth of explicit references to film in her novels, Cather's critiques of feminized consumer culture certainly included the burgeoning film industry, as her depictions of women certainly engaged contemporary issues of women's roles and representations that played out in print and on screen.

The nineteenth-century dressmaker, the twentieth-century woman, and the gendered narrative intersect in *My Ántonia*, Cather's fourth novel. Certainly less formally experimental than *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Nightwood*, *My Ántonia* predates many of the defining texts of "high modernism"—T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* were both published in 1922—and even falls outside of our prescribed time period of the 1920s and '30s. As a study of female identity and representation, however, *My Ántonia* bridges the nineteenth

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comfortable: fragmented body parts suggestive of sexual appeal yet forbidding. . . . These icons diminish the female sexuality St. Peter fears to isolated caricatured body parts" (71).

<sup>20</sup> In her history of the film adaptations of *A Lost Lady*, Andrea I. Faling notes that "Several critics wished Greta Garbo had been allowed to tackle the role in a screenplay more in keeping with the novel's storyline" (72). This allusion to Garbo is particularly intriguing when we remember that Mulvey cites close-ups of Garbo's face as exemplars of narrative cinema's fragmentation and fetishization of the female body (Mulvey 12). Although Cather and Garbo apparently never met, John P. Anders further explores their connections and even suggests that "While Ántonia . . . would perhaps be the antithesis of Garbo, Lena Lingard would be her apotheosis" (4).

and twentieth centuries, calling upon the reflective imaginations of multiple generations of women and girls. And although more subtly than many of her twentieth-century peers, Cather revises the formal conventions of the nineteenth-century novel that functioned to enhance the illusion of realism or objectivity, foretelling many of the defining works of the period. In *My Ántonia*, for example, she plays with the so-called “framed narrative,” in which an objective character/narrator introduces and concludes the story, thereby testifying to its veracity. Cather uses this compositional method to create an embedded first-person perspective that, as we will see, destabilizes the fetishizing male gaze that would define narrative cinema’s presentation of women, calling attention to the inherent subjectivity of seemingly objective representation, which, according to Walter Benjamin, made film the ideal medium for fascist propaganda. By structuring this framed narrative according to selective memory, rather than sequential events, Cather likewise manipulates narrative time, experimenting with the techniques that would redefine realism in the cinema and in the modernist novel.

The Introduction to the 1918 edition of *My Ántonia*, which was notably revised for the 1926 edition, establishes the novel’s revisionary narrative frame and structure. It is written from the first-person perspective of an unnamed female writer, who runs into her childhood friend, Jim Burden, on a train and, in reminiscing, finds that their conversation “kept returning to a central figure”: Ántonia. When Jim wonders why the narrator has not written about Ántonia, she responds that she “had always felt that other people—he himself, for one—knew her much better,” which seems rather a failure of imagination for a writer (5). When she suggests that they each document and then share their memories of Ántonia in order to “get a picture of her,” Jim responds enthusiastically, but with one caveat: “‘Of course,’ he said, ‘I should have to do it in a direct way, and say a great deal about myself. It’s through myself that I knew and felt her, and

I've had no practice in any other form of presentation” (5). It is ironic, and indicative of his limitations as a narrator—and, perhaps, as a man—that Jim would consider this compositional method “direct.” Jim’s declaration that he has “had no practice in any other form of presentation”—that is, that he has never imagined life from any perspective but his own—calls attention to the fact that Cather will do just that in this very novel, by writing from Jim’s point of view. Jim’s limitations also belie Cather’s association with the Introduction’s seemingly autobiographical narrator, who cannot describe *Ántonia*. Or perhaps the narrator cannot write about *Ántonia* because she realizes what Jim does not: that a portrait of *Ántonia* from any viewpoint—even, and perhaps especially, the author’s own—would necessarily be *indirect*. Had Cather written the novel from the female writer’s perspective—that is, a perspective that easily could have been read as her own—she would have reinforced the illusion of authorial objectivity and of narrative realism, which was, as we have noted, the established function of the framed narrative. By writing the novel from the perspective of a character expressly distinguished from the female writer *via* the narrative frame, however, Cather calls attention to the inherent subjectivity of representation.<sup>21</sup> By making this character a man—and his subject a woman—she likewise calls attention to the patriarchal construction of such representation, much in the same

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<sup>21</sup> In his examination of the influence of *My Autobiography* on *My Ántonia*, Thacker cites an anonymous contemporary review of the novel that recognizes the ingenuity of Cather’s narrative frame and structure—but as a successful rendering of realism, of autobiography. Cather apparently saved and shared this review: “By deliberately and at the out set surrendering the storyteller's most valuable prerogatives Miss Cather has won a complete victory over the reader, shattering his easeful assumption of the unreality of it all, routing his ready-made demand for the regulation thrills and taking prisoner his sense what is his rightful due” (qtd. in Thacker 127). It is certainly possible that for Cather’s contemporary, presumably male reader, the framed narrative functioned as traditionally intended—as a testament to verisimilitude—and yet still seemed novel, still prevented “easeful” reading. This review, rather than opposing our reading, testifies to Cather’s ability to both destabilize and redefine realism.

way that cross-dressing reveals the construction of seemingly essential gender identity. If Cather's own cross-dressing "signified the demand for a 'space of possibility,'" then her narrative "masquerade" creates such a space in literary form (Wolff 212, 201).

In addition to revealing the realist narrative's inherent subjectivity, then, Cather's revision of the narrative frame creates this space—between, perhaps, these various viewpoints—for the expression of otherwise prohibited female desire. Despite the narrator's previously stated reservations about describing *Ántonia*, her response to Jim's "direct" method seems curiously distant: "I told him that how *he* knew her and felt her was exactly what I most wanted to know about *Ántonia*. He had had opportunities that I, as a little girl who watched her come and go, had not" (5, emphasis added). We could read this statement as a matter of fact—that is, Jim, as a boy, was allowed to "come and go" as he pleased and had, therefore, been able to spend more time with *Ántonia*. We could, however, also read this statement—the only one in the Introduction that indicates the narrator's gender—as a subtle revelation of the narrator's own prohibited sexual desire to "know" and "feel" *Ántonia*. Judith Fetterley certainly supports the latter reading, arguing that Cather's own reserved lesbianism explains the embedded narrative voice:

In *My Ántonia* Cather renounces the possibility of writing directly in her own voice, telling her own story, and imagining herself in the pages of her text. Obviously autobiographical, the obvious narrator for *My Ántonia* would have been Cather herself. Yet for Cather to write in a female voice about *Ántonia* as an object of emotional desire would, in the context of early twentieth-century awareness of sexual "deviance" and thus of the potentially sexual content of "female friendships," have required her to acknowledge a lesbian sensibility and to feel comfortable with such a self-presentation . . . . (154)

By focusing on the novel's supposedly "obvious" autobiographical foundation, Fetterley limits her analysis to Cather's hypothetical, personal perspective, thereby limiting the productive potential of Cather's narrative choice. Fetterley's observation concerning the "context of early twentieth-century awareness of sexual 'deviance,'" however, widens the critical scope. It is certainly possible that Cather—and/like her unnamed female narrator—did not "feel comfortable" expressing prohibited female desire in her "own voice." It is also possible that Cather realized the problematic singularity of such a perspective—as well as the impracticality, or even impossibility, of publishing such a "deviant" perspective—and chose instead to complicate the narrative voice, creating time and space for alternative expressions of female character.

Following the narrator's proposition, the Introduction resumes "[m]onths afterward," when Jim returns with his manuscript, establishing the novel's structure and perhaps appealing directly to the female reader. Upon his arrival, Jim tells the narrator, "I didn't arrange or rearrange. I simply wrote down what of herself and myself and other people *Ántonia's* name recalls to me. I suppose it hasn't any form" (6). As he previously called attention to the inherent subjectivity of his perspective, Jim ironically calls attention here to Cather's careful composition of narrative time, which lingers in particular scenes while skimming entire seasons. Fetterley's argument concerning Cather's narrative voice also applies to the novel's structure of selective memory: "the text as a whole recapitulates the burden of narrative choice—a transposition only partially completed; a story, a sensibility, an eroticism only partially renounced" (158). The novel's structure of selective memory supports this reading, as memories only "partially" and subjectively recall the past. Even the possessive title, *My Ántonia*, which initially suggests Jim's ownership of *Ántonia's* story, ultimately emphasizes the narrative's subjectivity, which the

Introduction continues to establish. When Jim advises the narrator to “Read it as soon as you can, . . . but don’t let it influence your own story,” it seems as though Cather is speaking directly to her reader, cautioning her against accepting any single perspective—even her own—as objective reality. The narrator concludes the Introduction, “My own story was never written, but the following narrative is Jim’s manuscript, substantially as he brought it to me” (6). This simple declaration casts the female narrator not as a writer, but as an editor, recalling Cather’s own progression from editor to novelist, and perhaps even challenging the female reader to write her own story.

If the Introduction and its narrator propose productive female agency, then the character of Lena Lingard, another childhood friend of Jim’s and *Ántonia*’s, embodies this potential. I will focus the remainder of my examination of *My Ántonia* on Lena, rather than the eponymous *Ántonia*, not because *Ántonia* does not engage questions of female representation, but because Lena so clearly alludes to several contemporary concerns of independent womanhood: personally and financially fulfilling work and sexual identity outside of marriage and motherhood. Through Jim’s eyes, Lena plays the rebellious flirt to *Ántonia*’s earnest good girl in their youth, and, to some extent, these roles continue into adulthood: Lena becomes an independent, urban businesswoman, while *Ántonia* becomes a rural wife and mother. Therefore, Lena reveals Jim’s sexual anxiety, while *Ántonia* inspires his faithful adulation. Fetterley locates Lena at the center of *My Ántonia*, as the character who embodies Cather’s own desire for, as Wolff puts it, a “space of possibility” (208):

Emblematic of the eroticism Cather can not bring herself to renounce completely is the character of Lena Lingard. If the idealization of *Ántonia* in ‘the pioneer woman’s story’ requires the steady denial of her sexuality, Lena remains

convincingly sexual. And significantly, her sexuality is neither conventionally female nor conventionally male but rather identifies an erotic potential possible only outside the patriarchal, heterosexual territory of rigid definitions and polar oppositions. Characterized by a diffused sensuality rooted in a sense of self and neither particularly aggressive nor particularly passive, Lena represents one model of lesbian sexuality. Her presence in the text as a symbol of desire, felt as desirable and allowed to be desired, . . . provides occasional moments of pure sensual pleasure and indicates the strength of Cather's resistance to renouncing her lesbian sensibility. (158-59)

Although her description of Lena is apt, Fetterley's focus on Cather's own lesbianism once again limits her reading, for Lena's "sense of self" provides a potential model not only of "lesbian sexuality," but also of independent womanhood. In the wider cultural and historical context of narrative fiction film and the American play movement, Lena has the potential to belie contemporary, reductive messaging and to inspire a generation of women and girls to imagine their own independent womanhood. Although not explicitly lesbian, Lena's sexuality remains inscrutable to Jim, simultaneously arousing and obstructing the male gaze that would, as Mulvey suggests, fetishize and temper Lena's threatening "sense of self." Rather than merely aligning the reader's perspective with Jim's—as cinematography aligns the audience member's viewpoint with the male protagonist's—Cather, as we have noted, uses the framed and partial narrative to destabilize the appearance of objectivity, emphasizing Jim's subjective struggle to represent Lena's womanhood. Relatively displaced in time, Lena likewise implicitly threatens the contemporary messaging of the American play movement by recalling the personally and financially fulfilled, late-nineteenth-century dressmaker. By the time of the novel's publication,

independent dressmakers—like Lena—were being replaced by large-scale standardization and mechanization, as well as small-scale consumer products and messaging that encouraged every woman to channel her inherent creative talent in the home. Therefore, Lena provides an acceptably *indirect*, alternatively independent mindset for twentieth-century girls coming of age—and hoping to—in the era of the film star and the paper doll.

As the epitome of the late-nineteenth-century dressmaker, Lena starkly contrasts with early-twentieth-century images of the domestic wife and mother, recalling a society of alternatively productive women. As “a single woman of working-class origins” with her own shop and workspace, she is necessarily skilled, mysteriously tasteful, and financially independent (Gamber 135). Surprising Jim at college, she tells him, rather unassumingly, “I’m in business for myself. I have a dressmaking shop in the Raleigh Block, out on O Street. I’ve made a real good start” (160). As the manager of her own shop in the city, “her business was going well, and she saved a little money”—enough money, she tells Jim, “to build the house for mother I’ve talked about so long” (160). She even employs her own “sewing girls,” marking the clear distinction between the tradeswoman and the wage worker (162). She cuts a lovely, “quietly conventionalized” figure in her “city clothes”: “Her black suit fitted her figure smoothly, and a black lace hat, with pale-blue forget-me-nots, sat demurely on her yellow hair” (160). She softens the significance of her own appearance, demurring, “You like my suit? I have to dress pretty well in my business” (160). Of course, the “smooth” cut and style of her suit display her skill and taste for dressmaking. Despite her moderation, or perhaps because of it, this interaction tells the reader that Lena has been quite successful during a single season in the city, as this meeting initiates the season that Lena and Jim spend together.



While Lena's independent womanhood confuses and threatens Jim, he appreciates her prosperity and takes comfort in her girlish attributes. In her loosely divided work and living spaces, Lena has created a warm and comfortable setting for her productive, contented life, a setting that starkly contrasts with her rural, childhood home and with contemporary commercialized sites of dressmaking and shopping: the factory and the department store. As Lena and Jim spend more time together, Jim observes Lena's shop/home and her countenance, confirming—and even enjoying—her fulfilling independence:

We had delightful Sunday breakfasts together at Lena's. At the back of her long work-room was a bay-window, large enough to hold a box-couch and a reading-table. We breakfasted in this recess, after drawing the curtains that shut out the long room, with cutting-tables and wire women and sheet-draped garments on the walls. The sunlight poured in, making everything on the table shine and glitter and the flame of the alcohol lamp disappear altogether. (168)

Recalling Gamber's historical portrait of the independent dressmaker, Jim regularly witnesses Lena's talent, diligence, and satisfaction: "Evidently she had great natural aptitude for her work. She knew, as she said, 'what people looked well in.' She never tired of poring over fashion-books. Sometimes in the evening I would find her alone in her work-room, draping folds of satin on a wire figure, with a quite blissful expression of countenance" (167). As the qualifier "evidently" suggests, Jim remains somewhat befuddled by Lena's commitment and contentedness, despite seeing it with his own eyes. On the one hand, Jim admires her undeniable, if somewhat illusive, success: "She was so easygoing; had none of the push and self-assertiveness that get people ahead in business," but he "thought her manner with her customers very good, and wondered where she had learned such self-possession" (167, 168). On the other

hand, he mocks “the conventional expressions” that “Lena had picked up” from her local “dressmaking shop”: “Those formal phrases, the very flower of small-town proprieties, and the flat commonplaces, nearly all hypocritical in their origin, became very funny, very engaging, when they were uttered in Lena’s soft voice, with her caressing intonation and arch naïveté” (169). When Jim tries to understand Lena’s professional fulfillment, musing “that the years when Lena literally hadn’t enough clothes to cover herself might have something to do with her untiring interest in dressing the human figure,” he reduces her to girlhood without considering her development. Neither a two-dimensional “fashion-plate” nor a three-dimensional “wire figure,” however, Lena harkens back to the previous generation while troubling contemporary images of girlhood *and* womanhood, which threatens Jim’s limited perspective. In Mulvey’s terms, Jim cannot alleviate the anxiety that Lena inspires by simply objectifying her—as in narrative cinema—for in the modernist narrative, she remains a complex character.

Lena continues to complicate Jim’s characterizations of girlhood and womanhood outside of her shop and home, particularly when they attend the theatre. Although Lena always insists on paying for her own ticket, as “she was in business now, and she wouldn’t have a schoolboy spending his money on her,” she has a childlike reaction to the performance: “everything was wonderful to her, and everything was true” (163). On a particular night, they see American actress Clara Morris, whom Jim can only partly place, in *Camille*. Alexandre Dumas’s 1848 novel *La Dame aux camélias*, or *The Lady of the Camellias*, was adapted and widely performed across the Atlantic as a play, *Camille*, and an opera, *La Traviata*, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and by the time of *My Ántonia*’s publication in 1918, two American silent film adaptations had already been made, and several more silent and sound films would follow. Thus, contemporary readers of *My Ántonia* would certainly have been familiar with the story of

*Camille*, perhaps even more so than Lena and Jim.<sup>22</sup> Still, Cather develops—even prolongs—Jim’s experience of the play, perhaps indulging in *his* perspective on one of *her* passions, or perhaps dramatizing the superiority of theatre to film in its ability to transport even Jim “across long years and several languages, through the person on an infirm old actress” (167).<sup>23</sup> This extended evening also, however, provides Jim the opportunity to watch and reflect upon Lena, who responds to the performance, and even the theatre itself, with pensive reverence: “After the second act I left Lena in tearful contemplation of the ceiling, and went out into the lobby to smoke. I congratulated myself that I had not brought some Lincoln girl who would talk during the waits about the junior dances, or whether the cadets would camp at Plattsmouth. Lena was at least a woman, and I was a man” (165-66). Through Jim’s eyes, Lena’s emotional response to the performance not only defines her as “at least a woman,” as opposed to a “girl,” but it also

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<sup>22</sup> In a 1914 interview, Sarah Bernhardt, “who had been appearing in the title role in *La Dame aux camélias* since her first American tour, which lasted from October 1880 to May 1882” (Lant and Periz 684), recalls,

in a recent tour I made in America with *La Dame aux camélias*, our troupe was followed by a cinema company. Everywhere I stopped, and frequently in a theater right next door to where I was playing, the movie version of *La Dame aux camélias* was also showing. It so happened that the posters for the two events were sometimes put up right next to each other. However, every night both theaters were full—but in the one you paid only fifteen or twenty sous while in the other it cost fifteen or twenty francs. (Bernhardt 597)

<sup>23</sup> Jim’s response to Clara Morris recalls Cather’s own November 1893 reviews (see *The World and the Parish* 42-45). Cather explained the superiority of theatre to film in a 1929 letter to longtime friend and *Omaha World-Herald* editor, Harvey E. Newbranch:

The “pity and terror” which the drama, even in its crudest form, can awaken in young people, is not to be found in the movies. Only a living human being, in some sort of rapport with us, speaking the lines, can make us forget who we are and where we are, can make us (especially children) actually live in the story that is going on before us, can make the dangers of that heroine and the desperation of that hero much more important to us, for the time much dearer to us than our own lives. (qtd. in Faling 71)

defines him as “a man.” Following this observation, however, Jim becomes “unrestrainedly” emotional himself, confusing his own characterizations of gendered maturity (166). Lena ultimately obscures and threatens Jim’s role as the man in their relationship by refusing to play the wife and mother.

Lena’s personal experience as a rural, working-class girl who became an urban, middle-class businesswoman directly contrasts with the American play movement’s depiction of domestic work as fulfilling employment for women and fun play for girls and, therefore, with Jim’s conceptions of female desire. When Jim asks Lena why she does not want a husband and children, she tells him unapologetically that she grew up taking care of children when she was just a child herself. She briefly, but vividly, describes her childhood of hard domestic labor, a stark contrast to her financially and creatively fulfilling work as a dressmaker and to contemporary advertising images of middle-class girls happily caring for their dolls. Initially, Jim relays her testimony: “She told me she couldn’t remember a time when she was so little that she wasn’t lugging a heavy baby about, helping to wash for babies, trying to keep their little chapped hands and faces clean. She remembered home as a place where there were always too many children, a cross man and work piling up around a sick woman” (174). Lena continues in her own words, explicitly calling attention to the gap between her knowledge and Jim’s:

It wasn’t mother’s fault. She would have made us comfortable if she could. But that was no life for a girl! After I began to herd and milk, I could never get the smell of the cattle off me. The few underclothes I had I kept in a cracker-box. On Saturday nights, after everybody was in bed, then I could take a bath if I wasn’t too tired. I could make two trips to the windmill to carry water, and heat it in the wash-boiler on the stove. While the water was heating, I could bring in a washtub

out of the cave, and take my bath in the kitchen. Then I could put on a clean night-gown and get into bed with two others, who likely hadn't had a bath unless I'd given it to them. You can't tell me anything about family life. I've had plenty to last me. (174-75)

Lena's memory both recalls and belies the 1919 Ivory soap advertisement showing a middle-class girl washing her dolls' clothes in the parlor, instructing mothers that "a girl *unconsciously* does things by the methods acquired in her childhood's play" (qtd. in Gleason 169, emphasis added). While Lena certainly does remember the "methods" that she learned as a girl, she has *consciously* rejected them as a woman. The advertisement suggests that it is the mother's responsibility to train her daughter in the ways of women's work through girls' play. Lena, however, asserts that her mother would have given her a different life if she could have, renouncing the Progressive ideology that would make mothers complicit in the domestic training of their daughters. In this exchange, we see none of Lena's supposed "arch naïveté" that has brought Jim pleasure and relief (169). Rather, in articulating her epistemology, Lena seems to have reached the limits of Jim's understanding. When Jim consequently announces that he is leaving Lincoln, Lena comforts him by apologetically suggesting that she perhaps never should have sought him out, but that she could not help herself: "I guess I've always been a little foolish about you" (175). Rather than distrusting Lena's somewhat cajoling confession, Jim, a bit naïvely himself, finds his faith in Lena restored: "She was a sweet creature to those she loved, that Lena Lingard!" (175). Lena ultimately continues her successful dressmaking business in San Francisco, where she and Tiny Soderball, a fellow immigrant "hired girl" who made her fortune as a hotelier during the Klondike Gold Rush, remain friends, modeling an alternative partnership between independent women.

In *Lena*, Cather has created a character who is both recognizable, as the typical independent dressmaker of the previous generation, and exceptional, in her rejection of enduring images of domestic womanhood. Her presence disrupts and complicates the dominant narrative of female epistemology as a successive inculcation through girlhood, wifehood, and motherhood, depicted in ubiquitous images of women across media and enacted by previous generations of wives and mothers. Susan J. Rosowski, in her study of female adolescent development in Cather's novels, asserts that Cather's "girls contain within themselves the women they will become, and her adult women remain in touch with the children they once were" (61). Rosowski describes a more reflective than successive development in Cather's female characters. Indeed, she continues, "Cather described girls and women as enjoying the security of knowing that they carry within themselves that which they need to be creative. . . . While to grow up male is to be dispossessed of childhood in adolescence and then of adolescence in adulthood, to grow up female concerns claiming that which is within, then giving it form" (61). Female identity, then, is less inherited than "claimed," in stark contrast to the indoctrinating message of the American play movement, which casts the mother as instructor to the daughter's student, and the patriarchal model, which bestows identity upon succeeding generations of men. Consequently, female creative production embodies dynamic female identity, as in the dysmorphic figures born of Fitzgerald's evolving experience as a "performance artist" (Seidel, Wang, and Wang 138). Cather's dynamic narratives likewise embody her enduring "demand for some space of possibility" (Wolff 208). Fetterley finds that

perhaps the ultimate irony of Cather's career lies in the fact that we remember her best, not for her impersonations of male experience, her masculine masquerades, but rather for the strategies she evolved to maintain her own point of view and tell

her own story within the masquerade. In a word, we remember her less for the consequences of her renunciation than for the results of her resistance. (159)

It is these “strategies” that allowed Cather to create alternative representations of women through modernist narratives.

The next chapter will consider how women, often mothers, inhabit the space of the silent-film theater and how this space appears in literary representations of the female mind, which may function as a retreat from the reproductive, unproductive, fetishized, or fragmented body. If the silent-film theatre provides a quiet, reflective space for women and mothers, then the modernist narrative, enhanced by the images and processes of film, provides a medium for the expression of unsanctioned and, therefore, often unspoken female thoughts and desires. In considering the transition from silent to sound film, the next two chapters will engage more fully with the issue of voice, which Cather so skillfully raises. As her narrative voices have shown, the relationship between female agency and voice—be it narrative or corporeal—is more complex than it may appear.

### **CHAPTER 3: PROJECTING FEMALE CONSCIOUSNESS**

Cinematic composition and technology perverted women’s bodies, but women were not only the objectified subjects of film. They were also the primary consumers and the productive critics of film: “Filmmakers and exhibitors consciously targeted women from the start; by the 1920s popular wisdom had it that films were *for* women, and that they formed the majority of audiences. These regular filmgoers further shaped cinema’s fortunes in their buying of, and written responses to, film magazines, the act of reading about cinema became an intrinsic part of consuming it” (Lant and Periz 1). These magazines were both popular, like *Photoplay*, and elite,

like *Close Up*, and, therefore, reflected a theoretical divide in film criticism between those who considered film to be mass entertainment and those who considered film to be high art. As the epitome of the Hollywood “fan magazine,” *Photoplay* provided its primarily female readership with behind-the-scenes access to photos, profiles, and editorials featuring their favorite film stars and sets, engaging readers in celebrity culture and consumption outside of the theatre (Hutchinson). *Close Up*, in contrast, published intellectual critiques of avant-garde films and international cinema for a select, transnational audience of progressive writers and critics. As consumers and critics, women played defining roles in both the art and the entertainment of film.

Although film, in its association with a primarily female audience, was easily characterized as sentimental amusement, “high modernist” female writers like H.D. and Dorothy Richardson were engaged in theoretical, transnational debates concerning the aesthetics, technologies, and experience of the cinema. During the 1920s and ’30s, these debates often centered on the transition from silent film to talkies, which spanned these decades. In her columns for *Close Up*, Richardson argued that the silent-film cinema provided women and especially mothers with a quiet respite and protective space, where they might connect with their “creative consciousness.” Talkies, however, were dominated by synchronized voice and, therefore, disrupted the feminine space of the silent-film cinema. Although her *Close Up* audience was elite, Richardson’s observations concerned the theatre experience for the typical female viewer. Rather than reducing this woman to her consumption of celebrity culture, Richardson supported her potential for enlightenment in the silent-film cinema.

The same progressive female writers who critiqued film as both art and entertainment, including Richardson, Djuna Barnes, and Virginia Woolf, employed cinematic techniques in their narrative fiction, particularly in their depictions of female characters and perspectives.



While such cinematic composition distorts and objectifies the female body, it presents—or projects—the female mind in a new light, as a sort of “screen of consciousness.” As a contemporary silent medium concerned with representing female “voice,” the modernist novel provides an alternative perspective on “silent” cinematic composition and experience. Therefore, we will look to Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928) and Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight* (1938), “high modernist” novels that span the international transition from silent film to talkies, to explore the potential of the modernist narrative to represent otherwise unspeakable female consciousness.

### **3.1 Dorothy Richardson: Silent Film and the Female Voice**

The 1920s and ’30s saw a rise not only in popular periodicals, but also in so-called “little magazines”: elite, transnational journals that aimed to parallel the “high art” that they published and critiqued. The editors of and contributors to these journals were often members of the “high modernism” coterie. Ezra Pound, for example, edited and contributed to many of these little magazines, including *The Dial*, the American magazine that first published T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* at Pound’s behest; *The Egoist*, the quintessentially English modernist journal; and *The Little Review*, the aptly titled American magazine that initially serialized James Joyce’s *Ulysses* from 1918 to 1920, when the editors were halted by obscenity charges. In fact, the editors of and contributors to these periodicals were so entwined that there was even a little magazine entitled *Coterie*. Their readerships were similarly tight-knit and, therefore, limited. While mass-market periodicals like *Ladies’ Home Journal* boasted circulations in the millions, little magazines like *The Little Review* had readerships in the thousands at most. Despite their

limited reach at the time, these journals were the first to publish much of the art, literature, and criticism that we now consider to be the masterpieces of transnational modernism.

In addition to spanning the transnational literati scene, these periodicals also crossed media, applying political and theoretical manifestos to literature, photography, and/or film. *Close Up* was such a journal. Founded in Switzerland by English writer Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman), American writer H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), and Scottish writer Kenneth Macpherson, *Close Up* ran from 1927 to 1933, spanning the nexus of the modernist era and explicitly intersecting international literary and film studies. Alluding to the ubiquitous “close-up” shot, which we discussed in the previous chapter, the journal aimed to apply “close analysis, scrutiny, an ‘optic’” to the high art of film: “As the first English-language journal devoted entirely to the ‘art of the film’, *Close Up* aspired to do for English-language film writing and for the dissemination of film theory what the silent cinema did for the spectator: transcend the boundaries of language and of nation” (Friedberg 1, 10). Expanding upon the work of French film journals, the editors and writers of *Close Up* wanted not only to revise film criticism, but also “to transform the cultural topography of the cinema and its future” (3). This goal seems rather ambitious for a journal that printed only 500 copies of each issue, but aims of artistic and political grandeur—and, ironically, elitism—were hallmarks of such publications. Independent financing from Bryher likewise allowed them to focus on their earnest intention to inspire “better films”: “Instead of using writing to extend the cinema’s effect, they advocated a cinema that mirrored the aesthetics and production of their own written discourse: discourse *about* the object, artfully designed, psychologically astute, independently financed, free from commercial constraints” (3). The cover of the first issue defined the journal’s stance: “CLOSE UP, an English review, is the first to approach films from the angles of art, experiment, and possibility”

(qtd. in Friedberg 2). Edited in Switzerland, printed in France, and distributed to Paris, Berlin, London, Geneva, New York, and Los Angeles, “The writing in *Close Up* created a mobile discursive forum, a diffused salon” (10).

Despite being written in English, *Close Up* aimed to align with silent film as a consciously transnational—and theoretically queer—medium, starkly contrasting with conservative, nationalist ideologies like the American Progressive movement. As artists, luminaries, and bisexuals, Bryher and H.D. maintained “itinerant lifestyles” that “permitted a freedom from class, from family, from pressures toward a heterosexual norm” (Friedberg 10). Anne Friedberg argues that “It is tempting to speculate that bisexuality, travel, the efforts to escape class and gender designations parallel the stridency that *Close Up* maintained about being a *transnational* journal and about advocating a *transnational* cinema, blurring all borders” (12). Macpherson, who was married to Bryher and was H.D.’s lover, likewise embodied the journal’s commitment to intersectionality, as the “editorial threesome . . . travelled widely and frequently enough to conduct pilgrimages, not to cities but to screens” (12). The transition from silent film to talkies, however, obstructed their political and artistic vision. In the December 1930 issue, Macpherson announced the impending reduction from monthly to quarterly publication, attributing this change to talkies: “With the establishment of the talking film, the world situation with regard to film was completely altered. Whereas, during the period of silent films, world distribution was fluid, now films are becoming more and more tied up within national limits. Circulation has to an enormous extent come to an end” (qtd. in Friedberg 26). Over the next three years, the journal “that had so heavily invested in the transformative power of writing about the cinema” “switched to a more predominantly visual format,” and ultimately discontinued in December 1933 without explanation (26). “In retrospect,” Friedberg reflects, “the body of

writing in *Close Up* appears as its own form of ‘literary montage’ – . . . an exhibit of documents which offer the contemporary reader an extensive tour of the ardent debate about cinema as it emerged as an aesthetic form” (3-4). This “body of writing” likewise provides the current literary critic with productive perspectives on representations of women and the silent cinema.

From the start, *Close Up* aimed “to bring the English literary world to the cinema,” and its editors certainly considered women writers to be an important part of this “world” (Friedberg 13). Having two female writers at the helm no doubt influenced this effort “to encourage a select group of modernist writers to engage with the cinema” (13). H.D.’s own poems and articles published in the journal also likely inspired contributions from women writers. In fact, Macpherson called attention to H.D.’s poem “Projector” when he “solicited” work from Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein (13).<sup>24</sup> Sending Stein a copy of the first issue, he entreated her to contribute in the future:

I really want to ask now if perhaps sometime you would send a poem or article for *Close Up* in which this development of experimental art is concerned. You will see that H.D. has written a charming poem *Projector*, which has this bearing upon form in the films. The most modern tendency seems so linked up in this way and the kind of thing you write is so exactly the kind of thing that could be translated to the screen that anything you might send would be deeply appreciated. (qtd. in Friedberg 14)

Despite his somewhat condescending description of H.D.’s poem as “charming,” Macpherson suggests several provocative, if ambiguous, topics that the journal aimed to address: the formal “link” between writing and film, the “translation” of writing to film, and the potential influence

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<sup>24</sup> For more on H.D.’s poetry and “cinematic modernism,” see Susan McCabe.

of writing upon film. The journal's explorations of these subjects often encompass our more specific investigation into the intersections between writing and film in modernist representations of women. In fact, in their study of *Close Up*, James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus focus on female contributors H.D. and English author Dorothy Richardson as intermediary voices: "We want to give their speculations on film and cinema wider currency primarily in order to pose the question whether *literary* modernism – and especially modernism of women like Virginia Woolf as well as the *Close Up* contributors – should be seen in large part as a response to, and an appropriation of, the aesthetic possibilities opened up by cinema" (vii). In other words, women writers had a distinctive perspective on both literary and cinematic modernism and, therefore, on their intersection. In order to explore this perspective further, we will examine some of Dorothy Richardson's contributions to *Close Up*, which consider the relationships between the female audience, the cinema, silent film, and the female mind.

Although not widely read today, Richardson (1873-1957) was highly regarded in the modernist literary milieu for her semiautobiographical—and notably cinematic—thirteen-volume "novel sequence," *Pilgrimage*. A "quest narrative and *Bildungsroman*," *Pilgrimage* "covers the period in Richardson's life between 1891 and 1912 through the consciousness of her autobiographical/fictional persona, Miriam Henderson" (Marcus 152). The first five volumes or "chapters" were published between 1915 and 1920, and the remaining volumes appeared throughout the '20s and '30s, aside from the final incomplete "chapter," which was published posthumously in 1967. Prior to its publication in 1920, excerpts from the fifth book were, in fact, serialized in *The Little Review*, alongside, as we previously mentioned, Joyce's *Ulysses* ("Dorothy Richardson"). Given its highly experimental use of free indirect discourse, *Pilgrimage*

was regarded as one of the first works to employ so-called “stream of consciousness.”<sup>25</sup> Richardson, however, “rejected the label,” and seemed to prefer cinematic comparisons, as in Bryher’s 1931 review of the tenth volume for *Close Up*: “in each page an aspect of London is created that like an image from a film, substitutes itself for memory, to revolve before the eyes as we read” (Marcus 152; qtd. in Marcus 153). Laura Marcus finds, then, that in *Pilgrimage*, “Consciousness becomes a screen (rather than a stream) on and through which the past and the future project their shapes and scenes” (154). Richardson herself suggested this idea of the “screen of consciousness” when she commented that the writing/reading “process may go forward in the form of a conducted tour, the author leading, visible and audible, all the time. Or the material to be contemplated may be thrown upon a screen, the author out of sight and hearing” (qtd. in Marcus 154). These creative concerns with female consciousness, voice, memory, and imagery are some of the same issues that Richardson took up in her critical work for *Close Up*.

As an established member of the modernist literary community who engaged in the aesthetics and politics of visual media, Richardson was an ideal contributor to *Close Up*. Although she had “reservations about her qualifications as a writer on film,” she developed a regular column for the journal, in which she “explored the conditions of cinema spectatorship in ways both practical (what shape should a cinema auditorium be?) and phenomenological (how is the spectator incorporated into the filmic spectacle?)” (Marcus 150). Since most filmgoers were women, Richardson’s interest in the audience’s relationship to the cinema naturally led her to consider “the meanings of cinema spectatorship for women and . . . cinema as a woman’s

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<sup>25</sup> For more on Richardson’s “extreme version of free indirect narrative technique,” see Deborah Parsons (31).

sphere” (150-51). Consequently, she was ardently invested in the woman’s perspective on the transition from silent film to talkies, which was particularly significant for *Close Up*. She entitled her column “Continuous Performance,” which “refers to a particular kind of film exhibition and viewing, an ongoing process of projection and spectating, in marked contrast to the ‘single performance’ of the theatre” (151). The title likewise “suggests her interest in cinema in all its aspects and not merely in high-art films, her concern with the cinematic as a way of seeing and as a total and totalizing experience, rather than with individual films as artefacts” (151-52). These democratic concerns with the “process” and “experience” of film going had particular implications for women’s agency and gave Richardson a distinctive voice in *Close Up*.

In the debut July 1927 issue of *Close Up*, Richardson recalls attending her first silent film at a London “photo-play” palace, where she discovered an alternative purpose for the cinema: as a haven for weary mothers. Exhausted with the theater, she decided to attend a “picture,” despite her distaste for the “repulsive” palaces, with their “plaster frontages and garish placards” (“Continuous Performance” 160). Upon entering, she immediately took solace in the “scattered audience,” which

was composed almost entirely of mothers. Their children, apart from the infants accompanying them, were at school and their husbands were at work. It was a new audience, born within the last few months. Tired women, their faces sheened with toil, and small children, penned in semi-darkness and foul air on a sunny afternoon. There was almost no talk. Many of the women sat alone, figures of weariness at rest. Watching these I took comfort. At last the world of entertainment had provided for a few pence, tea thrown in, a sanctuary for

mothers, an escape from the everlasting *qui vive* into eternity on a Monday afternoon. (160)

Despite having no children of her own, Richardson felt a sort of kinship with these women, finding consolation in an otherwise dreary scene. That her own experience with the cinema began by “watching” and sympathizing with the female audience—rather than the film—certainly suggests her continuing interest in the female cinema experience. The relative silence of the audience—“There was almost no talk”—likewise affected her impression of the event, even as the film began: “The first scene was a tide, frothing in over the small beach of a sandy cove, and for some time we were allowed to watch the coming and going of those foamy waves, to the sound of a slow waltz, without the disturbance of incident” (160). Richardson’s poetic employment of assonance and sibilance here recreates the silent-film experience for the reader, lulling her into a similar solace. Ultimately, it was this sensation, rather than the film itself, that remained with Richardson as a filmgoer and as a writer: “The rest of the scenes, all of which sparkled continuously, I have forgotten. But I do not forget the balm of that tide, and that simple music, nor the shining eyes and rested faces of those women” (161). Her shift to the present tense here—“I do not forget”—emphasizes the lasting impression of the scene, which inspired her continuing interest in the silent-film experience for the female audience.

As the column continues, Richardson ties her growing dissatisfaction with the theater and her growing appreciation of the cinema back to this experience, finding the potential for transcendent consciousness in silent film. Dismayed by her displeasure at yet another play, she reconsiders the connection between the performance and the patron, which she found to be so affecting at the cinema: “I realised that the source of the haunting guilt and loss was for me, that the players, in acting *at* instead of *with* the audience, were destroying the inner relationship



between audience and players. Something of this kind, some essential failure to compel the co-operation of the creative consciousness of the audience” (161). Richardson suggests here that the audience should be able not only to witness the performance, but also to engage in the creative ethos. In order to attain this connected consciousness, however, the objective mindset must become subjective, and this transition requires quietness: “Such co-operation cannot take place unless the audience is first stilled to forgetfulness of itself as an audience. . . . And the film, as intimate as thought, so long as it is free from the introduction of the alien element of sound, gives this co-operation its best chance” (161). Music, however, which typically accompanied “silent” films “is not an alien sound if it be as continuous as the performance and blending with it” (161). In fact, she asserts, “Music is essential. Without it the film is a moving photograph and the audience mere onlookers” (161). This distinction between music, which “compels” connection, and synchronized voices, which impede connection, is particularly significant in the context of the impending transition to talkies. If, as Richardson suggests, silent film could be “as intimate as thought,” then the cinema—prior to talkies, at least—could provide its primarily female audience with not only a quiet place to escape the burdens of everyday life, but also a productive space to express agency through “creative consciousness.”

Synchronized voices, however, are not the only voices that can impede the audience’s transition to this connected mindset. In her March 1928 column, “Continuous Performance VIII,” Richardson assumes an affected formality to poke fun at discourteous groups of young women who talk throughout silent films. Despite the humor in her facetious tone and antiquated diction, she addresses—or at least alludes to—sincere issues throughout the column, including gendered identity and spectatorship. She begins by praising the rise of the silent film actress in a proclamation that is both affected in its composition and problematic in its message: “Amongst

the gifts showered upon humanity by the screen and already too numerous to be counted, none has been more eagerly welcomed than the one bestowed upon the young woman who is allowed to shine from its surface just as she is. In silent, stellar radiance, for the speech that betrayeth is not demanded of her and in this she is more fortunate than her fellows on the stage” (174).

Having already examined the fetishizing effects of staging, costuming, and cinematography on women’s bodies, we immediately recognize the danger in Richardson’s conflation of female image and identity here. That is, the image that “shines” on the screen’s “surface” *cannot* represent the woman “just as she is,” as this phrase suggests not only corporeal verisimilitude, but also authentic identity. However, we can appreciate Richardson’s notion that synchronized voice would complicate—rather than correct or complete—the representation of female characters on the screen. Richardson then introduces the character of the rude female spectator in juxtaposition to the actress: “But it is not only upon the screen that this young woman has been released in full power. She is to be found also facing it, and by no means silent, in her tens of thousands” (175). Although Richardson humorously notes that her “conversation may be more interesting than the film,” she likewise earnestly cautions that “so long as she is there, gone is the possibility of . . . escape via incidentals into the world of meditation or of thought” (176).

Ultimately, Richardson argues—somewhat sarcastically and somewhat seriously—that “this type of woman,” like a man, “does not need . . . the illusions of art to come to the assistance of her own sense of existing” (176). While many women may reach “creative consciousness” through silent film, this “dreadful woman asserting herself in the presence of no matter what grandeurs unconsciously testifies that life goes on, art or no art and that the onlooker is a part of the spectacle”—if not a particularly productive part (176).

Richardson continued to develop her perspective on the transition from silent film to talkies over the next four years, distilling many of her conclusions in her March 1932 column, “Continuous Performance: The Film Gone Male.” In this provocative—and, for current critics, problematic—piece, Richardson associates women with universal memory, silence, and “being,” and men with “evolutionary” history, speech, and “becoming.” If the silent film is the woman’s connection to “creative consciousness,” then the talkie is “the film gone male.” She theorizes almost nostalgically that

the film, regarded as a medium of communication, in the day of its innocence, in its quality of being nowhere and everywhere, nowhere in the sense of having more intention than direction and more purpose than plan, everywhere by reason of its power to evoke, suggest, reflect, express from within its moving parts and in their totality of movement, something of the changeless being at the heart of all becoming, was essentially feminine. In its insistence on contemplation it provided a pathway to reality. (206)

Richardson seems to describe the “essentially feminine” as theoretically queer, and in that sense, she has imagined an alternative time and space for female agency via silent film. However, by classifying and criticizing women who do *not* align with her definitions, she fails to model this theoretically queer perspective herself. For example, she accuses “women who never question the primacy of ‘clear speech’” of being “*by nature* more with the man’s than within the woman’s camp,” and she finds that women who “talk incessantly” are “*always*” speaking “in the manner of a façade” (206, emphasis added). Recognizing these concerns, we can appreciate Richardson’s concept: If speech is patriarchal—politically, not “naturally”—then women may employ speech as a “façade” and find otherwise unsanctioned agency in silence. Richardson consequently ties

the development of sound film to the use of film as political propaganda, which she calls its “masculine destiny” (206).<sup>26</sup> She does not, however, completely condemn the “new film,” for in its unprecedented accessibility, it is a medium “at the disposal of all parties,” including—to a greater extent than ever before—“the unconquerable, unchangeable eternal feminine” (206).

Although current critics will certainly recognize the contradictory aspects of Richardson’s arguments, including her essential treatment of gender and her resistance to an embodied female voice, we can appreciate her vision of the silent cinema as a protective and productive space for women. As a writer critiquing speech, however, she calls the corresponding potential of literature into question. The written word is silent, but language, like speech, is subject to political ideology. As we would suspect from her own “cinematic” fiction, Richardson maintains that art and literature are inseparable: “In its uttermost abstraction art is still a word about life and literature never ceases to be pictorial” (“Continuous Performance III” 165). Albeit problematic, Richardson’s consideration of silent film in *Close Up* provides a provocative perspective from which to consider the potential of modernist literature to express otherwise voiceless female consciousness.

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<sup>26</sup> In his foundational essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1935-36), Walter Benjamin suggests that film is a particularly effective medium for political propaganda as it creates the mass illusion of subjectivity. Richardson, as we have seen, finds potential in silent subjectivity and danger in seemingly objective synchronized voice. Richardson presages Benjamin, who asserts that “art for art’s sake” is necessarily fascist, when she notes, “It has always been declared that it is possible by means of purely aesthetic devices to sway an audience in whatever direction a filmateur desires. This sounds menacing and is probably true” (“Continuous Performance: The Film” 206).

### 3.2 *Nella Larsen: Reclaiming Silent Subjectivity*

In *Quicksand* (1928), Nella Larsen depicts the transatlantic odyssey of semi-autobiographical protagonist Helga Crane, who longs to find the place where she belongs. Haunted by the unsuccessful union of her white Danish mother and her black West Indian father, and her subsequent childhood and adolescent isolation, she travels from the southern black university, Naxos, where she teaches at the beginning of the novel, to Chicago to Harlem to Copenhagen, where her deceased mother's family lives, back to New York and, ultimately, to Alabama, where she settles into a debilitating domestic life. Helga's ongoing search for understanding intersects gender, race, and nationality, engaging many of the issues of female representation that Dorothy Richardson and Laura Mulvey consider. At Naxos, for example, the narrator fetishizes and fragments Helga's body in a cinematographic description, as Helga rests in her dark, quiet room, akin to the silent-film cinema. On the train to Chicago, her memory plays like a film in her mind, evoking Richardson's association of female consciousness with silent film and universal memory. In Copenhagen, Helga is silenced by the language barrier, objectified by her own aunt and uncle, and eroticized by a prominent Danish portrait painter. Rejecting the painter's propositions and regarding his portrait as a grotesque misrepresentation, Helga returns to New York, where in the fever of a religious revival, she seduces and marries a black southern pastor. Ultimately, her only relief from the embodied reality of consecutive pregnancies is the theater of her mind, a space recalling Richardson's observations of the silent-film cinema. In her inability to locate a stable identity, Helga evokes the "tragic mulatta," but Larsen's narrative engagement with cinematic composition and experience suggests the potential for alternative agency in the time and space between images, perspectives, and destinations.

Given the novel's investigation of gendered and racialized image/identity—and the critical role of Helga's own painted portrait—critics have aptly analyzed the painterly qualities of Larsen's descriptions, but they have not considered the cinematic aspects of significant scenes throughout the novel. Although the attention to visual media is productive, this focus on painting neglects the contemporary cinematic context, which, as we have seen in the previous chapters, provides a novel perspective on female representation and agency. In fact, several of the passages that critics liken to painted portraiture strongly suggest cinematography, despite the critics' own painterly diction. Ann E. Hostetler, for example, asserts that “Larsen presents the narrator as painter in the verbal portrait that opens the novel, framing the subject of Helga Crane within a rarefied environment of carefully rendered and illuminated objects” (37). Pamela E. Barnett agrees: “Like a portrait painter, Larsen's narrator positions Helga inside frames and strategically places her at the center of the settings in which she appears. The lighting focuses on Helga's features and catches the sheen of the fabrics she wears. The narrator paints Helga's image with meticulous attention to colors, shadows, and shapes” (575). Cherene Sherrard-Johnson similarly identifies these descriptive scenes as “visual tableaux” and compares them to Archibald Motley's painted portraits (845). As we have seen, however, the staging, costuming, and situating—or “framing”—of the female subject, which these critics relate to painted portraiture, likewise define cinematic representations of women.<sup>27</sup> This cinematographic connection continues as critics consider how the visual medium transforms Helga from stylized subject to sexualized object. Otherwise apt analyses of Helga's fetishization inadvertently

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<sup>27</sup> Critics like Hostetler and Sherrard-Johnson also liken the novel's concern with color to painting. Hostetler's article begins, “Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* is a meditation on color . . . (35). Contrary to current misconception, the vast majority of silent films likewise used color by the early 1920s. For more on color in silent cinema, see Joshua Yumibe.

conflate the painter's perspective with the camera eye. Barnett, for example, refers to the "lens of the visual artist" (583). Given this critical context, I will illustrate the novel's engagement with cinematic composition and experience in several significant scenes, while reconsidering the issue of Helga's representation and agency in light of Richardson's silent film theory.

In the opening scene of *Quicksand*, the narrator describes Helga in a quiet, stationary position somewhat akin to Richardson's respite in silent cinema and somewhat akin to Mulvey's "moment of erotic contemplation" (11), establishing a cinematic connection that will reappear throughout the novel (11). The narrative begins in a still moment: "Helga Crane sat alone in her room," "shadowy" in the "soft gloom" of the evening, "with the drawn curtains and single shaded light." The "spot" of light "where Helga sat was a small oasis in a desert of darkness." It was "eerily quiet," "But that was what she liked after her taxing day's work, after the hard classes, in which she gave willingly and unsparingly of herself with no apparent return" (5). Although not a mother, Helga, as a teacher, recalls the mothers Richardson saw at the cinema, for she has spent her day in unrequited labor and longs for peace. The dark, quiet space to sit, interrupted only by a single shaft of light, likewise evokes the protective space of the silent cinema. In fact, Helga specifically requires refuge from incessant talking: "gossiping faculty," "bearing fresh scandals, or seeking information, or more concrete favors, or merely talk" (5). Therefore, "She loved this tranquility, this quiet . . . This was her rest, this intentional isolation for a short while in the evening" (5).

Having set the scene, the narrator assumes a seemingly objective perspective—similar to the camera eye—to describe Helga as a situated, female subject: "An observer would have thought her well fitted to that framing of light and shade" (5). Panning up and down her

dramatically clothed figure, the narrator fragments and eroticizes Helga's body in close-up images, suggesting the fetishizing effects of cinematography:

A slight girl of twenty-two years, with narrow, sloping shoulders and delicate, but well-turned, arms and legs, she had, none the less, an air of radiant, careless health. In vivid green and gold negligee and glistening brocaded mules, deep sunk in the big high-backed chair, against whose dark tapestry her sharply cut face, with skin like yellow satin, was distinctly outlined, she was—to use a hackneyed word—attractive. Black, very broad brows over soft, yet penetrating, dark eyes, and a pretty mouth, whose sensitive and sensuous lips had a slight questioning petulance and a tiny dissatisfied droop, were the features on which the observer's attention would fasten; though her nose was good, her ears delicately chiseled, and her curly blue-black hair plentiful and always straying in a little wayward, delightful way. Just then it was tumbled, falling unrestrained about her face and on to her shoulders. (5-6)

As cinematography aligns the viewpoint of the audience member with the male protagonist, so the cinematic composition of this description casts the reader as the fetishizing male viewer, both stimulated and threatened by the female body. Each particular observation illustrates this perpetuating contradiction: Helga is both “delicate” and “sharply cut,” both “radiant” and “careless,” both “soft” and “penetrating,” both “sensuous” and “chiseled,” both “good” and “wayward,” both “delightful” and “unrestrained.” As in narrative cinema, the theatrical appearance of clothing as costume—“vivid” and “glistening”—contributes to these fetishizing effects, as the narrator's repeated allusions to an “observer” reinforce the illusion of objectivity in this subjective description. The depiction of Helga's hair likewise dramatizes Mulvey's



arrested “moment of erotic contemplation”: Her hair was “always straying,” but was “just then . . . tumbled.” It seems that time has stopped for this observation in the perpetual motion of her hair “falling unrestrained.” This cinematic connection invites our further investigation of Larsen’s narrative engagement with the compositional methods of silent film.

By aligning the reader’s viewpoint with the objectifying narrator/“observer,” the opening scene calls attention to the various intersections between visual composition and narrative perspective. While some critics have read the narrator as perpetually detached, others have found potential in the shifting narrative distance of indirect discourse.<sup>28</sup> Some critics have likewise focused on Helga’s passivity as a silent subject/object, while others have located agency in her psychological and geographical movement. As a visual medium, the painted portrait offers little time and space for such potential female agency. The silent film, however, as we have seen in our investigations of stop-motion photography and cinematography, provides productive narrative time and space *between* the moving pictures. Hostetler notes the limitations of the “verbal portrait,” even as she employs a painting metaphor: “The dynamic processes through which Helga Crane has come into being are suppressed as Larsen creates a static image of repose, a ‘still life’ surrounding Helga’s figure” (37). Unlike a painted portrait or “still life,” the visual medium of silent film has the potential to provoke a narrative representation of these “dynamic processes” of female consciousness and identity. Despite comparing the narrator to a

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<sup>28</sup> Barnett, for example, asserts that “Larsen’s use of the narrator . . . functions to dispel the notion of a space outside of representation. . . . There is no space for the articulation of desire that is not already framed by some problematic depiction of African Americans” (597). Jeanne Scheper, however, finds intimacy in the shifting narrative voice: “The reader is closer to being her diary, closer to being the passive recipient of her passing thoughts. Through Larsen’s mastery of free indirect discourse, the narrative voice slips into the third person omniscient, and the reader may thus feel they know Crane better than she knows herself” (683).

“portrait painter,” Barnett echoes Mulvey’s film theory in her insightful analysis of the opening scene: “The lack of agency in these first pages is essential for Larsen’s depiction of visual and sexual objectification. . . . the depiction is fragmented. The gaze lingers on parts of her body; she is an object composed of attractive parts” (583). Beyond depicting “objectification,” however, this scene serves an “essential” role in the narrative, as its cinematographic composition in fact calls attention to the space *between* the reader and the narrator/“observer”:

A fragmented description is directed toward the perceptual processes of the viewer in a way that a holistic vision is not. This narrative choice draws attention to the production of an image. We are told as readers that our gaze will fasten on particular features; in a sense we read the process of our own looking. The fragmented image foregrounds the visual trajectory of the eye; we are manipulated into focusing on the act of spectatorship itself. (Barnett 583)

Although Barnett does not call this description “cinematic,” her emphasis on the “processes” of spectatorship, “the *production* of an image,” suggests a compositional engagement with a simultaneously static and dynamic visual medium, like film. Through this engagement, the modernist narrative not only recreates narrative cinema’s fetishizing gaze, but also disrupts it by calling attention to—rather than concealing—its composition.

The narrative engagement with silent film continues when Helga’s memory appears as a series of images in her mind, suggesting not only the novel’s cinematic composition, but also Richardson’s association of female consciousness with memory. Fleeing Naxos, Helga takes the train to Chicago, the first of her many passages. The liminal space of the train is an apt setting for a cinematic scene, as the successive windows literally frame the passing landscape, resembling a film reel. This particular scene functions as a visual flashback, revealing select

insights into Helga's familial and emotional background. Larsen's contemporary readers would certainly associate such a flashback with film, as D. W. Griffith created the technique in his highly publicized and protested 1915 feature, *The Birth of a Nation*. In the simultaneously static and dynamic time and space of the train, Helga pictures her mother, who died when Helga was 15:

She visualized her [mother] now, sad, cold, and—yes, remote. . . . Memory flown back to those years following the marriage, dealt her torturing stabs. Before her rose the pictures of her mother's careful management to avoid those ugly scarifying quarrels which even at this far-off time caused an uncontrollable shudder, her own childish self-effacement, the savage unkindness of her stepbrothers and sisters, and the jealous, malicious hatred of her mother's husband. Summers, winters, years, passing in one long, changeless stretch of aching misery of soul. (26)

To some extent, this depiction suggests Richardson's description of the "essentially feminine" quality of memory and silent film. Rather than telling a progressive narrative, Helga's visual memory—a "changeless stretch of aching misery of soul"—evokes Richardson's notion of memory as reflecting the "universal, unchanging, unevolving verities that move neither backwards nor forwards and have neither speech nor language" (206). Despite her continuous movement, Helga's journey likewise continues to suggest Richardson's description of silent film as "having more intention than direction and more purpose than plan" (206). Feeling dissatisfied and displaced in both Chicago and New York, Helga imagines a "life somewhere else," "Some place where at last she would be permanently satisfied" (59). Her "delightful dreams" once again evoke Richardson's transcendent, silent-film consciousness: "Her anticipatory thoughts waltzed

and eddied about to the sweet silent music of change. With rapture almost, she let herself drop into the blissful sensation of visualizing herself in different, strange places, among approving and admiring people, where she would be appreciated, and understood” (59). Although some critics read Helga’s continuous movement as perpetual defeat, characteristic of the “tragic mulatta” narrative, Jeanne Scheper argues that “Larsen uses mobility to represent the possibility for agency that *resists* the tragic mulatta narrative through imagining the potentiality for a nonxenophobic locality in the space of moving between” (693, emphasis added). At the intersection of modernist narrative and silent cinema, we may likewise locate “the possibility for agency” in “the space of moving between” static images.

During her subsequent stay in Copenhagen, Helga becomes increasingly aware of her racial and gendered objectification, but she cannot effectively articulate this consciousness. We could read Helga’s silence and, indeed, her relative complicity in her own fetishization as passivity, paralysis, or the “effacement of identity,” as Barnett does, but we could also consider—in the manner of Richardson—the potential agency in female silence and subjective perception (585). Upon Helga’s arrival, “it was taken for granted that she knew nothing or very little of the [Danish] language,” which sets the scene for her seemingly natural objectification (72). Although initially “amused” and flattered by the attention she receives, Helga becomes “dubious . . . and not a little resentful” when her aunt and uncle revel in costuming and displaying her as an exotic figure (69, 70). Through the carefully mediated narrative voice, we shift between the perspectives of the fetishizing viewer and the fetishized protagonist, questioning our own complicity as Helga considers hers. When her aunt and uncle host a large dinner, the famous painter Axel Olsen attends. Gazing upon Helga, he speaks Danish rapidly only to those around her, casting her as “the silent girl” (73). Despite her reservations, Helga

eventually accepts and encourages the role of the restrained, eroticized spectacle, even agreeing to sit for a portrait by Herr Olsen: “after a little while she gave herself up wholly to the fascinating business of being seen, gaped at, desired. . . . Intentionally she kept to the slow, faltering Danish. It was, she decided, more attractive than a nearer perfection” (76). Her amusement culminates, however, during the final act at a vaudeville house, as “two black men, American Negroes . . . danced and cavorted, . . . sang in the English of America an old rag-time song that Helga remembered hearing as a child . . .” (84). While the entire Danish audience of “enchanted spectators,” including Olsen and his friends, “applauded with delight,” “clapped and howled and shouted for more,” “Only Helga Crane was silent, motionless” (84). Helga feels more shamefully exposed as the spectator of these men on the stage than as the object of the Danish gaze, and following this perspective shift, “she returned again and again to the [performance], always alone, gazing intently and solemnly at the gesticulating black figures, an ironical and silently speculative spectator” (85). We can imagine Richardson using just such a phrase—“silently speculative spectator”—to describe the female filmgoer who claims her silent subjectivity as she gazes upon the fetishized female body on the screen. Scheper accordingly “read[s] in Crane’s silence the exercise of resistance as a means of political response through cognitive distance and dissonance with her circumstances. Silence here is not the erasure of identity, but the assertion of difference from the enthusiastic and applauding white audience. . . . her silence signals a complicated disidentification with the images on stage” (692). Thus in realizing her own spectatorship, Helga reclaims her subjectivity.

When Helga finally rejects her fetishized role and representation, her audience seems not to understand her, reinforcing the limited ability—if not inability—of speech and static images to represent female identity and express female agency. When Olsen proposes marriage to Helga,

the reader learns that he had previously suggested a sexual arrangement. Helga, uncertain of his implication at the time—as he seemed to be speaking to her portrait rather than herself—had “remained quiet, striving to appear unhearing” (86). Assuming that she had silently refused him out of propriety—or, at least, the impression of propriety—Olsen proposes marriage, which surprises Helga, “who had a stripped, naked feeling under his direct glance” (88). When Olsen mocks her surprise and alludes to his previous suggestion, however, Helga rebukes him, insisting that “in my country the men, of my race, at least, don’t make such suggestions to decent girls” (88). Barnett aptly observes that the gaze shifts here, as Helga takes on the subjective—even cinematographic—viewpoint and “visually fragments *his* body” into “his leonine head, his broad nose,” “his bushy eyebrows,” and his “sullen blue eyes” (590, emphasis added; 89).<sup>29</sup> Having reclaimed her subjectivity, Helga aims to assert her agency, redressing his suggestion that she would “sell [her]self to the highest buyer”: “But you see, Herr Olsen, I’m not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man. I don’t care to be owned at all” (89). Olsen, however, does not understand, looking back at her with “the surprised stare of a puzzled baby” (89). Realizing his confusion, she speaks more “deliberately”: “I think you don’t understand me. What I’m trying to say is this, I don’t want you. I wouldn’t under any circumstances marry you” (89). Her attempted agency in speaking, however, seems invalidated by his continuing inability—or refusal—to comprehend. When he refers to her explanation as “some strange talk of race and shame . . .

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<sup>29</sup> Barnett continues to echo Mulvey and to suggest the effects of proto-cinematic and cinematic technology in her extended analysis of Helga’s “ironic gaze”:

As Helga emerges as a subject, she also emerges as a spectator. Significantly, she is cast as a spectator who can visually fragment the object of her gaze. Olsen becomes a body composed of parts; his surface is dissected. She compartmentalizes him into the bare surfaces but also mutilates him in some way; she severs parts away from the whole. She can manipulate his features as violently as he has manipulated hers. (590)

nonsense,” she yields “because she couldn’t, she felt, explain” any further (90). Despite his failure to understand her when she speaks, Olsen believes that he understands her true identity and has captured it in his portrait: “I think,” he asserts, “that my picture of you is, after all, the true Helga Crane” (91). When he leaves the room, Helga views the painting for the first time and, finding it to be a grotesque misrepresentation, speaks her disdain to the empty room: “It wasn’t . . . herself at all, but some disgusting sensual creature with her features. . . . Vehemently she shook her head. ‘It isn’t, it isn’t at all,’ she said aloud. . . . Anyone with half an eye could see that it wasn’t, at all, like her” (91). Olsen’s inability to comprehend or represent Helga is, as we have seen, inextricably tied to his racial viewpoint, but it also speaks to his gendered viewpoint, supporting Richardson’s critique of speech as a masculine medium. Helga finds alternative agency here in shifting subjective perception, and after two years in Denmark, she returns to New York and, ultimately, to the South, where her journey began.

Although initially excited by her married life—and her sex life—in Alabama, Helga becomes debilitated by consecutive pregnancies, finding relief only in a mental space akin in its transcendent peace to the cinematic consciousness that Richardson describes. In the “vitality” of each “amorous” night, Helga believes that “she had found . . . the intangible thing for which, indefinitely, always she had craved. It had received embodiment” (121). The embodiment of her desire, however, is necessarily gendered and, therefore, procreative. After the birth of her fourth child, Helga refuses to reengage with her surroundings, “retreating” instead into the “haven” of her mind:

Helga . . . was unconcerned, undisturbed by the commotion about her. It was all part of the general unreality. Nothing reached her. Nothing penetrated the kind darkness into which her bruised spirit had retreated. . . . While she had gone down

into that appalling blackness of pain, the ballast of her brain had got loose and she hovered for a long time somewhere in that delightful borderland on the edge of unconsciousness, an enchanted and blissful place where peace and incredible quiet encompass her. (129)

Helga's respite from her domestic life into the quiet space of her mind recalls the mothers Richardson observed taking refuge in the silent-film cinema. When corporeality seems "unreal," the mind becomes a protective, transcendent place that provides time and space for reflection. In time, Helga recovers from childbirth and resumes her domestic life, but not before reminiscing on her final hours of peace:

The truth was that she had been back for hours. Purposely she had lain silent and still, wanting to linger forever in that serene haven, that effortless calm where nothing was expected of her. There she could watch the figures of the past drift by. . . . Flashingly, fragmentarily, other long-forgotten figures, women in gay fashionable frocks and men in formal black and white, glided by in bright rooms to distant, vaguely familiar music. (129-30)

Her visual memory once again evokes the silent-film cinema, as the "silent" moving pictures are augmented not by voices, but by "music." Rather than telling a progressive narrative, these "drifting" images of the characters from her life create a sense of "immersion in the past," further suggesting Richardson's association of female consciousness with timeless memory (130). In the space between consciousness and unconsciousness, Helga can envision her own narrative identity.

Although Helga's story ends in corporeal deterioration, the text itself—through its engagement with cinematic composition and experience—becomes a silent representation of



dynamic female identity. Hostetler observes that “Though prolific in her ability to procreate, Helga seems curiously lacking in the ability to create” (44). Larsen, however, creates Helga via the modernist narrative:

Through Helga, Larsen simultaneously shows the need for black women to create new forms of self-representation and the profound difficulty of the task. Helga finds that one cannot escape from cultural constructs of race and gender in a life of the body—for this is where these constructs are the most imprisoning. And when she abandons her restless search for identity, she finds that the search is the only self she knows. (Hostetler 44)

Barnett agrees that Larson recognizes “constraints,”—or constructs—but she also argues that “Larsen does not provide real solutions . . . Helga experiences desire; the problem of how to represent that is the challenge left to future writers” (595). We could say, however, that the “experience” *is* the representation, the “search” *is* the self. Hostetler supports this idea, asserting that “the text is iconic of Helga’s dilemma: Helga *is* the text—an aesthetic experiment, an isolated gem on the margins of the African American literary heritage” (45). As we have seen, however, Helga and/as the text is thoroughly engaged in the contemporary context of cinematic composition and experience. In fact, Hostetler recalls Richardson’s and Benjamin’s critiques of propagandist film when she suggests that—unlike “art for art’s sake”—this text inspires subjective political reflection: “Helga Crane’s self-imposed isolation and her imprisonment by constructions of race and gender (both those of her society and those that she has internalized) direct the reader outside the work to reexamine the social practices of racial and sexual discrimination that the text represents and that an aesthetic of ‘art for art’s sake’ tends to perpetuate” (Hostetler 45). Larsen may likewise have inspired Jean Rhys’s subsequent

exploration of the potential productivity—and the potential consequences—of cinematic composition and experience in *Good Morning, Midnight*.

### 3.3 *Jean Rhys: Narrating the “Film-Mind”*

Published five years after the last issue of *Close Up* and ten years after the publication of *Quicksand* and the widespread transition from silent film to talkies, Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight* (1938) embodies female “cinematic consciousness” and its potentially violent consequences. The novel explores the first-person “screen of consciousness” of self-named Sasha Jansen, an English woman of dubious origins who has just returned to Paris, the site of her newborn son’s death and her husband’s abandonment. Sasha experiences the city as a film reel, spliced with images from her fractured memory, paranoid psyche, and cinematic imagination: a state she calls her “film-mind” (176). As she walks the city streets, simultaneously avoiding and searching for a drink, sights and sounds invoke her memory, which “moves in an ordered, undulating procession past my eyes” (109). Having once worked as a model, Sasha takes a job as a receptionist at a fashion house, where dolls, models, and mannequins embody the fragmenting and fetishizing effects of cinematography on the female body. Sasha’s struggle to comprehend and communicate with men inside and outside of the shop has corporeal consequences, and although the cinema appears to be an escape, the sound film in fact provides little comfort. We could say that the novel realizes Dorothy Richardson’s fears: national and patriarchal language norms have infiltrated the cinema, which is no longer a quiet refuge for women. Memory is timeless in its persistence, but it has the frightening potential to evoke past traumas. The female mind is as fractured as the female body on the screen, and cinematic consciousness, rather than inspiring transcendent creativity, distracts from embodied reality. Given this dire situation, we

may struggle to locate agency in Sasha's narrative, but we can, through further examination, appreciate how Rhys's revision of cinematic composition and experience allows for the narrative representation of otherwise unspeakable female identity.

The novel's explicit allusions to film have invited valuable critical examinations into the compositional and cultural intersections between media, if not with our specific consideration of the silent-film cinema. As we will see, many critics focus on the particular scene in which Sasha identifies her "film-mind," but critics like Erica L. Johnson also consider the character's cinematic composition throughout the novel: "Like a film, which is composed of thousands of stills that combine into a picture in motion, Sasha's mind is animated by episodic moments, most of which she attempts to tamp down into her unconscious" (36). This cinematic reading likewise applies to Sasha's corporeal body: "Sasha often questions her identity, and while her fragmented, floating sense of herself never coheres internally, it becomes painfully frozen and fixed when she is seen by others" (E. Johnson 17). Johnson recalls the embodied effects of the male/cinematographic gaze here, but she also suggests the novel's interrogation of the tenuous boundary between seeing and being seen, between manipulating the gaze and being manipulated by the gaze. As Laura Frost points out, "At the same time that readers are inside Sasha's head, her interior monologue, Rhys stages scenes in which we 'see' her from the outside" (206). Sasha even seems to see *herself* from the outside as she attempts to protect—or project—her own subjective perspective from the male/cinematographic gaze that threatens to objectify her. Maren Tova Linett finds a similar "dissociation" in Sasha between the "repulsed mind" and the "yielding body," "usually in sexual situations" as a result of "sexual trauma": "this dissociation, or splitting, both contributes to a subject's passivity and protects her emotionally from her own helplessness" (155). As we will see, this "dissociation," whether in narrative voice or body, is

rarely effective and, in fact, often places Sasha in dangerous situations. Rachel Potter emphasizes “the danger of sentimental language, a sentimentalism that is produced through popular ballads and the movies”: “As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that the real danger both of films and clichéd language is their power to penetrate Sasha’s psychic and emotional life” (165). This “psychic and emotional” “penetration” provokes corporeal “danger” that threatens to annihilate female consciousness.

Sasha’s first-person narration immediately evokes her cinematic consciousness, through which she sees and is seen. At the beginning of the novel, Sasha remembers the encounter in London that prompted her return to Paris. Returning from a walk, Sasha was confronted by a long-time acquaintance, perhaps one-time friend, Sidonie, who reflected Sasha’s own subjective gaze: “I had just come in from my little health-stroll [. . .] I had looked at this, I had looked at that, I had looked at the people passing in the street and at a shop-window full of artificial limbs. I came in to somebody who said: ‘I can’t bear to see you looking like this’” (11).<sup>30</sup> As the “shop-window full of artificial limbs” foreshadows repeated images of fabricated and fragmented female bodies, the play on “looking” suggests Sasha’s role as both subjective viewer and objectified body throughout the novel. In Paris, Sasha has recently begun working as a receptionist at “one of those dress-houses still with a certain prestige,” but whose “customers were getting fewer and fewer” (18). Surrounded by “mannequins,” or models, she tries to act appropriately and “say everything right,” but the job bores her, and she becomes aggravated by “three or four elongated dolls, beautifully dressed, with charming and malicious oval faces” propped in the entryway: “I would feel as if I were drugged, sitting there, watching those damned

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<sup>30</sup> In quotations from *Good Morning, Midnight*, my ellipses appear in brackets. Ellipses are otherwise original to the text.

dolls, thinking what a success they would have made of their lives if they had been women. Satin skin, silk hair, velvet eyes, sawdust heart – all complete” (21, 17, 18). Even as she describes the dolls by their “artificial” components, Sasha sees them as “complete.” Although she is “watching” them, we can deduce that their “malicious oval faces” are reflecting Sasha’s own subjective gaze. Sasha likewise scrutinizes the unnamed female models, comparing the “English mannequin,” whom she does not like, to “une fleur de verre,” or a glass flower, and “the little French one whom I like so much” to “une fleur de terre,” or a flower growing just above the ground (23). Although they are both beautiful in her eyes, one is dynamic and earthly, while the other is inert and fabricated. When the visiting English owner, Mr. Blank, arrives, he questions Sasha about her previous work experience and turns the gaze upon her. When Sasha tells him that she worked for another dress-house as a “mannequin,” or model, he responds dubiously: “‘You worked as a mannequin?’ Down and up his eyes go, up and down. ‘How long ago was this?’” (20). As “his eyes” pan her body, she becomes the object of his fetishizing gaze and subsequently panics about his unknown “intention” and longs to flee from “these abominable eyes” (21, 25). Although Mr. Blank does not threaten Sasha, “these abominable eyes” foreshadow the frightening manifestation of her cinematic consciousness.

Sasha struggles to comprehend and communicate with men throughout the novel, and although she remembers an alternative language and protective space for feminine production, she cannot return to it. Erin M. Kingsley asserts that “Sasha repeatedly finds herself at the mercy of hegemonic male linguistic and rhetorical norms,” citing the scene in which Sasha loses her job over Mr. Blank’s mispronunciation of the French word *caisse* (302). In this scene, Sasha is called to Mr. Blank’s office without explanation. Initially believing that he has called her in to see if she can speak German, as he had heard that the receptionist was fluent in English, French, and

German, she rambles through German words and phrases in her mind, eventually falling into Latin and musical solfège. When he tells her to deliver a letter to the “kise,” Sasha agrees, even though she does not understand: “Kise – kise. . . . It doesn’t mean a thing to me. He’s got me into such a state that I can’t imagine what it can mean” (25). She returns to Mr. Blank’s office with the letter still in hand, and he cannot understand why she has not delivered it to the cashier. Her sympathetic French manager, Salvatini, then clarifies: “la caisse” (26). Sasha considers explaining the situation, but decides “if I tell him that it was the way he pronounced it that confused me, it will seem rude. Better not say anything. . . .” (27). Rendered mute by the patriarchal structure and its faulty speech, Sasha recalls Richardson’s critique of talkies as “the film gone male.” Sasha finds no agency in silence here, as her male superiors control the medium of communication and, therefore, cannot understand her. Later in the novel, however, Sasha remembers giving birth to her son in a birthing house for poor women, “a solely feminine space . . . where a different linguistic code rules” (Kingsley 302). When Sasha asks for chloroform, which she knows they do not have, the midwife comforts her: “She speaks to me in a language that is no language. But I understand it.” The midwife “darts from one room to another, encouraging, soothing, reproaching. ‘Now, you’re not trying. Courage, courage.’ Speaking her old, old language of words that are not words” (58). Sasha finds comfort in this ancient medium, which recalls Richardson’s concept of the “essentially feminine.” Kingsley explains, “The tension that has built in Sasha due to living under the harsh phallogocentric order of patriarchy dissipates as communication occurs between women in a refreshing exchange that is not rife with unknowable (and therefore dangerous) meaning . . .” (302). When her baby dies, however, Sasha loses her connection to this space and its medium: “The feminine community symbolized by the language of the midwife is only ever promised and never realized . . .” (Kingsley 303). As the

silent cinema, once a refuge for mothers and an “essentially feminine” medium, has been overtaken by patriarchal speech, so Sasha has returned from the protective, feminine space—rendered through memory—to the confusing and threatening city outside.

When Sasha goes to the Cinéma Danton, a respectable place for a woman to retreat in the evening, she finds little relief, and must, instead, continue to interpret and perform patriarchal speech and behavior codes. Frost sets the critical scene: “In keeping with contemporary views of filmgoing, Rhys’s cinema is largely a female space and its narratives are preoccupied with questions of female desire” (192). Nevertheless, “Rhys’s women go to the movies as a means of retreat or an escape that never turns out to be so” (Frost 193). In this scene, Sasha initially remains an objective narrator and an appropriate viewer, transcribing but not translating the film for the reader: A “good young man” is “trying to rescue his employer,” “a gay, bad old boy who manufactures toilet articles,” “from a mercenary mistress.” The “good young man” “interrupts intimate conversations, knocking loudly, bringing in letters and parcels, etcetera, etcetera. At last the lady, annoyed, gets up and sweeps away. She turns at the door to say: ‘Alors, bien, je te laisse à tes suppositoires.’ Everybody laughs at this, and so do I. She said that well” (108). It is perplexing that Sasha responds to, but does not translate, the mistress’s line. The reader is, instead, put in the position of having to interpret the line in the context of Sasha’s narrative and response, which may cause confusion. Frost, for example, reads the line as the mistress “announcing with annoyance that she’s on her way to fetch ‘suppositoires’” (193). The line essentially translates, however, as “I’ll leave you to your suppositories,” which aligns with Sasha’s response: “She said that well.” In the moment, we are left to trust Sasha’s response because it aligns with the responses of the other viewers: “Everybody laughs at this, and so do I.” We, however, have already seen Sasha’s ongoing struggle to comprehend and reflect socially

sanctioned behavior. When a scene in the film reminds Sasha of her own bad fortune, she fails to maintain an appropriate, objective distance and must escape the theater: “I laugh till the tears come into my eyes. However, the film shows no signs of stopping, so I get up and go out” (108). In stark contrast to the haven of Richardson’s silent-film cinema, which evokes the female viewer’s “creative consciousness,” the sound-film cinema provokes Sasha’s struggle to repress her own unspeakable mind.

When Sasha envisions a simultaneously erotic and violent scene from her so-called “film-mind,” she foreshadows her attempted rape and enacts the narrative composition—and the embodied consequences—of cinematic consciousness. Riding back to her hotel in a taxi with a persistent “gigolo,” Sasha asks him to whistle a tune, which stimulates her cinematic mind. In this brief scene, “Sasha is both the narrator and the starlet,” the subject and the object (Frost 200):

I am in a little whitewashed room. The sun is hot outside. A man is standing with his back to me, whistling that tune and cleaning his shoes. I am wearing a black dress, very short, and heel-less slippers. My legs are bare. I am watching for the expression on the man’s face when he turns round. Now he ill-treats me, now he betrays me. He often brings home other women and I have to wait on them, and I don’t like that. But as long as he is alive and near me I am not unhappy. If he were to die I should kill myself.

My film-mind. . . . (“For God’s sake watch out for your film-mind. . . .”)  
(176)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Critics have noted that this scene bears a striking resemblance to Rhys’s own traumatic memory of molestation. For more on this connection, see Linett (157-61) and Frost (200-04).



Her cinematic mind, like the scene itself, is both stimulating and threatening. In this way, it suggests the male/cinematographic gaze that fragments and fetishizes the female body, as in Sasha's own observation: "My legs are bare." Linett explains this narrative separation: "By referring to this negative fantasy as emerging from her 'film mind,' Sasha distances it from her own psyche . . . . projecting her fantasy outward, imagining it on a movie screen in some separable part of her mind" (158). Thus she narrates the scene as both the subjective viewer and the objectified body. When the gigolo says, "What are you laughing at now?," the reader realizes that Sasha has been laughing at her own "film-mind" narrative, recalling her performative laughter in the cinema. Frost argues that "Sasha's laugh suggests there is a conscious and ironic kind of narration at work. It implies that she knows she is a product of the clichés and gender stereotypes she has seen up on the screen" (203). Sue Thomas agrees that Sasha's laugh indicates her own "recognition that the narrative is shaped by melodramatic conventions of popular cinema" (136). This "recognition" does not, however, prevent Sasha's attempted rape by the gigolo. These "clichés and gender stereotypes" and "melodramatic conventions" may induce laughter in the cinema, but they have embodied consequences outside of it. After convincing the man to take her money and leave without hurting her further, Sasha realizes the grotesque personification of her cinematic mind.

Drinking alone in her room, Sasha envisions a simultaneously frightening and beautiful cyborg that fuses the male/cinematographic gaze with its object, the fractured, female body:

All that is left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable flexible arms, made of steel. Long, thin arms. At the end of each arm is an eye, the eyelashes stiff with mascara. When I look more closely I see that only some of the arms have these eyes – others have lights. The arms that carry

the eyes and the arms that carry the lights are all extraordinarily flexible and very beautiful. But the grey sky, which is the background, terrifies me. . . . And the arms wave to an accompaniment of music and of song. Like this: “Hotcha – hotcha – hotcha. . . .” And I know the music; I can sing the song. . . . (187)

These technical and corporeal components construct “a surreal cinematic machine whose eyes and lights combine surveillance, spectacle and a distorted beauty” (Potter 166). By projecting this image from her cinematic mind, Sasha maintains the distance that allows her to narrate as both the subjective viewer and the objectified body. She must, for example, “look more closely”—or zoom in—to see her own vision of the metonymical eye. As the whistled tune stimulated her “film-mind” in the previous scene, the song crosses her severed consciousness here, revealing her complicity in the image and prompting her to “have another drink”: “Damned voice in my head, I’ll stop you talking” (187). Potter applies the image to the automation of “talking” throughout the novel: “Words in this novel partake of this idea of mechanised surveillance. . . . words fail to recognise Sasha’s individual predicament, glancing over her as though as though she is an inert object. Like the arms with eyes, clichéd words have become separated from the individuals who speak them” (166). Mary Lou Emery, however, finds the potential for unity in this vision, which “combines and condenses” images from throughout the novel: Sasha “recognizes herself as part of a feminized mass culture that she dreads for its mechanical artificiality. . . . Yet in creating the machine version, Sasha potentially transforms the fragmentation that compelled her to improvise and borrow identities through commodified gestures into something whole” (168). This formal unity does not, however, extend to Sasha’s embodied experience. Seeing that the gigolo did not take her money, she wills him to return and allows her lascivious neighbor into her room instead. In the ultimate dissociation of

consciousness from body and speech, she “pull[s] him down on to the bed, saying ‘Yes – yes – yes. . . .’” (190). With these words, perhaps a perversion of Molly Bloom’s final thoughts in *Ulysses*, Sasha’s cinematic consciousness succumbs to its corporeal embodiment.

In *Quicksand* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, we have seen the potential of the modernist narrative to engage silent-film composition and experience in order to represent otherwise unspeakable female consciousness. While Larsen finds temporary agency in the narrative of subjective epistemology, Rhys belies the respite of silence in the literary expression of trauma. These representations, however, still contribute to and culminate in the violent objectification of the female body. In the next chapter, we will consider the potential for embodied female voice in the anthropological and literary work of Zora Neale Hurston through the lens of sound film. Hostetler observes that “*Quicksand* contrasts strikingly with Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which tells the story of its mulatto female protagonist in the context of the African American vernacular folk tradition” (44). As we will see, Hurston likewise revises the “vernacular folk tradition” in the contemporary context of synchronizing voice in sound film.

#### **CHAPTER 4: SYNCHRONIZING THE FEMALE VOICE**

The transition to sound film in the late 1920s and early ’30s coincided with a white, urban fad for black musical culture, particularly for “slumming” in black cabarets. This “vogue,” in addition to the limitations of early synchronization technology, invited the linking of sound film to the objectified “black voice.” Black and white publications, including *Close Up*, promoted technical and cultural claims aligning the transition to sound with the rise of African Americans in film. Despite this trend, Hollywood industry practices changed little during this time, resulting in little realized upward mobility for African Americans in the film industry.

Depictions of African Americans in film likewise shifted from silent-film static stereotypes to sound-film characters ironically confined to interiority. A similar shift occurred in depictions of *women* during the transition to sound, suggesting a connection between the cinematic treatments of these populations. Despite these widespread conditions, female filmmaker Dorothy Arzner not only successfully transitioned to sound film, but also reflectively explored the complexities of the medium. Arzner's female characters—albeit only white—use their voices to transgress private and public spaces and interior and exterior boundaries, suggesting the potential of synchronized voice to embody cinematic images of women.

During these years, African American ethnographer and writer Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) was engaged in multimedia anthropological work that informed her many published plays, studies, and novels. Hurston herself regularly transgressed social, racial, and geographical boundaries: She participated in the Harlem Renaissance coterie, conducted fieldwork in African American and African diaspora communities, and worked for the Works Progress Administration's Federal Writers Project. Often negotiating multiple audiences, as well as her own insider/outside status, Hurston experimented with scientific and artistic methods of representing black culture, employing a sort of “embodied performance” in which she engaged privately with her subjects even as she documented them for public translation and consumption. Her early work in film established her as one of the first female, African American filmmakers, but her ongoing work in audio and visual recording also revealed the limited ability of synchronization technology to compose embodied black culture. Although never accepted for Hollywood adaptation, her writing, particularly her renowned modernist novel, succeeded where visual media failed in illustrating dynamic African American identity.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Hurston depicts the visual and vocal epistemology of African American woman, Janie Watson. Framed by private discourse between two African American women, to be translated later for their rural black community, Janie's narrative embodies dynamic individual and communal voices. As Janie analyzes her relationships, she realizes that she has a distinct but interconnected "inside" and "outside," or mind and body. Ultimately, she finds that understanding requires what I call a "synchronization" of her visual mind and embodied voice. As in her own anthropological work, Hurston privileges lived experience and individual understanding over communal translation and consumption in Janie's modernist narrative, which allows her to tell and show a black female story for—first and foremost—a black female audience.

#### ***4.1 African Americans and Women in the Transition to Sound***

In August 1929, *Close Up* published a special issue on the "Negro in Film," providing one example of the widespread linking of African American film with the transition to sound. As my examination of Dorothy Richardson's columns showed, the editors of and contributors to *Close Up* were wary of the transition to sound, particularly as it interfered with their own visions of progressive, international cinema. However, they conceded, and to some extent applauded, the seeming simultaneous success of the "Negro in film."<sup>32</sup> Of course, their admiration and support relied upon a racially and aesthetically segregated, if well-meaning, mindset: Editor "Kenneth Macpherson implicitly aligned silence, film art, and white/European cinema on one side of a

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<sup>32</sup> Even Richardson, in her September 1929 Continuous Performance column entitled "Dialogue in Dixie," "found 'the notable acceptable twin of the silent film' in the non-verbal aspects of (Negro) sound film – singing and the 'lush chorus of Negro-laughter' – but described the speech as 'annihilating'" (Donald and Marcus 34).

divide and sound cinema with black culture on the other” (Donald and Marcus 34). In his regular preface, “As is,” Macpherson condemns the stereotypical treatment of African Americans by white filmmakers, for “the white man is always going to portray the negro as he likes to see him, no matter how benevolently” (87). Macpherson calls, instead, for depictions of “the negro” by “the negro”: “Let the negro, then, film himself, be free to give something equal to his music, his dance, his sculpture . . . . The negro documentaire of the negro. Think what might be in it. The negro as an observer of himself. As his own historian. As his own agitator. Talking films took films from us but they have given us a glimpse of him . . .” (90). As twenty-first-century readers, we can recognize Macpherson’s “perceptiveness” and appreciate his intention (Donald and Marcus 33). We also, however, can note his patronizing tone—a tone tailored to his elite audience and aligned with his separation of “us” from “him.” It is certainly not a novel suggestion that African Americans act as their own “observers,” “historians,” and “agitators,” no matter the medium. In fact, Zora Neale Hurston had, by this time, already begun working as a compositionally experimental documentary filmmaker of African American and African diaspora communities and cultures. Macpherson’s sentiment is likewise hypocritical, as he was, at the time, writing the film *Borderline*, which would star well-known African American performer, Paul Robeson, under Macpherson’s own direction. From his privileged position, Macpherson is, in fact, reinforcing the avant-garde, urban white “vogue” for African American performance and, correspondingly, “Negro” sound film. His call “for a ‘pure’ black cinema” (Donald and Marcus 34) fails to recognize the political and financial realities of the film industry, which ultimately altered little during this brief transition. As white film critic Harry A. Potamkin puts it in his contribution to the issue, “Sound has made the negro the ‘big thing’ of the film-moment” (65).

In addition to editorials from several regular white, male contributors, the issue includes pieces from a few “black critics and cultural commentators,” such as Elmer Carter, editor of the National Urban League’s *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, and Walter White, secretary and soon-to-be head of the NAACP, and one essay from a woman: African American journalist, publicist, and radio announcer, Geraldyn Dismond (Donald and Marcus 34; “Contents” 72). Dismond’s piece, “The Negro Actor and the American Movies,” introduces her in parenthesis as a “well-known American Negro writer,” but she played a number of roles in the Harlem Renaissance scene (73). Also known as Gerri or Gerry Major, Geraldyn Hodges Dismond (1894-1984) served throughout the twentieth century as a writer and editor for many African American publications, including the *Pittsburg Courier*, the *Inter-State Tattler*, the *Amsterdam News*, the *Tattler*, *Ebony*, and *Jet*. As a “society writer,” she was a fixture among “Harlem’s artistic and intellectual set” and was even referred to as “Harlem’s Hostess.” As a radio announcer, she became “the first African-American woman to host a regular show,” “The Negro Achievement Hour” (“Geraldyn Dismond”). As a literal voice of the Harlem Renaissance, then, Dismond provides an apt, if still somewhat privileged, perspective on “Negro” cinema during the transition to sound. Unlike Macpherson, Dismond addresses more practical concerns, such as industry financial investment in “all-Negro feature pictures” and everyday treatment African Americans, but like Macpherson, she expresses great optimism for the potential impact of “Negro” sound film on the “struggle for better race relations” (75, 76). Knowing her elite audience, Dismond tinges her earnest optimism with sarcastic observations, recognizing the real benefits to African Americans without disregarding white paternalism:

It is significant that with the coming of the talkies, the first all-Negro feature pictures were attempted by the big companies. White America has always made

much of the fact that all Negroes can sing and dance. Moreover, it is supposed to get particular pleasure out of the Negro's dialect, his queer colloquialisms, and his quaint humour. The movie of yesterday, to be sure, let him dance, but his greatest charm was lost by silence. With the talkie, the Negro is at his best. Now he can be heard in song and speech. And no one . . . will disagree with the fact that the Negro's voice can be a thing of beauty in spite of the mechanics of this new venture in the art of the movies. (75)

Dismond occupies a skillfully liminal perspective here. Distancing herself from both "White America" and "the Negro," she maintains authority even as she critiques her audience. Therefore, her "conclusion must be conceded . . . by the most skeptical": "the Negro has at last become an integral part of the Motion Picture Industry" (76). She continues to describe the non-"monetary" "benefits" of this fact: "Because of the Negro movie, many a prejudiced white who would not accept a Negro unless as a servant, will be compelled to admit that at least he can be something else; many an indifferent white will be beguiled into a positive attitude of friendliness; many a Negro will have his race-consciousness and self-respect stimulated" (76). Ultimately, "the Negro movie actor . . . under proper direction and sympathetic treatment can easily become a potent factor in our great struggle for better race relations. And the talkie which is being despised in certain artistic circles is giving him the great opportunity to prove his right to a place on the screen" (76). Her final statement here is pointed, as she well knows that the writers and readers of *Close Up* are at the center of these "artistic circles." Her use of the plural possessive "our" in "our great struggle for better race relations" could likewise include or exclude her reader. Although she recognizes the hypocrisy and condescension of her audience, Dismond remains idealistic about the potential of African American sound cinema to effect social change.



Despite its limited perspective, *Close Up*'s linking of "Negro cinema" with the transition to sound was representative of a larger trend across white and African American print media. Cultural critics like Ryan Jay Friedman confirm that the "preexisting vogue" for black musical performance transferred to sound film (30):

During the Hollywood studios' conversion to synchronized-sound film production in 1929 and 1930, it became commonplace to speak of a "vogue" for "Negro films," which "echoed" the contemporary, New York-centered white "fad" for black musical theater, jazz music, and dance. Writers in both the white-controlled trade magazines and African American newspapers asserted a growing audience interest in films featuring African American characters and rooted in these entertainment contexts. (Friedman 29)

This transference was by no means "natural," but, rather, depended upon "a very specific set of industrial conditions": "In an effort to resolve the early talkies' problems with visual stasis, acoustics, and synchronization, some white industry personnel seized on African American performance (and vocal expression, specifically) as an ideal means for making the new medium technically and aesthetically viable" (Friedman 30). The practice of white "slumming" in black cabarets had already begun to commodify the African American voice, facilitating a similar approach to the burgeoning medium of sound film. Widespread print media promoted this image of the urban white consumer of black musical culture:

By depicting it as the practice of white aristocrats and celebrities, contemporary newspapers, magazines, literary texts, and theatrical productions associated slumming with cultural progressiveness and sophistication as well as (ironically, from an African American perspective) upward status mobility. Thus, the cabaret

used as a slumming destination offers a theater of white “highbrow” culture, giving a particular symbolic value to cultural blackness and becoming the point of intersection for the dominant American cinema and the black-cultural “vogue” of the 1920s. (Friedman 30-31)

Thus “the Hollywood film industry seize[d] upon the symbolic value of blackness for the white consumer” (Friedman 31). Despite the optimism shown by contemporary white and African American correspondents, like Macpherson and Dismond, “the studios [during this period] remain[ed] ignorant of, if not hostile to, African American audiences in determining production schedules, thereby constraining their investment in ‘Negro films’ and reinforcing a sense of white racial privilege and authority” (31). Nevertheless, these associations between the African American voice and cinema remained prominent across media during the transition from silent to sound film.

Diverse media outlets even advocated spurious technical claims aligning black culture with sound film, reinforcing the objectification of the African American voice: “filmmakers, industry personnel, journalists, and critics” asserted “that African American voices are especially well suited to the sound film’s technologies of mechanical reproduction” (Friedman 32).

Friedman refers to Alice Maurice, who “has delineated this rhetorical pattern, which constructs an affinity between ‘the black voice’ and the ‘talking picture,’ and interpreted it as a response to prevalent anxieties within the American cinema about the aesthetic effects of the conversion to synchronized-sound recording” (Friedman 32).<sup>33</sup> These concerns included “that sound would make the movies static” and that “human voices reproduced by the recording apparatus sounded artificial, lacking warmth, richness, and ‘personality’” (33). Contemporary critics

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<sup>33</sup> See Maurice’s “‘Cinema at Its Source’: Synchronizing Race and Sound in the Early Talkies.”

correspondingly “suggested that black musical performance—vernacular dance in particular—might be an ideal form of spectacle for filmic treatment, thus bringing dynamic energy back into the frame”; “that African Americans’ voices were ideally suited to sound-film recording, registering on the soundtrack with more warmth and fidelity than the voices of other groups of people”; and that “the talking picture [was] an inherently ‘Negro’ medium” (33). Even Dismond suggested that “the Negro’s voice can be a thing of beauty *in spite of the mechanics* of this new venture in the art of the movies” (75, emphasis added). These claims, Friedman argues, “make a fetish of African American-produced sounds, creating what we might call a black acoustical (or, more specifically, vocal) object and using this object—its acoustic ‘quality’ and ‘timing’—to facilitate the American cinema’s transition to exclusive talkie production” (34). This objectification via “pseudo-physiological arguments about the exceptional qualities of ‘the black voice’ achieved currency in the early American sound cinema and were appropriated by African American cultural critics and cinephiles,” like Dismond, “who sought ‘to extend and to take advantage of growing opportunities for black performers in Hollywood’” (Friedman 34).

The realities of racial politics in the Hollywood studios, however, complicated expectations that “Negro talking pictures” would revolutionize the depiction of African Americans in film, ironically resulting in the cinematic composition of “black interiority.” Prior to the transition to sound, roles available to African Americans “were few and limited in scope” (Friedman 15). In fact, critical descriptions of these roles recall Laura Mulvey’s descriptions of women’s static roles in classical narrative cinema. Daniel J. Leab, for example, “describes the ‘freezing of an image’” to explain “the reduction of the African American screen presence to a

set of stock gestures and character types” (Friedman 15)<sup>34</sup>: “Limited to brief screen appearances, which establish visual and symbolic social counterpoint, African American characters . . . are primarily fixed points of reference in relation to which the trajectories of white characters can be gauged” (Friedman 18). Given this standard, “it stands to reason that the basic redistribution of screen space and time entailed by early ‘Negro films’ would disrupt this carefully codified (‘frozen’) formula of symbolic social relations”; however, “the brief reevaluation of black performance as a production feature that occurs during the transition to sound does not cause or follow from a concomitant change in the studios’ racial politics” (Friedman 18). In other words, expectations did not align with the industry reality. “Negro talking pictures” that depicted African American protagonists with embodied agency—that is, “protagonists moving physically (within the frame or within fictional geographic space), willing things to happen, and acting on desires”—often simultaneously or ultimately reduced these characters to a state of “black-primitive interiority,” restoring the status quo of “black social stasis and immobility” (Friedman 19, 23, 19).<sup>35</sup> Cinematic “strategies of interiorization,” such as “formal distortion and phantasmagoria,” “mirrors and high-contrast or chiaroscuro lighting,” “narrative strategies of

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<sup>34</sup> See “The Freezing of an Image” chapter in Leab’s *From Sambo to Superspade: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures*.

<sup>35</sup> Helga Crane’s geographic agency and ultimate regression in Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928) come to mind here. Friedman’s analysis of the 1933 film *The Emperor Jones*, starring Paul Robeson, could describe Helga’s exterior narrative:

While the narrative trajectory of the opening scenes traces a movement toward cultural sophistication—from the country to the city, from humble beginnings to great power—such a trajectory, the film hints, is an illusion. These opening scenes instead set the stage for Jones’s immanent “regression.” What appears like progress in the first sections of the narrative is, at best, the constant repetition of the same, or, at worst, incipient regression—the accumulation of false trappings of “civilization” that will collapse under the pressure of Jones’s flight from his pursuers. (25)

enframing and enveloping,” “repetitions and circular plot devices,” “doubled characters,” and “audiovisual constructions of black excess embodiment,” allowed “‘Negro talking pictures’ . . . to represent African American social immobility without linking that immobility to concrete practices of oppression” (22, 23). Friedman argues that these “formal aspects of the films bear the imprint of a logical tension that, in turn, makes legible the overtly unrepresentable social underpinning of the films” (19). That is, the cinematic techniques that preserved the representation of African American immobility simultaneously revealed its social reality. Nevertheless, the transition from stasis to interiority belied the profound prospects of “Negro” sound film.

Critics have also described cinematic representations of women in terms of “stasis” and “interiority,” aligning analyses of African Americans and women in sound film. Turning to feminist, psychoanalytic, film critic, Kaja Silverman, Friedman finds that “figurative containments of *African American* subjectivity . . . are analogous to the forms of inscribing *sexual* difference” (Friedman 23, emphasis added). Silverman argues that “Hollywood’s soundtrack is engendered through a complex system of displacements” that associate women with “interiority”: “Far from being a privileged condition, synonymous with soul, spirit, or consciousness, interiority in Hollywood films implies linguistic constraint and physical confinement—confinement to the body, to claustal spaces, and to inner narratives” (45). Silverman’s concept of female “interiority” in sound film does not, therefore, coincide with Dorothy Richardson’s notion of female “consciousness” in the silent cinema. While Richardson imagines the female, silent-film viewer experiencing creative enlightenment outside of the film narrative, Silverman finds the female character in sound film systematically separated from the act of composition and limited to the narrated story, or diegesis: “As a result of these

mechanisms, interiority and exteriority are redefined as areas within the narrative . . . . ‘Inside’ comes to designate a recessed space within the story, while ‘outside’ refers to those elements of the story which seem in one way or another to frame that recessed space. Woman is confined to the former, and man to the latter” (Silverman 54). Silverman provides little prospect of agency in embodied female voice, suggesting that “‘interior’ rhymes with ‘inferior’ to such a degree in classic cinema that sexual difference is the usual vehicle for its articulation” (56). Prior to this era of “classic cinema,” however, one female film director not only successfully transitioned from silent to sound film within the Hollywood studio system, but also invented sound-film mechanisms and employed them in complex embodiments of the female voice.

Dorothy Arzner (1897-1979) followed the Hollywood trajectory promoted by women’s magazines at the time, working her way up at Paramount Pictures to become one of few female directors in the business: “Starting as a script typist in 1919, Arzner progressed to work as a script supervisor, a film editor, a screenwriter, and, finally, a director” (Bryant, “Dorothy” 347). The transition to sound stymied many filmmakers,<sup>36</sup> but Arzner made her silent directorial debut in 1927 and transitioned to talkies in just two years: “The first three films that she directed were silent with intertitles: *Fashions for Women*, *Ten Modern Commandments*, and *Get Your Man*—all released in 1927; her fourth film *Manhattan Cocktail*, from 1928, featured synchronized vocal music but the dialogue was silent. . . . Arzner’s first full talkie was released in April 1929: *The Wild Party* with Clara Bow in her first speaking role” (Bryant 347). Rather than merely adapting to technological changes, Arzner contributed to the transition to sound: “during the filming of

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<sup>36</sup> This reality ironically applies to Oscar Micheaux, the legendary African American filmmaker, and his Lincoln Motion Picture Company: “the transition to sound responsible for ‘all-Negro talking pictures’ would effectively put Micheaux out of business for a couple of years” (Friedman 4).

*The Wild Party* . . . Arzner invented the fishpole, or boom, microphone—a microphone that hangs and moves easily anywhere on set, in part in response to Bow’s nervousness about central, stationary microphones” (347-48). Still in use today, this microphone “revolution[ized] the talking picture” (Stephens 159). Arzner continued to direct into the 1940s, making five more “pre-Code talkies with Paramount” and six more films with various other studios (Bryant, “Dorothy” 348). “Known as a star-maker, Arzner worked with, in addition to Bow, Katharine Hepburn, Joan Crawford, and Lucille Ball, among others,” and, in turn, became known for making films “focused around complex female characters” and “challenging female storylines” (Bryant 348, Stephens 161). As a pioneer in both feminist and sound film, Arzner clearly did not find mechanical synchronization at odds with female agency. Rather, she “embraced the talkies and their integration of film’s visual capabilities with technologies of voice,” as well as the potential of these technologies to represent female embodiment (Bryant 349).

Arzner’s early films starring Clara Bow, the silent *Get Your Man* (1927) and the talkie *The Wild Party* (1929), show Arzner’s continuing interest in the transition to sound and its implications for the medium, particularly via the roles of women. Sara Bryant notes that “*Get Your Man* is the only silent film of Arzner’s of which a partial copy is known to exist, and the footage that remains reveals a filmmaker engaged in discourse about the coming of sound film” (“Dorothy” 353). Bow plays Nancy Worthington, an American in Paris who “gets her man.” Despite the traditional Hollywood narrative, “an early set of scenes in a waxworks museum meditates on the history of film form”: “In the few years before the transition to sound film, filmic treatment of wax museum tableaux can be read as reflection of the soon-to-be surpassed media of silent film” (Bryant 353, 354). In these scenes, Nancy visits a Parisian waxworks museum and comically mistakes mechanical and wax figures for people, and vice versa: “In each

instance, it is voice [conveyed by intertitles] (or its lack) that makes distinction between the two possible” (355). Bryant argues that in these scenes, “Arzner aligns silent cinema with the representational aesthetics of waxworks and mechanical figures, and the talkies with the speaking (but as of yet unheard) characters—primarily Nancy—who visit the waxworks and whose narratives extend beyond it” (356). Therefore, “The sequence gestures toward corporeal voice as a new form for film, but a form engaged with the cinematic past. At the dawn of the talkies, *Get Your Man* reflects on its own status as a silent film” (356). Two years later, Arzner released her first talkie, *The Wild Party*, which also starred Bow in her first speaking role. *The Wild Party*, “which opens with the visual of a banner for Winston College (a fictional women’s school) and the chaotic sounds of women students socializing with one another,” “incorporates many scenes of women collectively chattering, singing, and laughing, an unruly acoustic experience that, at moments in the film, prompts from male characters ineffective disciplinary responses” and even “mild fear” (357). Bryant argues that “These moments of vocal ruckus recall the largely female and vocal audiences for silent film,” alluding to Dorothy Richardson’s *Close Up* column scolding these women. Although “Sound film may compel audiences to be quiet while a film plays, . . . Arzner shows how film itself can offer a new outlet for women’s voices”: “The raucous chatter of the women in *The Wild Party* can be read as empowering newly silenced audiences with displays of collective female vocality” (358). These scenes from *Get Your Man* and *The Wild Party* demonstrate Arzner’s “experiment[ation] with the sensorial reintegration posed by the talkies,” which continues in her succeeding films as she “develops the possibility of an embodied modernist voice that is both reflexive about technologies of mass culture and deeply attentive to the situations of women” (Bryant 347).



In *Anybody's Woman* (1930), Arzner further examines the potential of synchronized voice and image to represent embodied female identity. In fact, Bryant finds that “Arzner’s reflexivity about sound film technology takes most significant shape” in this film, “the screenplay of which was written by Arzner’s frequent collaborator at Paramount, Zoë Akins,” who “had a close friendship with Willa Cather” (“Dorothy” 358, 353). In the opening and closing scenes, “Arzner explores how voice can complicate and enhance narrative film’s depiction of gendered subjectivity,” as “[c]haracters seeing and overhearing conversations through hotel windows begin and conclude the film” (358). The film opens, for example, on two men overhearing a song from two women, whom they can hear and see through open windows across the hotel courtyard. When the women begin conversing more intimately, the men can no longer hear them, unless the women adjust their mechanical fan, unknowingly projecting their voices across the courtyard once again. Bryant argues that this scene “can be read as a meditation on embodied voice and sound synchronization in film,” “with the fan thematizing sound film technology” (358, 361):

At one level, the men’s watching and hearing the women through the window frames could be read as an early reflection on the workings of the male gaze in Hollywood film: the film audience is at first positioned voyeuristically with the men, viewing over their shoulders. But Arzner counters such a mapping, especially through the employment of voice. In one respect, the men are outside viewers, looking in, but we are made visually aware of the limitations of their view and how they, too, are framed . . . . More crucially, transmission of the women’s voices transgresses demarcations of interior and exterior, and public and private life, but in such a way that [a woman’s] voicing of her situation does not

make her vulnerable to the men . . . the men are granted neither authority nor exposure as unseen listeners. (361)

In its formal depiction and transgression of female “interiority” and its “framing” of both the female and male perspectives, this scene challenges Silverman’s narrative cinema claims and recalls the formal techniques of contemporary African American sound films, which revealed otherwise concealed social realities. In Arzner’s films, “The properties of voice—the ultimate untraceability of its origin, its transit between bodily interiors and exteriors and between private and public social spaces—allowed for the representation of situated and embodied subjects who could express alterity and resistance to visual and social classifications” (Bryant 366). Zora Neale Hurston likewise engages in this work through her anthropological and literary representations, particularly of the embodied African American, female voice.

#### **4.2 *Zora Neale Hurston: The Anthropologist***

As an artist and an anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston was deeply ensconced in contemporary explorations of the capabilities and limitations of representing embodied black culture in literature, drama, sound, and film—for many purposes and audiences. Elaine Charnov explains Hurston’s “unique” position as a “participant/observer in widely disparate communities”: “she was a highly educated woman performing herself within the New York City intellectual milieu, and yet her status as African-American and woman set her apart. Additionally, she was a participant in the communities that she studied, and yet her advanced educational status set her apart as an outsider” (44). During the 1920s and ’30s, Hurston conducted written, audio, and visual ethnographic fieldwork in the US South, Jamaica, and Haiti under the sponsorship of a private patron, multiple Guggenheim Fellowships, the Works

Progress Administration, Barnard College, Columbia University, and fellow anthropologists. These years spent documenting black culture would become the basis for many of her books, articles, and plays, including her New York City concert production, *The Great Day* (1932); her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1935); and her book of African American folklore, *Mules and Men* (1935) ("The Life"). Despite technical limitations, these expeditions would likewise yield extant audio and film recordings that dramatize Hurston's "embodied performance" of the songs, stories, and rituals that she learned from the communities she studied.<sup>37</sup> Intersecting the individual and the communal, the objective and the subjective, Hurston claimed her own female, African American voice during the transition to sound film.

Hurston's silent film footage shot during her 1927-1930 ethnographic fieldwork in the US South establishes her as one of the first—if not the first—female, African American filmmakers. Having already studied under and conducted fieldwork with famed German-American anthropologist Franz Boas, Hurston returned to the South "under the sponsorship of Charlotte Osgood Mason," white "patron of many artists of the Harlem Renaissance," "who in December 1927 had equipped Hurston with a car, two hundred dollars a month, a 16mm camera, and the directive to collect 'all information, both written and oral, concerning the music, poetry, folklore, literature, hoodoo, conjure, manifestations, of art and kindred subjects relating to and existing among North American negroes'" (Womack 115, Charnov 40, Womack 115). Boas, Mason, and Hurston, herself, each had their own purposes for the expedition, which Hurston "negotiated" in her film work: "Boas' interest was grounded in his concern with salvage ethnography — that is, the process of collecting materials from a culture before it disappears so

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<sup>37</sup> Only limited audio and film recordings are available online. For collections at the Library of Congress, see "Zora Neale Hurston: Recordings, Manuscripts, Photographs, and Ephemera."

it can be studied by academics for future generations. Charlotte Mason, by contrast, was interested in the collection of the material for presentation to the general public, through popular publications and theatrical performances” (Charnov 41, 40). In order to accommodate “these audiences,” Hurston “took motion pictures to address Boas’ concern with ‘objective’ research, other segments to satisfy Mrs. Mason’s interest in being entertained, and lastly and most importantly, she approached filmmaking the same way she approached the literary form, experimenting with different methods and stances” (Charnov 41). In fact, Charnov finds that “The parallels between her written work and her film work are striking. Sometimes she stands as the ‘objective’ outsider, other times as ‘the participant’ of the community, and other times as an unabashed experimenter. In all the roles she adopts, Zora Neale Hurston is involved in capturing the dynamics of ritualized performativity on the level of daily, commonplace occurrence” (Charnov 41). We can see each of these perspectives in Hurston’s extant footage from this period.

Even as a novice filmmaker, Hurston intersects art and science, subjectivity and objectivity, with scenes and sequences often calling attention to their experimental composition. Charnov explains: “In contrast to many amateur films from the 1920s, which are marked by their static quality, Hurston’s footage is distinguished by its broad range in style and composition. In some cases, she uses the camera to record an activity. In other cases she engages the apparatus as an extension of her person, creating documents that have a participatory feel” (39). The extant 24 minutes of silent, black and white footage include, among other subjects, children playing and dancing in a schoolyard, a working logging community, and a baptism. In fact, “Films of children playing games make up nearly half of the twenty-four minutes,” “[r]anging from mere seconds to just under two minutes (or half of a four-minute roll of 16mm film)” and including

“highly organized schoolyard games and spontaneous play” (Womack 120). While Hurston attempts to film some of these sequences from an objective distance, anticipating the anthropological standard, she films others inside the scene, calling attention to her experimental methods: In several sequences, Hurston sets a stationary line of sight, “placing the camera on a tripod and letting it run without interruption.”<sup>38</sup> “At one point,” however, a “twirling” child “knocks over the entire apparatus,” belying the objective viewpoint (Charnov 43). In other sequences, “Rather than stand at a fixed distance, she shoots . . . with what seems to be a handheld camera and in one sequence situates herself inside the [children’s] performance circle” (Charnov 43). In her adult studies, Hurston continues to experiment with both scientific and artistic, objective and subjective composition. In fact, she recalls Muybridge in a more “objective” series: “a short segment of two men with an ax . . . suggests material intended to be used for research purposes, perhaps for comparative studies of gesture and movement. In this sequence, Hurston juxtaposes shots of two different men, both of whom are holding an ax. She provides a side and front view of each and then a whole body shot of both men gripping the tool”

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<sup>38</sup> “In fact,” Charnov observes, “in one sequence of children playing in a Cyprus grove, Hurston is so concerned with obtaining informative, accurate records that she begins the sequence by having a number of the children stand individually before the camera, with their age scrawled on a pad of paper” (43). Autumn Womack, however, complicates this reading, arguing that the overexposed, and therefore difficult to decipher, cards that the children hold have long been misread: “on closer inspection, the white cards do *not* actually record identification data, but rather, they contain production information”—film reel numbers, as in “REEL” and “1” (121). Womack thus asserts that “Hurston’s efforts reveal themselves to be at odds with film’s technical capabilities” (122-23): “Although it would seem that Hurston cast the boy as an active participant in the film production, and not a specimen of scientific inquiry, the near impossibility of making out the inscription on the overexposed white card undercuts even this seemingly empowered role” (123). Womack continues this argument in her analysis of Hurston’s later unsuccessful attempts to synchronize sound film, which I will discuss.

(Charnov 43).<sup>39</sup> In contrast, Charnov argues that “The segment which best illustrates Zora’s fictional effort is a sequence looking at a woman on a porch”:

A woman walks out of her shack onto the porch. She smiles directly into the camera. There is a close-up of her face, and close-up of her left and right profile. The film jumps to a shot of the garden and then to a shot of the woman lying on a bench. Next we see a medium shot of a woman on a rocking chair and a close-up of her feet juxtaposed with a close-up of a cat’s paw. Next there is a long shot, a silhouette of the woman rocking, taken from a neighboring porch. (46)

Despite the seemingly scientific profile shots, “this piece is constructed very differently from the other films”: “This film is composed of a series of jump cuts, juxtaposing animate and inanimate objects, deconstructing the woman’s body and performativity” (46). It is notable that the explicitly objective, scientific series features men, while this more subjective, narrative series features a women.<sup>40</sup> This choice of subject perhaps suggests Hurston’s selection of a female protagonist for her modernist literary narrative.

In her 1939 recordings for the Federal Writers Project (FWP), Hurston performs songs that she learned from the communities she visited, exemplifying her embodied approach to representing black culture. Having worked intermittently for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) throughout the 1930s, Hurston became “the only black female member” of the FWP’s

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<sup>39</sup> Charnov suggests another connection to Muybridge in “one extremely short segment, perhaps 5 second in length, in which a boulder moves down a road on its own. Although it is unlikely that her 16mm camera had the technical sophistication, it is possible that Hurston developed a make-shift, stop-action technique” (46).

<sup>40</sup> This footage also includes a five-minute segment with a “story-telling” subject and “a professionally created title”: “Kossula Last of the Takkoi Slaves in America” (Charnov 44). See Charnov (44-45) and Womack (126-31) for context and analysis.

*Florida Guide* editorial staff in 1938. In this role, Hurston reported on “Florida folklore and music” and eventually joined “a statewide recording expedition” (Brooks 621). In June 1939, Hurston “set up camp with [her] Florida guide colleagues” in Jacksonville, Florida, where they used “a recording device ‘the size of a coffee table’” to “capture the voices of various informants,” including local “railroad workers, musicians, and church ladies” (Brooks 621, qtd. in Brooks 621-22): “At the center of it all there is Hurston shifting fluidly between the role of the folklorist and that of the informant, introducing songs, sketching out their socio-cultural context and utility, and performing them for a wonkish gaggle of folklore scholars who listen and prod her for details” (Brooks 622). On one track, Hurston explains that she learned the songs by joining in with the community while they were singing, slowly picking up the songs as they sang, and eventually singing them back to community members for validation (Brooks 622-23): “Then I carry it in my memory [...]. I learn the song myself and then I can take it with me wherever I go” (qtd. in Brooks 623, Brooks’s ellipses). Hurston’s performative body—unlike the mechanical apparatus—participates in the composition of the “text” and informs the audience’s understanding of its cultural context. Daphne A. Brooks applies Sonnet Retman’s analysis of Hurston’s “deeply performative style of presentation,” or “signifying ethnography,” in *Mules and Men* to Hurston’s singing:

her insider and outsider claims loop together like a Möbius strip to stretch the very limits of participant observation methodology heralded by the period’s most renowned cultural anthropologists. . . . Indeed, the practice of shuttling is part of her signifying ethnography; it allows her to create a radically hybrid text that

traverses the space between informant and ethnographer and fiction and nonfiction. (Retman 154)<sup>41</sup>

Brooks argues that Hurston's singing likewise "traverses the space" "between personal and collective voice," as she "inspires the subjectivity of the black collective whose voices she preserves, as well as her own present, active independent reception as a woman" (622, 623).

Thus Hurston's "performative epistemology" provides a model for representing embodied black culture and claiming "sonic black womanhood" (625, 624).

In 1940, a decade after the transition to sound film in Hollywood, Hurston conducted audio and visual recordings of services at Commandment Keeper Church in Beaufort, South Carolina, documenting rural, communal, black culture and calling attention to the limitations of synchronization technology. With the backing of fellow anthropologist Jane Belo, Hurston and a crew, including Norman Chafin, Lou Brandt, and Bob Lawrence, aimed to capture the May 18 and 19, 1940 services in sound film, but technical difficulties prevented synchronization (Anthony 54). Much of what we know about this trip comes from a May 20, 1940 letter written to Belo from Chafin, Brandt, Lawrence, and Hurston:

We've been shooting, shooting and shooting—We been begging and wheedling—and bluffing to get current—But we've got records.—that much we know. It's a

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<sup>41</sup> In *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz suggests the Möbius strip as an alternative to the Cartesian separation of mind and body:

The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another. This model also provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside. (xii)



good thing records can be played back immediately. / If the gods of anthropological investigators are with us we have swell fotos and films. / Not all that we planned worked out—We don't have any synchronization because our motor lay down on us before we started—so we were hand cranking all the four hundred foot rolls and using the spring on the 100 foots. We have a [illegible] service, and an outdoor service and also a Sunday nite service. / Had we attempted to synchronize the sound the flexibility of jumping from place to place would have been impaired— / We really did shoot some wonderful reactions I hope that they prove satisfactory for study purposes. / We find that after having gone through it once that there are a number of things we'd have liked to do that our equipment did not permit. / The excellence of what we did get we'll leave up to you to judge. / Without Zora most of it would have been impossible.

This letter calls attention to the physicality of audio and visual production, belying the efficiency of media technology. Attributing the letter primarily to Hurston, Autumn Womack considers these technical difficulties in light of the widespread alignment of sound film with black culture: As “Hurston draws attention to what the cinematic apparatus *cannot* do,” she “unsettles the long-held notion that black life was necessarily amenable to the camera, and likewise, that the camera could reveal a ‘real’ and ‘accurate’ picture” (120, emphasis added). Rather, Hurston “suggests that film’s technical limitations actually attest to what black cultural life is: a continually moving networking of relations requiring a level of dexterity and flexibility that exceeds the technical capabilities of a camera . . .” (Womack 120). As the letter notes, however, the team did successfully document several services in multiple media, including “approximately 42 minutes of black and white 16mm film footage” showing “prayers, songs, sermons, trances and general

religious services” and “an additional 90 minutes audio recording of prayers, songs, and sermons” (Parks, Anthony 54, Parks). As in her previous fieldwork, Hurston participates in the scenes, acting as both insider and outsider: “during an outdoor church service scene, . . . Hurston waves her hand directing a church soloist to move closer to the microphone while staying in camera view. . . . Congregants play instruments and Hurston joins them by playing a pair of rattles in another scene” (Parks). Hurston once again enacts her embodied approach to representing black culture, despite the limitations of her media.<sup>42</sup>

Despite her valuable work outside of Hollywood, Hurston was certainly not immune to the financial incentives of studio film adaptation, and although she was never successful, Hurston submitted much of her writing for studio consideration and, later in her career, even wrote for the express purpose of film adaptation. In fact, Elizabeth Binggeli argues that Hurston’s “artistic production was shaped by the Hollywood industry that considered, but ultimately rejected, her work” (1). Hurston was aware of the studios’ readiness to adapt literary material in the early stages of her own writing career. In 1923, prior to her ethnographic education and expeditions, Hurston “worked as a chauffeur and secretary to [Fannie] Hurst, whose fiction was then being adapted to silent film and would soon be adapted to talkies” (Binggeli 4). Throughout the 1930s, Hurston submitted her work to Hollywood studios without success. In 1934 and 1937, respectively, Warner Bros. reviewed and rejected Hurston’s novels, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* and

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<sup>42</sup> These separate recordings do provide current viewers—with advanced technology—the potential to compose new works of audio/visual media. For example, approximately seven minutes of Hurston’s 1928-29 silent film footage appears “synchronized” with four of her 1939 song recordings in a 2013 video on YouTube (Andrew Rasmussen). At times, as Hurston describes the context of the song, she seems to be introducing or narrating the footage, and as she sings, the children seem to be dancing and clapping along. Although the caption clearly states that the scenes and songs come from different sources and were recorded at different times, the concurrent presentation of the media creates a new artifact.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, for film adaptation (Binggeli 4). Then, “in the spring of 1941, Hurston moved to Southern California,” where she “was briefly employed by Paramount studios as a writer and technical advisor” (5). In the next year, however, both her novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) and her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) were once again “reviewed and rejected” by Warner Bros. (5). Following these rejections, Hurston began writing a story about poor, white Floridians, hoping to capitalize on “the industry’s appetite for a particular kind of white character: the Southern cracker” (4). This attempt to write specifically for Hollywood adaptation resulted in the ultimately “unadapted” novel *Seraph on the Sewanee* (1948), which critics and readers have generally dismissed as “a confused, embarrassing aberration amidst the author’s otherwise distinguished and innovative work” (4).<sup>43</sup> Despite the “failure” of this novel, Binggeli finds resistance in the “decision of black authors to write about white characters and to court Hollywood,” which

may be read as merely a regrettable—if pragmatic—capitulation to white narrative consumption. That their creative output was constrained by the racism of the publishing world and Hollywood is without doubt. But capitulation or not, by presuming to narrate whiteness Hurston and her contemporaries posed a significant challenge to an entrenched narrative code that granted only white authors the privilege of writing beyond their own racial identity. (11)

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<sup>43</sup> Binggeli further notes that “Seraph’s [sic] neurotic protagonist, Arvay Henson, is a wretchedly insecure Southern white woman in a masochistic marriage. Any reader hoping for a female liberation epiphany a la *Their Eyes Were Watching God* will be disappointed by *Seraph*—Arvay finds fulfillment only when she realizes that she was ‘meant to serve’ her abusive husband Jim” (4). “Arvay’s psychology throughout the novel is more understandable,” however, “if she is read, as the tragic mulatta is read, as anxiously *passing* for white, and in constant fear of exposure,” as “a twist on the trope of the tragic mulatta: a ‘tragic cracker’” (12).

Here Binggeli suggests Hurston's larger concern with representation outside and/or inside of the body. As an anthropologist, Hurston employed her own body in the multimedia composition of black culture. As an author, she articulated an epistemology that synchronized the bodily outside and inside in the depiction of dynamic, female, African American identity.

### 4.3 *Zora Neale Hurston as Author*

Despite her groundbreaking anthropological work in multimedia technology, Hurston successfully synchronized voice and vision through the medium of the modernist novel, specifically *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). The novel opens on Janie, a middle-aged, African American woman returning to Eatonville, Florida after a year-and-a-half-long absence. Janie's personal conversation with her intimate friend, an African American woman named Pheoby, frames the story of her life leading up to her mysterious return, the story that Pheoby will eventually relate to their black community. The narrative follows Janie through her forced first marriage to an older man, her second marriage to Joe "Jody" Starks and her life with him in Eatonville, and her third marriage to Tea Cake and her life with him in the Everglades. When Janie kills Tea Cake in self-defense and goes on trial for murder, she must use her voice to make the white jury understand, or "see," her story—that is, the story she has been "telling and showing" to Pheoby all along. I suggest that we think of Janie's visual epistemology as becoming synchronized with her embodied voice. Like the Möbius strip, and Hurston's "performative epistemology," they are interconnected rather than integrated, aligned rather than combined.<sup>44</sup> Unlike African American sound films depicting black interiority for urban white

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<sup>44</sup> In the sound-on-film method, the sound recording is converted into a photographic soundtrack, and this soundtrack negative and the photographic film negative are copied onto a single combined film strip, where they appear side-by-side ("Sound Recording"). The combined film

audiences, or Hurston's ethnographic work translating rural black culture for white scholars and patrons, or even Hurston's stories courting Hollywood studios, however, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* depicts embodied black vision and voice for African American audiences, both intimate and communal.

Although many critics have considered the role of literary and linguistic "voice" in African American fiction and specifically in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, some have noted the novel's essential association—or synchronization—of voice and vision. In his foundational work of African American literary theory, *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), Henry Louis Gates, Jr. identifies the novel as a "speakerly text," "a text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition, designed 'to emulate the phonetic, grammatical, and lexical patterns of actual speech,'" a "text in which all other structural elements seem to be devalued," in contrast to "the privileging of oral speech and its inherent linguistic features" (181). Gates argues that Hurston "introduced free indirect discourse into Afro-American narration": "It is this innovation . . . which enables her to represent various traditional modes of Afro-American rhetorical play while simultaneously representing her protagonist's growth in self-consciousness . . ." (191). Although Gates's persuasive analysis has bolstered a valuable critical emphasis on voice, critics like Stuart Burrows "have begun to pay attention to the fact that vision plays just as important a role as voice in the formation of Janie's identity" (158).<sup>45</sup> Given the cultural context

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strip is not a Möbius strip: It has a beginning and an end, and the picture and the sound do not appear on opposite sides. The Möbius strip does, however, continue to provide a provocative model for synchronization.

<sup>45</sup> In his study of American fiction and the "language of photography," Burrows notes that although *Their Eyes Were Watching God* "declares an investment in vision in its very title, critics have tended to agree with Gates's assertion," and that the critical "bias" towards voice "is reflected in the titles of some of the most well-known studies of the novel" (158).

of African American sound film and Hurston's multimedia ethnographic work, however, I am more interested in critics who consider the necessary *relationship* between vision and voice. Deborah Clarke, for example, concurs that "voice has prevailed as the primary medium through which African American writers have asserted identity and humanity," but finds that "For Hurston, . . . the construction of African American identity requires a voice that can make you see, a voice that celebrates the visible presence of black bodies" (599, 600). Although "Janie's achievement of a voice is critical to her journey to self-awareness," "the highly ambivalent presentation of voice in the novel indicates that voice alone is not enough" (599): "Janie seeks for a voice which can picture, which can make you see. The ability to use voice visually provides a literary space for African American women to relate their experiences . . ." (Clarke 600). Reframing Clarke's article, I argue that Hurston composes a vocally and visually synchronized epistemology enacted privately between African American women and then translated to a communal African American audience.

The novel's first chapter introduces the various voices that tell, hear, and see the narrative, defining vocally and visually synchronized epistemology and privileging private discourse between two African American women. The narrator begins by zooming in on Janie, narrowing the narrative scope from "every man" to "women" to "a woman" (1). The line of sight shifts then to "the people," "sitting on porches beside the road" at sundown, watching Janie walk back into town: "These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long," but "It was the time to hear things and talk," so like a jury, "They sat in judgment" (1). As Janie walks by, the townspeople—metonymically identified as "the porch"—fix their gazes upon her, the men objectifying her body and the women critiquing her clothes. When she greets the porch and keeps on walking, with no explanation of her absence or return, the townspeople are

paralyzed: “The porch couldn’t talk for looking” (2). As indignant chatter resumes, Janie’s best friend, Pheoby Watson, speaks up in Janie’s defense, quipping, “If she got anything to tell yuh, you’ll hear it” (4). That is, Janie owns her story, and she will choose whether or not and to whom to tell it. Pheoby takes Janie some dinner, and they begin talking on Janie’s back porch. As Janie reflects upon her walk into town, she refers to the townpeople by another metonym, conflating the metaphorical and corporeal: “Ah see Mouth-Almighty is still sittin’ in de same place. And Ah reckon they got *me* up in they mouth now” (5).<sup>46</sup> When Pheoby confirms and suggests that Janie tell everyone her story, Janie declines, preferring to tell Pheoby and allow *her* to share it with the town: “Ah don’t mean to bother wid tellin’ ’em nothin’, Pheoby. ’Tain’t worth de trouble. You can tell ’em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat’s just de same as me ’cause mah tongue is in mah friend’s mouf” (6). That is, private communication between two female friends becomes embodied experience that may be translated into communal knowledge. Janie trusts Pheoby as her witness and her translator because of their intimacy: “Pheoby, we been kissin’-friends for twenty years, so Ah depend on you for a good thought. And Ah’m talking to you from dat standpoint” (7). When Pheoby struggles to “understand” Janie’s “mean[ing]” from her “tell[ing],” however, Janie explains that she will not “understand” the story simply by hearing it. She also has to “see” it: “’tain’t no use in me telling you somethin’ unless Ah give you de understandin’ to go ’long wid it. Unless you see de fur, a mink skin ain’t no different from a coon hide” (7). Janie once again conflates the physical and the metaphorical here. To “see”

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<sup>46</sup> Clarke finds that “Hurston equates all three sensory apparati [‘tongueless, earless, eyeless’]; she does not privilege the verbal over the visual” (602). Gates argues, “Of these three senses, however, it is the communal speaking voice—‘Mouth-Almighty,’ as the text has it—which emerges early on as the most significant” (199). Janie’s subsequent theory of epistemology seems rather to call for communal understanding via the personal synchronization of speech and sight.

metaphorically is to understand, but in her maxim, to “see” literally is to understand. Rather than privileging speech or sight, the preposition “along” suggests the necessary synchronization of hearing, seeing, and understanding. This exchange between two female friends establishes both the voices and the embodied epistemology that frame the narrative to come.

Janie’s relationship with Joe “Jody” Starks depends upon his privileging of his own voice over hers, ultimately belying the agency of the particularly male voice separated from internal sight, or understanding. The narrative introduction to Joe emphasizes his ambition in vocal terms, repeating the phrase “big voice”: “He had always wanted to be a big voice, but de white folks had all de sayso where he come from and everywhere else, exceptin’ dis place dat colored folks was buildin’ theirselves. . . . It had always been his wish and desire to be a big voice and he had to live nearly thirty years to find a chance” (28). When Janie leaves her first husband and moves to Eatonville with Joe, he immediately takes charge, impressing the townspeople with his fervor and eloquence, and earning their nomination for mayor. Upon his acceptance, a townsperson calls for Janie to speak as Mrs. Mayor Starks, but Joe takes the stage once again (43): “Thank yuh fuh yo’ compliments, but mah wife don’t know nothin’ ’bout no speech-makin’. Ah never married her for notin’ lak dat. She’s uh woman and her place is in de home” (43). Although Janie “had never thought of making a speech, and didn’t know if she cared to make one at all,” “the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another” leaves Janie unsettled (43).<sup>47</sup> As Joe becomes increasingly successful, the town begins to dislike his condescension, complaining that “He loves obedience out of everybody under de

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<sup>47</sup> When Janie later gives an impromptu speech praising Joe, a townsperson responds, “Yo’ wife is uh born orator, Joe Starks. Us never knowed dat befo’. She put just the right words tuh our thoughts” (58). This response foretells Janie’s yet unfulfilled ability to synchronize her visual mind and embodied voice.



sound of his voice,” and that “You kin feel a switch in his hand when he’s talkin’ to yuh” (49). This violent, oppressive speech, which aligns Joe with the “white folks” who silenced him, particularly applies to Janie, who is not allowed to participate in the porch talk (54): “Janie loved conversation and sometimes she thought up good stories . . . , but Joe had forbidden her to indulge. He didn’t want her talking after such trashy people” (53-54). Janie must likewise work in their store, but wear her tied back in a rag so that other men will not view her sexually: “She was there in the store for *him* to look at . . .” (55). That is, Janie is to be selectively seen and not heard. By silencing her voice, however, Joe fails to see, or understand, Janie’s mind, her inside. When Joe becomes frustrated that Janie is not “minding” him, Janie talks back: “Yo sho loves to tell me whut to do, but Ah can’t tell you nothin’ Ah see!” Joe responds, “Dat’s ’cause you need tellin’ . . . . Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don’t think none theirselves.” When Janie insists that she “knows uh few things, and womenfolks think sometimes too!,” Joe retorts, “Aw naw they don’t. They just think they’s thinkin’. When Ah see one thing Ah understands ten. You see ten things and don’t understand one” (71). This argument illustrates the gendered intersectionality of seeing, speaking, and understanding. Janie equates seeing with understanding, while Joe equates speaking with understanding, arguing fallaciously that for women, seeing is not understanding. Following this exchange, Janie begins “thinking about the inside state of her marriage” and realizes that “when she fought back with her tongue,” “it didn’t do her any good,” for Joe “wanted her submission” (71). In order to survive, Janie “learned” to be quiet, to separate her “mind” from her “mouth,” foreshadowing her conscious separation of her inside from her outside (71, 63).

Janie’s recognition of her “inside” as a separate part of her identity stimulates her embodied epistemology through the synchronization of mind and body, sight and speech. When

Joe's verbal abuse becomes physical, Janie consciously explores her mind through visual metaphor: "Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over" (72). In contrast to static images of female interiority, this extended passage transgresses the interior and exterior, the cerebral and corporeal, on the path to Janie's enlightenment. Having realized that Joe is not the embodiment of "her dreams," Janie continues to traverse the space of her mind, discovering her "inside":

In a way she turned her back upon the image where it lay and looked further. . . . She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. (72)

Having discovered her "inside," Janie comes to realize that her mind and body are distinct, but still interdependent. Barbara Johnson explains that "Knowing how not to mix them is knowing that articulate language requires the co-presence of two distinct poles, not their collapse into oneness" (212). Johnson's notion suggests once again the model of the Möbius strip, which allows for the continual "co-presence" of its "two distinct" sides. Janie's concept of her separation takes further form when "one day she sat and watched the shadow of herself going about tending store and prostrating itself before Jody, while all the time she herself sat under a shady tree with the wind blowing through her hair and her clothes" (77). Gates argues that this

“ability to name her own division and move the parts simultaneously through contiguous spaces . . . is that crucial event that enables [Janie] to speak and assert herself” (204). When Janie becomes fed up with Joe mocking her aging female body, despite his own deteriorating state, she “took to the middle of the floor to talk right into Jody’s face,” delivering a shaming invective: “When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life” (78, 79). Bewildered, Jody questions her, and a townspeople responds, “You heard her, you ain’t blind” (79). Clarke asserts that “This comment highlights the interconnection between hearing and seeing; to hear is to see. And yet, given the words of her insult, Joe might as well be blind . . . ” (606). Janie’s emasculating defiance ultimately kills Joe, who even on his deathbed cannot stand Janie’s insistence that *he* listen to her. Filled with pity, Janie examines herself in the dresser mirror and finds “a handsome woman,” an outside fit for her inside (87).<sup>48</sup>

In her subsequent relationship with Tea Cake, Janie develops but does not fully realize her embodied voice and synchronized sight. As a playful younger man, Tea Cake is a fittingly stark contrast to Joe Starks. He and Janie enjoy talking and teasing as soon as they meet: “Look how she had been able to talk with him right off!” (99). He teaches her how to play the games that Joe forbade, “and she found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play” (95-69). He “looked like the love thoughts of women,” while Joe was *not* the “figure of her dreams” (106, 72). While Janie had to hide her true

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<sup>48</sup> Karen Jacobs agrees that the response “You heard her, you ain’t blind” “signals the conflation of visual and verbal registers,” but she cautions, “We must not, however, let these various signs of Janie’s emerging subjectivity—her expanding interiority, and her brandishing of the gaze and voice—allow us to forget that Janie has also internalized herself as object” (345). While Clarke reads Janie’s examination of herself in the mirror as “us[ing] her own vision to find beauty and value in her visually inscribed racial identity” (608), Jacobs notes that “her primary standard of value in her own eyes as well as others”—that is, her hair—“seems unchanged” (346).

feelings from Joe, who insisted that she “need tellin’” how to act, Tea Cake says that Janie “needs tellin’ and showin’” his true feelings for her, suggesting the necessary synchronization of speech and sight (71, 107).<sup>49</sup> The town disapproves of Janie’s relationship with a poor young man—and her dressing like a woman in love instead of a widow in mourning—but she enjoys feeling “like a child breaking the rules” (102). Although Tea Cake shows signs of possessiveness—“Holding her and caressing her as if he feared she might escape his grasp and fly away”—Janie agrees to marry him, telling Pheoby that she and Tea Cake are leaving Eatonville “‘Cause Tea Cake ain’t no Jody Starks . . . . But de minute Ah marries ’im everybody is gointuh be makin’ comparisons” (107, 114). After a difficult start in Jacksonville, where Tea Cake gets into trouble gambling with Janie’s money, they travel to the Everglades, where they work and play together. The community of itinerant workers gathers at their house, where Janie joins the porch talk: “The men held big arguments here like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest” (134). Tea Cake allows Janie to experience her visual inside and her vocal outside as Joe never did. As Clarke notes, however, “Janie does not need simply to find a man capable of assimilating voice and vision, she needs to learn for herself how to formulate a self which is not predicated upon oppression” (Clarke 607). Tea Cake’s possessiveness becomes physical when he overhears another woman denigrating his dark skin to Janie. He later “whipped Janie” “to show he was boss,” which “reassured him in possession” (147). Tea Cake explains, “Ah ain’t mad wid her for whut she done, ’cause she ain’t done me nothin’ yet. Ah’m mad at her for thinkin’” (148-49). This statement belies his seeming

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<sup>49</sup> Clarke asserts that in this phrase, Tea Cake “recognizes the need to combine voice with understanding” (607). I emphasize the alignment or “co-presence,” to use B. Johnson’s term, of voice and vision necessary to understanding.

understanding of Janie's "inside," as his beating literally marks her "outside" for the townspeople to see. Despite his violent jealousy, Janie stays with Tea Cake and continues to love him. When a great storm comes, Tea Cake saves Janie from a rabid dog, who bites and infects him. Possessed by disease, Tea Cake appears disembodied: "Janie saw a changing look come in his face. Tea Cake was gone. Something else was looking out of his face" (181). When Janie kills Tea Cake in self-defense, she goes on trial for murder, where she must use her voice to save her own life.

During the trial, Janie successfully enacts visually and vocally synchronized epistemology by telling and showing the white jury her story and, therefore, convincing them of her innocence. As Janie surveys the courtroom, she considers the audience gathered to listen to her testimony: "The court set and Janie saw the judge who had put on a great robe to listen about her and Tea Cake. And twelve more white men had stopped whatever they were doing to listen and pass on what happened between Janie and Tea Cake Woods, and as to whether things were done right or now" (185). She recognizes the irony in these "strange men who didn't know a thing about people like Tea Cake and her" deciding her fate, and briefly wishes that "she could make" the white *women*, who "had come to look at her too," "know how it was instead of those menfolks" (185). At this gendered intersection of listening, looking, and knowing, Janie believes that women, even white women, would be more likely to understand her. The communal black audience, "packed tight," "standing up in the back of the courtroom," appears hostile to Janie, who sees, hears, and feels their violent "thoughts": "She felt them pelting her with dirty thoughts. They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks. The only killing tool they are allowed to use in the presence of white folks" (185-86). When the prosecution begins, "a tongue storm struck the Negroes like wind among palm trees. They talked

all of a sudden and all together like a choir and the top parts of their bodies moved on the rhythm of it. . . . All they wanted was a chance to testify” (186). “They had come to talk” on Tea Cake’s behalf, but the prosecutor silences and threatens them (186). The members of the black communal voice have no audience in this white courtroom. As the sole defendant, however, Janie, despite being black and a woman, has the rapt attention of the room. The judge “told her to tell just how it happened,” and “They all leaned over to listen while she talked” (187). The narrator emphasizes that Janie uses her voice to make the jury “see” and, therefore, understand: “She had to go way back to let them know how she and Tea Cake had been with one another so they could see she could never shoot Tea Cake out of malice. / She tried to make them see how terrible it was . . . . She made them see how she couldn’t ever want to be rid of him. She didn’t plead to anybody. She just sat there and told and when she was through she hushed” (187). The absence of dialogue in Janie’s telling speaks to the complexity of voice in the novel. Clarke notes “critical concern with the narrator replacing Janie’s voice at this crucial moment,” but argues that “we must recognize that Janie has made them see, as she has already made the reader see, that voice at this moment is subordinate to the ability to visualize, an effect that may be heightened by Hurston’s deflection of Janie’s story” (610). I contend that voice, if not dialogue, is *necessary* to visualization here, rather than subordinate to it, and that Hurston’s deflection of Janie’s story privileges the narrative’s primary audience, Pheoby, rather than the white men of the jury. Following Janie’s acquittal and Tea Cake’s burial, Janie returns to Eatonville, and the novel returns via the ending frame to Pheoby, confirming Janie’s selected, private audience.

In the ending frame, Janie explains to Pheoby that knowledge must be embodied, must come from lived experience, suggesting that even vocally and visually synchronized composition has its limits. Janie’s dialogue resumes when she addresses Pheoby: “Now, dat’s how everything

wuz, Pheoby, jus' lak Ah told yuh. So Ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons" (191). Because she has experienced personal mobility, Janie is content to return to the place she once left. She is likewise content to let the people she once left hear her story through her interlocutor: "Ah know all dem sitters-and-talkers gointuh worry they guts into fiddle strings till dey find out whut we been talkin' 'bout. Dat's all right, Pheoby, tell 'em" (191). Inspired by and protective of Janie's personal growth, Pheoby replies, "Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo'. . . . Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin'" (192). Janie, however, dismisses the town's judgment, employing sensory metaphors to explain the futility of voice without embodied experience:

Now, Pheoby, don't feel too mean wid de rest of 'em 'cause dey's parched up from not knowin' things. Dem meatskins is *got* tuh rattle tuh make out they's alive. Let 'em consolate theyselves wid talk. 'Course, talkin' don't amount tuh uh hill uh beans when yuh can't do nothin' else. And listenin' tuh dat kind uh talk is jus' lak openin' yo' mouth and lettin' de moon shine down yo' throat. It's uh known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves. (192)

That "nobody" can "tell" and "show" lived experience suggests the limitations of communicating even vocally and visually synchronized epistemology. That is, even if Pheoby, the jury, and the townspeople, hear, see, and understand Janie's story, they still have not lived it. The experience still belongs to Janie. "There was a finished silence after that," as Pheoby returns home (192).

Janie, however, continues to experience her inside—her “feeling and thinking”—as exterior sights and sounds (192): First, the memory of “the gun, and the bloody body, and the courthouse came and commenced to sing a sobbing sigh out of every corner in the room; out of each and every chair and thing” (192). Then, the image of “Tea Cake came prancing around her,” as “his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall” (193). This cinematic scene celebrates Janie’s vocal and visual understanding of her own lived experience.

In her influential article, Clarke alludes to a passage in Hurston’s essay “What White Publishers Won’t Print” that recalls Dorothy Arzner’s wax museum of silent film: “Hurston explains the American attitude toward blacks as ‘THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF UNNATURAL HISTORY. This is an intangible built on folk belief. It is assumed that all non-Anglo-Saxons are uncomplicated stereotypes. Everybody knows all about them. They are lay figures mounted in the museum where all may take them in at a glance’” (qtd. in Clarke 601). As Arzner’s protagonist explores the wax museum, she discovers living, speaking characters among the inanimate figures, belying her cursory vision, or “glance.” Hurston likewise brings these figures to life as Janie explores her black communities, discovering her own subjective identity along the way. Hurston “thus provides a model for reconciling voice and vision, for transforming black bodies from museum pieces or ethnographic objects into embodied voices, by recasting spectacle as visual, a move away from passive sensationalism to active participation” (Clarke 611). In this way, Hurston achieves in literature what proponents hoped sound film would achieve for African Americans. She tells—and shows—a story by and for specifically African American women, transgressing the interiority and stasis that often limited African Americans and women in visual media, including sound film.



## CONCLUSION

Across this study, I have argued that transatlantic modernist narratives engaging the compositional methods of visual media express dynamic female identity that would otherwise remain unsanctioned, unseen, and unspoken. As these narratives create time and space for the complexities of female representation, I have aimed to create time and space for the critical exploration of specific evocative encounters between women and their interdisciplinary works. Like the “parallel histories” of modernist literature and visual media (Trotter 3), the lives and compositions of these women intersect and diverge. By staging new encounters across media, this dissertation composes a dynamic community of female authors and artists, and invites the continued discovery and exploration of relationships that enlighten and expand this community. The depth and breadth of these select investigations suggests the potential of these relationships between women authors, artists, and audiences to inspire the continuing evolution of modernist studies.

My particular examinations evoke connections between and beyond these chapters. Zora Neale Hurston and Willa Cather, for example, document and depict rural working-class communities in their home states of Florida and Nebraska, respectively. Their African-American and European-immigrant female characters use their bodies to cultivate and survive these distinct landscapes, revising white, urban, middle-class images of femininity and productivity. The 1939 film sensation *Gone with the Wind* also intersects these regional, racial, economic, and gendered representations. Based on Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 novel, the film’s heroine, Scarlett O’Hara, adapts her privileged, provocative, Irish-immigrant identity to survive the Civil War and the Reconstruction era in the US South. Cather was, in fact, born in Virginia on the family farm of her Welsh ancestors less than a decade after the Civil War ended. Her mother was a strong-

willed “belle” who “faithfully honored” the appearance of “late Victorian ‘femininity’” (Wolff 199). Cather’s final novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), which “is set in her birthplace in the 1850s and is specifically, centrally concerned with . . . racial and gender politics” was “initially widely read” following the success of *Gone with the Wind* (Romines 4). The film’s dramatically stereotypical presentation of black characters, however, suggests little progress for African Americans in film since the transition to sound, but actress and singer Hattie McDaniel became the first African American to win an Academy Award for her role as “Mammy.” Exploring these encounters between women and their interdisciplinary works has the potential to revive our critical perceptions and to prompt further enlightening connections that would otherwise remain undiscovered.

This study likewise suggests the enrichment and expansion of the community of women authors and artists through the exploration of mutual female relationships. In her article on Dorothy Arzner, for example, Sara Bryant notes that American writer Zoë Akins was a frequent collaborator of Arzner’s and a close friend of Cather’s. Bryant later considers the relationship between Akins and Cather through their epistolary criticism or “feedback” in *Modernism/modernity*’s blog “The Discipline.” This digital extension of a print medium “explores untold histories of literary study in the twentieth century,” and asks, “What futures for our discipline do these new pasts make possible?” (Heffernan). Bryant bolsters my conclusion when she ultimately proposes that “The relationship between Cather and Akins can serve” not only “as one example of the kind of feedback we might productively explore as we constantly negotiate the contours of modernism and its archives,” “but also as an opening onto a wider network of feedback among women writers and artists” (“My Brilliant”). Beyond direct communication, critical encounters inspired by literature build this community of women authors

and artists, revealing intersections across media and inciting interdisciplinary explorations of female representation. As these investigations continue, so will our understanding of the complex composition of female identity during the modernist era.

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