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## **Introduction: The legacy of Laura Marcus in film studies**

The loss of Laura Marcus in September 2021 has affected people across multiple academic communities and diverse fields of study. Many have mourned her passing as an intellectual force: this is ‘Marcus’ the authoritative scholar of nineteenth and twentieth-century literature, biographical writing, feminism, and psychoanalysis, whose insights unpacked the rhythm of modernism in the English language. Something else is evident from the various articles, events, and obituaries commemorating her, however, as well as from the very moving and personal memorial event at New College, where she was a Fellow and Oxford’s Goldsmiths Professor of English Literature. This is the fact that Laura Marcus inspired not only great international respect, but also a rare degree of affection. To the many colleagues to whom she was a friend or a mentor, she inescapably remains ‘Laura’ as well as ‘Marcus’.

Here, as scholars of cinema, we focus on her work on film, a medium which she connected with literature, but which she recognised as a cultural lifeforce with its own specific energy. Marcus’ work enables us to see not only the cinematic in modernist literature, but also cinema’s literary connections and the ‘aesthetic convergence’ – to invoke André Bazin’s famous essay ‘In Defense of Mixed Media’ – brought about by the inception of the film medium. Bazin argued fervently that cinema’s emergence led to a dialectical interaction between old and new media. It was not just that cinema made use of narrative techniques rooted in the novel, but also that modern literature was simultaneously becoming cinematic. He contended that many modern novels made a better use of cinematic techniques of montage and non-linear narration than films and this development created a complex media environment, in which novels inspired by the language of cinema turned out to influence modern cinema too. As Bazin says, ‘*Thomas Garner* and *Citizen Kane* would never have existed had it not been for James Joyce and Dos Passos. We are witnessing, at the point

at which the cinematic avant-garde has now arrived, multiple films that dare to take their inspiration from a novel-like style one might describe as ultracinematographic'.<sup>1</sup> Dudley Andrew has recently pointed out that for Bazin cinema's engagement with literature, its 'literary imagination' was 'the necessary complement to its rapport with reality' and thus a significant part of his thought.<sup>2</sup>

Marcus' work urges us to take this symbiotic relationship between cinema and literature seriously and offers new dimensions to our understanding of the nexus between film and literature. Exemplary in this respect is her book *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (2007), which addresses the intersections between cinema and literature, as well as their impact on film criticism of a time when many accomplished poets and authors were beginning to review films.<sup>3</sup> Marcus' study invites us to go beyond essentialist conceptions of the cinematic or the literary and to understand both as hybrid media. At the same time, it shows how film criticism provided authors and poets with new opportunities to utilise cinematic devices in their own writings. Her discussion of how Sergei Eisenstein's theory of intellectual montage was influential on Hilda Doolittle's – widely known as H.D. – poetry and film criticism is a case in point: it reveals the complex remediations between film theory, cinema, poetry, and film criticism. Cinema's capacity to transform not only literary writing, but also writing about film, emerges clearly in this book.

The fifth chapter of the book is dedicated to a study of *Close Up*, the influential British journal of eclectic film criticism in the late nineteen twenties and early nineteen thirties. This part of Marcus' study is rooted in a previous collaborative project with James Donald and Anne Friedberg that sought to evaluate *Close Up*'s legacy. Edited by the artist Kenneth Macpherson, the author Bryher and poet H.D., the journal advocated art and avant-garde cinema and hoped that its commitment to 'THEORY AND ANALYSIS' and its penchant for a theoretically informed film criticism would have an impact on the film

industry too.<sup>4</sup> Marcus' discussion of *Close Up* in *The Tenth Muse* urges us to consider how the journal's preoccupations with questions of cinema and politics, psychoanalysis, and the representation of women anticipate later theoretical developments, as exemplified in the pages of journals such as *Cahiers du Cinéma*, *Positif*, and *Screen*. Her meticulous historical reading has an archaeological quality that enables the past and the present to communicate with each other; her engagement with writings on cinema by Bryher, H.D., and Dorothy Richardson thus alerts us to how early writings on the medium foreshadowed later film-theoretical debates. We learn, for instance, how the representation of women was central to Bryher's and H.D.'s writings on film and how *Close Up* authors addressed questions of spectatorship they drew on theories of psychoanalysis, which they combined with Brechtian and Russian formalist theories. These are all approaches that, in a different register, were taken by authors writing for *Screen* in the heyday of nineteen-seventies film theory. Marcus' research provides a valuable counter-history that contextualises and illuminates that later phenomenon.

Marcus, as James Donald observes in his contribution, had a penchant for long quotations. Far from being an index of intellectual laziness, these long passages have a somehow Benjaminian function: they provoke a series of associations that enable the reader to connect writings from the past with more recent debates in film theory and criticism. Consider, for example, Marcus' rigorous engagement with the writings of women film critics such as Caroline Lejeune and Iris Barry. As well as identifying the central role played by such writers in the nineteen twenties, Marcus shows how they addressed issues related to the gendered aspects of cinematic spectatorship, the question of cinematic pleasure, cinema's affective capacities and power, and the interconnection between gendered forms of spectatorship and emotional responses to film. Exemplary in this respect is a passage from Lejeune's review of *Stella Dallas* – the silent 1925 version – that touches on a topic that

became very significant in later feminist and psychoanalytic theories of film. This is the issue of cinematic identification:

To admit that *Stella Dallas* moved us is not in the least to admit our critical faculties at fault ... We are merely confessing that there is something, a sequence of something, in the film that set our own emotional imaginings free to create. Confessing to a purely physical contraction of the muscles of the throat, a curious physical sense of leap and poise. Confessing that we have lived the ordinary lives of ordinary men and women, and caught a reflection of it here ... These are all real people whose every move rings true; real people, moving in circumstances just unreal enough to give their own reality romance ... the film that, like *Stella Dallas*, can persuade us by cunning emotional experience that we have gone through fire and come out finer, can persuade us that we have gone through fire for someone else's sake, is the film that makes us happiest of all.<sup>5</sup>

It is in long passages like this that Marcus invites associations between past reflections on film and future theoretical directions, considering especially how King Vidor's 1937 remake of *Stella Dallas* has been analysed through the optics of different theoretical perspectives. Marcus' quotations operate as rediscovered historical materials that reveal untold stories, such as (to repeat) the central role played by women critics in Britain in the early days of the medium.<sup>6</sup>

Marcus' engagement with these intuitive forbears resonates across her work, while her meticulous archaeology of modernist writers on 'filmpay' and 'photoplay' reveals the extent to which they were always already canvassing more contemporary concerns.

Emblematic in this respect is her discussion of Virginia Woolf's 1926 renowned essay 'The

Cinema', which Marcus reads as exemplary of a modern understanding of film as a medium that privileges technological mediation and downplays human agency.<sup>7</sup> Marcus' analysis demonstrates how Woolf's view of cinema is premised upon the dialectics between presence and absence; that is, the medium's capacity to visualise a reality from which the spectators are absent. She allows us to understand the fundamental affinities between Woolf's reflections on cinema and film-theoretical debates pertaining to cinema's roots in photography. In particular, she connects Woolf's discussion of the medium with, on the one hand, André Bazin's and Siegfried Kracauer's theories of realism, and also, on the other hand, with Stanley Cavell's assessment of cinema in *The World Viewed* (1971) as a medium that produces a universe that affirms the audience's distance from it. In Marcus' words: 'It is this dimension of *The World Viewed* that comes closest to Woolf's vision of the world perceived without a self, along with his explorations of the interplay of presence and absence or "the presence of an absence".'<sup>8</sup>

From the prolegomena, we can understand that Marcus allows us to identify productive links between early writings on film and film theory, while pointing at the same time to the various ways in which cinema infiltrated the world of literature. In her discussion of Woolf's work, she provides a rigorous analysis of the author's use of narrative techniques rooted in cinema and photography. This was a defining characteristic of modernist literature. As Marcus puts it: "Cinematographic technique" thus appears to have been a method and a way of seeing that writers of this period understood to be both central and hidden or occluded, revealing itself only to those who had learned to "read" the film image, and the film image in the literary text.'<sup>9</sup> This dimension of Marcus' interdisciplinary work facilitates an understanding of modern literature's 'cinematic imagination' – to paraphrase Andrew's abovementioned take on Bazin – as well as the analogies between early reflections on the medium by modernist authors and subsequent theoretical developments.

The value of Marcus' contribution to the fields of literature and cinema, and her assiduous, interdisciplinary approach to the study of both, is thrown into relief by Robert Stam's recent call for film studies to re-engage in a productive dialogue with the sister art of literature. There are many 'art-historical synergies between the history of literature and the history of filmic fiction', notes Stam, that combine to make the world of both media 'thoroughly comingled'. Championing a 'transdisciplinary' approach, he goes on to caution film scholars that film studies can lose its value when it stops engaging with its sister arts.<sup>10</sup> Preceding Stam's intervention, Marcus' work provides a fine example of how an interdisciplinary perspective can enable us to identify synergies between cinema and literature, to the benefit of scholarship in both fields.

Another virtue of Marcus' research lies in its ability to contextualise cinema within the wider history of modernity. Her 2014 collection of essays, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema*, demonstrates persuasively how the development of new media technologies, modern forms of transport, and psychoanalysis together affected the nature and texture of twentieth-century thought and literature. In the fourth chapter of the book, for example, Marcus revisits the theories of film published by Vachel Lindsay and Hugo Münsterberg in the nineteen tens. By placing their discussion of the psychology of spectatorship and a supposed contemporary crisis of attention in the context of theories of advertising, her analysis offers an understanding of the medium as part of the wider visual turn that has characterised Western modernity.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, it throws new light on a topic that has always preoccupied film studies: that is, cinema's dual function as an art form and as an industrial product.

The way that Marcus' engagement with early writings on film resonates with, and enriches, wider debates in film studies is underlined by the fifth chapter in *Dreams of Modernity*, which focuses on the ways in which ways modernist filmmakers engaged with

changing metropolitan spaces in the city symphony films of the nineteen twenties and nineteen thirties. As Marcus perceptively explains, filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov, Joris Ivens, Alberto Cavalcanti, and Walter Ruttmann responded to the modern transformation of urban experience by coming up with new representational practices that would revive early cinema's interest in registering reality but reimagined its techniques through a modernist aesthetic.<sup>12</sup> The analysis here strikes a chord with enduring debates concerned with offering a more complex, dialectical relationship between realism and modernism rather than treating them as opposing polarities.<sup>13</sup> It also reveals how cinema's reliance on technological mediation – its capacity not just to record but also to reveal aspects of reality not predetermined by the filmmaker – allowed the directors of the city symphony films to capture the ephemeral and contingent aspects of the modern metropolises. A recurring theme in Marcus' work is cinema's modernity, namely its emergence as part of the historical moment linked with a wider media revolution, but also its capacity to shape and affect the social and cultural milieu. Typical here is her brilliant analysis of F.W. Murnau's film *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927) as an object that summarises the tension between modernity and tradition at the same time as it makes use of moments of 'implied sound' to articulate an analogous anxiety regarding the medium's impending transition to sound.<sup>14</sup> Again, that perspective is in dialogue with the debate in film studies about the sonic dimensions of early cinema.<sup>15</sup> It was in recognition of such contributions that Marcus was invited to be a keynote speaker at the *Screen* conference in 2019.

The four contributors to the dossier speak about Laura Marcus' elaboration of modernity and film in a connective conversation. Julian Murphet writes of Marcus' brilliance in understanding the impact of sound on film as both medium and institution. The artform that was visible to the writers who gave it a cultural identity was suddenly and brutally dispersed and its oneiric metaphors and signs bundled into the past. Murphet notes that



Marcus' historical co-locutors, most especially Dorothy Richardson, realised aghast that whilst 'the Film' had been a protracted moment of feminine imagination and expression, it was now being undermined and rent apart by the masculinity and overweening narrative authority of recorded voice.<sup>16</sup> Murphet's essay underlines the loss of possibility enforced by the coming of sound and dwells on the melancholia that arose as a result. He takes us back to the reason for our conversation, the loss of Laura Marcus herself, and our gratitude for her capacity to connect us with the timbre as well as the intensity of the writers' response to the moving image.

James Donald picks up the thread on writers and their engagement with 'the Film' with his memories of *Close Up*, both the journal itself and the 1999 book that he, Marcus and Anne Friedberg edited.<sup>17</sup> His essay, like many others, from Isobel Armstrong's in *Critical Inquiry* to Robert Young's in *The Oxford Literary Review*, touches on the personal qualities that made Laura Marcus' collaborations with others so successful – not least a confident generosity that also gave her access to the thinking of those whose writings she engaged with in her exquisite essays and books.<sup>18</sup> Donald imagines his own debate with the thinking film as a conversation with Marcus, now a figure in our past, about the city symphony films. He then re-reads her writing on sequences, noticing her fluency in seeing the detail of the film language and her willingness to disagree where earlier critics have been over-concerned to link a non-narrative sequence with a poem or other literary trope. Donald's point is that, although first a theorist of literature, Marcus also writes as one who sees and respects and feels the moving rhythm and pattern of film itself.

Helen Groth, who co-edited a book in which Marcus' essay on railways and rhythm appeared, pursues the notion of rhythm here too.<sup>19</sup> In so doing, she takes us forward to sound, eschewing melancholia for a claim to the sound embedded in vision and movement rather than the technologies of sound that marked the end – or the seeming end – of the oneiric

photoplay. Groth discusses Marcus' essay, elaborating resonance as a form of feeling in film, and acknowledging the spatial reach of rhythm through human bodies, across events, through cities and more than this, moving geographically far and wide. The train travels, of course it does, but the performance of a train on film is also a rhythmic adventure into places and potentialities that are human, as much as they are technological and terrifying. Groth understands that there is in Marcus' work a gentle acknowledgment of the melancholic losses that modern invention brought to modern humanity. Bizarrely perhaps, the pulsation of a train can return us to ourselves.

The train is again key to Johannes Riquet's essay on how Marcus' connections between literary works and film afford him a pathway to analysing a diasporic postcolonial text – here, an adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003). The relation in this story between reading, naming, travelling, and migrating, whilst leaving parts of the self behind in limbo, fits perfectly with Marcus' own concerns with the train as an ideal carrier of narrative.

When we were putting the list of contributors together, we wanted to include those film and literary modernists who had hosted Marcus on her single trip to Sydney. There are so many in the United States and in Britain who have celebrated her achievements, but her reach was wider than the proverbial Pond. She didn't of course come by train but she did make a long journey. at the end of which she found modernists, literary critics, and film thinkers. And not only that. By some wonderful chance, the Art Gallery of New South Wales was holding a retrospective that included the works of women modernist painters. She purchased a print of children flying on swings, which she gifted her hosts. The lithograph 'Swings' (1932) is the work of Ethel Spowers (1890-1947), one of several women whose art was shaped by encounters with European modernism and who have manifested the risks that more established male artists would or could not assume, and thus arguably led the way for modernism in Australia.<sup>20</sup> This account must acknowledge that modern(ist) Indigenous art was not yet

understood or valued in settler and White Australian culture. ‘Swings’ is a still image of children swinging: it is poignant, exuberant, and its dominant yellow and orange hues capture the warm air of a hot Australian summer. We cannot say exactly why Marcus chose this particular image, but we can venture that neither cinema nor literature best records the exquisite suspension of flying high into the air with a friend standing astride you holding the ropes. This is where the medium of a still and silent image serves the moment exactly. Marcus’ imagination allowed her to cross the media of the modernists to know when and which artform could resonate with the rhythm and energy of a moment in time.

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<sup>1</sup> André Bazin, ‘In Defense of Mixed Media’, in *What is Cinema?* ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 53-75, here p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Dudley Andrew, ‘Introduction: André Bazin’s Position in Cinema’s Literary Imagination’, in Dudley Andrew (ed), *André Bazin on Adaptation: Cinema’s Literary Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), pp.1-44, here p.4.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing About Cinema in the Modernist Period*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Anne Friedberg, ‘Introduction: Reading *Close Up*, 1927-1933’, in James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (eds), *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 1-26, here p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p.306.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus explains that elitist dismissals of the new medium of film allowed more women to venture in film criticism as cinema was regarded as a lesser art form. See *ibid.*, p.295.

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<sup>7</sup> See Virginia Woolf, ‘The Cinema’ in Rachel Bowlby (ed.), *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life* (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 54–58.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.115. See also, Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.131.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Stam, *World Literature, Transnational Cinema, and Global Media: Towards a Transartistic Commons* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 61, p. 65, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> See Marcus, ‘‘From Autumn to Spring, Aesthetic Change’. Modernity’s Visual Displays’, in *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.77-88.

<sup>12</sup> Marcus, ‘‘A Hymn to Movement’: The ‘City Symphony’ of the 1920s and 1930s’, in *Dreams of Modernity*, pp. 77-88.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013); Daniel Morgan, ‘Bazin’s Modernism’, *Paragraph*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2013), pp. 10–30; Colin MacCabe, ‘Bazin as Modernist’, in Dudley Andrew and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin (eds), *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 66–76. Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Marcus, ‘F.W. Murnau’s *Sunrise*: Between Two Worlds’, in Scott W. Klein and Michael Valdez Moses (eds), *A Modernist Cinema: Film Art from 1914 to 1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp.108-125.

<sup>15</sup> See for example, Melinda Szaloky, ‘Sounding Images in Silent Film: Visual Acoustics in Murnau’s “Sunrise”’, *Cinema Journal* vol. 41, no. 2 (2002), pp.109-131; Isabelle Raynauld, ‘Dialogues in Early Silent Screenplays: What Actors Really Said’, in Richard Abel, Rick Altman (eds), *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp.69-78; Dominique Nasta, ‘Setting the Pace of a Heartbeat : The Use of Sound Elements in

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European Melodramas before 1915', in Richard Abel and Rick Altman (eds), *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp.95-109; Kata Gellen, *Kafka and Noise: The Discovery of Cinematic Sound in Literary Modernism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> The American Film Institute's recent 'Women They Talk About' project provides empirical data to back up their aesthetic and emotional response. There was indeed a far larger proportion of female writers, directors, editors, sources and producers in Hollywood before the pre-recorded sound era than after the advent of the Talkies. Between 1910 and 1930, 10.9% of feature film credits were attributed to women writers, directors and producers. <https://aficatalog.afi.com/wtta/> Press release 6 January 2023.

<sup>17</sup> See *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*.

<sup>18</sup> Isobel Armstrong (2022), in Santanu Das and George Potts, 'Laura Marcus (7 March 1956–22 September 2021)', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 1, pp. 3-26, here pp. 13-14; Robert J.C. Young, 'Phantom Threads', *The Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2022), pp. 197-26

<sup>19</sup> Laura Marcus, 'The Rhythm of the Rails: Sound and Location', in Julian Murphet, Helen Groth, and Penelope Hone (eds), *Sounding Modernism: Rhythm and Sonic Mediation in Modern Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 193-210.

<sup>20</sup> See Natalya Lusty, 'Women Modernists and the Legacies of Risk: An Introduction', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 34: no 101 (2019), pp. 267-276; Caroline Jordan and Diane Kirkby, 'Women Modernists Gendering Leadership in Australian Art in the 1930s and 1940s', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol. 18, no 2 (2018), pp. 259-281.

## The Marcusian Moment: Sound, Film, and the Body of a Woman

If there was any particular moment in the history of cinema that seemed to light up all the remarkable circuitry of Laura Marcus' unexampled brain, it was surely the 'coming of sound' to the medium, an event that elicited from her the most ingenious methodological braiding of film studies, psychoanalysis, feminism, theories of modernity, and empirical archival excavation, in all the storied literature on this topic.

There is nothing quite like it in the history of any other medium: this sudden sublation of an entire thirty-year history of *the Film* into something that would become sound cinema, but which was then simply *the Talkies*. Marcus writes superbly in her coda to *The Tenth Muse* of the extraordinary effects this *Aufhebung* had on a generation of melancholy cineastes and aesthetes devastated by the impact of Movietone and Vitaphone. One of these was the sudden retroactive gathering-up and unification of all the heterogeneous silent movies under a single banner, a single flag of experience, now reclassified as *memory* and rediscovered henceforth only by chance in the provinces and suburbs and the back alleys and repertory cinemas of our major metropolises. Never so dramatically for another medium has there been such a before-and-after moment, such a cleavage in the history of a form into 'two distinct evolutionary species or subspecies—silent and sound—of which the latter, like the Cromagnons, drove the former out and made it extinct.'<sup>1</sup> But this also meant, and simultaneously, that the (silent, or deaf) Film at last stood forth in all its aesthetic specificity, revealed at a flash in its essence through its own technical negation by sound. It was as if, in its death, the Film as such became an indisputable art-form and lapsed from the world in a single moment.

Another effect recorded by Dorothy Richardson and other women writers at the time was the equally sudden and shocking realisation that the Film had been (in Marcus' words) 'an essentially female form', and that the sound cinema's was (in Richardson's words) to be a

disappointingly ‘masculine destiny’.<sup>2</sup> This is a somewhat more opaque but equally fascinating symptom of the extinction of the silents: the idea that, sound introducing a new and clearly ‘mechanical’ element to the photoplay and stilling the increasingly mobile cinematography of the early-to-mid nineteen-twenties, silent cinema had retrospectively disclosed its relatively organic and ‘natural’ foundations in indexical photography and the propagation of light in space – foundations that could be gendered female along a more or less conventional axis. Of course, the distinction between the Talkies’ ‘goat-glanded’ dialogue and the choric images of silent plenitude in the Films plays into later feminist discourses as well; and there are many as yet undeveloped arguments for why there might have been ‘a quite marked hostility among women writers to sound technology, and a greater degree of regret for the loss of the silent film.’<sup>3</sup> There were, to be sure, many other effects of the coming of sound, all of them treated to extensive analysis by this assiduous critic over her working life; but these two are most interesting to me here.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Marcus’ interventions on this topic (and others closely related) is her unstinting reliance on the depositions neither of film historians nor of industry veterans, but of the courageous literary intellectuals who devoted much of their available time and energy to the new medium: reviewing, theorising, debating, noting in journals, letter writing, and incorporating aspects of it in their poetry and fiction. Her argument was always that film emerged and matured in the context of a nascent *film culture*, which was peopled and driven by a variety of thinkers, artists, and writers – none of whom benefitted commercially from ‘the business’, but all of whom implicitly understood that a new art form required a dedicated critical discourse for its proper reception and understanding. Alongside the established genres of drama criticism and literary reviews, film criticism, pioneered by literary intellectuals, was developed in the teeth of sneering contempt and neglect from the literary establishment. Film may have been the work of technicians,

engineers, designers, producers, performers, artists, and advertisers, but *film culture* was largely the work of writers working in full awareness of their own ‘rankling indignity [at] seeing the power of the written word subordinate to another power, a more glittering, a grosser power.’<sup>4</sup> Or, as Virginia Woolf put it

All the famous novels of the world, with their well-known characters and their famous scenes, only asked, it seemed, to be put on the films. What could be easier and simpler? The cinema fell upon its prey with immense rapacity, and to the moment largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim.<sup>5</sup>

There is much yet to be written of these remarkably selfless and dissociated efforts from representatives of a dying ‘discourse network’ (to borrow Friedrich Kittler’s phrase) in the interests of another nascent one. It is to Marcus’ great credit that she dedicated so much of her scholarship to establishing the richness, perceptiveness, generosity, and ingenuity of the dozens of writers who toiled on behalf of a predator species – whose diet was their own bread and butter, the written word – in order that it should have a culture and not just a market of its own.

On the question of the coming of sound, then, what is most striking is the ubiquitous key of melancholy in which most practitioners of film culture should have heralded it. In what remains of this short reflection, I want to ruminate on that melancholy and consider the trope of re-gendering the medium that it seemed to precipitate in the discourse, to see what yet remains conceptually latent in Marcus’ great body of work. We are placed at a knotty junction here between psychoanalytic, media-historical, and feminist interpretive frameworks, just where she thrived so eloquently. For Freud, of course, melancholia was precisely the experience of ‘*identification*’ between ‘the ego and the abandoned object’:



Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object. In this way the loss of the object became transformed into a loss in the ego, and the conflict between the ego and the loved person transformed into a cleavage between the criticizing faculty of the ego and the ego as altered by the identification.<sup>6</sup>

In the entire history of the shadow-play of cinema, there has been no more acute instance of a collective intellectual 'loss in the ego' and corresponding introjection of the agon, the cleavage, between 'me and my beloved Films', into an agon between 'my critical faculty and my negated identification with them'. The shadow of the object of cinema fell hard upon the ego; so branded was a generation of writers and thinkers by the negative impression of the silent Film that they proved unable to let it go. And this condition of melancholia was all the more intolerable given that the Talkies were somehow Films *under erasure*, dreamy forsaken objects newly subordinated to the hiss and crackle of an incommensurable technical artifice: the abandoned photographic object persisted, traduced and doubly abandoned, alongside a soundtrack that henceforth called the shots, quite literally.

As Marcus quotes Dorothy Richardson, the coming of sound brings: 'Apparatus rampant: the theatre, ourselves, the screen, the mechanisms, all fallen apart into competitive singleness.'<sup>7</sup> The shattering of the communal illusion, the Gestalt of cinematic artifices, is the result of adding one too many, a 'mechanism too far', giving rise to melancholic symptoms: self-accusations, a fragmentation of the faculties and psychic unities, unhappiness and guilt.<sup>8</sup> Yet it is precisely by hanging on to the 'lost object' while the subject disintegrates around its shadow, that the object emerges in its ideal form. As Marcus wrote elsewhere, 'Psychoanalysis and cinema [...] emerged in tandem at the close of the nineteenth century:

twin sciences or technologies of fantasy, dream, virtual reality and “screen memory”.<sup>9</sup> But it was only in the late nineteen-twenties, ten years after the publication of ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917), that an even deeper relationship became troublingly obvious. As she wrote, ‘the realism of early films, combined with their unlikelike absence of sound and colour, seems to have provoked, in Yuri Tsivian’s words, “the uncanny feeling that films somehow belong the world of the dead” and that “cinema is a convenient metaphor for death”’<sup>10</sup> – but with the coming of sound, Film itself was dead and the metaphor was realized. Become death, Films unfurled their essence and their aesthetic secret: *death 24x per second*.<sup>11</sup>

And this gives to that other striking melancholic characterisation of the lost object – its *femaleness* – an altogether unexpected valence. For if the essence of the Films was their inner relationship to death, their ontological hauntedness by Bazin’s ‘change mummified’, then it seems to make a profound difference whether that death was, to cut a long story short, of the Father or the Mother. Nor would there appear to have been little doubt, in Marcus’ work, in the work of the women writers she returned to again and again on this question, or in the unconscious work of the cinema itself, about what was at stake here. Marcus quotes Stanley Cavell:

The new emergence of the ideas of silence and fantasy and motion and separateness take us back, or forward to beginnings. For it isn’t as if, long after our acceptance of the talkie, we know why the loss of silence was traumatic for so many who cared about film.... What was given up in giving up the silence of film, in particular the silence of the voice?<sup>12</sup>

We need to remember that, in Kittler’s retelling of the story of the nineteenth century, Goethe’s idea of the Mother’s Mouth’ had underwritten an entire discourse network of

literary hegemony: the maternal voice that inspirits the child's growing mind, fecundating his genius, creating his nascent consciousness and inner voice, which is then expressed in his thoughts, his writings, and his publications.<sup>13</sup> The prevailing story of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries, as Franco Berardi likes to point out, is a very different one where, thanks to 'the capture of feminine nervous and physical energies by the machinery of global exploitation, mothers are less and less the source of language.' From the advent of the Talkies onward, mothers 'are replaced by linguistic machines that are constantly talking and showing. The connective generation is learning language in a framework where the relation between language learning and the affective body tends to be less and less relevant.'<sup>14</sup>

What I think the pervasive feminine gendering of the silent Films by a shell-shocked generation of melancholic writers really meant was a retrospective realisation that, at the dawn of mass-mediatised mechanical modernity, things might have gone very differently indeed. If the great Mother of the Twentieth Century was a silent medium, an affective body of dreaming images haunted by death, uncoupled from prattle and referred to intermittent intertitles, then language might possibly have been freed from mechanised didactics and literature at liberty to thrive in its protected enclosures and reservations. The young might not have been abandoned to the ubiquitous talking machines of modern propaganda and information but nurtured instead on a diet of gorgeously dying dreams. A whole collective way of life was glimpsed at the moment of its eclipse by an altogether more 'masculine' and contemptible destiny of wars and misinformation and brutality and plots: the anal father's malign hoarding of pleasure to himself, the obscene narcissism of a super-oligarchy who sell our sociality back to us for profits.

I will never forget, many years ago now, when I had carriage of the fledgling paper on film in the Oxford English Faculty, how Laura Marcus rose to my invitation to cover the momentous

topic of film's conversion to sound for our students in a guest lecture that crackled with wit and erudition. Her chosen illustration was none other than the canonical scene from *Singin' in the Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, USA, 1952) when Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen) is wired for sound during the shooting of 'The Duelling Cavalier' for Monumental Pictures. What most struck me during her presentation, and has stayed with me ever since, is the immense institutional and personal violence of what is done to Lina during this very funny scene: her seemingly inviolable glamorous screen presence is invaded, penetrated, usurped by an apparatus that finds its way into her surrounding props, her corsage, her bosom, and mercilessly exposes the single quality that will render her extinct in a new sonic economy: her reedy, high-pitched, slangy and class-accented voice. That this violence is perpetrated on the body of a woman, while the dancing boys and their insipid love interest ride roughshod over it, ultimately consigning it to the oblivion of a style and an aesthetic that have become superannuated overnight, was lost on none of Laura's spellbound audience. It seemed to me in that moment that I understood exactly what she would write about later, 'that silent film was an essentially female form,' because Lina Lamont was its dazzling apotheosis, a flickering mobile figure in whom a generation of young men and women had invested the best of themselves, only to be ridiculed, abused, conspired upon, coerced, tricked, and finally consigned to the ashbin of history by her own industry, because it had to be hauled by main force into the domain of speech.

The great Jean Hagen, clearly the outstanding actor in this astonishing film, died in 1977 of throat cancer. She had made her name in radio, famed for her deep, rich tones, and in fact her larynx was so exceptionally developed that, during the scene in which Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds) is dubbing Lina's speech to translate 'The Duelling Cavalier' into *The Dancing Cavalier*, Stanley Donen decided to get Hagen herself to dub over the lines – the thrilling contralto vibrations of her delivery offer the kind of tonal authenticity that was

simply unavailable to Reynolds' piping mid-west vocal range. Every revisitation of *Singin' in the Rain* is another painful reencounter with the living-dead body of this extraordinary woman who transcended herself and violated her own most powerful instrument, her voice, in portraying a woman who could not speak because she was always and already the Body of Silent Film, whom we have been mourning, or rather orbiting in melancholic fixation, since 1927, four years after Hagen was born. I will surprise none of you and say that it is, for me, at the same time a reencounter with the extraordinary voice and writing of Laura Marcus, who has also been untimely ripped from us by cancer, but who gave to us the wherewithal to understand that cinematic melancholia is also an engagement with a missed opportunity, a lost future, a compact with Mother Cinema. What our melancholia preserves is a sense of 'the relation between language learning and the affective body,' since it exonerates cinema from any invasive protrusion into this intimate space and leaves us free to speak in and around the frames of its radiant fantasies. It gives language something to do and cinema the chance to recover its origins; the way I think Paul Thomas Anderson understood in *There Will Be Blood*, which begins as a silent film and achieves its greatest moment in the becoming-deaf of its precious *Bildungsheld*, young H. W. Plainview, even as it struggles gamely against the enormous, consuming presence of the anal father, Daniel. At any rate, if cinema is a woman who is already dead, and yet not dead, still animated, still dreaming, still teaching without didactics, and if it is Laura Marcus who did more than anybody to instil that lesson in me, in us, then that is clearly because Laura Marcus *is* cinema and we have yet to learn to want to let her go.

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 157.

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<sup>2</sup> Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 406.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up with other Pieces and Stories* (London: Penguin, 1965), p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 168.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (c.1917), *General Psychological Theory*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 170.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 405.

<sup>8</sup> Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 405

<sup>9</sup> Laura Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity*, p. 186.

<sup>11</sup> See Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 147, cited in Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 407.

<sup>13</sup> See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse/Networks 1800/1900I*, trans. Michael Metteer, with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 25-70.

<sup>14</sup> Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012), p. 107.

## Close Up: Laura

Memory is not an instrument for surveying the past  
but its theatre. It is the medium of past experience,  
just as the earth is the medium in which dead cities lie  
buried. He who seeks to approach his own buried  
past must conduct himself like a man digging.

Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*

In the autumn of 1927, Winifred Ellerman, the feminist author who wrote under the pen name Bryher and who also happened to be heir to a large shipping fortune, married the young Scottish artist, novelist, and cinephile, Kenneth Macpherson. This was largely a marriage of convenience. Both were gay: Bryher had already embarked on her lifelong relationship with the third member of the POOL collective, Hilda Doolittle, the poet H.D., with whom Macpherson had had an affair the previous year. Nevertheless, the relationship also represented a meeting of minds and a confluence of aesthetic interests. In her memoir, *The Heart to Artemis*, Bryher recalls how later that autumn she and her new husband were walking around the lake at Territet, the picturesque Swiss town where the three of them were living, when ‘Kenneth compared the ripples drifting across the water with an effect that should be tried on screen.’ Recalling her own enthusiastic participation in the culture of ‘little reviews’ in Paris in the early years of the decade, Bryher said to Macpherson, ‘If you are so interested, why don’t you start a magazine?’ So *Close Up* was born, observes Bryher, typically disavowing the extent of her financial support, ‘on a capital of sixty pounds.’<sup>1</sup>

## *Close Up*

Seven decades on, on a summer’s day in 1996, I found myself walking over the Sussex Downs with Laura Marcus and Anne Friedberg, discussing how we might put together a selection of writings from *Close Up* as a contribution to the intertwining histories of cinema and modernism. Laura and I had first floated the idea of such a collection at a symposium on

*The City, The Cinema: Modern Spaces*, which I had organised at the University of Sussex in May 1994. Laura, already an old friend, was then still working at Birkbeck College in London but living locally in a Sussex village with her soon-to-be husband, William Outhwaite. She would have been the first person I invited to contribute. Pragmatically, I was using my contribution as an opportunity to juxtapose ‘city symphony’ films like Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1926) and Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) against fantastic studio-built movie cities from *Metropolis* to *Batman*’s Gotham City as two contrasting articulations of the city-cinema-modernity nexus. Laura’s typically elegant and erudite talk was an early iteration of her thesis about the decisive influence of film as a medium and the experience of cinema on modernist feminist literary writing. She cited Virginia Woolf on cinema, of course, but also contributions to *Close Up* by H.D. and Dorothy Richardson. Intrigued, and less knowledgeable than I should have been about the journal, at the end of the day I told Laura that *Close Up*’s work deserved to be more widely available. Unwittingly channelling Bryher, I said, ‘It’s so interesting, why don’t you put an anthology together?’ The answer came with an apparently diffident, but actually confident smile: ‘I will, if you edit it with me.’

We had got as far as finding a UK publisher, who was sounding out potential US partners, when we learned that there might be a glitch. Apparently, an American scholar had had a similar idea and was approaching publishers over there with a proposal. When this potential rival turned out to be Anne Friedberg, whose wonderfully imaginative study of transmedia spectatorship, *Window Shopping*, had appeared in 1993, we had no hesitation in deciding to explore a transatlantic pooling of resources. Hence an invitation for Anne to lunch at Litlington when she was in Europe, and hence that walk. (When I visited William recently, he dug out a photograph. There were even more very small children than I had remembered, and it really does seem to have been one of those golden ‘past-is-another-



country' days.) It did not take long for the three of us to reach agreement. Although Anne came from a visual culture perspective and Laura was above all a scholar of modernist literature, they shared not just their feminism and their profound engagement with psychoanalysis, but also a conviction that writing about cinema should be seen as a core component of the institution of cinema, and not as merely a secondary or peripheral commentary. (Anne's PhD thesis from NYU in 1983 was titled *Writing About Cinema: Close Up 1927-1933* and *Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* would become the subtitle of Laura's *The Tenth Muse* in 2007.)<sup>2</sup> The appeal of *Close Up* for both of them was that it embodied a particular *style* or *register* of writing about cinema: writing that was, as Anne put it, 'theoretically astute, politically incisive, critical of films that were simply "entertainment",' and which eschewed any one direction of development 'but rather posed alternatives to existing modes of production, consumption, and film style.'<sup>3</sup>

By the time we got back to Litlington, we had mapped out the main foci of the project: the POOL group's attempts to identify, create and sustain a radically modernist cinema in the nineteen twenties, the journal's archive of international modernist writings about the new art form, the culture of modernist and activist journals, and the aspiration to use the journal as a vehicle for establishing a national and international 'film culture'. Although the selection of articles and the writing of introductory material were necessarily done in the margins of other activities, the production of the book must have gone smoothly, as I remember no panics and certainly no disagreements or arguments. Its publication in 1998 proved to be timely, insofar as it provided both a catalyst and a resource for conversations between the strand of historically informed film studies initiated in the early nineteen nineties by Miriam Hansen and Tom Gunning (the so-called 'modernity thesis') and the emerging revisionist study of modernism in literature and the visual arts.<sup>4</sup> As we acknowledged, our selection was inevitably and polemically partial, as well as being very

much of its moment. (It is good to see alternative readings of the journal's history and significance appearing.)<sup>5</sup>

For Anne, *Close Up* was just one point of reference in her ambitious long-term project to trace a history of visuality from the fifteenth century to the twenty-first century: that is, the ways in which architectural, metaphorical, and virtual *windows* framed and periodically reconfigured 'the social, psychical, and historical habits of vision'. This was the argument of *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*, published in 2006, just three years before her death in 2009, at the age of 57, from a cancer disconcertingly similar to the one that would kill Laura twelve years later.<sup>6</sup> Laura acknowledged in *The Tenth Muse* that the collaboration on the *Close Up* project had 'sowed the seeds' of that later work. In my own case, loose ends around Paul Robeson's involvement with the POOL group and the tantalising fact that one of *Close Up*'s Paris correspondents, Marc Allégret, went on to direct Josephine Baker in *Zouzou* in 1934 (with Dziga Vertov's brother, Boris Kaufman, as cinematographer) eventually led me to write my book, *Some of These Days*, which Laura generously launched in 2015.<sup>7</sup>

### **City symphonies**

In 1997, I moved to Australia, where I would live and work for the next eighteen years. As Arts Dean at the University of New South Wales, I took the opportunity to encourage and support a research strength in the new modernism studies. When we set up the Centre for Modernism Studies in Australia, with Julian Murphet as Director, one of its earliest initiatives was to organise a conference on *Modern Soundscapes* in July 2013. I was pleased that I was able to persuade Laura to overcome her dislike of flying and travel to Sydney in July 2013 to be one of its keynote speakers. As Helen Groth explains in her contribution to this dossier, her enthusiastically received lecture, 'The Rhythm of the Rails: Sound and Locomotion',

announced *modern rhythm* as the topic of her next, and, as it turned out, final, major project.<sup>8</sup> Outside the conference, Laura enjoyed the *Sydney Moderns* exhibition then showing at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, with its emphasis on women artists like Grace Cossington Smith, and she revelled in the beauty of Sydney's shoreline and harbour, in the unique quality of its light, and in the excellence of its food and wines.

I mention that because it brings into focus an important aspect of Laura's talent for friendship. Although we shared many academic interests and allegiances, I cannot remember ever sitting down, even when we were not at opposite ends of the world, and having long conversations about film, modernism, or whatever. One was always aware of the breadth of her learning and the depth of her intelligence, but those topics would be woven into what was usually more wide-ranging, gossipy, and light-hearted talk about family, friends, who was doing what, and what was happening in the world. Laura was always serious, but never earnest.

Now, of course, I regret the conversations we did not have. So, as an act of mourning, here I want to stage a conversation Laura and I might have had about a topic that we both wrote about: the coming together of cinema, cities, and modernism in the 'city symphony' films of the 1920s. Laura referred to them in *The Tenth Muse*, making particularly illuminating use of *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* to illustrate what was innovative in Woolf's literary style, and she returned to them in "'A Hymn to Movement": the "City Symphony" films of the 1920s and 1930s', which she included in her *Dreams of Modernity* in 2014.<sup>9</sup> I have chosen this chapter as an interlocutor because I think that it reveals not only *what* Laura thought, but also *how* she thought, in terms of her method, her style, and her characteristic chains of association. I hear her voice in it.

At the outset, Laura succinctly identifies the range of films in which she is interested and lays out some of the resources in her conceptual and critical toolkit: the affinity between

city and cinema, the opposition between avant-garde filmmaking and ‘commercial and narrative cinema’, and the ‘particular twist’ given to the documentation of the spatial and temporal dimensions of urban ‘dailiness’ by ‘the perspectives and angles of modernism’.<sup>10</sup> Her argument is adumbrated in the observation that what makes the films *symphonic* is their day-in-the-life structure and, above all, their *rhythm*. She indicates that rhythm will be the chapter’s key category, not by looking at its manifestation in any of the films, but by citing a substantial quotation from an article that Graham Greene wrote about *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* in 1928. As so often, Laura’s genuine interest in film is mediated through an overriding focus on writing about cinema. Thus, Greene’s contrast of the artfully planned spatio-temporal rhythms in Ruttmann’s film against the ‘restless race of actions’ in conventional movie plotlines is followed up not, again, by analysis of the film, but by a leap forward to Henri Lefebvre’s distinction between cyclical time and linear time in his ‘rhythmanalysis’ and then back to an early (1905) essay by Virginia Woolf on ‘Street Music’ in London, which argues that ‘vagrant’ musicians embody something ‘wild and inhuman’ that has been repressed in more respectable forms of art. And that is, once again, *rhythm*.

This citational darting from critical writing to theoretical writing to literary writing across half a century or more might appear bewildering, but it is at the heart of Laura’s strategy. In his affirmative review of *The Tenth Muse* for *Screen* in 2009, David Trotter observed how the book ‘proceeds by the steady accumulation of weighty extracts from a wide range of commentaries on film.’ (‘Marcus does like an epigraph,’ he also commented. ‘There are eight of them before you get to the Introduction, and then a further three as an overture to the first chapter.’)<sup>11</sup> As I see it, Laura’s habitual inclusion of unfashionably large blocks of quotation points to the nature of her authorial persona: she comes across as simultaneously archaeologist, archivist, curator, and guide. These occasionally unwieldy citations are historical specimens that she has excavated in the course of her exhaustive

research. Having collected, sorted, and assessed them, she then organises them as exhibits in a display that shapes the experience of the reader. They are not quite the textual footpads that Walter Benjamin took his quotations to be, waiting to mug the reader and strip them of their presuppositions, although there is undeniably something confrontational about them.<sup>12</sup> She absolutely does not rely on them to carry her argument or lend it a spurious authority. Rather, the quotations bring the reader up short, arresting our attention and demanding serious engagement, while Laura (always the exemplary teacher) acts as a helpful but still demanding guide who will suggest useful links but who refuses to do all the work for us: ‘We are reminded of *Mrs Dalloway* at this point ...’; ‘... we might think more broadly of the alliances and contestations between film and literature in this period ...’; ‘We might think in this context of one of Strand’s best-known early photographs ...’<sup>13</sup> Rather like song-and-dance numbers in a Hollywood movie, the quotations act as interruptions to the unfolding argument, as points of stasis or resistance. In his review, Trotter suggested that they function as ‘a network, with each item a node or switching-point’.<sup>14</sup> Equally, they also constitute a collage: Greene, Lefebvre, Woolf, and then Woolf again (this time the essay on ‘The Cinema’), T.S. Eliot (on poetry beginning ‘with a savage beating a drum in the jungle’) and Raymond Williams (invoking *Orlando* in *The Country and the City* to make the link between motoring, film and ‘urban movement’). As this montage of different voices alerts the reader to unexpected connections and sometimes dissonances, it comes as no surprise that one of Laura’s favourite words has an aural connotation. It is (as David Trotter spotted) ‘chimes’. In the seventeen pages of ‘A Hymn to Movement’, it appears three times: Woolf’s ‘Street Music’ essay ‘chimes with many of those perceptions of art that we now define as “modernist”’; the idea that modernism is located in urban experience ‘chimes with Woolf’s complex sense that a future cinema move to seize the sense-impressions of the city at the moment of their fleeting unity’; and Juan Suarez’s argument that *Manhatta* ‘anticipates a

story without actually producing one' 'chimes with my earlier discussion of the "intermediate zone" of film and urban modernity.'<sup>15</sup> Rather like Virginia Woolf, Laura perceived the world, or at least the symbolic and affective worlds, as a network of affinities more than in terms of causality or determination.

Having established that an aesthetic 'structured around diurnal time and the city' links a modernist novel like *Mrs Dalloway* to the cinematic symphonies of Ruttmann and Vertov, Laura then launches into a fairly lengthy digression about George Augustus Sala's *Twice Round the Clock: Or the Hours of the Day and Night in London*, a collection of vignettes of Victorian city life organised in an hour-by-hour structure that was published in 1859.<sup>16</sup> She claims that Sala constitutes 'a significant, though largely forgotten, precedent' for the later works.<sup>17</sup> I have to admit that I failed to see the nature of this 'significance'. If this really were a conversation, I would say to Laura that if there is an affinity, it is not (to borrow Max Weber's term) an *elective* affinity. Yes, Sala's structure looks like that of *Mrs Dalloway* or *Berlin*, but there is no evidence of mutual awareness, a common *Zeitgeist*, or a shared pattern of aesthetic responses to contemporaneous experiences. On this occasion, the resonances are simply too faint to be salient. Laura-the-collector's enthusiasm for an unexpected and intriguing find appears to have trumped Laura-the-guide's pedagogy of illuminating historical juxtapositions and aesthetic connections.

The detour turns out to be no great problem, however, as Laura decisively closes the brackets around it and brings us back to her primary focus. That is, not just 'the connections between literature and cinema in the modernist period', whose reality she has clearly documented, but now also the nature and significance of those connections.<sup>18</sup> She summarises two broadly modernist accounts of the literature-cinema link in the nineteen twenties. One is the idea that a cinema eye and the rhythm of montage had 'penetrated' (Alfred Döblin's word) definitive novels of the time like *Mrs Dalloway*, *Ulysses* and

Döblin's own *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. The other is the injunction that filmmakers should eschew any engagement with literature and embrace a purely cinematic, and often abstract, aesthetic. Laura quotes Ezra Pound, whose enthusiasm for Abel Gance's celebration of the machine (the train) in *La Roue* (1923) was tempered by his exasperation that the film has been ruined by the introduction of a conventionally novelesque narrative – a 'punk sentimental plot'. She backs this up with a comment by Elliot Paul and Robert Sage about *Rien que les Heures* (1926). Cavalcanti's film, they argued, was 'a preliminary demonstration that the cinema is capable of being under no obligation to literature, drama or painting.' On the one hand, then, cinema *and* literature; on the other, cinema *without* or even *against* literature. Laura mentions that this division of opinion would recur in debates about realism and in the opposition between (commercial) fiction and (political and/or avant-garde) documentary, but only in passing, as at this point she moves towards the conclusion of her argument. What, substantively, was 'the significance of the city symphony in the construction of the relationship between the arts that the new medium of film had brought into sharp new focus'?<sup>19</sup> To find an answer, she finally gets around to looking at two city films.

The first is *Manhatta* (1921), made by the painter and photographer, Charles Sheeler, and the photographer Paul Strand, the earliest in the cycle of city films and often described as the first American avant-garde film. With a running time of under ten minutes, *Manhatta*'s four 'movements' offer an elliptical account of a day in the life of New York, and specifically the southern tip of the island of Manhattan. It relies not on dramatic vignettes of New Yorkers or everyday New York life but, for the most part, on shots taken from rooftops and on the streets. It draws on the aestheticizing urban photography of Alfred Stieglitz, with whom Strand had been closely associated, and it highlights the formal, even abstract, patterns of the modern metropolis – its shapes and its rhythms – as well as its crowds and its

architecture. For Laura, the point of interconnection between cinema and literature in *Manhatta* is to be found in the intertitles presenting fragmentary extracts from various Walt Whitman poems that are scattered through it. To those of us who find Whitman's conflation of poetry, America, and democracy somewhat baffling, it can be difficult to get a grip on the function of these quotations in the film. Acknowledging that the role of the poetry is 'complex and overdetermined', Laura guides us through some possible explanations.<sup>20</sup> Given the mainstream use of intertitles at that time to explain or amplify plot points, their inclusion here may be intended to provide a degree of narrative structure to the film. Equally, the cinematic imagery may serve as a visual counterpoint to, or even 'illustration' of, the poetry, thus 'opening up the complexities of word-image relations in this period.' A third plausible explanation is that Strand and Sheeler invoked Whitman in an attempt to create 'a specifically American perspective and aesthetic' that would project 'a homogeneous, non-conflictual model of the city': New York's citizens, perhaps, as Whitman's *leaves of grass*, each one individual but at the same time part of a larger and undifferentiated whole.<sup>21</sup> Laura cites the poet Vachel Lindsay's call, in his contemporaneous *The Art of the Moving Picture*, for 'Whitmanesque scenarios' that would show 'the entire American population its own face in the Mirror Screen.' However influential on 'our sophisticated literati,' in Lindsay's view Whitman had failed to 'persuade the democracy itself to read his democratic poems.' It was up to the kinetoscope to 'bring the nobler side of the equality idea to the people who are so crassly equal'.<sup>22</sup> Finally, Laura identifies 'formal correlatives' between *Manhatta* and Whitman's poetry: both are 'metonymic and sequential.' In the film, the mass of discrete impressions and images is rendered coherent in part through the inclusion of the intertitles, but primarily by 'the doubling of images between opening and closure': from dawn to dusk, for example, and from the journey into New York to the journey home.<sup>23</sup> In light of this analysis, Laura is able to identify the particular way in which the film articulates an affinity



between film and poetry. Rather than illustrating particular lines of Whitman's poetry, *Manhatta* embodies his 'proto-cinematic' vision, in which 'verbal sequences are themselves ways of seeing.' With that implicit nod to John Berger, Laura is saying that the *ways of seeing* inherent in the social vision, style, and, yes, rhythm of Whitman's verse made the visual choreography of *Manhatta*'s urban imagination possible – a way of seeing that, as she showed throughout her work, fed back into, or penetrated, modernist literary writing at that time. Whereas the similarity between the structure of Sala's book and the city films was most likely fortuitous, here Laura shows us the substance of the affinity: it has to do with timing, a shared culture, and an evolving aesthetic paradigm to which both poetry and film contributed. Rather than rejecting 'literature' in the name of cinematic purity, *Manhatta* engages Whitman's poetry of democratic America and revitalises it 'in terms of the movement – historical, perceptual – towards the new medium of film'<sup>24</sup>

The other film Laura looks at is Joris Ivens' *Regen/Rain* (1929), which reconstructs the experience of a shower falling on an unnamed Amsterdam. I sometimes had the impression that Laura was unduly modest, even self-deprecating, about her capacity to write authoritatively about individual films. Perhaps that is why she only gets to discuss two of them at the end of this chapter, and why she tended to stay within the familiar territory of 'writing about film'. But read her account of *Regen*:

The equivalent of the dawn and the emergence of the day in many of the other 'city symphonies' becomes, in Ivens' film, the space-time of the city just before it rains: the city knows it is raining (the raindrops meet the water of the canal) before the human subject in the film, who puts out his hand to confirm what we, and the city, already know. The movement of the film is along the lines of the vertical and the horizontal: the rain comes down and umbrellas go up; we see the city through the

window of a tram as it moves along the wet streets. The rain acts as a reflector or mirror, creating a doubled city. The film also intimates that there is a question of quantity or number in the city: we begin with the single drops before the downpour, and this in turn becomes an issue of individual and group or mass among the city's inhabitants.<sup>25</sup>

This is astute observation and precise description. Even so, Laura turns away from the film as such and back to 'writing about': in this case, to Béla Balázs's argument that *Regen* should be seen as an 'absolute film', not in terms of representation and realism. As she reads Balázs, its 'filmic world' takes precedence over 'the "real" world': 'the city film will train the spectator's eyes to see the impressions that cinema alone has brought into being.'<sup>26</sup>

Laura is not wholly convinced by this, not least because of Ivens' own programmatic commitment to documentary film as a synthesis of realism and avant-gardism. She turns instead to Germaine Dulac, for whom Ivens' films were all about rhythm: he was 'the man who orchestrated everything' and so promised to become 'one of the visual musicians of the future.' That perspective enables Laura to assess *Regen* in terms of the film's relationship not just to music but also to poetry. She quotes Hanns Eisler, who saw the task of the score he wrote for the film as being not to illustrate the falling of the rain, but rather 'to push forward this plot-less and therefore static motion picture.' Again, Laura takes exception to the assumption that because *Regen* is 'plot-less', it must be 'static'. Like Dulac, she sees Ivens' films as symphonic and rhythmical, and she reminds us of the writers and filmmakers who believed that 'it was only in the absence of "plot" that "rhythm" could emerge.' She also questions the relevance of the widespread claim that Ivens' conception of the film was inspired by Verlaine's lines, '*Il pleure dans mon coeur/ Comme il pleut sur la ville.*'

Whereas *Manhatta* makes its debt to Whitman's poetry explicit, in *Regen*, even if Verlaine

did have an influence, there are no ‘markers of the “literary”.’ Instead, Ivens’ priority is ‘to forge a singular and autonomous language for the cinema’, one that enables the city and the cinema, as it were, ‘to tell each other’s stories’.<sup>27</sup>

Laura having made her case, how might I have responded? First off, I would have thanked her for deepening my sense of the city symphonies as the embodiment, or enactment, of a certain ‘way of seeing’ (Berger) that was itself one instance of a broader ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams) – or, rather, it might be more accurate to say a modernist structure of *affect*, as the *feeling* being structured was somatic as well as emotional and intellectual. Put plainly, Laura showed how the city films of the nineteen twenties recognized and rendered a specifically modern rhythm. Secondly, I might have said that, as an editor from way back, I have always been suspicious of articles (or essays, or theses) that hold back discussion of film examples until their conclusion. My preference is to start with the analysis of films, so that the capacity of the critical or theoretical commentary to explain why a film is like it is, and to enhance my understanding of its significance and value, can be demonstrated in practice. The danger is that postponing that engagement can make it appear as though the films are being wheeled out to exemplify a *parti pris*. However, and thirdly, I would acknowledge that listening carefully to the argument of ‘A Hymn to Movement’ made me realise that this is not what Laura was doing. She did not pretend to offer conventional film analysis. Rather, she was undertaking an historically precise investigation of a particular moment, and a particular possibility, in the history of film culture, one in which ‘writing about cinema’ was neither just journalism nor just theory, but aimed to make a decisive contribution to what cinema might be – or, as it turned out, might have been.

And in that difference of purpose, I would have told Laura, lies the value of her work for film studies. It is not just that she fleshed out the ‘modernity thesis’ with the wealth of her quotations from literary sources, nor even that she demonstrated the role of ‘writing about

cinema' in shaping an emerging film culture in the interwar years. The illuminating implication of her reading of *Manhatta* and *Regen* in terms of 'the film/literature dynamic' is that, if 'writing about cinema' is a thing, then its counterintuitive corollary ought to be 'cinema about writing'. In part, and least controversially, 'cinema about writing' might refer to the way a film aesthetic reconfigured the perspectives and rhythm of modernist literary writing. In part, too, it acknowledges the explicit dialogue between the new medium and the other, older arts in a film like *Manhatta*. More radically, and most provocatively, 'cinema about writing' suggests how a limited number of films have aspired to, and sometimes achieved, 'the literary', if we take 'the literary' to indicate the power of art in whatever medium to make unexperienced situations, worlds, and possibilities accessible and meaningful, at the same time as defamiliarizing routine habits of perception, explanation and understanding. That is what, at their best, the city symphonies achieved. It is also the version of modernism that Laura's scholarship did so much to illuminate.

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<sup>1</sup> Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer's Memoirs* (Ashfield, Mass.: Paris Press, 1982 [1963]), p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (eds), *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell/N.J: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', in Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Film: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), pp. 56-62. 'Modernity

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thesis' was David Bordwell's not altogether friendly coinage: see Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 141-2.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Christopher Townsend, 'Close Up, after *Close Up*. *Life and Letters Today* as a Modernist Film Journal', *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, vol. 9 no. 2 (2018), pp. 245-264, and 'A Deeper, Wider POOL: Reading *Close Up* Through the Archives of its Contributors', *Papers on Language and Literature*, vol. 55 no. 1 (2019), pp. 51-76.

Townsend objects that our selection overemphasised the high literary modernist contributors at the expense of those with a background in the film industry, and undersold *Close Up*'s later impact on the middlebrow English culture of the 1930s, which was achieved primarily through Robert Herring's editorship of *Life and Letters Today*, which Bryher had bought, and his inclusion of a number of old *Close Up* writers.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), p. 249.

<sup>7</sup> James Donald, *Some of These Days: Black Stars, Jazz Aesthetics, and Modernist Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> In Julian Murphet, Helen Groth and Penelope Hone (eds), *Sounding Modernism: Rhythm and Sonic Mediation in Modern Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 193-210.

<sup>9</sup> Laura Marcus, "'A Hymn to Movement': the 'City Symphony' films of the 1920s and 1930s", in Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 89-109. My account of city symphonies can be found in 'Light in Dark Spaces: Cinema and City', ch. 2 in James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (London: Athlone Press/Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 63-92.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

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<sup>11</sup> David Trotter, Rev. 'Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period*', *Screen* vol 50. No. 3 (Autumn, 2009), p. 345.

<sup>12</sup> 'Quotations in my work are like wayside robbers who leap out armed and relieve the stroller of his convictions.' Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 95.

<sup>13</sup> 'Hymn to Movement', pp. 94, 99, 102.

<sup>14</sup> Trotter, '*Tenth Muse*', p. 346.

<sup>15</sup> 'Hymn to Movement', pp. 92, 94, 104.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>21</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Random House, 1915/19220, pp. 65-66; cit. 'Hymn to Movement', p. 103.

<sup>23</sup> 'Hymn to Movement', p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.104.

<sup>25</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.105.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

## Modern Rhythms and Resonant Connection: Laura Marcus on sound, literature, and cinema

This article reflects on the resonant movements between literature, sound, and cinema that Laura Marcus' work generated, focusing primarily on her 2015 essay, 'The Rhythm of the Rails: Sound and Location'.<sup>1</sup> It also looks forward to the posthumous publication of Marcus' final monograph, *Rhythmic Subjects*, which promises to explore the notion of rhythm as 'a still unrecorded utopia of interdisciplinarity' and 'an entirely new way of measuring the emergence, eclipses, and reappearances of the Modern at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century.'<sup>2</sup> With an erudition and historical range typical of her work, this larger project on rhythm, like the exemplary case study that is the focus here, is intrinsically connective and resonant in its impetus and thinking. Resonance, to quote one *OED* definition, is 'the reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection or by synchronous vibration.' That sense seems apposite in this context. For the purposes of this essay, *reflection*, *vibration*, and *synchrony* signal a generative sympathetic movement between objects or forms: a movement that never collapses one form into another whilst marking the co-presence and integrity of both. Julie Beth Napolin distils 'resonance' as method thus: 'One system acts upon another near it spatially or akin to it vibrationally. It is the physical, social, linguistic, and psychological fact of the more than one.'<sup>3</sup> Analogising further, resonance can be enlisted to describe the consolidating movements of acts of criticism that depart from and question historical appropriations of various kinds. This understanding of resonance captures a defining feature of Laura Marcus' work: a way of thinking, writing, and researching that always attends to the specificity of the medium that is its object, whilst tracing affinities and alignments with acuity and subtlety.

## Resonances

In her work on early film and modernist literature, Marcus sought out moments when writers and/or filmmakers gave allusive shape to a protean cinematic repertoire. One such moment occurs early in *The Tenth Muse* in a characteristically multivalent glossing of Jean Epstein writing in 1921 on the interrelatedness of ‘fashion, film, time, and transience’. Epstein effused: ‘Within five years people will be writing cinematographic poems: 150 metres and 100 images arranged as a rosary on a string followed by the intelligence ... The film like contemporary literature accelerates unstable metamorphoses.’<sup>4</sup> Noting Epstein’s Futurist-inspired embrace of acceleration and instability, Marcus reads the voracious convergence of forms this new aesthetics of ‘mental rapidity’ or ‘seeing quickly’ promulgated alongside three cognate strands of early twentieth-century cinematic thinking: that cinema produced thought independent of a human observer, the contention of Munsterberg and others that ‘picturing emotion must be the central aim of the photoplay,’ and the subtle transitions of Bergson’s thinking on and with cinema in his progression from *Creative Evolution* to *The Creative Mind*.<sup>5</sup> The connective thread linking these introductory glosses is Marcus’ commitment to capturing the range and nuance of early responses to film’s movement in situ. Thinking through and with these writers, Marcus animates a cultural moment through historically sensitized reading, as she succinctly elaborates: ‘the writing of many early film critics and commentators revealed an acute awareness not only of the relationships between filmic motion and the modernity that they inhabited, but also of the need to articulate new understandings of vision and identity in a moving world.’<sup>6</sup>

Reviewing *The Tenth Muse* for this journal, David Trotter remarked on ‘a certain looseness about the notions of resonance and chiming’ only to counter this judgment with praise for Marcus’ specific orchestration of both: ‘here, however, they operate within a field constituted by the array of material (a great deal of it hitherto neglected) brought



meticulously to light and set on the page.’<sup>7</sup> Trotter notes the ‘initially disconcerting’ process of being located in this field through Marcus’ ‘para-epigraphic’ technique up to the point where the gradual accumulation of voices became ‘comprehensible as a network, with each item a node or switching point.’<sup>8</sup> From an analysis of Virginia Woolf’s *The Years*, Trotter describes being directed by Marcus’ exegetic accretions to images of litter in Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a City* (1927), then through a brilliant elucidation of Eric Walter White’s reflections on Ruttmann’s cinematic rhythms in *Parnassus to Let* (published by Woolf’s Hogarth Press in 1928), only to be offered two divergent pathways – one leading to a detailed endnote on White and another to Marcus’ subtle commentary on the resonance between White’s observations on rhythm in film, Graham Greene’s 1928 article ‘A Film Technique: Rhythms of Time and Space,’ and Woolf’s privileging of rhythm over plot in *To The Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931).

Returning to this sequence in *The Tenth Muse* via Trotter, what is striking is the paths he does not take through the field Marcus maps (the limits of the monograph review notwithstanding). The two most prominent are, first, Marcus’ sustained tracking of the intertwining of cinematic and literary mediations of the rhythmic pulses of modern urban life throughout *The Tenth Muse* and, second, her intricate exploration of modernist writing (primarily in the Anglo-American film criticism of the nineteen-twenties) on sound and cinema. This is typified by the example Trotter directs us towards, which connects Woolf’s lyrical rendering of blood and yellow-smearred litter wrapped around the architecture of ‘a polluted city’ in *The Years* and the opening shots of discarded paper blowing along an empty street in *Berlin* to White’s literary evocation of the elegiac urbanism of Ruttmann’s cinematic style in the following passage:

One of the most notable moments in *Berlin* was when the rhythmic acceleration, emotional tension, and musical climax of the arrival by train were suddenly succeeded by quiet photographic stills: of the city, lifeless as a picture post-card in the dawn, of the smokeless factories, of the deserted streets, each accompanied by a low chord *pianissimo*. Still followed after still, like so many lantern slides, until down an exhausted street came the first wind of the day, blowing a piece of white paper along the dry pavement, over and over.<sup>9</sup>

White captures his multi-sensory experience of simultaneously watching Ruttmann's images and listening to Edmund Meisel's orchestral score, constructing an associative soundscape that blurs the lines between still and moving images as the train's rhythmic movements through the hinterland of Berlin are supplanted by a sequence of evocative still-life images of the awakening city's deserted streets. White's prose aspires to a lyricism that Marcus saliently compares to Greene's response to *Berlin*: 'the camera for a moment turns from the restless race of actions to poetry, perhaps, an empty room, sun-drenched, barred with cool shadows.'

Both literary writers construct a descriptive repertoire that works through formal analogy and wonder: an aesthetic convergence that Marcus then counterposes to Siegfried Kracauer's less than poetic description of Ruttmann's 'garbage-minded film' with its 'wealth of sewer grates, gutters and streets littered with rubbish' registered by indiscriminate 'rag-picking' camera work.<sup>10</sup> This transition deftly reminds the reader that the cultural field being mapped here is contested and dynamic. Lifting Kracauer's suggestive fragments from his review of *Berlin* also allows Marcus' specific exegesis to resonate beyond the pages of this study: a descriptive technique that invites readers to follow, as this reader did, a trajectory that leads to a more extensive discussion of sound and cinema. To exemplify briefly: in a

review of Ruttmann's sound-image film *Deutscher Rundfunk*, Kracauer returned to *Berlin* to substantiate a more general criticism of a cinematic style that subordinated filmic form to 'a literary idea foreign to the images – an idea that does not possess the necessary cohesive force in an optical medium'.<sup>11</sup> Meisel's score creates an 'artificial unity' in *Deutscher Rundfunk* that recalls *Berlin* to Kracauer's mind: a negative association that highlights Ruttmann's tendency to commodify rather than utilise the revelatory acoustics of film-sound. It 'reminds one of a conveyor belt and seems to have been manufactured by the kilometer', Kracauer complains, rather than realising the 'fairy-tale dreams' inspired by simultaneously hearing and seeing a 'harbor with ships, and the sirens begin to blare: one sees and hears it all at once'. Likewise, the sounds of the station as the train departs, or an old lady calling out *Auf Wiedersehen*, are falsely orchestrated by Meisel's score, just as the wonder of seeing people 'speak as their lips move, the machines grate, and the sea lions snort and snarl' is rendered formulaic by being saturated by harmonising affects that irritate Kracauer's ear. What audiences require of such cinematic experiences, he counters, is the unadulterated mediation of 'the involuntary roar of the street' as people go about their everyday lives – talking, shouting, crying, working and playing: 'Life repeats itself in image and sound; whatever was comes up again and again.'<sup>12</sup>

These sound-images are not poetry, nor do they correspond to Proust's search for lost time. Kracauer insists that to repeat 'the existence [*Dasein*] that has already been handled aesthetically' would be futile. Rather, film will only achieve its full significance when it 'renders accessible existence previously unknown, the sound and clamour around us that has never yet communicated with the visual impressions and had invariably escaped the senses.'<sup>13</sup> Marcus draws out these differences between literary and cinematic experience as Kracauer conceives of them when she returns to his theories of cinema as a resonant counterpoint to Dorothy Richardson's writing on film audiences for *Close Up* in a later

chapter in *The Tenth Muse*. Situating Kracauer's intervention more explicitly in relation to Walter Benjamin's development of his account of the modern 'cult of distraction' in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' allows both to work 'para-epigraphically', to adapt Trotter's term, thus clarifying the specificity and nuances of Richardson's ethnographic observations on changes and developments in film spectatorship. Whereas Kracauer and Benjamin abstracted from the medium to conceive of a revelatory 'non-bourgeois mode of attention proper to the fragmentary, discontinuous nature' of film, Richardson directed her reader's attention to the differences between audience members.<sup>14</sup>

Marcus selects a series of moments from Richardson's essays that exemplify the novelist's interest in the social space of the local cinema and its role in London's densely populated areas, from the West End to the slums of the East End. Unlike the passive consumers portrayed by Kracauer in his account of 'little shop girls' going to the movies, Richardson offers a less reductive perspective that Marcus captures in a series of appositely selected quotes. The first of these, taken from Richardson's first essay for *Close Up*, takes us into a North London picture palace on a Monday afternoon to observe a scattered audience largely composed of mothers escaping the banal demands of washday:

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. 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.<sup>15</sup>

There is an unguarded intimacy to Richardson's writing here that resists sentimental appropriation or pathologizing diagnosis. The mothers she describes sip tea and consciously subside into reverie as the screen fills with images of waves moving back and forth across the beach, accompanied by the lilting rhythms of a slow waltz. Neither Richardson nor the mothers she observes appear to long for the sounds of the sea in this moment of shared pleasure: a response that Marcus contrasts with contemporary criticisms of the frustrating silence accompanying similar Vitascope images of waves crashing on the Jersey Shore, before returning to Richardson's defence of silence later in the same essay: 'Life's "great moments" are silent. Related to them, the soundful moments may be compared to the falling of the crest of a wave that has stood poised in light, translucent, for its great moment before the crash and dispersal. To this peculiar intensity of being, to each man's individual intensity of being, the silent film, with musical accompaniment, can translate him.'<sup>16</sup> These observations capture Richardson's keen interest in both the historicity of cinema as a medium in transition, and 'the imbrication of film spectatorship with questions of speech and silence, writing and talking', as Marcus puts it.<sup>17</sup>

Marcus' reading of Richardson's essays sets up a series of dynamic convergences between cinematic thinking and practice in the late nineteen-twenties. So, for example, she links Richardson's characterization of perfectly placed captions as more 'intimately audible than the spoken word,' like 'the swift voice within the mind', to the various engagements with the concept of 'inner speech' residing in the connective capacities of the spectator's mind being developed at that time not just by Sergei Eisenstein, but also by the literary scholar, Boris Eikhenbaum, and by Lev Vygotsky, the linguist and author of *Thought and Language* – thinking that in turn informed Eisenstein's ambition for an intellectual cinema and theory of film-form.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Marcus identifies resonances between Richardson's argument for the animating vitalism of the rhythmic orchestrations of musical

accompaniment and Kracauer's writing on Ruttmann. Where Kracauer found an inappropriately literary insistence on unity, for Richardson musical accompaniment acted to mitigate the intrusive focus of the camera. All, as Marcus argues, were part of a network of writers on cinema who were developing 'a free-associative form of writing which, in its production of perceptual and cognitive connection and dissociation, became a way of acting out, and of thinking through, the forms of attention and of distraction brought into being by the cinema.'<sup>19</sup>

This stress on resonance and connective modes of thinking pervades Marcus' *oeuvre*. Writing on cinema and with cinema is a situated social practice for Marcus, guided by the cognate principles of relationality and interdependence. 'Acting out' and 'thinking through' cinema and literature in her distinct citational style modelled a way of understanding both forms as social spaces in the sense elaborated by Henri Lefebvre. As Lefebvre conceives of it, social space is not a 'passive locus,' it is a dynamic and consciously constructed form of 'knowledge and action, in the existing mode of production.' It is 'not a thing but rather a set of relations between things.'<sup>20</sup> Social spaces, Lefebvre suggests, 'interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things, which have mutually limiting boundaries.'<sup>21</sup> This dynamic interplay between forms eludes reification and reveals previously undisclosed overlaps and interactions. Marcus' writing is animated by a similar impulse. Essay after essay demonstrates the sheer range of her knowledge of the capacious archive that connects the histories of modern literature and film, as well as a deep scholarly commitment to modelling forms of reading literature's textured, sensual, sometimes whimsical, engagements with cinema from the late nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century.

### **Rhythm, Sound, Cinema**

In her essay ‘The Rhythm of the Rails: Sound and Locomotion’, which was published in a collection I co-edited called *Sounding Modernism*, Marcus created a space for rethinking the interleaved histories of modernist literature, the acoustic dimensions of rhythm, and avant-garde cinema. It begins in the latter decades of the nineteenth century by tracing the connections between Herbert Spencer’s materialist conception of rhythm as an omnipresent orchestration of physical, social, and aesthetic expression and the physiological aesthetics of Vernon Lee and Ethel Pfuffer, before culminating with a close analysis of the rhythmic confluences that shaped the collaboration between the French avant-garde poet Blaise Cendrars and the film maker Abel Gance.<sup>22</sup> In his prose-poem ‘The Open Road,’ Cendrars spoke of the ‘tensely listening ear’ deciphering the resonant sounds of revolution in the clattering noise of international express trains drawing into Paris: an urban soundscape that diverges radically from that evoked by Ruttmann’s cinematic paean to Berlin:

‘Revolution!’ and ‘Re-re-re!’ repeated the distant engine-whistles of the great international express trains, vanishing into the depths of the night with a roar of wind and a great clattering of wheels: ‘... volution, volution, volution ...’ and this same word was stammered, stammered in the racket of the endless cortège of dust-carts that came up from the further bank of the night, carrying the dawn into Paris, ‘Revolution!’ they said at each jolt, the wagons in front and the wagons behind, their heavy chassis and their iron coffers shaken in the mare’s nests of the badly-paved streets of the suburbs. It was like onomatopoeia, this word deciphered by the tensely listening ear. ‘Revolution’, announced the rattling motors.<sup>23</sup>

Onomatopoeia here simultaneously forges sense out of sound and exposes their radical disarticulation. Cendrars develops this acoustic experiment with the rhythmic pulses of

railway locomotion further in a poem with a title that announces its refusal of the order and sequence of poetic form: 'The Prose of the Trans-Siberian'

I deciphered all the garbled texts of the wheels and united the scattered  
elements of a violent beauty  
Which I possess  
And which drives me.<sup>24</sup>

This sensuous and intoxicating willing of a transient order and sequence out of the 'garbled texts of the wheels,' is energized by the idea of locomotion as opposed to the literal rhythms of the rails: a gap or 'unlikeness' that Marcus amplifies further through a series of citations that establish a specific formal resonance between the rhythms of Cendrars' poem and Abel Gance's film *La Roue* (1922). As Mikhail Iampolski has chronicled, the collaboration between Cendrars and Gance is the stuff of legend: Cendrars worked on *La Roue* and Gance transposed the final lines of Cendrars' poem – 'Paris/City of the incomparable Tower the great Gibbet and the Wheel' – from page to screen. Marcus' concern, however, lies elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> It is rhythm that connects their practice more fundamentally: a connection that Marcus exemplifies by allowing Cendrars' poetic lines to resonate with Gance's account of his cinematic practice in terms of rhythm:

Is movement not, in fact drama? Movement, in art, is rhythm. The possibility of inventing new rhythms, of encapsulating the rhythms of life, of intensifying them and varying them infinitely, becomes, at a given moment, the essential problem of cinematographic techniques. I think I resolved this by inventing what has since been called rapid montage. It was in *La Roue* that I think we saw on the screen for the first



time those images of a runaway train, of anger, of passion, of hatred that follow one another with increasing rapidity, one image generating another in an unpredictable rhythm and order, an eruption of visions which, at the time, people thought of as apocalyptic and which are now as common in our cinematographic syntax as enumeration or exclamation in literary syntax.<sup>26</sup>

The exchange between Cendrars and Gance that Marcus orchestrates here returns the reader to the key terms of the field of rhythm studies, with which her essay began. Roger Fry claimed in the essay's epigraph that rhythm is the 'fundamental and vital quality of all the arts,' and John Middleton Murry echoed these sentiments in an account of his agreement with the Scottish painter J.D. Ferguson that 'rhythm was the distinctive element in all the arts, and that the real purpose of "this modern movement" ... was to assert the pre-eminence of rhythm.'<sup>27</sup> Both these reflections refuse or deflect any obligation to define rhythm beyond their shared understanding of it as a quality and animating energy: a conception informed by the prevalent vitalism of the period that sought to connect the arts of time and space anew. Marcus reads this definitional looseness as characteristic of the discursive formation of an emergent field, in this case 'Rhythmics' – a practice or mode of conceiving of new formations that she had previously traced in her textual analysis of early writing on cinema in *The Tenth Muse*. According to this critical logic, modern rhythmics only makes sense as part of a larger system of cognate thought and practice which Marcus argues, in this instance, finds its origins in Henry Spencer's writing on the directions and rhythm of motion in his influential *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy* (1862).

Rhythm is omnipresent in its connection of physical, social and aesthetic activities for Spencer. Just as rhythm moves on an expansive geographical scale, it pulses through the bodily processes of individual organisms and consciousnesses, as well as the more obvious

rhythmic dimensions of dancing, poetry and music. The latter brings Marcus to the connective thread that links these domains to modernist writing, film, and more, to quote her essay's core contention:

The desire of writers and thinkers of the period to connect 'rhythm' (etymologically and conceptually) with natural and organic processes is highly significant. The metaphors of the 'pulse' and the 'heartbeat', as well as of waves, come to define concepts of 'rhythm' in a very wide range of contexts. It is my hypothesis that the fascination with rhythm in the period arose in substantial part from the desire to reclaim, retain or redefine human and natural measures in the face of the coming of the machine and the speed of technological development.<sup>28</sup>

This hypothesis, as Marcus notes, resonates with Henri Lefebvre's ambitious claims for rhythmanalysis as 'a new science that is in the process of being constituted', one that 'situates itself at the juxtaposition of the physical, the physiological and the social, at the heart of daily life'.<sup>29</sup> Immersed in the archive, Marcus hears the echoes of other theorists and precursors in Lefebvre's expansive claims for the imbrication of rhythm in the broader experiential and phenomenological fields in which we live. Where Lefebvre claims innovation, Marcus finds connections with the work of Spencer, Bergson and Bachelard: resonances that she expanded well beyond the scope of this essay in her broader project on rhythm. Extrapolating from this example, in conclusion, what strikes one here, as always when reading Marcus, is how she writes with an ear sensitized to patterns of recurrence, to echoes and resonances between forms and media, between writers and filmmakers, theories of mind and culture: a generative critical practice and legacy that continues to expand the scope of interdisciplinary work and to reveal multiple lines of inquiry for other scholars to follow.

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Marcus, 'The Rhythm of the Rails: Sound and Location', in Julian Murphet, Helen Groth, and Penelope Hone (eds), *Sounding Modernism: Rhythm and Sonic Mediation in Modern Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 193-210.

<sup>2</sup> *Rhythmic Subjects* had not been published at the time of writing. This brief description comes from Laura Marcus, 'Rhythm and the Measures of the Modern', in Anne-Florence Gillard-Estrada and Anne Besnault-Levita (eds), *Beyond the Victorian/Modernist Divide: Remapping the Turn-of-the-Century Break in Literature, Culture and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 211-228.

<sup>3</sup> Julie Beth Napolin, *The Fact of Resonance: Modernist Acoustics and Narrative Form* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse. Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>7</sup> David Trotter, Rev. 'Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period*,' *Screen* vol 50. No. 3 (Autumn, 2009), p. 346.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 345-6.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Walter White, *Parnassus to Let: An Essay about Rhythm in the Films* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), p. 18. Cited in Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p.159.

<sup>10</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 54. Cited in Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p.159.

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<sup>11</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, 'Sound-Image Film' (1928), in Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (eds), *The Promise of Cinema. German Film Theory 1907-1933* (California: University of California Press, 2016), p.557.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 558.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 558.

<sup>14</sup> Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 357.

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance', *Close Up* 1:1 (July 1927), pp.35-6. Cited in Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p.352.

<sup>16</sup> Richardson, 'Continuous Performance,' cited in Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 352.

<sup>17</sup> Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 354.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 354-355.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>20</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), pp. 11-12.

<sup>21</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 83,86.

<sup>22</sup> Marcus, 'The Rhythm of the Rails', pp. 204-209.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Marcus, 'The Rhythm of the Rails', p. 208.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Marcus, 'The Rhythm of the Rails', p.206.

<sup>25</sup> Mikhail Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias. Intertextuality and Film* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1998), p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Marcus, 'The Rhythm of the Rails', p. 209.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

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<sup>29</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (1992), Trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (New York: Continuum, 2004), p.79. Cited in Marcus, 'The Rhythm of the Rails', p. 197.

## **Dreams and Nightmares of Diasporic Modernity: Reading, Cinema, and the Railway in Mira Nair's *The Namesake***

Johannes Riquet

At the beginning of Mira Nair's 2006 adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's 2003 novel *The Namesake*,<sup>1</sup> we see calligraphic writing in Bengali appearing on a painted background alongside the English opening credits to the sound of a departing train. In the first shot after the credits, the camera tracks a suitcase with the inscription 'A. Ganguli' on the head of a porter as it moves through the bustle of a railway station, before a reverse shot shows us a young man following the suitcase, whom we will later get to know as Ashoke Ganguli. After that, we see a rural Indian landscape through a train window that momentarily merges with the film screen, still to the sound of the train from the opening credits. What follows is a scene of reading inside the train compartment; we see Ashoke explaining to an elderly man that he is reading Nikolai Gogol's short story 'The Overcoat' from a book that his grandfather gave him. The next scene takes place at night in the same compartment. The older man tells the younger of his travels to England and America. 'It was like a dream', he says, as the film cuts to another view of the window and the now darkened landscape, before the man encourages his fellow traveller to 'pack a pillow and blanket' and 'see the world'. Ashoke replies that his 'grandfather always says that is what books are for. To travel without moving an inch'. A few seconds later, the calm of the compartment is violently disturbed: a rapid series of shaking, handheld shots accompanied by a chaotic soundscape establishes the scene of an accident, which is marked as the film's primal scene, both disconnected from and foundational to its diasporic narrative. After a few seconds of black

screen, the opening credits resume and give the film its own proper name, *The Namesake*, before the film, as it were, starts again.

I have chosen to write about Nair's *The Namesake* as the film engages with a variety of issues that concerned Laura Marcus throughout her extraordinary career. The intersection of these issues in Nair's film will allow me to reflect not only on the breadth of Marcus' work, but also on the multiple links between her various interests, from memory and autobiography<sup>2</sup> to the interactions between film and literary modernism,<sup>3</sup> the technologies of modernity (including the railway),<sup>4</sup> psychoanalysis,<sup>5</sup> and the rhythms of modern life.<sup>6</sup> The opening scene of *The Namesake* already brings together several of these concerns. Drawing on a short essay by Walter Benjamin, Marcus writes in *Dreams of Modernity* that trains and reading were intimately linked from the mid-nineteenth century, when railway journeys contributed significantly to the creation of a reading public as it became common for passengers to read fiction (especially detective and sensationalist fiction) on trains and substitute the thrills of exciting stories for the thrills of the journey.<sup>7</sup> As Marcus argues, trains and reading are linked in more metaphorical ways, too, as the act of reading resonates with the railway journey's dialectic of separation and connection, interiority and exteriority, inner and outer landscapes; there are multiple 'relationship[s] between the movement of the train and the movement of the text from one place to another, departures and arrivals, the rhythms of the journey and the rhythms of the narrative.'<sup>8</sup> The beginning of *The Namesake* immediately establishes a connection between reading and railway journeys, depicting them as parallel activities while also establishing them as alternatives, as different forms of travelling that can substitute for each other.

In the same gesture, the film sets up a competition between verbal and visual modes of encountering the world: the cut to the window after the older man speaks about the 'dream' of

travelling associates the window with film as a technology for visually experiencing the world. Yet this dream-screen soon turns into a nightmare, visually anticipated by a second train effacing the view through the window shortly before the accident. Indeed, the railway journey returns in visual flashes of memory throughout the film – once in Ashoke’s nightmares, once as he tells his son about the accident – as the foundational trauma that sets all the other events in motion. As Marcus shows in her chapter ‘Oedipus Express: Psychoanalysis and the Railways’, the railway journey as a site of literal and figurative shock played a foundational role in the formation of trauma theory, and trains figured the psychic apparatus with its logics of displacement, substitution, and projection for Freud,<sup>9</sup> just as cinema provided a metaphor for the psychic apparatus for early psychoanalysis, even if Freud never explicitly acknowledged the connection.<sup>10</sup> In *The Namesake*, this association between train, cinema, and psyche is established at the beginning of the film as the dream-screen of the railway is linked to both the desires and the traumata fueled or caused by the modern world. Yet the modernity of *The Namesake* is not that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that Marcus’ work mostly focuses on, but the film allows us to think about the reverberations of modernity in twenty-first-century narratives of postcolonial displacement and diaspora.

These echoes of (an earlier) modernity are also figured through the insistence of the written word, already present in the inscription, ‘A. Ganguli’, on Ashoke’s suitcase, an image the returns repeatedly at key moments of the film. While the transmission of names and cultural baggage is also the central concern of Lahiri’s original, it takes on additional significance in Nair’s film, where it becomes tied to the film’s allegorisation of its relationship to the novel it adapts. In both the novel and the film, Ashoke marries soon after his accident and moves to New York City with his wife Ashima. Their first child, Gogol, is born in New York City and named



after the famous Russian author, who wrote ‘The Overcoat’ while living in exile in Rome and Geneva. In both the novel and the film, Nikolai Gogol’s nineteenth-century story functions as a symbol of displacement and signals cultural echoes between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries. In Nair’s adaptation, Gogol’s struggles with the identity imposed on him by his parents also reflect on the film’s own relationship to the literary text from which it emerged. Marcus’ work on the importance of writing in film – and on film *as* writing – has taught us to think about the complex ‘relationships and transitions between the written or printed word and the cinematic image’,<sup>11</sup> which she sees foregrounded not only in modernist works but also in recent cinema.<sup>12</sup> Just as modern Russian literature was said to have emerged ‘out of Gogol’s overcoat’ by Fyodor Dostoyevsky in a statement quoted by Ashoke in both the novel and the film,<sup>13</sup> his son emerges from the modernity that brought the railways to India and tied the subcontinent’s history to that of the anglophone world. Nair’s film, too, emerges out of the covers of Lahiri’s novel and constantly confronts its own textual origin. In a 2015 article, Marcus argues that in representations of libraries, ‘film as a medium reveals its own complex, ambivalent relationships to the book and to the medium of print from which it both derives so much of its narrative drive and which it has, to some extent, come to replace.’<sup>14</sup> Nair’s *The Namesake*, too, repeatedly reflects on its relationship to the written word by showing the New York library in which Ashima works. Various close-up shots of books and handwritten inscriptions within books serve a similar function. Thus, near the end of the film, we see a secret message from the French lover of the woman Gogol marries inscribed in a novel by Stendhal and, in one of the film’s last scenes, Gogol discovers his (by then deceased) father’s inscription in the copy of his Nikolai Gogol’s *Collected Tales* (a present from Ashoke to his son, just as Ashoke received the same

book from his father): ‘The man who gave you his name, from the man who gave you your name.’

The film’s relationship to its own namesake – the book that gave it *its* name – also raises the question of the (auto)biographical impulse that pervades both works. Strictly speaking, of course, *The Namesake* is not an autobiographical narrative, though it contains several elements that could be considered autobiographical. Like Gogol, Lahiri was ‘born to Bengali parents from Calcutta’ and grew up in the United States; like her protagonist, furthermore, she ‘was encouraged by her grade-school teachers to retain her family nickname . . . at school.’<sup>15</sup> Nair, too, is an Indian (though not Bengali) living in diaspora (mostly the United States and Uganda). Having started out as a documentary filmmaker, she has dedicated much of her work to the real and fictional lives of Indians at home and abroad. But more importantly, the novel and the film meditate on what it means to literally and figuratively write one’s one name and story in diaspora. As Marcus writes, many autobiographies are faced with the problem that the self is ‘an evolving, changing entity, moving in the flux of time, even as the autobiographer seeks to capture and compose it.’<sup>16</sup> The diasporic condition arguably heightens this challenge, creating dissonances between the remembered (and sometimes largely imagined) homeland and the new emergence of a new self. Referring to the psychoanalytic work of Adam Phillips, who observes that ‘[w]e share our lives with the people we have failed to be’, Marcus argues that ‘[t]he conditions of modernity . . . make [this] ever more intense’<sup>17</sup>.

The nostalgia and loss resulting from this condition, as Laura shows in her discussion of André Aciman’s novel *Call Me By Your Name* and its film adaptation by Luca Guadagnino, is also linked to a sense of exile and displacement. While Laura’s work occasionally touches on exile, it also offers conceptual tools for thinking more broadly about the nexus of memory, loss,

and modernity in narratives of diasporic selves. The film *The Namesake* possibly highlights the construction of diasporic subjectivity even more than the novel. While Lahiri's original is written in the third person, giving us access to Gogol's, Ashoke's, and Ashima's experiences through focalisation, the film repeatedly combines verbal and visual strategies such as visual flashbacks, voice-overs, and shots of signed as well as printed names to construct a modern diasporic self whose proper name is continually under erasure even as it is articulated through words and images. In the remainder of this essay, I would like to examine these verbal and visual strategies in more detail by tracing them through the film's treatment of time. Indeed, the philosophical, narrative, and aesthetic importance of time is a common thread that runs through all of Marcus' work. In *Dreams of Modernity*, she writes that 'temporal reversals and inversions are a significant dimension of the [modern] reshaping of time and space, to be found not only in the speed of railway travel but also in the juxtapositions and inversions common to dreams and cinema.'<sup>18</sup> Such 'reversals and inversions' also characterise *The Namesake*.

From its beginning, Nair's film uses the railway to spatialise the rhythms and non-linear movements of the diasporic experience. Altogether eleven train shots and scenes punctuate the film's narrative, including three flashbacks to Ashoke's journey at the beginning of the film. Most of these trains signal spatial and/or temporal distances or gaps, and all of them are linked to narrative junctions and ruptures. As one of the flashbacks reveals, Ashoke's foundational journey propelled his desire to move to the United States. The second train appears in the first shot shown of the United States, crossing a bridge in New York city; it signifies both the spatio-temporal gap that separates Ashoke and Ashima's American existence from their Indian lives and the connection between the two worlds. After Gogol's birth, we see another train in New York City as we hear Ashima's voice saying 'I want to go home'. Shown just after a scene of

Ashima's family receiving a photo of the couple with the baby and followed by a scene of the young family a few years later, this train similarly points to the passing of time and the desire for connection across vast distances. We see another train through a glass pane at the airport after Ashoke's death, shortly before Gogol and his mother return to India to scatter Ashoke's ashes in the Ganges. The airport train thus links diasporic disconnection with the radical separation of death; echoing other shots through windows and glass panes scattered throughout the film, the mediated view visually reinforces this sense of disconnection. The next train we see signals Gogol's impending separation from his wife Moushumi. We see her clandestinely taking the book containing her French lover's inscription from a shelf while Gogol is asleep. The next shots show us an elevated New York train, then Moushumi reading at home, before we see her presumably in the same train in seductive attire; the actual break-up between Gogol and Moushumi also takes place at a train station. In the final minutes of the film, too, we see several trains. As Ashima announces to her family and friends that she will return to India, we see another elevated New York subway train as we hear her say that she will miss 'this country in which [she] had grown to know and love [her] husband'. In the film's penultimate scene, Gogol is reading 'The Overcoat' on a train along the sea, seamlessly followed by an Indian train before we see Ashima singing in India in the very last shot.

As this overview makes clear, trains are linked to the multiple vectors of diasporic time throughout Nair's film. They signal the jumps and ruptures not only between spaces but also between temporalities, the eruptions of the past in the present and the projection of future trajectories. As such, they highlight the film's rhythm as it moves back and forth between Calcutta and New York, aligning with Hamid Naficy's conception of diasporic (or 'accented') cinema, in which 'transitional and transnational places and spaces . . . and vehicles of mobility,

such as trains, buses, and suitcases [are] frequently inscribed'<sup>19</sup> alongside communication devices such as letters and telephones<sup>20</sup> (which also recur in *The Namesake*). In her 2017 essay 'The Rhythm of the Rails: Sound and Locomotion', discussed in detail in Helen Groth's contribution to this dossier, Marcus demonstrates that trains were paradigmatic figures of rhythm for modern rhythm scientists as well as modernist writers and artists: 'it is the engines of movement and of temporality, and their incorporations and internalisations, which become the key terms of modern rhythm.'<sup>21</sup> As her work makes clear, theories of rhythm frequently revolve around a tension between mechanical and organic understandings of rhythm.<sup>22</sup> Representative of a new mechanical order but also frequently personified and linked to biological rhythms, trains became a key locus for thinking about 'the relationship between the organic and the mechanical.'<sup>23</sup> *The Namesake* allows us to think about the interplay of mechanical and human rhythms in diasporic modernity. Its protagonists are moved by the forces of the modern world but also create their own rhythmic trajectories, just as they are both named and write their own names. The name Ashima means 'without borders', as both the novel and the film explain, and Ashima's decision at the end of the film to divide her time between India and the United States, spending six months of the year in each, embodies a human rhythm of diasporic time. In a conversation I had with Laura during our shared time at the University of Zurich in 2016, we debated to what extent rhythmic conceptions of trains and railway journeys were compatible with their role as figures of interruption and disruption (the subject of my own forthcoming monograph). I would suggest that *The Namesake* allows us to think about disruption *as* rhythm, with the violent interruption of Ashoke's journey inaugurating the multiple rhythms of diasporic temporality.

With this in mind, I would like to return to the relationship between the visual and the verbal in the film. Shortly before the final train scenes, we see Gogol in his former room, finding the volume of his namesake's *Collected Tales* that he received from his father. After a close-up of Ashoke's inscription inside the book, we see a memory flashback of the father addressing his son: 'We all came out of Gogol's overcoat.' A second flashback follows after Gogol shows the book to Ashima, this time of a family excursion to the sea. The flashback itself is about visual memory, as we see Ashoke realising that he forgot to bring his camera: 'We just have to remember it then, huh?' Yet, as viewers of the film, we *do* see the scene on the memory-screen of cinema. In both scenes, the printed book and the handwritten inscription are, as it were, generative of film, suggesting – like the adaptations Laura discusses in 'The Writer in Film'<sup>24</sup> – a complementary rather than competitive relationship between writing and cinema, word and image.

As the final train scenes make clear, however, film is linked not only to the screen of memory, but also to the projection of future lives. As we see Gogol riding the train along the sea, his gaze shifts from 'The Overcoat' to the (blurry) window as we hear a voice-over of Ashoke ventriloquising the elderly man on the train in India: 'Go, see the world!' The past, transmitted through written and spoken words, here leads directly to a screen, a window into Gogol's as-yet-unwritten future. After a shot of Gogol's smiling face against the window, a cut takes us to the window of another train; the landscape is blocked by yet another train flitting across the window. The composition of the shot echoes the already discussed, almost identical shot that foreshadowed the accident of Ashoke's train – which was repeated in Ashoke's nightmare of the accident, a flashback that interrupted a scene of Ashoke and Ashima having sex. Both in Ashoke's nightmare and at the end of the film, the past visually intrudes into the present and

inflects the production of futurity – literally in the juxtaposition of sex and traumatic memory in the earlier scene and figuratively at the end of the film, when one train window leads not only into Gogol’s imagined future but also to another window of another train. The latter takes us back to the foundational moment of the diasporic narrative, to the event that ultimately led to Gogol’s birth, and to the beginning of the film itself. Yet the return to the traumatic past is also the journey into Ashima’s future. The shot, after all, only *looks like* the one from Ashoke’s near-fatal train journey. It is, furthermore, followed by a view of a pastoral Indian landscape that again repeats an almost identical shot of the framed landscape from Ashoke’s journey, though the order is reversed in a chiastic structure. Indeed, as already noted, right after these train shots we see Ashima singing in India, which suggests that the train is *not* that of Ashoke’s journey, but a similar train Ashima takes as she travels back to her Indian home - a return that in itself takes her both into her past and into the future. Or perhaps the point is that the train is both trains at the same time. Lahiri’s novel does not begin with Ashoke’s journey, nor does it end with Ashima’s. In making these two journeys meet and fusing them with Gogol’s, the film creates a circular narrative structure that adds temporal complexity to the novel and draws attention to itself as a film. It emphasises both the memory work and the projection of future trajectories enabled by its own dream-screen, the window-cinema of the train.

In *The Namesake*, the past, the present, and the future interpenetrate each other in the swerves and layers of diasporic temporality, just like different spaces inhabit each other, visually illustrated by the placement of a globe (with India in the centre) in front of a world map (located in front of the American east coast) in Gogol’s room. By the end of the film, Gogol has come to embrace his name and the past it represents. He rides the train into his uncertain future with an awareness that the words and images of the past, the legacy bestowed on him by his parents, not

only condition his existence but also enable new creative possibilities. Trains mean many things in this film; among others, the ruptures of diaspora and the more radical rupture of death, which become metaphorically linked to each other. Yet out of this rupture something new can emerge, just as Laura Marcus' intellectual legacy will no doubt be generative of a wealth of insights by a new generation of scholars. Gogol's most important lesson in *The Namesake* becomes our own: if we want to move forward, we should remember and honour those who have departed this world and left their indelible marks, signed their names, on our collective knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2003); *The Namesake* (Mira Nair, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1994); Laura Marcus, *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Modernism in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Laura Marcus, 'Literature and Cinema', in Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (eds), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 335-358.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014); David Bradshaw, Laura Marcus, and Rebecca Roach (eds), *Moving Modernisms: Motion, Technology, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Laura Marcus and Ankhi Mukherjee (eds), *A Concise Companion to Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Culture* (Chichester: Wiley, 2014); Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity*.



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<sup>6</sup> This is the subject of the last monograph Laura Marcus was working, which is currently being prepared for publication. See also Laura Marcus, 'Rhythm', *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Literature*, 23 February 2021, accessed 15 December 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.1089>; Laura Marcus, 'The rhythm of the rails: sound and locomotion', in Julien Murphet, Helen Groth, and Penelope Hone (eds), *Sounding Modernism: Rhythm and Sonic Mediation in Modern Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 193-210.

<sup>7</sup> Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity*, pp. 59-76.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-58.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 178-200.

<sup>11</sup> Laura Marcus, 'The writer in film: authorship and imagination', in Judith Buchanan (ed), *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-47.

<sup>13</sup> The attribution of the statement is unclear; it has also variously been attributed to Ivan Turgenev and Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Marcus, 'The library in film: order and mystery', in Alice Crawford (ed), *The Meaning of the Library: A Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 218.

<sup>15</sup> 'Jhumpa Lahiri', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed 20 December 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jhumpa-Lahiri>.

<sup>16</sup> Marcus, *Autobiography*, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Laura Marcus, "'In the key of loss": Aciman, Guadagnino, and *Call Me By Your Name*', *Journal of World Literature*, vol. 6 (2021), p. 372.

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<sup>18</sup> Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Marcus, 'Sound and Locomotion', p. 200.

<sup>22</sup> Marcus, 'Rhythm'.

<sup>23</sup> Marcus, 'Sound and Locomotion', p. 200.

<sup>24</sup> Marcus, 'The Writer in Film', pp. 35-41.