

Cinema and Modernism

by David Trotter



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DAVID TROTTER



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Foreword

The academic study of film and literature has not flourished in our time. Much of the initial impetus for the setting up of schools of English after the First World War found its energy in an opposition to the horrors of mass culture of which film was often portrayed as the most horrific. This disdain of literary academics for the masterpieces of the cinema was not confined to the Anglophone world. Of course, there was always an early recognition of the possibilities of what the French called the Seventh Art, but the efforts of pioneers in film criticism in France, England or America took place outside the groves of academe. When André Bazin founded his magazine *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1952, his audience gathered in cine-clubs, not in lecture theatres, and indeed Bazin had earlier taken the decision to renounce his academic career in order to devote himself to the study of film.

All this changed in the seventies when the political demand to study contemporary culture and the considerable body of film criticism already established (most notably the work of Bazin and *Cahiers*) enabled the study of film to find a growing place within the university. Bazin himself, however, might have been astonished by the way in which the new academic discipline of film studies was often constituted as autonomous, functioning in an aesthetic void where any reference to literature was at best jejune and at worst disqualifying.

The reasons for this are not complicated. Film started life as a genuinely new artistic medium whose beginnings were in the fairgrounds and music halls far removed from any connection either with literature in particular or with traditional high culture in general. Even when film began to borrow from the other arts, and most importantly from literature, there was a continuous critical effort to stress film's unique qualities, particularly the universality of the silent image, a stark contrast to language-limited literature. If the advent of the talkies destroyed this claim to universality, important critical discourses continued to appeal to notions of pure cinema, of film, which had to be appreciated in its difference from other arts.

These intellectual tendencies were offered institutional reinforcement as film studies began to develop within the universities. It was perhaps inevitable that young critics and scholars keen to develop their brave new subject sought institutional independence from the largely literary departments in which they had developed their interests, perhaps also inevitable that older critics and scholars were pleased to see the back of an unwelcome distraction. What is

more surprising is that even in those departments where local histories determined that film and literature were housed under the one roof, a very strict demarcation separated the professional worlds of literary and film scholarship.

These academic developments, however, look more than bizarre if one moves outside the university to look at the worlds of film and literature. The twentieth century – and the twenty-first is so far no different – saw an ever greater interpenetration of these two worlds. From Graham Greene's film criticism to Salman Rushdie's claim that *The Wizard of Oz* was his greatest literary influence, writers have thought and written about the cinema in ever greater numbers. At the same time cinema has from its second decade sought much of its source material in literature and there is almost no major novelist or dramatist in the last century who has not earned part of his or her living either from the direct sale of their work or by the writing of screenplays.

The magazine *Critical Quarterly* has from the mid-eighties sought to sponsor and promote work which focused on the complicated interrelations between the worlds of film and literature. It is no exaggeration to say that David Trotter's *Cinema and Modernism* is the most important book on this topic yet written and it is therefore an ideal title to launch a new series of *Critical Quarterly* books whose aim is to bring the most original academic work to the widest possible audience.

Trotter's work takes off from, and offers an overview of, one of the few areas of academic scholarship that has begun to investigate this complicated interrelation. Curiously enough this does not originate in film scholarship but from a long overdue literary critical reconsideration of the relations between cinema and modernism. It could be said unkindly that it has taken literary students of modernism more than half a century to notice the elephant in the sitting room. However, literary criticism in its modern form was largely designed by Eliot and Richards in the late 1920s as a device to render the elephant invisible. The close reading of difficult modern literary texts was the explicit psychic therapy to cure the facile forms of attention encouraged by modern popular culture, above all by the cinema. Cinema and literary modernism were antithetical and could not be put into any kind of common theoretical framework.

The first step out of this carefully constructed intellectual box has come only in the last two decades with a host of scholarship demonstrating the intensity of modernist interest in cinema. The two most obvious instances of this interest are Joyce's establishment of the first cinema in Dublin and the late-twenties magazine *Close-Up*, but the examples multiply. Indeed, Trotter's own book makes a substantial contribution to this scholarship with its focus on early letters of Eliot, which show how thoroughly Eliot had mastered the grammar of early narrative cinema.

Much of this recent scholarship, however, has wanted to stress the relations between cinema and literature as one of technique and above all the technique of montage as it was understood in the light of the great

Russian film-makers of the 1920s. Trotter wants to object to this on two grounds. First, this comparison is often woefully ahistorical. Both *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* (favoured candidates for this comparison) are published long before this Russian cinema has been shown in the West. More significantly, this ahistorical emphasis on technique obscures something much more important, which is a shared concern of modernist writing and early mainstream cinema with the implications of a world in which representation without an intervening consciousness is possible.

It was, of course, Bazin, in his essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', who stressed this feature of the camera, and Trotter's book is the product of a deep engagement with the French thinker. Indeed, Trotter's main thesis elaborates an aside of Bazin, which characterised the relations between twentieth-century literature and cinema not as direct influence or borrowing but as a 'certain aesthetic convergence'.¹ It is this convergence that Trotter is concerned to delineate, and he locates it firmly in the cinema's double impersonality – its automatic reproduction of a reality that it cannot intervene to change and its indifference to the audience before which it is projected.

This indifferent automatism had become an aesthetic concern before the Lumière brothers developed the 'last machine'; one can find it in writings as different as symbolist poetry or the Naturalist novel. Trotter's genius is to trace from a series of brilliant local readings and histories – a letter of Eliot, an essay of Woolf's, accounts of the first cinema projections in Dublin – a general account of Joyce's Dublin, Eliot's waste land and Woolf's Mrs Ramsay which demonstrates beyond question the convergence that links modernist masterpiece to mainstream cinema.

Trotter, however, is concerned with a much more comprehensive recasting of the cultural history of modernism than a simple demonstration of the centrality of the cinema to three great modernist classics. His ambition is to demonstrate that the convergence is exactly that; a matter not simply of literature deepening its investigation of impersonality through a meditation on the camera and the screen but also of the cinema itself addressing these fundamentally modernist questions.

If Trotter's book constitutes a magisterial correction of the last two decades of literary scholarship on modernism, it also acts as a kind of critical culmination of the past two decades of early cinema history, the great scholarly achievement of modern film studies. This book is unthinkable without the work of Tom Gunning and Charles Musser, Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, but it uses that work, which has given us so much better an understanding of the specific history of the cinema, to place Griffith and Chaplin at the centre of the most general debates about modernism.

Trotter's book is nowhere more salutary than in its insistence that modernism has always been concerned with the real, that modernism's interruption of conventional forms of representation is at the service of

more urgent realities. Auerbach at the end of his discussion of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* puts it best: 'What takes place here in Virginia Woolf's novel is precisely what was attempted everywhere in works of this kind (although not everywhere with the same insight and mastery) – that is to put the emphasis on the random occurrence, to exploit it not in the service of a planned continuity of action but in itself. And in the process something new and elemental appeared: nothing less than the wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment to which we surrender ourselves without prejudice'.²

What Trotter does is to show us, at the centre of the two greatest exponents of American silent cinema, Griffith and Chaplin, this very same reality and depth of life, this surrendering without prejudice. Modernism is not here to be opposed to mass culture but is to be found at its centre. It has been fashionable in recent years to dismiss modernism as 'elitist'. Trotter's book makes clear the ignorance on which such facile populism rests. The modernist emphasis on the random occurrence is – and this is as clear in Griffith and Chaplin as it is in Woolf, Eliot and Joyce – part of a fundamental democratisation of life, the bringing into focus of what Auerbach called 'the elementary things which men in general have in common'.

The delights of this book are many. It provides an expert guide through the bibliographies of both recent literary criticism of modernism and recent historical work on silent American cinema. It offers a re-engagement with the classic texts of film theory, most notably Bazin and Heath. It offers delightfully close readings of both film and literature, text and context. Above all it makes clear why modernism, which provided the founding literary texts for the establishment of English as a university discipline, cannot be understood without reference to the early cinema and, furthermore, why that cinema cannot be fully appreciated without reference to literary modernism.

COLIN MACCABE
September 2006

Notes

- 1 André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 63.
- 2 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 552.

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Introduction

'The short story', Elizabeth Bowen declared in 1944, 'is a young art: as we now know it, it is the child of this century.' Since 1900, the young art had been taken up assiduously, and often to superb effect, by most if not all of the British and American writers whom we would now characterise as modernist. It had, in Bowen's view, a visual counterpart, or rival. 'The cinema,' she went on,

itself busy with a technique, is of the same generation: in the last thirty years the two arts have been accelerating together. They have affinities – neither is sponsored by a tradition; both are, accordingly, free; both, still, are self-conscious, show a self-imposed discipline and regard for form; both have, to work on, immense matter – the disorientated romanticism of the age.¹

The short story as a literary form will only feature intermittently in this book. But the argument I aim to advance is based on the premise Bowen floats: that there were significant affinities between early cinema and literary modernism. Bowen's categories of affinity are perhaps too lightly sketched to sustain extensive analysis of the relation between literature and cinema during the modernist period. Even so, they point us in the right direction. During those years, literature and cinema were indeed, in her adroit phrase, busy with a technique; and they did self-consciously seek out new forms, at once fragmentary and encyclopaedic, to fit the immense matter of modern life. Bowen herself will reappear in the argument as the author of one of the finest short stories ever written about movie-going.

Modernist writing in English constitutes a capacious and by no means stable historical and theoretical category encompassing a wide variety of engagements with the idea of the new in texts published (for the most part) during the first half of the twentieth century.² Cinema has been proposed with increasing frequency as an illustrative or explanatory context for some or all of those engagements.³ The great majority of the enquiries into literary modernism's relation to cinema undertaken during the past thirty years have been committed implicitly or explicitly to argument by analogy. The literary text, this argument goes, is *structured like a film*, in whole or in part: it has its 'close-ups', its 'tracks' and 'pans', its 'cuts' from one 'shot' to another. Writers and film-makers were engaged, it would seem, in some kind of exchange of transferable narrative techniques. The transferable narrative technique which has featured most consistently in debates about

modernist writing in English is montage. Michael Wood, indeed, proposes that the 'principle of montage', together with the 'construction of imaginary space through the direction of the gaze', was 'quintessentially modernist'.⁴ It is a principle active, according to an already voluminous scholarship, throughout the work of James Joyce. *The Waste Land* has recently been described as the 'modern montage poem par excellence'.⁵

There has always been an advantage in thinking of the modernist literary text as though it were a film structured by the principle of montage, if montage is understood in its basic sense as the juxtaposition of two or more images. Moments in that text do seem to invite, indeed almost to require, analysis in terms of the 'construction of imaginary space' either through montage or through camera-movement (pan, track, tilt).⁶ These are affinities I intend fully to acknowledge. However, I do also believe that recent criticism has been at once too loose, in its attribution to the modernist literary text of just about any cinematic technique going (including some which were not going at all when the work in question was written); and too tight, in its insistence on one particular kind of montage as that text's primary method. There are historical and theoretical reasons for scepticism on both counts.⁷

Louis MacNeice remembered encountering the poems of T. S. Eliot for the first time in 1926, when he was in his final year in school: 'we had seen reviews proclaiming him a modern of the moderns and we too wanted to be "modern".' To someone his age, MacNeice recalled, *The Waste Land*'s literary allusions and 'anthropological symbolism' meant nothing. What did help was a ticket to see the movies. 'The cinema technique of quick cutting, of surprise juxtapositions, of spotting the everyday detail and making it significant, this would naturally intrigue the novelty-mad adolescent and should, like even the most experimental films, soon become easy to grasp.'⁸ That might have been, and yet be, entirely true; and still not tell us anything at all about how the poem came to be written as it was written. For experimental cinema did not arrive in Britain until the founding of the London Film Society in 1925 (a development whose consequences I explore at length in chapter 6). The view the novelty-mad adolescent reading *The Waste Land* in 1926 would have taken of its 'cinematic techniques' already differed significantly from the view the author took (if he took a view) in devising them. In chapter 5, I show that Eliot was familiar with montage practice as developed in mainstream cinema during the period immediately before and during the First World War. But that is in itself no reason to read *The Waste Land* as though it were an experimental film (indeed, it's a reason not to).

There is a history, in short, to literature's affinities with cinema. I shall argue throughout this book that such affinities should only be established – and put to use in literary criticism – on the basis of what a writer might conceivably have known about cinema as it was at the time of writing. Historically, the term 'montage' acquired in a short period of time a range of

not always entirely compatible meanings.⁹ For the most part, it came to be understood as referring either to the combination of two shots in such a way as to generate an effect or meaning not discernible in either shot alone, or to the sort of conceptual or rhythmical cutting associated in particular with Sergei Eisenstein. P. Adams Sitney identifies reverse angle cutting as the 'montage formula' which by the end of the First World War had become the basis of narrative continuity in cinema. Modernist montage arose out of the reinvigoration of this formula through 'playful hyperbole' and other means in films made from the mid-1920s onwards.¹⁰ Michael North's meticulous survey of small magazines has made it clear that the intellectual prestige of the movies, and thus of montage as transferable narrative technique, peaked during the late 1920s, when Eugene Jolas's *transition* found room for various experiments in 'logocinema'.¹¹ Whatever its virtues, no account of modernist montage along these lines can tell us how and why works of literature conceived during the previous decade, works such as *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, came to be written as they were written.

Where literature and film are concerned, argument by analogy fails not only on historical but also on theoretical grounds. Literature is a representational medium, film a recording medium. The freedom modernist literature sought was freedom from the ways in which the world had hitherto been represented in literature. The freedom film sought (initially, at any rate, if not for very long) was freedom from representation: the freedom merely to record. For the recording arts constituted, as James Monaco has put it, 'an entirely new mode of discourse, parallel to those already in existence'. The new mode of discourse eventually made it possible to record, on film, tape, or disc, any event whatsoever that could be seen or heard. From the beginning, Monaco adds, film and photography were neutral; the media existed before the arts. The art of film thus developed by a process of replication. 'The neutral template of film was laid over the complex systems of the novel, painting, drama, and music to reveal new truths about certain elements of those arts.'¹² Film as medium before film as art: that fact, or the awareness of that fact, made all the difference, from literature; and continues to make all the difficulty, for arguments by analogy. 'For the first time,' André Bazin was to observe of the photographic image, 'between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent.'¹³ The relation between cinema and literature can best be understood as a shared preoccupation with the capacities and incapacities of that which distinguishes one from the other: the instrumentality of a nonliving agent.

I propose here to substitute for the model of an exchange of transferable techniques the model of parallelism. In my view, the literature of the period and the cinema of the period can best be understood as constituting and constituted by parallel histories.¹⁴ Some early film-makers shared with some writers of the period a conviction both that the instrumentality of the new recording media had made it possible for the first time to represent (as

well as to record) *existence as such*; and that the superabundant generative power of this instrumentality (the ever-imminent autonomy of the forms and techniques it gave rise to) put in doubt the very idea of existence as such. The conviction's ground was technological fact: film as medium before film as art. When modernist writers thought of cinema, they thought of an image of the world made automatically: an image which, due to the original and durable excess in it of record over representation, contains either more or less of the world than would the image which would occur under comparable circumstances to a human observer. Film, Marianne Moore pointed out in 1933, 'like the lie detector of the criminal court, reveals agitation which the eye fails to see'.¹⁵ In his essay on 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), Walter Benjamin drew an influential distinction between the 'pictures' obtained by painter and cameraman: the painter's is 'total', whereas the cameraman's consists of 'fragments' assembled under a new 'law'. For Benjamin, the camera was a surgeon's scalpel which laid bare the 'optical unconscious'.¹⁶ By obstinately seeing as the human eye does not see, film became a meta-technology: a medium whose constant subject matter was the limits of the human.

'Any effective account of modern culture', Jonathan Crary has maintained, 'must confront the ways in which modernism, rather than being a reaction against or transcendence of the processes of scientific and economic rationalization, is inseparable from them'.¹⁷ Modernism has generally been understood, in recent scholarship, as a peculiar openness to modernity at its most enabling (sometimes a fearsome prospect).¹⁸ Hugh Kenner argues that the affinity Eliot and many of his contemporaries felt with technological change had profound consequences for their writing. 'If Eliot is much else,' Kenner notes, 'he is undeniably his time's chief poet of the alarm clock, the furnished flat, the ubiquitous telephone, commuting crowds, the electric underground railway'. There is even a hint at cinema. For the 'hooded hordes' which swarm over endless plains, in the final section of *The Waste Land*, stumbling in the cracked earth, 'may', Kenner adds, 'have been literal impressions of World War I newsreels'.¹⁹

Garrett Stewart has recently offered an admirably challenging description of modernist literature's affinity with cinema which promises to move the whole debate decisively beyond argument by analogy, in the direction of the idea of parallel histories. During the course of a wide-ranging enquiry into the 'material transformations' of photography into cinema, Stewart brings a reading of literary experiment to bear on a reading of film in order to clarify the 'special kind of newness' accruing to photographic imprint when it enters into the 'motorized disappearance', frame after frame, which constitutes cinematic process. His emphasis is on the 'shared modernist strain, in every sense, of literary and filmic textuality': on the 'photogrammatic track' as the 'underlying stuff of the apparition'; and on writing as *écriture*, as text in production. The 'filmic', Stewart proposes, stands to the 'cinematic' as *écriture* to 'classic narrative'; one is modernist,

the other merely modern.²⁰ Stewart's insistence on textuality has in effect reanimated the poststructuralist readings of Eliot, Pound, Joyce and others prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s. To think in terms of photographic imprint or 'photogrammatic' track is to think once again in terms of what Maud Ellmann has called a 'poetics of impersonality'.²¹

We might say, then, that modernism's axiom or formula was literature as (recording) medium *before* literature as (representational) art: an axiom or formula sprung, at that particular 'moment' in history, by the sudden pre-eminence of a medium which was from the outset, and remained at least for the ten years or so after its invention in 1895, a medium rather than an art. Film did not easily relinquish its neutrality. To begin with, the uses to which the medium was put ranged from scientific enquiry through education and reportage to light entertainment. The Lumière camera-projector was in itself all of these things: a prototype, an exhibit, and a stunt. Only from 1903, at the very earliest, did film become primarily a narrative art. The production of fictional films outstripped the production of factual films for the first time in 1907.²² I shall argue that what fascinated modernist writers about cinema was the original, and perhaps in some measure reproducible, neutrality of film as a medium. Texts by Eliot, Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, and Virginia Woolf look back, in their affinity with cinema, to that original neutrality of film as a medium, rather than forward to montage as the apotheosis of cinematic narrative art. Dorothy Richardson, in an essay published in January 1929 in *Close Up*, the first British journal of film theory, spoke of the 'innocence' of the first movies.

They were not concerned, or at any rate not very deeply concerned, either with idea or with characterisation. Like the snap-shot, they recorded. And when plot, intensive, came to be combined with characterisation, with just so much characterisation as might by good chance be supplied by minor characters supporting the tailor's and modiste's dummies filling the chief roles, still the records were there, the snap-shot records that are always and everywhere food for a discriminating and an indiscriminating humanity alike.²³

Richardson's evocation of the 'snap-shot record' – of the image not yet bound up with and into narrative – eloquently expresses the motive for modernism's investment in cinema. Even in 1933, long after the transition to sound, and thus to enhanced narrative plausibility, Marianne Moore still held, as we have seen, to the medium's potential as a mode of scientific enquiry. To what extent, then, did these writers succeed in disintegrating their own literary art back into (the fantasised trace of) text's original neutrality as a medium? And how?

In defining modernist textuality, Stewart draws productively on Fredric Jameson's analysis of a passage in E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910). The novel's opening chapter consists of three letters from Helen Schlegel to her sister Margaret, describing her visit to the Wilcox family at Howards End,

and the sudden strong attraction she feels towards the younger son, Paul. Chapter 2 ends with the arrival of a telegram from Helen announcing the end of the affair. The telegram, however, has arrived too late. For their aunt, the formidable Mrs Munt, is already in a train on the way down to Howards End. Chapter 3 finds Mrs Munt installed at one and the same time in a comfortable seat (facing the engine, but not too near it) and, Jameson explains, a 'cinematographic kind of space'. Gazing out of the window, she gazes into a framed scene; or frames the scene by her gaze. What is significant about this moment, Jameson adds,

is not some possible influence of nascent cinema on Forster or on the modernist novel in general, but rather the confluence of the two distinct formal developments, of movie technology on the one hand, and of a certain type of modernist or protomodernist language on the other, both of which seem to offer some space, some third term between the subject and the object.²⁴

For Jameson, Stewart observes, that third term is in effect the (literary/photographic) apparatus, the 'disembodiment of perception by technique'. 'Modernist writing is neither predominantly impressionist nor expressive (since both imply the intervening subjectivity of an author) but in some new way strictly technical, a prosthesis of observation in the mode of inscription.' What Stewart discerns in *Howards End*, and then in an enhanced form in *Heart of Darkness* and *Finnegans Wake*, is 'an automatism of language beneath the intentionalities of inscription'. There was, he claims, a 'cultural commonality' between 'automated image projection' and 'the depersonalized verbal techniques of a modernist stylistic "apparatus"'.²⁵

Stewart's broad 'textualist theory' of the 'adjacent inscriptive media of film and literature' strikes me as consistently illuminating. Since the argument turns on 'confluence' alone, rather than a conjuncture more often asserted than proven, he is able, as the proponents of montage as transferable narrative technique are not, to read each medium closely, and often to brilliant effect, in terms appropriate to its specific 'textuality'. The very broadness of the theory, however, can create problems.

In the first place, Stewart's programmatic lack of interest in the author (or Author, or author-function) damagingly flattens out his analysis of the literature of the period. In Forster and Joseph Conrad, Stewart argues, as in Joyce, the 'mechanisms of linguistic articulation' have been 'brought forward' as the 'suppressed material basis (phonemic even when not phonic or oral) of all lexical processing'.²⁶ But brought forward *how*, and to what effect? By whom? And why, at this moment in history? Forster, in particular, seems an odd choice as the vehicle or screen for a display of the 'mechanisms of linguistic articulation'. He surely owes his inclusion less to anything he might himself actually have said or done than to Jameson's

need to fill the proto-modernist slot in an abstract scheme of the evolution of literary practice during the first years of the century.

'The train sped northward,' Forster wrote of Mrs Munt's journey, 'under innumerable tunnels.'²⁷ Stewart discerns in this sentence a 'writing beneath the written' which offers 'the near equivalent in prose for the filmic beneath the cinematic'. Trains, he notes, ordinarily pass through rather than under tunnels. Forster, perhaps, was aiming at assonance; that is, at literary *style*. He could, however, have squeezed out a little more assonance still if he had substituted 'numberless' for 'innumerable'. Stewart's conclusion is that he was not, in fact, after style. He had put the 1890s behind him. What happens instead, in this sentence, is something altogether more modern. The unexpected 'under' ruffles narrative transparency just enough for writing to emerge for an instant from beneath the written. What 'innumerable' does, in conjunction with 'tunnels', as 'numberless' would not have done, is to bring forward into view the modernist apparatus of depersonalised technique. For each word incorporates a 'pictogram' – 'nn' and then again 'nn' – of side-by-side tunnels.²⁸ Forget the *fin-de-siècle*. This could be a line in a poem by Ezra Pound. There, at the centre of Jameson's 'cinematographic kind of space', exactly where it ought to be, Stewart has spotted an irruption of textuality.

Forster, of course, did not conceive of himself as an Imagist *manqué*. *Howards End* was a (mildly) polemical fiction designed, as its nineteenth-century precursors had been before it, to alert a middle-class readership to the extent of the damage done to the body politic by the increasingly bitter antagonism between two separate 'nations': 'England', founded on 'local life' and 'personal intercourse'; and 'Suburbia', glossy product of the 'superficial comfort exacted by businessmen'.²⁹ Arnold Bennett thought that the book had been a success because it had got itself 'talked about' by the 'right people'.³⁰ The function of the paragraph describing Mrs Munt's journey was to give the right people something to talk about. Mrs Munt herself could not be considered up to the task. Engrossed in her mission, she has, we are told, neither the will nor the ability to grasp the social and political significance of the world she gazes out at through the carriage window. 'To history, to tragedy, to the past, to the future, Mrs Munt remained equally indifferent.'³¹ Forster, however, has already demonstrated his superiority to her by discovering in the terrain through (or 'under') which she is conveyed a figure for her state of mind. The assonance created by the unexpected 'under' throws enough emphasis on to those 'tunnels' for them to remain in our minds until the paragraph's unfolding enables us to convert descriptive detail into metaphor. Mrs Munt, engrossed in her task, suffers, of course, from tunnel-vision. In this novel, the author alone, and then with great deliberation, rises above engrossment, above partiality. He does so again, once Mrs Munt has arrived at her destination, by distinguishing in an absolute manner between England and Suburbia. The paragraph, in short, constitutes a traditional exercise in the use of literary

style (assonance) for rhetorical purposes (to establish the authority of the narrative voice). Any irruption of the modernist apparatus within it is insignificant.

A comparable doubt must attend Jameson's discovery in Forster's description of Mrs Munt's train journey of a 'cinematographic kind of space'. We surely cannot establish what it might have meant to propose such a 'space', in a novel published in 1910, without some reference, however tentative, to the spaces proposed in films its author could actually have seen. Such enquiries have been hindered by gaps in the historical record: lack of information about the nature and extent of a writer's interest in cinema. They have also been hindered in theory, or by theory. There has been a systematic failure, in discussions of early cinema and literary modernism, to take proper account either of films made before the First World War, or of films made after it for a mass audience.³² The second objection to Stewart's theory is that it applies only to films based on the deliberate (self-conscious) 'multiplication of shots through editing': French and Russian experimental cinema of the 1920s, and the 'modernist valedictions' of the 1960s and 1970s.³³ The theory is, in this respect, representative. I know of no study of early cinema and literary modernism which does not restrict itself to the avant-garde.

Stewart does acknowledge the historical significance, as something 1920s modernism sought to 'retrieve' from its own rapid 'normalisation', of what Tom Gunning has termed a 'cinema of attractions'. Gunning proposes that the films made during the cinema's first ten years or so, whether in the documentary mode associated with Lumière, or in the narrative mode associated with Georges Méliès, should be understood as presentations compatible with – and indeed to some extent derived from – popular entertainments such as variety theatre and the magic-lantern show.³⁴ What counts, in them, is not that absorption of the spectator into diegesis undertaken by classical Hollywood cinema: cinema as voyeurism, or unacknowledged scopophilia, in Christian Metz's terms.³⁵ What counts, instead, is exhibitionism: the display of views or accomplishments to an audience authorised, in turn, to exhibit itself.

These very early films require consideration in their own right – rather than as something lost, and then retrieved – for two reasons. The first is that, as I have already indicated, the writers who should interest us most gave them plenty of consideration, and not just for nostalgia's sake. The second is that film's neutrality as a medium was not erased by, or in, its constitution as a narrative art. To the contrary, the narrative films which became the industry's staple product from 1907 onwards artfully reintroduce or re-enact the medium's founding neutrality as and when they can. The writers who will most concern me here were a great deal more interested in cinema, as Stewart defines it, than they were in film. We need to take full account of the gradual and uneven development of a cinema of attractions into a cinema designed above all to tell stories. I shall