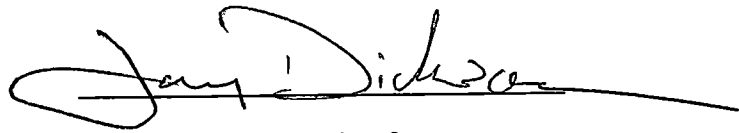


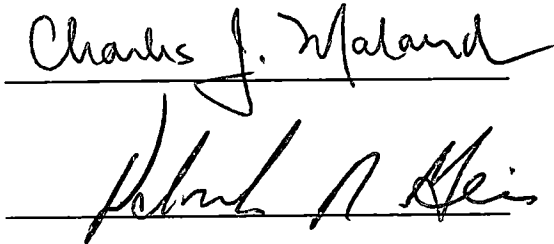
To the Graduate Council

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Stephanie Kaye Brinson entitled "The New Waves: The Influence of Avant-garde Film of the 1920s and 1930s on Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*" I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Dickson", written over a horizontal line.

Jay Dickson, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance.

Two handwritten signatures in black ink, one above the other, each written over a horizontal line. The top signature appears to read "Charles J. Maland" and the bottom signature appears to read "Robert A. Klein".

Accepted for the Council:

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Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

THE NEW WAVES THE INFLUENCE OF AVANT-GARDE FILM OF THE 1920s
AND 1930s ON VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *THE WAVES*

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
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Stephanie Kaye Brinson
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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore the influence of the experimental avant-garde cinema on the Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves*. As evident from her diaries before the publication of *The Waves* in 1931, Woolf found herself increasingly frustrated with the medium of language and novel forms already exhausted in the nineteenth century. In addition, Woolf felt pressure to protect her art from, the novel, from the encroaching film industry, which she believed had the power to usurp the literary audiences she enjoyed before the advent of film. In her 1926 article "The Cinema," she contends that films only create lazy audiences who will inevitably lose appreciation for "true" art.

However, her rhetoric in "The Cinema" also demonstrates that she also believed that films had access to extraordinary techniques that were not properly realized in contemporary popular cinema. Woolf's clear understanding of cinematic techniques in the article as well as her connection to the contemporary avant-garde film movement in France and Russia led her to incorporate cinematic techniques into her most experimental novel, *The Waves*.

Yet, Woolf does not merely surrender to the cinema and declare it the superior art form in *The Waves*. Instead, she surreptitiously reappropriates the techniques of avant-garde film into her novel and creates a new language that concomitantly combines linguistic and cinematic art forms.

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INTRODUCTION

For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.

—*A Room of One's Own*

The purpose of this thesis is to explain that Virginia Woolf's narrative strategies in her 1931 novel *The Waves* are not merely experimental, but are, more precisely, cinematic in technique. With her increasing frustration with the medium of language and her fear that the burgeoning popular cinema industry would soon take over the novel as an important art form, Woolf searched for a new way to communicate in her writing. While popular cinema did not appeal to Woolf as evident in her 1926 article "The Cinema," she does simultaneously acknowledge that creative power of cinematography. However, she would find that the techniques she sought to develop in her novels were surfacing in the contemporary avant-garde film movement growing in France and Russia. Woolf's knowledge the movement in France and Russia led her to usurp the experimental techniques developed by avant-garde filmmakers and use them in her masterpiece and most experimental novel, *The Waves*. By doing so, Woolf establishes a new art form that combines the cinematic with the linguistic without compromising the integrity of the differences of either art form. Furthermore, as she explains in *A Room of One's Own*, masterpieces do not have singular births that have no other influences from the past, and reading them as solitary works does little to explain the real significance of the author's meaning. For too long, Woolf scholarship has ignored the influence of the avant-garde cinema on *The Waves*, and, as a result, has compromised not only its aesthetic meaning, but also its accomplishment as a progenitor of the cinematic novel.

Diaries spanning 1925-1930 confirm that Virginia Woolf was on the verge of something phenomenal in her writing. Her frustrations with language would culminate in an explosion of experimentation in her 1931 novel *The Waves*. Her diaries, moreover, show her interest in making the visual linguistic. It is my argument that *The Waves* gleans techniques from the burgeoning avant-garde film circle of the 1920s and 30s. The diaries also give glimpses into her personal perception of seeing the world. We witness her struggle as an artist to translate her vision into words. Often, she admits frustration with her art form; for example, two early entries in 1928 depict what must have been an exhausting struggle for her:

Saturday 11 February

I am so cold I can hardly hold the pen. The futility of it all--so I broke off, . . . I know the feeling now, when I can't spin a sentence, & sit mumbling & turning; & nothing flits by my brain which is as a blank window. . . My pen protests. This writing is nonsense, it says. . . (174-75)

Wednesday 20 June

So sick of Orlando I can write nothing. I have corrected the proofs in a week, & cannot spin another phrase. I detest my own volubility. Why be always spouting words? . . . All seems insipid & worthless. (*Diaries*, [3], 186)

Of course, frustration with language is not unusual for artistically successful authors. However, this time for Woolf seems pivotal because she is on the threshold of writing *The Waves*. Her expression of a frustration with language suggests that she would reach

into other art forms to continue to push her own writing against the margins of conventional literature. In fact, in April of 1928, she states in her diary entry that "[a]t 46 I am not callous; suffer considerably; make good resolutions—still feel as experimental & on the verge of getting at the truth as ever" (180).

If Woolf was, indeed, feeling frustrated with writing and the linguistic tools that language offered, then an experimental "resolution" of hers may have been to attempt to be more visual with her writing. However, this resolution again brings another problem of putting the visual into the aural and the linguistic. Her 1928 diary entries show an initial attempt to wade through this linguistic-visual conundrum:

[W]hy did my eye catch the trees? The look of things has a great power over me. Even now, I have to watch the rocks beating up against the wind, which is high. & still I say to myself instinctively 'Whats the phrase for that?' & try to make more & more vivid the roughness of the air current & the tremor of the rocks wing [deep breasting it] slicing—as if the air were full of ridges & ripples & roughnesses, they rise & sink, up & down, as if the exercise [pleased them] rubbed & braced them like swimmers in rough water. But what a little I can get down with my pen of what is so vivid to my eyes, & not only to my eyes: also some nervous fiber or fan like membrane in my spine (190-91)

A filmmaker could, in effect, easily show the effects of wind within one frame of film; however, Woolf even wants to push the limits of visibility with words. Much like the musings of Bernard in *The Waves*—indeed, the phrasing is almost exactly similar—this diary entry of Woolf's contemplates categorizing what the eyes see with her pen. In the

diary passage, Woolf explores making images out of invisible phenomena like wind through words. Interestingly as well, she posits that the visual touches some rarely disturbed “nervous fiber or fan like membrane in [her] spine.” However, she admits that there is a connection between eye and some level of knowing which her pen—at the moment—cannot reach. Again on August 31, 1928, her diary reads, “The clouds—if I could describe them I would” (192). The fact that she later in November of 1928 calls *The Moths* “an abstract mystical eyeless book” (203) certainly does not dismiss her attempt to create the cinematic novel with *The Waves*. Woolf does not use the term “eye” in the traditional sense of visual. Instead, she means that the novel that would become *The Waves* would visualize in a new way, which is precisely the goal of not only avant-garde filmmakers, but also Modernist authors.

Moreover, when Woolf discusses this “next book,” which would be *The Waves*, she often frames it within a discussion of abstract thoughts. Similar to the structure of the actual novel, a narrative interrupted by abstract montages, Woolf’s method of writing in her diaries at this time ebbs between the abstract and concrete as in the following passage while she actually discusses making the abstract concrete (making written words visible): “I ask myself sometimes whether one is not hypnotised, as a child by a silver globe, by life; & whether this is living. Its very quick, bright, exciting. . . I should like to take the globe in my hands & feel it quietly, round, smooth, heavy & so hold it, day after day” (209). Contemplating the desire to take the abstract of life as “quick, bright, exciting” and place it into a “round, smooth, heavy” globe in her hands takes Woolf immediately into a discussion of *The Waves* and her desire to make this next book. In addition, from her papers that make up the body of “A Sketch of the Past” and other essays in *Moments of*

Being, we find that Woolf's philosophy centers on visual abstractions of her past

The papers, which later culminated in *Moments of Being*, were originally delivered between 1920 and 1936 to the Memoir Club. In her Introduction to *Moments of Being*, Jeanne Schulkind describes the club as "a group of close friends of long standing who gathered at intervals to read memoirs in which they were committed to complete candour" (64). Provided that Woolf's persona in these papers is as genuine as her persona in her diaries Schulkind suggests, they provide great insight into why Woolf might be influenced by avant-garde film and to what ends she believed that it would benefit her own writing. Particularly in "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf explains that the deepest part of her own psyche rests in a visual and aural memory of an experience in her childhood nursery:

If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach, and then breaking one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. . . . But of course there was one external reason for the intensity of this first impression: the impression of the waves and the acorn on the blind; the feeling, as I described it sometimes to myself, of lying in a grape and seeing through a film of

semi-transparent yellow—(65)

Several aspects in this passage draw attention to themselves when thinking about *The Waves* and avant-garde cinema. The choice in diction nods to the cinematic art when she compresses the experience into one statement: “I described it sometimes to myself, of lying in a grape and seeing through a *film* of semi-transparent yellow.” Most importantly, however, Woolf openly claims that the visual and the aural, the quintessential elements of cinematic art, are what she bases her life’s philosophy upon. Moreover, the experience is clearly the basis for the episode in *The Waves* which begins with this exact scene:

The sun sharpened the walls of the house, and rested like the tip of a fan upon a white blind and made a blue fingerprint of shadow under the leaf by the bedroom window The blind stirred slightly, but all within was dim and unsubstantial . . .

‘Look at the spider’s web on the corner of the balcony,’ said Bernard. ‘It has beads of water on it, drops of white light ’

‘The leaves are gathered round the window like pointed ears,’ said Susan

‘A shadow falls on the path,’ said Louis, ‘like an elbow bent ’

‘Islands of light are swimming on the grass,’ said Rhoda .

‘The birds’ eyes are bright in the tunnels between the leaves,’ said Neville.

‘The stalks are covered with harsh, short hairs,’ said Jinny, ‘and drops of water have stuck to them.’ (8-9)

Looking at both this passage from the beginning scene in *The Waves* and the previous passage from “A Sketch of the Past” suggests that Woolf, indeed, meant *The Waves* to “stand” upon the visual and the aural—i.e the cinematic. In addition, the “Sketch”

passage also gives insight to why Woolf would ever consider the cinematic (visual/aural) worthy of incorporation into her narratives. Certainly, Woolf wants to get as close as possible to real human experience, inner being, and “feeling,” and in the passage, she maintains that this memory upon which she bases everything in her life produces this extraordinary feeling, “of feeling the purest ecstasy [she] can conceive.”

Furthermore, Woolf goes on to speculate about the importance of art capturing true human experience in “A Sketch of a Past.” She does not merely praise the ability of language in these speculations, but she contemplates what the visual and aural have to offer language in the quest. Indeed, she posits that her first impressions in the nursery, which ground her life, are best represented through “sound and sight”. “Everything would be large and dim; and what was seen would at the same time be heard, sounds would come through this petal or leaf—sounds indistinguishable from sights. Sound and sight seem to make equal parts of the first impression”¹ (66). Surprisingly, Woolf, it seems, does not consider language to be the most fluid medium of her life, but sound and sight.

However, later she indicates that there may, indeed, be some new invention to which can fully represent the most core “being” of humanity:

Now if this is so, is it not possible—I often wonder—that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them? I see it—the past—as an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes, emotions. There at the

¹ Interestingly, one of the most pivotal cinema journals now in circulation is *Sight and Sound*

end of the avenue still, are the garden and the nursery. Instead of remembering here a scene and there a sound, I shall fit a plug into the wall; and listen in to the past. I shall turn up August 1890. I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace, and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it, so that we shall be able to live our lives through from the start. (67)

Rarely does Woolf so clearly point to the cinema as a venue of the unexplored yet real human feelings of “great intensity” as she does in this passage. It conjures an image of an invented mechanical device plugged into a wall and displaying ribbons of scenes for viewing. Certainly this *must* be a movie projector; however, it is equally certain that Woolf would not abandon literature for an art becoming so popular among common, non-literary circles. Yet, Woolf’s own “device” is born as a new language in *The Waves*. By conflating the techniques of avant-garde cinema and language, she masters a new literary convention, the cinematic novel, which “taps” deeper into the inner “being” of characters and exposes the intense feelings unavailable to the worn narrative strategies of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER I

PLACING WOOLF WITHIN AVANT-GARDE CINEMA

Throw away the lights, the definitions,
 And say of what you see in the dark
 —Wallace Stevens, "The Man with the Blue Guitar"

The method used in constructing an argument about Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves* in this thesis will be modernistic in approach. By "modernist in approach," I mean 1) synchronic, 2) reconciling contradictions, and 3) international. In "The Name and Nature of Modernism," Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane argue that at the heart of modernism is a synchronic (rather than diachronic) vision. Regarding the nature of modernism, Bradbury and McFarlane state that "[O]ne feature . . . is that they tend to see history or human life not as a sequence, or history not an evolving logic; art and the urgent now strike obliquely across" (50). That is, if one visualizes a history and human life progressing in a linear fashion, art and all that is important at a specific moment intersects and cuts across the line at singular points and creates momentary yet dynamic layered cross-sections. Bradbury and McFarlane further explain:

Modernist works . . . tend to work spatially or through layers of consciousness, working towards a logic of metaphor or form . . . to impose that synchronicity which is one of the staples of Modernist style. . . . Modernism thus tends to have to do with the intersection of an apocalyptic and modern time . . . (50)

And a model for approaching Woolf's novel surfaces with this spatial concept of modernism. Moreover, the spatial concept of a cross-section allows for multidisciplinary approaches to the novel, which will further be considered.

A specific cross-section of the modernist period can show a wide variety of possible intersections. For my purposes, I will look at the intersection of international modernism, avant-garde film, and Virginia Woolf's narrative strategy in *The Waves* (1931). The world Virginia Woolf circulated in was not only couched in modernist movements in other countries but also her surrounding intimate Bloomsbury group. However, modernism does not merely have one venue of expression in literature; instead, it manifests itself in all art forms and even creates new art forms like cinema through its manifestations. What I will look at in this study is the specific cross-section of Virginia Woolf's narrative strategy in *The Waves* with the surrounding aesthetic motivations and goals of emerging avant-garde film techniques within the even larger international aesthetic movement of modernism. In fact, cinema is not merely a new art form, but a conglomerate of older arts—language, theatre, painting, and later, music and the aural. One might envision the emerging art of cinema as a cross-section itself—a cross section of the preceding arts. Moreover, the act of combining seemingly oppositional forms of expression within the space of cinematic form is itself a modernist characteristic.

Indeed, modernism couples oppositional elements or forces so that the two exist within the same space and without canceling one or the other out. In "The Mind of Modernism," James McFarlane posits that "[w]hat is distinctive—and difficult—about the modernist mode is that it seems to demand the reconciliation of two distinct ways of reconciling contradictions, ways which in themselves are also contrary" (87). McFarlane further explains these two different ways of reconciling contradictions:

On the one hand, it recognizes the validity of a largely rational mechanistic, Hegelian synthesis, a higher *unity* which preserves the

essence of the two conflicting elements whilst at the same time destroying them as *separate* entities . But at the same time, the Modernist mind also seems to want to . . . approve instead his [Kierkegaard's] concept of 'either/or' in place of the Hegelian 'both/and.' 'Either/or,' Kierkegaard claimed, should not be considered as disjunctive conjunctions; rather they belong so inseparably together that they ought really to be written as one word. Their unique function is to bring life's contraries into the most intimate relationship with each other, whilst at the same time preserving the *validity of the contradiction* between them Dauntingly, then the Modernist formula becomes 'both/and and/or either/or.' (emphasis mine, 87-88)

The emphasized words highlight the modernist agenda of unifying opposites yet validating their contradictions that make them separate. Moreover, the confusing formula of "both/and and/or either/or" can actually reconcile contradicting features of Woolf's aesthetics and narrative strategies in her fiction—specifically, *The Waves* For why would a novelist so committed to guarding the novel as one of the highest forms of art genuflect to a low-brow, popular art such as the cinema? One might say that reconciling Woolf's disregard for the cinema and her narrative strategies which seem to embrace cinematic qualities is, in fact, the very nature of modernism. In fact, Don Macpherson, editor of *Traditions of Independence British Cinema in the Thirties*, claims in his chapter about avant-garde cinema that

[t]he different historical phases of the European avant-gardes met in Britain either with outright repression (e.g. Oscar Wilde) or with a gradual

absorption into an already established natural culture (e.g. the Bloomsbury tradition). (165)

Macpherson, in effect, articulates much of what I will explore in *The Waves*. While the avant-garde film movement was most prolific in other countries like France and Russia from the 1910s to the 1930s, Woolf seems to have slowly “absorbed” a cinematic narrative structure within her own aesthetics.

France in the 30s was, indeed, the avant-garde film crest. The avant-garde films stemming from France during this time were directly influenced by the cubist, surrealist, Dadaist, and futurist movements in art. Similar to Woolf’s desire to use abstractions in literature to tap into the inner being of characters, the French avant-garde often attempted to enter into the inner-most realm of the dream. Much of this abstraction, according to Edward S. Small in *Direct Theory: Experimental Film/Video*, surfaces through a non-linear narrative and unconventional cinematic abstractions like split screens, which provide simultaneous multiple perspectives, lens distortion, and unrelated montage. The main focus of these French film artists was to not only reject “artistic norms and values,” but also to “emphas[ize] . . . dreams and the ‘inner eye’” (Small 27). Certainly literary modernism and the avant-garde filmmakers in France have a similar concern for using art as a venue into the most inner being of the conscience.

In addition to France, strides in experimental avant-garde film were concomitantly advancing in Soviet cinema. While Virginia Woolf and others were attempting to revolutionize the art of the novel to be something set apart and strikingly different from the nineteenth-century novel, Soviet filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein were revolutionizing the art of theatre through his films and essays on film form and theory.

In a manner similar to the modernist desire to reconcile contradictions in contradicting ways, Eisenstein developed his entire method of film making around the theory of conflict or collision. The Soviet film tradition focused on editing as a way to shock its audience and bring attention to certain parts. In “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form” (1929), Eisenstein lays out his theory of conflict:

The foundation for this philosophy is a *dynamic* concept of things: Being—as a constant evolution from the interaction of two contradictory opposites. Synthesis—arising from the opposition between thesis and antithesis. A dynamic comprehension of things is also basic to the same degree, for a correct understanding of art and of all art-forms. In the realm of art this dialectic principle of dynamics is embodied in CONFLICT as the fundamental principle for the existence of every art-work and every art-form. For art is always conflict. (45-46)

Eisenstein interestingly uses diction which corresponds to one of the major tenets of the modernist movements—synthesis of contradicting elements, yet maintaining essential differences through conflict. For Eisenstein as well as literary modernists, synthesis in art surfaces through a conflict or collision between elements. He further explains his idea of conflict as a *collision* of singular shots juxtaposed through his theory of montage: “Montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots—shots even opposite to one another” (49). Collision between shots surfaces in numerous ways from graphic changes, sudden movement of camera angle, and insertion of non-diegetic images within a montage. In “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” Eisenstein further enumerates examples of “conflict within the shot, as well as for the conflict between

colliding shots, or, montage” as well as provides visual examples of such conflict. He enumerates the various types of colliding conflicts

1. Graphic conflict
2. Conflict of planes
3. Conflict of volumes
4. Spatial conflict
5. Light conflict
6. Tempo conflict
7. Conflict between matter and view point (distortion with camera angle)
8. Conflict between matter and its spatial nature (lens distortion)
9. Conflict between event and its temporal nature (slow-motion, etc)
10. Conflict between the whole optical complex and a quite different sphere (54)

Eisenstein’s categories of conflict certainly do not restrict themselves; indeed, as will later be demonstrated in *The Waves*, they elude categorization to the cinema and appear in literature as well. Moreover, Eisenstein, like Woolf, felt the need for film to separate itself from the shackles of linear narrative, which conventional theatre and literature were tied to at the time.¹

In “Through Theater to Cinema” (1934), Eisenstein examines his 1924 film *Strike*:

At the same time, the break with the theater in principle was so sharp that in my ‘revolt against the theater’ I did away with a very vital element of theater—the story. . . In 1924 I wrote, with intense zeal: ‘Down with the story and the plot!’ Today, the story, which then seemed to be almost ‘an attack of individualism’ upon our revolutionary cinema, returns in a *fresh form*, to its proper place. (emphasis mine, 16-17)

¹ However, Eisenstein was actually very enthusiastic for the Japanese Kabuki theatre and explored this fascination with Japanese culture beyond theater and often examines the very nature of the Japanese language, which is dependent on image and form for meaning. For further discussion, see “The Unexpected” [1928] and “The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram” [1929]

For Eisenstein, the “fresh form” he discusses in this passage is avant-garde film; however, for as will be shown, Woolf’s “fresh form” is not cinema alone, but the reappropriation of avant-garde cinematography in language. Indeed, even Eisenstein concedes to the connection between literature and film: “we have another credit to list—the value of profound ties with the traditions and methodology of literature” (17)

And yet, because modernism is, indeed, an international movement, the avant-garde cinema movement reached an intellectual audience in England. As Don Macpherson claims, the “different historical phases of the European avant-gardes met in Britain either with outright repression (e.g. Oscar Wilde) or with a gradual absorption into an already established natural culture (e.g. the Bloomsbury tradition)” (165). While Bloomsbury and other high-intellectual circles were reappropriating avant-garde techniques for their own use in various arts, other circles like the populace were repressing the impulse with popular film. And in 1927, England passed the Cinematograph Films Act, which made it possible for British film makers to increase the production of popular films; however, it caused more damage as far as quality is concerned. In his article “Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s,” John Sedgwick recalls Rachael Low’s statement that

[t]he 1927 quota legislation intended to solve all the industry’s problems was a failure. Film production doubled during the thirties, but the increase consisted almost entirely of cheap and inferior films, the famous quota quickies and others not much better, which took advantage of the protected market and went far to ruin the reputation of British production as a whole. (2)

In other words, the legislation did nothing to advance the quality of popular British films, yet increased the quantity of production in England. Moreover, in addition to domestic films in England, the most popular films—those with the largest audiences—were produced in the Hollywood studio system in America. Studios like Paramount, MGM, Warners, RKO, Fox, Columbia, and Universal all did well in not only the United States, but also England. Part of their success stemmed from their conventional narrative forms of a clear male protagonist with clear goals and a romantic love interest of the opposite sex as well as a closed ending. Moreover, the cinematography in Hollywood films rarely broke continuous editing rules which were established to only facilitate audience comprehension of the plot. Because England was infested at this time with a plethora of conventional and low-brow cinema-art, an equally resistant support of avant-garde film art rose in the high-brow intellectual circles like Bloomsbury.

While the United Kingdom actively lagged behind the international avant-garde film movement, intellectual circles were well aware of Soviet and French experimental film movements. In 1927, the same year as the Cinematograph Films Act in England, the English film journal *Close Up* (Pool Publishing) was founded by Kenneth Macpherson, Winifred Bryher, and Hilda Doolittle, which contained frequent articles, twenty three total, by Woolf's contemporary and literary rival, Dorothy Richardson. Richardson's articles focus mostly on theory of film form rather than particular films. The journal was in print from July 1927 to December 1933 and was dedicated to a "high aesthetic quality" and an awareness of international film movements. As Susan Gevirtz reports in *Narrative's Journey: The Fiction and Film Writing of Dorothy Richardson*, one of the main tenets of the journal was exploration of the "impact of Soviet filmmaking and film

theory” with multiple articles on people Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Hanns Sachs. High-brow intellectual groups like Bloomsbury were surely aware of *Close Up* and regularly read it.

While Bloomsbury’s contact with *Close Up* was not direct, indirect, yet real, connections can easily be drawn. Indeed, Bloomsbury member Roger Fry was one of the founding members of the London Film Society, which was dedicated to having screenings of experimental films² And in addition, selected articles in *Close Up* indicate an intimate knowledge about the Film Society of London. In article entitled “The Independent Cinema Congress” appearing in the October 1929 *Close Up* issue, Jean Lenauer acknowledges the efforts of the London Film Society to show Soviet films to audiences in their club. Moreover, this article specifically relates a meeting of internationally well-known avant-garde filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein among others from France, Germany, and England. While Woolf herself was not directly involved with the avant-garde movement in England, because her close friends such as Roger Fry were, she must have come into contact with, and was later influenced by, theories and ideas stemming from avant-garde cinema movements.

Perhaps in reaction to the conventional cinematic and narrative strategies of low-quality films emerging in Britain and in support of the nebulous London Film Society, Virginia Woolf wrote her essay “The Cinema” in 1926, which gives a less than stellar view of current cinema productions. In fact, she begins the essay by comparing those in the front rows of the cinema houses to savages:

² See Virginia Woolf’s autobiography of Roger Fry, *Roger Fry: A Biography*. Also, David Dowling’s book *Bloomsbury Aesthetics and the Novels of Forster and Woolf* (London: Macmillan, 1985) gives further insight into Roger Fry’s aesthetics.

They [i.e. those who remain optimistic about human nature] have never seen the savages of the twentieth century watching the pictures. They have never sat themselves in front of the screen and thought how for all the clothes on their back and the carpets at their feet, no great distance separates them from those bright-eyed naked men who knocked two bars of iron together and heard in that clangour a foretaste of the music of Mozart (268)

It is interesting, however, that Woolf's contemporary—indeed, her artistic rival—Dorothy Richardson gives more credit to those sitting in the front rows of movie houses. In one particular Richardson article, "Continuous Performance VII: The Front Rows" (January 1928), she articulates much faith in those who sit in the darkened front rows absorbing the flickering lights: "They are there in their millions, the front rowers, a vast audience born and made in the last few years, initiated, disciplined, and waiting" (64). And in 1931 in another of her Continuous Performance articles in *Close Up* entitled "This Spoon-fed Generation?" Richardson mocks people like Woolf—whom some could label an intellectual snob—when she says that some look down upon the everyday person because the art of film enlightens "Everyman" in regards to events around the world and that "Everyman" does not have to experience the world through "tears"

[T]he film educat[es] Everyman, making him at home in a new world.

And this it is, this enlightenment without tears, that makes so many of those who were brought up under different dispensation to cry without ceasing against both Radio and cinema as spoon-feeders of an Everyman who becomes more and more a looker and a listener, increasingly

unwilling to spend his leisure otherwise than in being entertained. Up hill and down dale we may criticize both Radio and Cinema. Nothing is easier. (306-07)

Richardson is clearly attacking if not Virginia Woolf herself, considering that Richardson's pieces follow the publication of Woolf's cinema article, then high-brow artists like Woolf. It is certainly not uncommon for Richardson and Woolf to be aware of each other's works and aesthetics. Indeed, their rivalry is well documented. For it seems that Richardson's phrase that "Everyman becomes more and more a looker and a listener, increasingly unwilling to spend his leisure otherwise than in being entertained" could certainly be a jab at Woolf when she states in "The Cinema" that "The eye licks it all up instantaneously, and the brain, agreeably titillated, settles down to watch things happening without bestirring itself to think" (Woolf 268). Richardson's "Everyman" is none other than Woolf's "ordinary eye," the "unaesthetic eye" (268).

By the tone of "The Cinema" in regards to coupling literature and film, one would think Woolf never incorporated cinematic devices within her own work. However, again, this is the modernist as well as the avant-garde filmmaker's penchant—to wed and juxtapose elements that seem to collide and cause conflict in order to delve deeper into the conscience than conventional art forms allow. In response to the prospect of literature and film working together, Woolf says,

[s]o many arts seemed to stand by ready to offer their help [to film]. For example, there was literature. 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? (269)

However, while Woolf clearly believes there is nothing “simpler” than adapting a famous literary work into film, Richardson says there is, perhaps, one easier activity—what Woolf is doing in “The Cinema.” Indeed, Richardson claims that there is nothing easier than pointing the finger at film-goers and calling attention to their uncultivated, unrefined intelligence, which is what Woolf does in her article. Woolf goes on to state that

The cinema fell upon its prey with immense rapacity, and to the moment largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim. But the results are disastrous to both. The alliance is unnatural. Eye and brain are torn asunder ruthlessly as they try vainly to work in couples. So we lurch and lumber through the most famous novels of the world. . . in the scrawl of an illiterate schoolboy. (269)

Woolf’s diction—prey, unfortunate victim, unnatural, illiterate schoolboy—is not merely intellectually snobbish, it is, more importantly, defensive of her own art. For Woolf, there is nothing more unnatural than to reduce literature to film; however, she furtively never mentions appropriating film for literature. And, indeed, with *The Waves*, we see a new experimentation with cinematic techniques within Woolf’s narrative.

However, the second half of her essay contemplates the “devices” of cinema, and through her diction in this part, Woolf clearly respects the potential power of cinematic techniques. And further, this was a moment where Woolf first concedes to converting the devices of film into theories of narrative composition in her own works. In the section,

she reflects upon her experience of viewing *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*.³ Although the film is a wonderful example of experimental German expressionism at the time, Woolf notices something much more subtle during her particular viewing. She states,

For instance, at a performance of Dr. Caligari the other day a shadow shaped like a tadpole suddenly appeared at one corner of the screen. For a moment it seemed as if thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than by words. The monstrous quivering tadpole seemed to be fear itself, and not the statement 'I am afraid'. In fact, the shadow was accidental and the effect unintentional. But if a shadow at a certain moment can suggest so much more than the actual gestures and words of men and women in a state of fear, it seems plain that the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotion that have so far failed to find expression. (270)

Clearly, Woolf has the eye of an experimental, avant-garde filmmaker. Her analysis of an ephemeral shadow and feeling of fear are two abstract ideas almost impossible to convey through written word or expression when she admits that other forms of expression like literature have so far "failed." The sentiment of failing language would later recur in her fiction in the character of Bernard, the artist, in *The Waves*. Woolf understands that there might be "some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak, and, if so, could . . . be made visible to the eye" (271). What Woolf has described

³ Leslie-Katleen Hankins is the only Woolf critic to connect Woolf to film without couching her argument within discussions of the new productions of *Orlando* or *Mrs Dalloway*. See her articles "Across the Screen of My Brain" Virginia Woolf's 'The Cinema' and Film Forums of the Twenties" and "The Doctor and the Woolf Reel Challenges - *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and *Mrs Dalloway*"

in her experience of *Dr Caligari*, an unexplainable, non-diegetic black blob that looms for a moment, is a type of visual—or graphic—collision that Eisenstein explains as one of the most powerful techniques of cinematic montage. In fact, in Woolf's concluding statements about the cinema, she uses Eisenstein's very words: "We should see violent changes of emotion produced by their collision" (272). To "see" a "collision" is the very essence of Eisenstein's montage theory; however, Woolf's opinions of the artistic value of the cinema continue to fluctuate throughout the essay

While she admits the ability film has to communicate instantly through the visual, an effect words do not have, Woolf always attempts to reclaim that ability for language. Although she insinuates that film has extraordinary power, the insinuations always manifest themselves as questions or with an overtone of doubt or disbelief. For example, Woolf implies that "it *seems* plain that the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression" (emphasis mine, 270) and later in the form of a question, "Is there any characteristic which thought possesses that can be rendered visible without the help of words?" (271) And again, Woolf doubts the slippery future of the cinema as a serious art form:

Yet *if* so much of our thinking and feeling is connected with seeing, some residue of visual emotion which is of no use either to painter or to poet *may* still await the cinema. . . . *seems* highly *probable* . . . films *may* in time . . . be composed. (emphasis mine, 271)

Woolf's rhetoric attempts, in effect, to dwarf or undercut the power and unique abilities of the cinema right after praising it, and reappropriate the power of the cinema for the written word. An example of the latter surfaces in Woolf's example of Shakespeare:

As everybody knows, in Shakespeare the most complex ideas form chains of images through which we mount, changing and turning, until we reach the light of day. But obviously the images of a poet are not to be cast in bronze or traced by pencil. They are compact of a thousand suggestions of which the visual is only the most obvious or the uppermost. . All this, which is accessible to words and to words alone, the cinema must avoid
(271)

Woolf's rhetoric bluntly demands the superiority of language as compared to film, however, within the argument also lies the sub-argument that it is the role of language to usurp these unconventional cinematic techniques for literature. "All this, which is accessible to words and to words alone, the cinema must avoid." Here, Woolf clearly not only dwarfs the importance of the new cinematic art form, but also belittles sculpture and painting; writing and poetry loom over and shadow the visual arts because for Woolf literature has the ability to make language visible. Her descriptions in this particular passage, moreover, express an idea that anything visual is momentary and singular. That is, "cast" implies that only one moment of Shakespeare can be captured in a sculpture or painting, and that moment is static and never dynamic. Of course, to place painting, sculpture, and the cinema into one category is premature of Woolf because the cinema's most important quality is that of motion, it can clearly never be static. Moreover, Woolf's cursory dismissal of the visual arts is somewhat surprising considering the interest other members of Bloomsbury as well as her sister, Vanessa Bell and brother-in-law, Clive Bell, shared in visual art and cinema. More likely, however, it may have been their very interest in the visual arts from which Woolf's defensiveness of literature stems.

Nevertheless, Woolf shares a visionary concept of cinematic abilities with her contemporary avant garde filmmakers in other countries as well England. In the last two paragraphs of "The Cinema," Woolf explores multiple possibilities of the cinema, yet, again at the end, pokes fun at it as an adolescent art form. Woolf, in effect, attempts to explain to the filmmaker exactly what a film "should" accomplish. To Woolf, the filmmaker "should" use his "riches" so his "booty could be hauled in hand over hand." Woolf directs imperative after imperative at the filmmaker.

[W]e *should* be able to see thought in its wildness . . . We *should* see these emotions mingling together and affecting each other. We *should* see violent changes of emotions . . . The most fantastic contrasts *could* be flashed before us with a speed which the writer can only toil after in vain. . . . No fantasy *could* be too far-fetched . . . The past *could* be unrolled.

(emphasis mine, 271-72)

Clearly, not a sentence escapes Woolf without the conditional phrasing of what an artist "could" and "should" in film. And exactly what the conditions are is not clear. Apparently, Woolf does not believe that film can achieve the level of artistic value she speculates it could have if properly approached: "How all this is to be attempted, much less achieved, no one at the moment can tell us" (272). Again, Woolf categorizes the impact of film as only a momentary phenomenon; "it is for a moment only" (272). For Woolf, film is in its adolescent manifestation in the late 1920s and early 30s, and she doesn't believe much further development possible as is clear in her concluding prediction:

It [i.e. cinematic art] is as if the savage tribe, instead of finding two bars of iron to play with, had found scattering the seashore fiddles, flutes, saxophones, trumpets, grand pianos by Erard and Bechstein, and had begun with incredible energy, but without knowing a note of music, to hammer and thump upon them all at the same time. (272)

By suggesting that filmmakers create only unsophisticated noise with the complicated tools available to them, Woolf implies that others have the ability to create an appropriate aesthetic from cinematic techniques, and certainly, Woolf believes herself as one with this ability. For if a filmmaker is too much the pedantic amateur to have the creative knowledge to use cinematic devices to an artistic ends, then a seasoned author with an established theory of aesthetics should be able to create her masterpiece, *The Waves*, as she finally titles it in a 1929 diary entry, from the scattered “fiddles, flutes, saxophones, trumpets, [and] grand pianos ”

From her diary entries from 1925-1930, it is clear that Woolf's intentions for *The Waves* (originally titled *The Moths*) were always conceptually cinematic. For example, on June 18, 1927, she writes about the form that her novel will take:

. . . then suddenly I rhapsodised & told over the story of the Moths, which I think I will write very quickly, perhaps in between chapters of that long impending book on fiction. Now the *moths will fill out the skeleton* which I dashed in here: the play-room idea: the idea of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night &c, all flowing together: *intersected by the arrival of the bright moths*. A man & a woman are to be sitting at table talking. Or shall they remain silent? It is

to be a love story: she is finally to let the last great moth in. The *contrasts* might be something of this sort: she might talk, or think, about the age of the earth: the death of humanity: *then moths keep on coming*. Perhaps the man could be left absolutely dim. . . . (139)

The description of what Woolf wishes to accomplish in *The Waves* is similar to her description of the black incidental "shadow shaped like a tadpole" appearing on the movie screen during her particular viewing of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Like the shadowy intrusion upon the narrative of *Dr. Caligari*, Woolf wants her moths to flutter in and out of her narrative—"intersecting" it, which will not only provide contrast, but also a shadowy visual presence. Clearly, the image Woolf describes in this diary entry is of a moth fluttering around the light of a candlelit table at night. Even the smallest moth would inevitably cast a formidable shadow on the lighted surroundings. What Woolf wanted to accomplish with the quivering moth shadow is unclear at this point, but it is not impossible that the non-diegetic black image in *Dr. Caligari*, which she writes about in 1926, is what "hovers some where at the back of [her] mind" in this 1927 passage (190).

Moreover, we get a first indication that the form of *The Waves* will be distinctly non-linear, which is a main tenet of avant-garde cinema. The image of a plot narrating the events between a woman and a man being rhythmically interrupted by an abstract image foreshadows the structure *The Waves* ultimately takes—a narrative periodically interrupted by abstract and disconnected scenes of light and shadow. In addition, Woolf suggests that "contrast" will be important to the structure of the novel, which again points to the theories of Eisenstein's theories of conflict and collision. The narrative will clearly

hinge on the visual, just as she claims her own life's narrative does in "A Sketch of the Past "

Indeed, *The Waves* centers itself around the visual senses, and Woolf does this so that she can tap into those deep emotions she claims to base her life on in "Sketch." Clearly, she was indeed part of a cultural climate in England that embraced the avant-garde cinema as a valid art-form. And while she felt threatened as a writer and openly challenged cinema's capabilities, she was obviously intrigued by cinematic capabilities in literature. Moreover, much of her essay and diary writings expresses a frustration with language and need to push the margins and limitations of conventional narrative to touch the real "being" of her characters. In "A Sketch of the Past" she calls the literature she produces her "so-called novels" full of "non-being." And, of course, her diaries express absolute frustration with the written word: "*Saturday 11 February*, The futility of it all—so I broke off; . . . My pen protests. This writing is nonsense, it says. . . *Wednesday 20 June*, Why be always spouting words? . . . All seems insipid & worthless" (174-75, 186). And in *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf does, indeed, finally break off from the jaded conventions of the nineteenth century to form a new literary genre—the cinematic novel.

CHAPTER II

THE CINEMATIC NARRATIVE STRATEGY OF *THE WAVES*

We have come together . . . to make one thing, not enduring--for what endures?--but seen by many eyes simultaneously
 There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves--a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution

—Bernard, *The Waves*

Visual impressions often communicate thus briefly statements that we shall in time to come uncover and coax into words.

—Bernard, *The Waves*

From the previous detailed discussion of Woolf's "Cinema" essay, it is clear that while she recognized that the cinematic medium had enormous potential artistic value, she was certainly not convinced that contemporary film directors possessed the knowledge or ability to create meaningful works of filmic art. Concomitantly, Woolf was aware that the narrative strategies of the nineteenth-century novel were problematic on a number of levels. First, the novel form had become conventional, and it was the agenda of most modernist writers to break up the static narrative structure of the novel to make it strikingly different, strange, difficult for readers, and, thus, unconventional. The goal was, in effect, to cause struggle for the reader rather than the ability to read quickly with only cursory attention to deeper levels of meaning. Woolf and other modernist authors attempt to shock readers into consciousness with the strangeness of their narratives. Second, by the time of the publication of *The Waves*, written language seemed to be in direct competition with an ever encroaching popular film industry, which

was threatening to make the novel an obsolete art form. Woolf was clearly aware of this situation and wanted *The Waves* to carry the burden of proving the eternal experimental nature of language—specifically, the language of novel.

Indeed, from her diary entries during the years of composing *The Waves*, Woolf continually asserts that *The Waves* must be her most experimental of novels. As Bernard states in the novel, "All is experimental and adventure" (118). Woolf wanted her novel to be anything but conventional, however, it is my claim that Woolf does not merely dismiss the experimental nature of film in her effort to create her most unconventional of novels. I will show that while it is Woolf's admitted agenda to prove the novel a superior art form, she actually incorporates avant-garde experimental film techniques into her narrative and narrative structure. That is, she covertly disguises cinematic techniques within *The Waves* in hopes to posit that language has always had the ability to accomplish all that the cinema could ever aesthetically offer. Moreover, from her "Cinema" essay, it is clear that she understood the ability of experimental film techniques to delve deeper into the psyche of a character than even traditional narrative styles allow; however, for Woolf, the cinema alone could not achieve the essence of "being," as described in "A Sketch of the Past," for a human. For Woolf, only the new form of language used in *The Waves* that appropriates the abstractions of the avant-garde cinema can give momentary glimpses of the purest human feeling and emotion.

Woolf often speaks through Bernard or seems most like Bernard than the other characters. There is no doubt that Bernard is the artist of the group of friends and the one most concerned with language and his own production of some valid work of literature.

Indeed, the majority of Bernard's soliloquies center around the struggle to find the right word for things. The task seems simple enough, but as any person inundated in language knows, it is often the most difficult. To exacerbate the situation, however, Bernard's conundrum compounds because of his attempt to filter the visual through language. Moreover, he often explores the problematic of making the visual linguistic by thinking of his language as images and then, of course, putting that back into linguistic forms for the reader. The multiple changes—linguistic to visual to linguistic—can only, according to some theorists such as Derrida, differ meaning even further from its original state. Moreover, the level at which Bernard successfully accomplishes this endeavor is entirely questionable. However, more importantly, this does not mean that Woolf is questioning the ability of language to surpass the visual aspects of film as an art form. It is important to keep in mind that Woolf's aesthetics are not specifically articulated through Bernard alone, but through *The Waves* as a whole work. What Woolf more likely suggests, as I will argue throughout, is that language has the capacity to encompass everything that the techniques of film can create. *The Waves* becomes Woolf's manifesto for the most experimental of narrative styles—the cinematic novel.

With Bernard, Woolf begins her argument that conventional narrative styles lack the ability to communicate in a technologically modern culture. Bernard spends much of his time attempting to imitate the writers of the generations just before him. He fancies himself Byron and pains himself to enter rooms with a romantic flourish, tossing his dark cloak carelessly across the room. As an older man looking back on his life, Bernard says, "For I changed and changed, was Hamlet, was Shelley, was the hero, . . . but was Byron

chiefly. For many weeks at a time it was my part to stride into rooms and fling gloves and coat on the back of chair, scowling slightly" (249). For most of his life—if not all of it—Bernard only plays the “part” or role of the artist. Only in his old age does he seem to recognize that his art was merely performed and in no way original. For Woolf, to merely perform or repeat the artwork of the past is not enough because it will inevitably become trite in the eyes of an audience already desensitized to such forms through endless repetition. Indeed, much like Stephen Daedalus of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Bernard’s artistic output is paltry, his whole repertoire consists largely of a journal of collected phrases and a room “always scattered with unfinished letters” (84). And his childhood desire to write his novel—“When I am grown up I shall carry a notebook—a fat book with many pages, methodically lettered. I shall enter my phrases . . . If, in my novel, I describe the sun on the window-sill, I shall look under B and find butterfly powder” (36)—collapses into nothing more than his journal. “[I]t falls flat,” he tells us (79).

Yet Bernard’s phrase notebook explores an important challenge for the writer, which is to compress the world, visual and beyond, into words in hopes of making the world visual for the reader. While it seems that a more direct approach—film for example, which represents the world through images—to this challenge would more easily succeed in the task, Woolf believes literature more appropriate. And, indeed, Bernard sedulously studies ways in which to find precise phrases that describe the world. Yet, to reduce a person to a word or a trite, “ready-made” phrase (50) is nothing but stereotyping and generalizing. Bernard rather flippantly categorizes his experiences as well as those he knows as Neville observes,

He [Bernard] talked as easily to the horse-breeder or to the plumber as to us. . . . But what did Bernard feel for the plumber? Did he not only wish to continue the sequence of the story which he never stops telling himself? He began it when he rolled his bread into pellets as a child. One pellet was a man, one was a woman. We are pellets. We are all phrases in Bernard's story, things he writes down in his notebook under A or under B. He tells our story with extraordinary understanding, except of what we most feel. . . . He has missed his connection. (69-70)

Neville's condemnation of Bernard's art clearly cuts to the core of Woolf's argument about writers who carelessly use language. For Woolf, a writer like Bernard exists on the same level as the filmmakers she describes in "The Cinema" who bang saxophones, pianos, and violins in discordant cacophony. To reduce a whole human being to one phrase or pithy epithet—a pellet—misses everything, and Neville adroitly identifies Bernard's misuse of the linguistic medium. Bernard simply defines people as inanimate things for his own agenda and never stops to feel the person, consequently, he loses the "connection" he so proudly touts. And, of course, Woolf would also argue that to reduce a person or event to a mere image on the cinematic screen limits real understanding of feeling and connection to one point-of-view. Just as Bernard cannot make "stories that follow people into their private rooms" (51), their innermost being, neither can receiving a narrative through one perspective or one sense provide any real truth into human nature.

Indeed, Neville, the most sensual of male characters in the novel, almost vehemently distrusts the deceptive nature of language—particularly how Bernard

manipulates language for his own benefit. For Neville, “words of authority are corrupted by those who speak them” (35). In Neville’s eyes, Bernard litters the world with “half-finished phrases” (70) and never gets to the core of what he tries to capture with language. Neville “detect[s] a certain effort, an extravagance, in [Bernard’s] phrase” as if his words are artificial and contrived (39). Indeed, Neville asserts that “Bernard’s power fails him” (39). Moreover, Neville often complains of the violence that distinctions do to him and others. By distinctions, Neville means distinguishing one person or thing from another in order to place labels and categories on people. However, Bernard does not understand this and runs around placing labels on everyone and everything. And yet Neville finds himself within the confines of language when he works himself into an ecstatic state while voyeuristically watching half-naked boys toss banana peels into the river, he becomes frustrated with the inevitability of the feeling converting into words:

Now begins to rise in me the familiar rhythm· words that have lain
dormant now lift, now toss their crests, and fall and rise, and fall and rise
again I am poet, yes. Surely I am a great poet . . . I see it all I feel it all.
I am inspired My eyes fill with tears Yet even as I feel this, I lash my
frenzy higher and higher If foams. It becomes artificial, insincere.
Words and words and words, how they gallop—how they lash their long
manes and tails, but for some fault in my I cannot give myself to their
backs (82-83)

In a moment of great feeling, seeing, and emotion, Neville realizes that as he puts such ecstasy into words, he betrays the impact and reduces the effect of the situation, which to

Neville is unjust Unlike Neville, who fears language and its reductive qualities, Bernard does not understand Neville's perspective until the end of his life.

However, perhaps Bernard's real talent is to facilitate communication between people through story telling. Not only can Bernard connect people through his stories, but also his words and phrases appear almost tangible to Bernard, the reader, and listener for that matter "But if I find myself in company with other people, words at once make smoke rings—see how phrases at once begin to wreathe off my lips . . . A smoke ring issues from my lips (about crops) and circles him, bringing him into contact" (67-68). Bernard's art of conversation and weaving stories for others creates a connection between people; the connection is entirely ephemeral. Interestingly, however, Bernard visualizes his phrases as smoke rings, which linger momentarily, but cannot last.

Certainly, Bernard questions his ability to write at crucial points in his life. For example, at the end of his life as he "sums up" his experiences, he recognizes the folly of his pursuit He sighs,

But in order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story . . . none of them are true. . . How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground! Also, how I distrust neat designs of life that are drawn upon have sheets of notepaper. I begin to look for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement. I begin to seek some design . . . (238-39)

Clearly, Bernard questions language as a means of conveying truth to others and wonders if there is such a medium or alternative language that does not rely on already established meanings. The beautiful phrases of his past that seemed to fit so perfectly on all fours now appear deceitful and dangerous. What Woolf is getting at is the idea of how difficult is it for a writer to break out of already established, ready-made, phrases, constructions, or definitions of things, people, etc. Indeed, the task of creating a different way of communicating through language is almost impossible, however, just as Bernard begins "to seek some [new] design" to express himself, so does Woolf within the experimental construction of the novel.

Although Bernard's art slips into entertainment merely for the pleasure of others, the element of the audience is an integral part of his aesthetic. And Woolf, indeed, contends with the need of an audience for written language, which, of course, also is the most important element of film. Bernard calls his stories "[t]oys I twist, bubbles I blow, one ring passing through another" (144). His art ultimately reduces to superficial tricks of spectacle, which Woolf would most certainly call most films. Moreover, Bernard needs others in order to not only define himself, but also to give his art relevance. Because the purpose of Bernard's art in his mind is to bring others into momentary connection with him, he clearly needs an audience: "I need eyes on me to draw out these frills and furbelows. To be myself (I note) I need the illumination of other people's eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is my self" (116). Yet for an artist to be aware of always having eyes watching him or her indicates that the author may be writing

only in response to that audience and not creating from his or her own consciousness¹ Nevertheless, in *The Waves*, Woolf clearly adumbrates that knowing and understanding arrives through multiple points-of-view—that is, the opinions of many—to achieve true consciousness of a thing. Bernard claims that “soliloquies in back streets soon pall. I need an audience That is my downfall” (115).

However, Woolf certainly does not mean that writers shouldn't have an audience or that even film art will always essentially fail—as Bernard does—because it needs a viewing audience. Instead, she more likely insinuates is an old philosophical debate: the essentialness of the self. Does the self or subjectivity have an essential quality or is our conscience only constructed by others through objectification? Bernard's struggle with words and language easily leads to a discussion of constructed or essential consciousness for it seems to be the challenge of art—despite the artists' agendas—to accurately represent the human heart and, for Woolf and other modernists, the human consciousness. And clearly, Bernard as the poet/writer does not succeed in doing this through mere imitation of past poets and repetition of trite phrases. Later in his life, Bernard understands that his language is insufficient as an artist and must find a new language that gets at the heart of human consciousness.

¹ This controlling effect that an audience may have on a work of an artist is precisely the reason that in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf insists that for a woman to really be an artist, she must have a room of her own—in other words, a separation from social responsibilities and awareness of opinions of others in regards to her or her work.

My book, stuffed with phrases, has dropped to the floor. It lies under the table to be swept up by the charwoman when she comes wearily at dawn . . . What is the phrase for the moon? And the phrase for love? By what name are we to call death? I do not know. I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz. I need a howl; a cry When the storm crosses the marsh and sweeps over me where I lie in the ditch unregarded I need no words. Nothing neat. Nothing that comes down with all its feet on the floor. . . . false phrases. I have done with phrases (294-95)

To find a phrase for the moon--for example, "the moon"--betrays just as much meaning as trying to define non-visual abstracts like love and death. Bernard speculates at the end of his last soliloquy and the end of the novel as well that perhaps reducing words and phrases as much as possible is better than creating smoke ring after smoke ring. Indeed, he suggests a completely new type of language, which would be more primal in the manner of a howl, acry, or silence. To do away with false phrases to create a new language, however, suggests use of a different medium rather than language as we know it to convey ideas through reception of the senses.

The character of Bernard provides, in effect, a transition into a discussion of the particular avant-garde film techniques used by Woolf in *The Waves*. Much like Woolf, the artist Bernard struggles with language and its inability to tap the core of human

existence. We see Woolf's own frustration not only in her diaries at the time of composing *The Waves*, but also in "A Sketch of the Past." She is aware of the struggle for writers to move beyond static narrative forms and find a dynamic linguistic vehicle that more clearly represents "being":

Often when I have been writing one of my so-called novels I have been baffled by this same problem, that is, how to describe what I call in my private shorthand—'non-being.' Every day includes much more non-being than being. . . . These separate moments of being were however embedded in many more moments of non-being. (70)

Woolf, of course, later describes "non-being" as the "cotton wool" in life. It is mere existence—that is, the plain, everyday essentials that we as humans need to exist in life. Additionally, "non-being" intrudes upon the way people think and choose to live their lives. With *The Waves*, Woolf interrupts this pattern of "non-being" by incorporating cinematic elements within her text. The effect is two-fold: it makes the reader more aware when reading, thus, more enlightened, and, more importantly, the appropriated avant-garde cinema techniques allow Woolf the ability to enter deeper into the "being" of her characters, which was exactly what avant-garde experimental filmmakers of the 1920s and 1930s wanted to do with their experimental, abstracted film.

However, Woolf's most cinematic character in *The Waves*, Percival, is not only constructed from multiple perspectives, but also at the same time deconstructed through their points-of-view. Indeed, like most film until the "talkies" of the late 1920s whose characters had no audible voice, Percival is left voiceless as well. While the other six

characters build Percival up to be a “hero” with an entourage which “assume[s] the sober and confident air of soldiers in the presence of their captain,” as Bernard claims, and one of the only people whom Louis admires, they concomitantly deconstruct him as a comical deity falling off a “flea-bitten mare” whilst attempting to solve the “Oriental problem” in India. For Woolf, Percival encompasses the epitome of the naive and conventional hero as well as a symbol of conventional artistic form.² He is, indeed, the embodiment of what the cinema without literature was to Woolf—a joke. And what Woolf shows in *The Waves* is that the new language she seeks is a combination of language and the cinema

In his 1939 essay “Achievement,” Eisenstein touts the enormous influence of Soviet film on all arts and specifically enumerates its influence upon each. He particularly mentions the influence of Soviet film on literature: “For literature—cinema is an expansion of the strict diction achieved by poetry and prose into a new realm where the desired image is directly materialized in audio-visual perceptions” (182). However, Woolf would contend with Eisenstein’s statement and argue that while literature may be influenced by film techniques, language is by no means restricted by diction and can, moreover, directly materialize the desired image without audio-visual aids. And in *The Waves*, Woolf reappropriates the revolutionary soviet film technique of montage as a tool of language. As Eisenstein explains his theory of montage in his 1929 essay “A Dialectic

² According to the *Encyclopedia of Literature*, Perceval is a “hero of Arthurian romance, distinguished by his quality of childlike (often uncouth) innocence, which the original protects him from worldly temptation and sets him apart from other knights in Arthur’s fellowship. This quality also links his story with the primitive folktale theme of a great fool or simple hero. In Chrétien de Troyes’s poem *Perceval, ou Le Conte du Graal* (12th century), Perceval’s great adventure is a visit to the castle of the wounded king, where he sees a mysterious dish (or grail) but, having previously been scolded for asking too many questions, fails to ask the question that would heal the king. Afterward, he sets off in search of the Grail and gradually learns the true meaning of chivalry and its close connection with the teachings of the church.”

Approach to Film Form," it "is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots--shots even opposite to one another: the 'dramatic' principle" (49) And Woolf's narrative strategy of having third person narration interrupt a narrative of altering first person narrators in *The Waves* can certainly be described as a montage of colliding voices and points-of-view.

While it may seem an obvious conclusion that first-person narration collides with the third-person narration of the interludes in *The Waves*, further examination of what Woolf is doing between and within these passages reveals the essence of Soviet montage theory as described by Eisenstein. With a montage of stark collisions of images within the interludes, Woolf is able to demonstrate a linguistic control over, and variety of, framing and rhythm, which are both among the most quintessential elements of film form. Within the sixth interlude of *The Waves*, Woolf provides a detailed example of filmic manipulation of language

The topmost leaves of the tree were crisped in the sun They rustled stiffly in the random breeze The birds sat still save that they flicked their heads sharply from side to side The dragon-fly poised motionless over a reed then shot its blue stitch future through the air The river water held the reeds now fixed as if glass had hardened round them, and then the glass wavered and the reeds swept low Pondering, sunken headed the cattle stood in the fields and cumbrously moved one foot and then another In the bucket near the house the tap stopped dripping, as if the bucket were full, and then the tap dripped one, two, three separate drops in succession The windows showed erratically spots of

*burning fire The blind hung red light fell on chairs and tables The
green pot bulged enormously The waves massed themselves, curbed their
backs and crashed and left pools inland, where some fish, stranded, lashed its
tail as the wave drew back* (166)

Clearly, much like avant-garde film of the 20s and 30s, Woolf creates a montage of images that have no clear connection to each other. Moreover, she experiments with a number of cinematic framing devices, camera angle movement, and distance. The montage sequences that manifest themselves during the interludes, however, more importantly allow Woolf much in the manner of experimental montages of the Soviet tradition to establish a visual trigger or symbol that later connects to a specific character within the narrative. The effort for both Woolf and filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein links essential human emotions and “being” with an visual montage of images that give form and heighten these abstract ideas.

The passage gives the reader a much deeper understanding of Susan’s self. From her narrative, we know that Susan is more comfortable in the kitchen on a farm with children and animals than in the high-class atmosphere of London; however, the interlude in this particular interlude sets a mental montage as well to provide deeper and more three-dimensional understanding of her character. The passage gives a brief visual montage of a pastoral scene to which Susan’s monologues in the narrative hearken. The passage moves the eye of the reader from a low angle gazing up at the “topmost” leaves of trees and pans down to birds on a lower branch in the tree, to a dragon-fly on reeds in water, to the reeds themselves, to the water of the river, and finally culminating in a high

angle gazing down at stranded fish on the ground. In addition, the passage shows an experimentation with camera distance and how objects can be framed through language. Through a cinematic vocabulary, the reader is first given a close-up of the topmost leaves on a tree, birds, and a dragon-fly on a singular reed to long or medium shots of the whole river and multiple "reeds." Woolf immediately shifts immediately from long shots of cattle in the field to an extreme close up on not merely a bucket, but the motions of a singular drop of water from the tap. Her cinematic manipulation of rhythm manifests itself in the sudden jump from the laconic rhythm of cuts between random breezes in trees, a motionless dragon-fly, pondering cattle, and three slowly falling drops of water to waves massing themselves, forcefully crashing upon the land, sweeping, spraying, leaping, and spattering (166).

Woolf's reasoning for using a cinematic montage to interrupt her narrative rather than using the unconventional narrative strategies of the nineteenth century correlates with her desire to represent accurately the "being" of her characters. The reason avant-garde filmmakers often use abstract montages within their films stems from the aesthetic belief that abstraction and making something conventional strange not only coax readers into consciousness, but also give a new sense of reality to the subjects of their work. Like these avant-garde filmmakers, Woolf wanted desperately to find a linguistic medium in which she could shatter the restrictions conventional language placed on her writing to be able to represent the real consciousness of her characters. And from her argument in "Cinema," we know that for Woolf abstract visuals represent the deepest of human emotions more accurately than a linear narrative. Within this particular interlude,

cinematic montages exude a better understanding of Susan's closeness to nature to be triggered every time Susan appears in the narrative. However, the montage sequences in Woolf's novel certainly do not limit themselves to the interludes. They merely set the cinematic conflict that spills over into the narrative.

Coupled with images colliding in the interrupting interlude montages, voices collide within the narrative as well.³ And to put it in cinematic terms, the changing point-of-view demonstrates a collision of cuts between camera angle. The effect creates a linguistic manipulation of point-of-view that illustrates the importance Woolf places on changing subjectivity when trying to capture reality. Contemporary avant-garde filmmakers placed similar importance on changing point-of-view and, thus, subjectivity through their experiments with camera angles. In fact, the reader's first introduction to Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis, surfaces through a montage of colliding voices, moreover, the voices focus on what they see or hear.

'I see a ring,' said Bernard . .

'I see a slab of pale yellow,' said Susan . . .

'I hear a sound,' said Rhoda . .

'I see a globe,' said Neville . .

³ In her essay "Nature and Community: A Study of Cyclical Reality in *The Waves*" (*Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity*, ed. Ralph Freedman, Berkeley: U of California P 1980, 219-240), Madeline Moore sees conflict in *The Waves* as stemming from the subject-object dichotomy. She states, "It was not Woolf's purpose in *The Waves* to overcome the phenomenological opposition between subject and object, but rather to dramatize that conflict" (220).

'I see a crimson tassel,' said Jinny . . .

'I hear something stamping,' said Louis . . . (9)

While Rhoda and Louis focus on something received through the ears rather than sight, it does not diminish what Woolf attempts to achieve in the passage. Indeed, very soon after these statements, Rhoda and Louis focus on shadow and light as do the rest of the characters, who are children at this point. The passage is disorienting because it swiftly cuts from a subjective angle of one character, say Bernard, "I see a ring," immediately to another subjective angle, Susan, "I see a slab of pale yellow." And the term "subjective angle" is appropriate because Woolf introduces us to these characters through what they see through their eyes and on what they uniquely focus. The form of quickly switching points-of-view repeats itself through the entirety of the novel and works as a trigger for the reader to place ourselves wholly in the position of each particular character.

In addition to an increasing penchant of avant-garde film to represent simultaneously multiple points-of-view, the abstract technique of the superimposition, when shot A and shot B concomitantly appear to the audience, also became perfected by the avant-garde. The technique was used numerous times by filmmakers to illuminate the inner being, thoughts, and emotions of a character as seen in chapter two with *Menilmontant* and *Entr'acte*. In *The Waves*, Woolf uses the common experience of the reflection in a window to introduce the cinematic technique to language:

Now we roar and swing into a tunnel. The gentleman pulls up the window. I see reflection on the shining glass which lines the tunnel. I see him lower his paper. He smiles at my reflection in the tunnel. My

body instantly of its own accord puts forth a frill under his gaze. My body lives a life of its own. Now the black window is green again. We are out of the tunnel. He reads his paper. But we have exchanged the approval of our bodies. There is then a great society of bodies, and mine is introduced; mine has come into the room where the gilt chairs are.

Look—. . . (63)

While Jinny sees the man's reflection in the window, which a film scholar might compare to "shot A," he sees her reflection, "shot B." However, the reader experiences both reflections simultaneously and, in effect, a cinematic moment where shot A and shot B are superimposed. Instead of a description of Jinny and the man gazing directly at each other, the superimposed reflections more accurately describe the compound emotions and feelings of Jinny. That is, the combined experience of both gazes together encourages the reader to visualize the two superimposed images and the insights that it gives into the character of Jinny. For example, we better understand that Jinny has a direct impact on others who gaze at her—as symbolized through her image superimposed on his. In addition, Woolf's visual impression provides an understanding of Jinny's comfort with performance in society. She knows that her body—living a life of its own—is watched by others, and she uses that to her advantage.

Unlike the male characters in the novel, Jinny does not use conventional language, yet finds mediums of communicating and, indeed, controlling her own existence—something Bernard does not successfully achieve. Jinny in particular uses the physical appearance of her body to communicate and control others—specifically, it

seems, to control the way men react to and gaze at her. In this way, Jinny's character suggests the cinematic medium itself because film also controls the gaze of the audience through framing, which includes camera movement, position, angle, and distance. Even though Woolf died approximately thirty four years before its publication, the issues raised regarding the gaze in Laura Mulvey's famous "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" manifest themselves in *The Waves*. Moreover, what Woolf is doing with this characteristic of Jinny almost anticipates the arguments that Mulvey would make in the mind 1970's, which ignited feminist film studies. Instead of the male gaze controlling her, what Jinny does, how she appears, or what her fate will be, Jinny is the one controlling the gazes of men and, possibly, women. She is subjective as opposed to Mulvey's objective female fetish always at the mercy of the male gaze. The men are objects of her control, which she achieves through the medium of her body. The mere fact that Woolf gives subjectivity to the female body is absolutely revolutionary for the time, and remains so even now. However, what Mulvey was reacting to was typical Hollywood films which still objectify the female body through the gaze of the male; experimental or avant-garde films, of course, steer away from anything conventional like objectifying women through a distinctly male gaze. Therefore, Woolf, again, explores an avant-garde cinematic technique by giving Jinny subjectivity through the medium of her body.⁴

Moreover, unlike Bernard and Neville, Jinny does not bother communicating with previously established modes of communication—like language—yet finds, in effect, a

⁴ See Chapter III for further detail about specific avant-garde films that give subjectivity to the female—in

more primal language, her body. Indeed, Jinny's control over her own subjectivity echoes the woman at the beginning of the novel who "couched beneath the horizon" raises a lamp to illuminate and give definition and being to all. Without the light that the woman provides in the beginning interlude of the novel, nothing would have definition or subjectivity; in addition to directing movement within the interlude, she, moreover, directs the movement of the readers' eyes, what they see—just as Jinny does with her body. When Jinny enters a room, Susan explains, everyone comes under her control:

There is Jinny . . . She stands in the door. Everything seems stayed. The waiter stops. The diners at the table by the door look. She seems to centre everything; round her tables, lines of doors, windows, ceilings, ray themselves, like rays round the star in the middle of a smashed window-pane. She brings things to a point, to order. Now she sees us, and moves, and all the rays ripple and flow and waver over us, bringing in new tides of sensation. (120-21)

Initially, this might seem that Jinny acts as nothing more than a spectacle for others to gaze at; however, Jinny is the only dynamic element--moving, rippling, wavering--while all else is static. In fact, the only other character who has the capacity to "centre" others like rays of light is the enigmatic Percival. However, this passage does not clearly articulate Jinny's power to control the gazes of others as a language of communication.

Indeed, Jinny exudes a new linguistic ability through her body—a visible element—as a medium of communication. Rather than linguistic sign systems, Jinny's resembles visual sign systems. And because her body is visible and not a static statue—it moves, waves, ripples—Jinny's sign system most clearly echoes that of the cinematic arts. As Jinny's body ripples as if a godly shower of gold, she tames male bodies into docility:

Rippling gold, I say to him, "Come," said Jinny. 'And he comes; he crosses the room to where I sit, with my dress like a veil billowing round me on the gilt chair. Our hands touch, our bodies burst into fire. The chair, the cup, the table--nothing remains unlit. All quivers, all kindles, all burns clear. (140)

Woolf's quotation marks, of course, do not always indicate actual aural speech, and in this case, when Jinny says to him, "Come," she says it with her body because he must cross a whole room to reach her. In Jinny's new sign system, which works rather effectively for her, she signals "come," and he performs the obediently performs the request. And when I say Jinny controls her body, I of course also mean she controls her sexuality as is apparent in the sexually charged language of Woolf in the previous passage. Bodies bursting into fire, quivering, kindling, burning, and climaxing of course indicates that Jinny's subjectivity of herself extends to her sexual activity—a phenomenally revolutionary statement on both Jinny's and Woolf's part. More poignantly, however, Jinny later describes the language of her body in terms of a sign system:

For now my body, my companion, which is always sending its signals, the rough black "No," the golden "Come" in rapid running arrows of sensation, beckons. Some one moves. *Did I raise my arm?* Did I look? Did my yellow carf with the strawberry spots float and signal? He has broken from the wall. He follows. I am pursued . . . Now let us sing our love song--Come, come, come. Now my gold signal is like a dragon-fly flying taut. (my emphasis, 176-77)

Jinny's references to signaling to others through her body illustrates her understanding that she uses a different communication than linguistic forms and that she has total control over it. Additionally, Woolf again echoes back to the woman raising a lamp in the with her arm in first interlude of the novel when Jinny asks "Did I raise my arm." Conflating the woman raising the light, which gives subjectivity to the objects in the beginning of the novel, with Jinny who has enormous cinematic qualities can only create an image of a female artist who appropriates the cinema for language—Woolf herself.

Moreover, with Bernard's narrative voice merging into the style of the interludes, her most cinematic sequences, at the end of the novel, it is not difficult to understand that Woolf, indeed, believed herself within the avant-garde circle of writers who construct cinematic novels. After pages and pages of attempting to "sum up" (238) his life and the lives of the others with the language of his phrase book, Bernard's voice finally merges into that of the interludes, that of the cinematic. He proclaims that he needs a new language, "I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as

children speak . . . I need a howl; a cry. . . . I need no words . . . I have done with phrases" (295), and then merges into filmic language

The stars draw back and are extinguished. The bars deepen themselves between the waves. The film of mist thickens on the fields. A redness gathers on the roses, even on the pale rose that hangs by the bedroom window. A bird chirps. Cottagers light their early candles. Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again.

(296-97)

Woolf's language in Bernard's final passage finally merges the cinematic with the linguistic. Bernard gives a montage of images reminiscent of the interludes. Further, Bernard identifies himself with the waves themselves, "And in me too the wave rises," and as a wave, he wholly enters into the cinematic in the last sentence of the novel, "*The waves broke on the shore*." The image of the waves ultimately combines the literary artist, Bernard, and the cinematic *interludes* as Woolf's final proclamation of a new linguistic form, the cinematic novel, which, as Woolf sees it, must be the new wave in literature.

CHAPTER III

AVANT-GARDE FILM TECHNIQUES IMPORTANT IN *THE WAVES*

“Down with the story and the plot!”—Sergei Eisenstein

Opusculum paedagogum.
The pears are not viols,
Nudes or bottles.
They resemble nothing else

They are yellow forms
Composed of curves
Bulging toward the base
They are touched red.

—“Study of Two Pears,” Wallace Stevens

Although Woolf herself was not a regular filmgoer and only found *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* worthy of limited academic discussion, as explained in Chapter 1, it is clear that she was clearly in the midst of the avant-garde film movement in England. It is hardly reasonable to suggest that she was not in any way aware or, as Chapter 2 demonstrates, influenced by avant-garde cinema. And while it cannot be proven that Woolf actually viewed any of the films discussed in this chapter with the exception of *Caligari*, she was certainly quite aware of them, their directors, and, most importantly, their aesthetic devices. Moreover, the avant-garde film movement and Modernism were similar in philosophical spirit and aesthetic beliefs, consequently, the goals of the avant-garde movement shared a common interest with the modernist aesthetic movement of the time, which crossed national borders and artistic disciplines as well

^ This chapter will not only discuss and give specific film examples of the experimental cinematic techniques being used by Woolf's contemporary avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s and 1930s that Chapter 2 explores in *The Waves*, but it will also

highlight the artistic concern of discovering a new art form to give an accurate expression of reality, which Woolf does within her character Bernard. Certainly, Woolf and other modernist authors like Richardson and Joyce, dedicated themselves to the experimentation of form as a means of conveying heightened feeling and means of delving into the consciousness as avant-garde filmmakers did. In fact, even Woolf's contemporary critics noticed the connection between avant-garde filmmakers and modernist writers. In his article published in *Film* magazine in 1932, Robert Fairthorne suggests that Joyce shares stylistic similarities in form with Eisenstein and Kuleshov: "There is a verbal parallel in the methods of James Joyce" (172). Fairthorne clearly had yet to read the fiction of Virginia Woolf because he would have certainly claimed the same stylistic experimentation in her narrative structure as that of Joyce, Eisenstein, and Kuleshov.

Although film was still in its childhood in the 1920s and 1930s and, thus, a new and unconventional art form, by the 30s Hollywood conventions in narrative and film form were already beginning establishing themselves. The result encouraged filmmakers to work within the limits of narrative and form construction set by Hollywood. Just as Woolf worked against established and popular nineteenth-century narrative constructions in *The Waves*, contemporary avant-garde film artists worked to contradict nascent conventional film forms. In fact, in his first film *Blood of a Poet* (1930), Jean Cocteau explores the artist's responsibility to reinvent old forms rather than merely imitating them. Cocteau more importantly allows for a self-reflection and criticism of himself and, as he says in the film, "how I let myself be caught up in my own film," as an artist in the film. Much like Bernard in *The Waves*, the artist in *Blood of a Poet* only imitates and idolizes

art of the past. When the film poet enters a mirror, he learns that the act of mere reflection only leads to artistic suicide. And upon exiting the mirror, the artist destroys the Grecian statue only to become a statue himself later in the film. While the *Blood of a Poet* is at times pretentious, the narrative explores the shared concern among modernist literary figures like Virginia Woolf and avant-garde filmmakers to not merely imitate the classics in their art, but to make their art totally new and unconventional. A. L. Rees further explains the link between the narrative in *Blood of a Poet* to modernist and avant-garde struggles:

Cocteau's film finally affirms the redemptive power of the classic tradition, but the dissolution of the hero's personal identity also undermines the Western fixation on stability and repetition, asserting that any modern version of classicism was to be determinedly "neo" rather than "post" (47)

In other words, artwork (be it literature or film) should be new in form; that is, there should be a clear rupture from past forms rather than merely a continuance, or "post," movement. And considering Virginia Woolf's connection to the Film Society of England, filmmaker Man Ray, and the international avant-garde movement in general, she was already familiar with the ruptures being made by figures like Cocteau in the avant-garde film movements of the early 1910s and 20s, which began with films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*

While *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919, director Robert Wiene and writers Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz) is certainly not the most experimental of early films at the beginning of the avant-garde movement, it did act as a catalyst in not only Woolf's own

writing—as is clear from Chapter 1—but also in film circles. In *Experimental Cinema*, David Curtis sees *Caligari* as an important turning point in the European avant garde movement "In May 1921 [Louis] Delluc launched a second magazine *Cinéa* . . . and in the same year he was responsible for importing *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, which had just been a smash hit on Broadway" (9). Thus, it is not unreasonable that as "[r]omantic and expressionistic German films (*Caligari*, *Nosferatu*) stimulated a research into composition" for avant-garde film—as Jacques Brunius, the French film critic, has implied (Curtis 10)—it also stimulated research into composition for modernist authors like Woolf. Interestingly, however, simultaneous with *Caligari*'s catalyst affect on avant garde film was its extraordinary success as a popular film. And clearly, from Woolf's rhetoric concerning *Caligari* in her "Cinema" essay, she sees it as a popular film that disregards unconventional and experimental techniques.

Yet Woolf's comment about the unintentional dark presence that interrupts the narrative sequence during her particular screening of *Caligari* highlights precisely the innovative technique that German expressionism used to evoke emotions from the audience and to explore the internal being of humans. *Caligari*, like many other German expressionist films, uses low-key lighting to create high contrast in composition on the screen. The result, according to Gerald Mast and Bruce F. Kawin in *The Movies: A Short History*, is that although the "camerawork is wretched and the direction is uneven, . . . [*Caligari*] is a world without sunlight. Shadows of light and dark, shafts where the sun would normally cast its shadow, have been painted on the sets" (154). In effect, *Caligari* and the following movements of German Expressionism and avant garde experimental films that it inspired primarily use shadows—the very technique Woolf finds most

exciting and believes is accidental—as its unconventional technique to shock viewers. For Woolf as well as the makers of *Caligari*, the power of lighting to depict unconventional visual compositions is a unique tool for film, and Woolf would argue for fiction as well. As she posits her "Cinema" article, "if a shadow at a certain moment can suggest so much more than the actual gestures and words of men and women in a state of fear, it seems plain that the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotion that have so far failed to find expression" (Woolf 270). For Woolf, *Caligari* does not fully realize the potential the cinematic techniques available.

In fact, with the exception of one slight pan, *Caligari's* employs little camera movement. And while the extreme shadows created by paint provide phantasmagoric sets in the film, the lack of camera movement constitutes a feeling that the film is still conventional and does not fully realize the modernist agenda of strangeness within texts that makes the audience feel uneasy. Still, *Caligari's* most suspenseful moments occur when unidentified shadows "suggest so much more than the actual gestures and words of men and women in a state of fear." For example, the first victim of the Somnambulist, Cesare, the sleeping Adam, is not approached by Cesare's actual image, but by his distorted, larger-than-life shadow that projected onto the wall. Indeed, as we learn at the end of the film, the fantastic world of exaggerated shadows is none other than the tortured state of fear within the consciousness of a madman who believes Dr. Caligari at the hospital is the mythological Caligari who traverses the countryside methodically killing people with the aid of his black magic and somnambulist.

As discussed in Chapter 2, this cinematic intruding shadow manifests itself in *The Waves* as the framing technique of the interludes as well as within the image of an

undulating “fin,” which she describes through Bernard as “[t]his bare visual impression [that] is unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon. Visual impressions often communicate thus briefly statements that we shall in time to come to uncover and coax into words” (*Waves* 189). Here Woolf admits that it is often the purely visible that captures what words cannot. Like the interrupting interludes in *The Waves* that give an unattached mental impression in the midst of her narrative in attempts to communicate that which cannot be put into words, director René Clair’s 1924 French-Surrealist short *Entr’acte* uses various experimental film techniques to do the same. In fact, during the final sequence of the film, a “fin” of sorts actually appears in the film as a magician who was in the coffin jumps through the “FIN” placard, which results in a questioning of the integrity of the whole film itself. And as Woolf’s “fin” breaks the surface of “non-being” to shock us into an extraordinary state of consciousness, Clair’s FIN is itself broken through by a person who “springs” through its surface.

Throughout *Entr’acte*, Clair assaults the audience’s eye with compounding interruptions of a simple plot—a man getting shot at a firing range and his funeral procession. In fact, in *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, A.L. Rees notes that Clair’s *Entr’acte* which translates as “Interlude” was “premiered ‘between the acts’ of a Satie ballet” (45). The statement is interestingly ironic in reference to Woolf in two ways: First, Woolf’s framing technique in *The Waves* is often referred to as “interludes,” and it does, indeed, interrupt the narrative of the novel as *Entr’acte* apparently did for the ballet; second, Woolf later wrote a novel called *Between the Acts*, which explores her continuing fascination with the interruption of conventional narratives with alternative

“narratives.” Similarly, Clair uses the various interruptions in the plot to create visual puns that could not easily be expressed or “coax[ed] into words” as Woolf would say.

And as Woolf does in *The Waves*, *Entr'acte* creates narrative interruptions with visual impressions unattached to any line of reason. Clair's interruptions coax us into new and different perspectives of seeing something or someone, which is also important to Woolf. Clair makes it clear that his main focus is to reinvent "normal" visualization when a pair of upside-down eyes invites the audience to see in oppositional ways. From the start of the narrative, a series of visual puns interrupt. While they have no connection to the narrative or each other, they deconstruct conventional ways of seeing on the part of the spectator. Interestingly, the most famous narrative interruption manifests itself through an extreme change in camera angle. Through a glass floor, we observe a fragmented sequence of the legs of a ballet dancer dressed in a tutu. The final revelation of the sequence culminates in a straight-on angle shot of the ballet dancer, which reveals what seems to be a bearded man. Clair's visual puns continually interrupt the simple narrative in a number of ways: blinking night lights become suspended white punching gloves, columns of the Parthenon become a row of cigarettes, and a chessboard is graphically matched with a superimposition of a long shot of a town square. Yet, the visual puns do more than simply break up the linear narrative, as do Woolf's interludes between the narrative and recurring image of the fin. Indeed, they also give the spectator multiple perspectives of a single image in order to shock the viewer into a new understanding of the object. And as demonstrated in the previous chapter, one of Woolf's main agendas in *The Waves* was to create multiple perspectives of a single object for the purpose of creating a fuller understanding of the inner being of a character.

Moreover, the interruptions in the plot of *Entr'acte* manifest themselves in what Eisenstein would label conflict. While Clair incorporates a number of conflicts that can be categorized by Eisenstein's criteria, the most experimental examples in *Entr'acte* are conflict of planes, tempo conflict, and light conflict. The conflicts cause not only a disruption in the narrative, but also encapsulate Eisenstein's idea that meaning in art arises from conflict and collision. The conflicts also recall the modernist ideal of reconciling opposites, yet maintaining integrity of each, within the same space. During the famous funeral sequence, Clair experiments with tempo conflict—a technique that alters linear time much like Woolf's interludes—by using slow and fast motion. And much of the light conflict exhibited in the film stems from tempo conflicts as well. Tracking shots from the casket and various other vehicles like roller-coaster seats increase in tempo to create a confusing montage of flickering lights that have a dizzying effect on the viewer. In addition, the most evident example of plane conflict surfaces when a tracking shot from the casket splits and tilts into the center of the screen on different planes. All of Clair's visual conflicts within the film work to combine opposites within the same shots and create completely new ways of seeing.

Much like Woolf creates conflict and collision between the style of the interludes, a disinterested third person, and the style of the narrative, shifting first-person narration, Clair's collisions created in *Entr'acte* exemplify the essence of Sergei Eisenstein's theory of collision and conflict editing. While Woolf's montages of colliding images and rhythms within the interludes are not used to enhance the feeling of the internal frantic fear within the fleeing masses as does the Odessa Steps sequence in Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), as argued in Chapter 2, her montages do, in effect, help get

closer to the inner being of characters. And although it is improbable that Woolf ever saw *The Battleship Potemkin* since it was banned in England until after her death, she was clearly aware of the power of conflict in imagistic and rhythmic montage as explained by Eisenstein in his essays in *Film Form*.

Of course, the most famous cinematic examples of his conflict manifest themselves on the steps of Odessa in *The Battleship Potemkin*. Eisenstein's acumen for finding conflicts within his editing style makes his montages such an emotional experience for audiences. During the Odessa sequence, long shots of the masses are cross-cut with shots of the individual to create a graphic conflict. Moreover, rapid cutting between soldiers marching in one direction across the screen and down the steps to civilians running in the opposite direction across the screen and a lone woman climbing up the steps again gives two powerful graphic conflicts that excite anxiety and empathy from the spectators for the helpless masses. In addition, Eisenstein's most powerful conflict of tempo surfaces during the cuts between the methodical, synchronized marching of the soldiers' boots and the frantic, out-of-control fleeing of the mass of civilians down the steps.

Another example of Eisenstein's conflict in *The Battleship Potemkin* that can again be related to the narrative style of Woolf's *The Waves* is the use of the nondiegetic insert within the film.¹ Inserting an image that is not part of the narrative space during the sequence mimics what Woolf's "fin" represents—an image that only momentarily surfaces, as a fin surfaces above the water, to break the continuity of the narrative and to

¹ In *Film Art: An Introduction*, Fifth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson define "nondiegetic insert" as a "shot or series of shots cut into a sequence, showing objects represented as being outside the space of the narrative."

shock the reader into a revelation of understanding of the text. In *Potemkin*, Eisenstein interjects stills of three stone lions which actually were photographs from a museum in the Crimea. To a Russian audience during the release of *Potemkin*, these nondiegetic inserts would certainly be recognizable. David Bordwell further explains the importance of the lion inserts in his book *The Cinema of Eisenstein*:

[T]hree shots of sculpted lions combine to create the image of a single lion leaping to his feet. . . . Like the jerking woman at the beginning of the sequence, they are quasi-diegetic. . . . The rampant lion, [Eisenstein] says, exemplifies the 'artificially produced representation of movement' that yields a 'primitive-psychological' effect. (77-78)

For Eisenstein, the nondiegetic, or, as Bordwell calls them, "quasi-diegetic," inserts are used to heighten the audience's sense of alarm and also cause dynamic motion through a graphic conflict. That is, the graphic conflict caused by the nondiegetic inserts causes, in effect, a false sense of motion through rapid edits between the static photos of the Crimea lions. The effort, again, is similar to what Woolf accomplishes not only with the recurring image of the fin, but also with her rhythmical shifts between a narrative spanning an entire human life and interludes spanning only one day. The montage of a rising and setting sun during the interludes gives the narrative a false sense of smooth transition during the lives of the characters. However, it also works to create a cyclical rhythm which underscores Woolf's themes of life and death within the novel. Indeed, the theme of conflating life and death is not unique to *The Waves*, but popular in such revolutionary films as *The Battleship Potemkin*.

Adding to Eisenstein's use of the nondiegetic static image in *Potemkin* and Woolf's belief that a "bare visual impression [that] is unattached to any line of reason" can, indeed, "communicate thus briefly statements that we shall in time to come to uncover and coax into words," Man Ray, an American photographer who was also an experimental filmmaker and closely connected the French avant-garde, also places great importance on unattached visuals in his film *Retour à la raison* (1923), "Return to Reason."² His composition is purely an exploration of form and image—similar to parts of Woolf's interludes. For often the interludes are composed of passages of dancing light and shadow "*Sharp stripes of shadow lay on the grass, and the dew dancing on the tips of the flowers and leaves made the garden like a mosaic of single sparks not yet formed into one whole*" (29). And Man Ray plays with the images that he calls "animated 'rayograms' which allowed the direct registration of objects on to film by physically placing them on the photographic surface and exposing them to light" (Curtis 17). Ray creates a flickering sensation through rayograms of nails, gyres, abstract black and white specs, and carnival whirling lights.³ In addition, he experiments with cast shadows created by a suspended mobile and attached shadows on a nude female torso.⁴ The importance of this film to Woolf is not merely compositional. Indeed, Man Ray and Woolf were both dedicated to using stark visual forms to return the human mind to a level of consciousness long forgotten. For Man Ray, this is a "return to *reason*," and

² Some of the most famous professional photographs of Woolf were taken by Man Ray during the early 1930s.

³ Stan Brakhage, an experimental filmmaker in the 1960s, explained flicker as creating a physical sensation through quickly moving shapes on the screen experienced with the eye. See "'Giving Sight to the Medium' Stan Brakhage" in William Wees' *From Light Moving in Time*.

⁴ According to Bordwell and Thompson, an "attached shadow occurs when light fails to illuminate part of an object because of the object's shape or surface features." And a cast shadow is caused by a "body block[ing] out the light" (178).

even Woolf explains these unattached visual impressions as apart from any line of *conventional* “reason.” Just as Woolf returns to the montages of unattached visuals in her interludes and in the beginning montage in the nursery, which was, of course, a reference to her earliest memory upon which she bases her life, Man Ray also considers the unattached visual image as something connecting to our deepest sense of consciousness.

In fact, in Man Ray’s later film *L’Étoile de mer* (1928), Ray’s whole film structure seems to be a progenitor to the narrative of *The Waves*. While the interludes in *The Waves* are, indeed, the most abstract part of the novel, the images we get are presented to the reader in a clear fashion clear; that is, there is no question what we are, in effect, seeing—a wave, a leaf, a chair, a bucket, a bird. However, the reception of the actual narrative arrives in a fragmented array of simultaneous multiple voices. Reality of the characters is, thus, obscured. Ray’s *L’Étoile de mer* follows a similar pattern. Any images of the conventional romantic plot of jealousy in the film are obscured through some type of gauze or frosted glass; thus, faces and action is obscured, and even the sex of the characters are often in question. And interjected into the film are crisp, close-up images captured in an iris of a starfish, various still life pictures, extreme close-ups of scared hands, and celestial bodies. However, like Woolf’s vivid images within the interrupting interludes, the interruptions in *L’Étoile de mer* give a better understanding of the inner emotions of the characters in the obscured plot. Moreover, Man Ray also experiments with interruptions of simultaneous multiple perspectives in the film as well in a shot of the starfish in different positions.

Multiple-perspectives were certainly used by Woolf in *The Waves* throughout the novel, but particularly when she composed the Percival character. Similarly, Man Ray

experimented with multiple perspectives through multi-screens, as well as Russian and French avant-garde filmmakers. The technique was, indeed, an international experiment shared among aesthetic disciplines to demonstrate that, at all times, any object or being can be seen in a different way. For example in his documentary *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), Dziga Vertov explores the multiple ways in which a director can frame objects or people for his or her audience. At points, a street will appear spiced and canted in opposite directions, while other times, Vertov will again have a split screen showing oppositional motions on the same city street filmed at different times. Moreover, *Man with a Movie Camera* illustrates how the medium of the camera itself controls the perception of its audience, and at several points during the film, Vertov shifts the perspective from our own eye, to the audience within the film, to the eye of his camera, and to the eye of someone else filming Vertov himself.

Additionally, the French avant-garde film movement experimented with the split screen. In the 1924 French experimental short *Ballet mécanique*, directors Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy also use the split-screen technique to present simultaneous multiple perspectives of the same object—similar to Woolf's technique when creating Percival through multiple perspectives. And yet, despite the multiple perspectives that we do get of Percival, he is never given a voice of his own, and Woolf's most visual and cinematic of characters ultimately looks comical because the strictly cinematic view of Percival cannot project the true self for Woolf. However, to infuse language with the avant-garde cinematic technique, as Woolf does with her character, Bernard, is her linguistic-cinematic accomplishment in *The Waves*.

Of course, as explained in Chapter 2, another important avant-garde film technique incorporated by Woolf in *The Waves* is the superimposition.⁵ Multiple examples may be given from the experimental documentaries of the 1920s like Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, Clair's *Entr'acte*, or Jean Vigo's *À propos de Nice* (1930); however, a more relevant example that uses the superimposition as a means of entering into the conscience of a character is Dimitri Kirsanoff's *Ménilmontant* (1926). At a particularly desperate point in the life of the main character, played by Nadia Sibirskaïa, she contemplates either committing suicide by jumping in the river, murdering her child by doing the same, or both. To capture the desperate state of the character's conscience, he creates a superimposed sequence. While a close-up image of her head floats on screen, Kirsanoff layers images of the cityscape. Dizzying pans and tracking shots of suited men frantically walking the street, the pavement, and horse-drawn wagons stream across her lost face. The superimposition clearly works to make the audience empathize with her perspective of walking the streets alone with a hungry child and contemplating death while simultaneously giving us a third-person image of her anxiety-ridden face. Woolf clearly mimics the editing device during the tunnel scene with Jinny. While the readers see what Jinny experiences through her eyes, they also get the opposite perspective of the man, which works to bring us into a better understanding of Jinny's self.

However, as explained in Chapter 2, Jinny also encompasses the aspects of film itself. In essence, she presents herself as in control of her own gaze and in control of what those who gaze at her see. At no point in Woolf's text do those gazing at Jinny

⁵ Bordwell and Thompson explain the superimposition as "the exposure of more than one image on the

have control, on the contrary, she is always in control of the direction of their gazes at exactly what they see. The scenario indicates that Jinny is subject of her own gaze and not an object to others. This cinematic technique of giving the subjective gaze to the female, instead of a male protagonist, as is the tradition of conventional Hollywood film at this time, was indeed pursued by avant-garde filmmakers. In what is probably the most well known avant-garde film, *Un chien andalou* (1929), by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, explores the control of the female gaze.⁶ For example, Buñuel shows the young girl, played by Simone Mareuil, gazing at a shirt and tie on the bed and cuts to a subjective angle from the girl's point-of-view showing the tie suddenly tied. Further, she gazes at the door, and the male protagonist suddenly appears for the first time in her apartment. Similar to Jinny's gaze, which has control over what others see, the young girl in Buñuel's film controls what appears to the audience. Moreover, like Jinny, who claims that her body "live a life of its own," Buñuel often uses camera angles that originate from the girl's breasts—particularly when the man is caressing her. The camera angles give a subjectivity not only to a female, which is one of the most unconventional of cinematic techniques at the time, but also to the girl's body. The technique directly relates to what Woolf does with Jinny. Moreover, Buñuel's most famous shot in *Un chien andalou*, an extreme close-up of a woman's eye being sliced with a razor suggests that his film invites the audience to see in a different and new way. In addition, the scene perhaps points to the female gaze as perhaps the origin of the "unconventional" vision that avant-garde filmmakers and modernist authors like Virginia Woolf, sought.

same film strip"

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the empowered female gaze in *Un chien andalou*, see *The Branded Eye* Buñuel's *Un chien andalou* by Jenaro Taléns (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993)

The experimental film techniques used by the French avant-garde and Soviet filmmakers during the 1920s and 30s clearly parallel the cinematic techniques that Virginia Woolf incorporated into *The Waves*. Although the probability of her seeing any of the mentioned films in this chapter is low, the spirit of their experimentation was certainly well known among intellectual circles. And the cinematic influence upon her own literature certainly manifests itself in *The Waves*. Yet, although Woolf and these filmmakers use different mediums to convey sometimes similar ideas, that does not mean that one medium better depicts the idea or that it is even important to show one superior to the other, as Woolf argues for literature in "The Cinema." Indeed, it is the dialog established between these two different ways of depicting images, film and literature, that brings new understanding that would not be available without the conflict between film and literature.

CONCLUSION / FIN

‘Now to sum up,’ said Bernard. ‘Now to explain to you the meaning . . .’

When I initially began this project, it was under the assumption that *The Waves* would be a perfect text for an experimental film. The montage sequences within the interludes and the narrative as well as Woolf’s manipulation of time seemed to run like ribbons of film through my mind in avant-garde fashion. However, upon completion of the project, I understand that representing *The Waves* through only the medium of the avant-garde cinema would not do it justice. For what Woolf does in *The Waves* is not only cinematic or only linguistic; it is more certainly a combination of the two art forms and the two ways of depicting images. Language possesses the power to tap into the consciousness that the avant-garde cinema lacks, and, similarly, the avant-garde taps a part of human understanding that language itself cannot grasp.

In his book *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, W. J. T. Mitchell explores the various ways of depicting images. Much of his argument lingers on the gap between the seen image and the word representing that image. There seems to always be a lack in language, which inevitably defers meaning of what reality is. Mitchell further explains the gap:

The image is the sign that pretends not to be a sign, masquerading as (or, for the believer, actually achieving) natural immediacy and presence. The word is its “other,” the artificial, arbitrary production of human will that disrupts natural presence by introducing unnatural elements into the world—time, consciousness, history, and the alienating intervention of symbolic mediation. (43)

With this explanation of the gap between seen image and linguistic representation of the image, it seems a meaningless task to attempt poetic representation with words. Any verbal translation of the image into language would inevitably fall short and produce a lack of understanding, an unjust representation, and even a harm to that which is seeking linguistic representation. However, as Eisenstein would argue, out of conflicts rises all art.

Indeed, Mitchell goes on to explain that the collision between seen image and the written word does not have to be reactionary. It should be, instead, a gap that stirs even more powerful thoughts and ideas.

What are we to make of this contest between the interests of verbal and pictorial representation? The point, then, is not to heal the split between words and images, but to see what interests and powers it serves. This view can only be had, of course, from a standpoint which begins with skepticism about the adequacy of any particular theory of the relation of words and images, but which also preserves an intuitive conviction that there is some difference that is fundamental. (44)

Mitchell's call to explore rather than attempt to close the fissure between image and word and find hidden insights hearkens back to a fundamental Modernist tenant. James McFarlane reminds us in his essay "The Mind of Modernism" that Modernism couples oppositional elements or forces so that the two exist within the same space and without canceling one or the other out. That is, differences are not necessarily reconciled, but the contradictory ideas of image and word ultimately exist within the same space without compromising them as separate and distinct entities.

Writers will often claim that the cinema does not offer the depth of character that literature does, as Woolf does in her article “The Cinema.” Vice-versa, experimental avant-garde filmmakers will inevitably argue that film is the ultimate medium of reality—not to be confused with “realism.” However, as we see in Woolf’s novel *The Waves*, the combination of the two may create an unconventional medium that takes advantages of both to depict a better image of reality and the human consciousness. In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf wonders if such a device exists that can recall the image upon which she stands her whole life—that of her memory of light, shadow, color, and sound in her nursery.

Now if this is so, is it not possible—I often wonder—that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them? I see it—the past—as an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes, emotions. There at the end of the avenue still, are the garden and the nursery. Instead of remembering here a scene and there a sound, I shall fit a plug into the wall. (67)

In my introduction, I suggest that this device which plugs into a wall and projects a long ribbon of past scenes and emotions is none other than the movie projector; however, it is now clear that Woolf’s “device” is, in effect, her cinematic novel, *The Waves*.

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