Introduction
Cinematic modernism

This book arose from a confluence of scholarship and serendipity. I had long been familiar with H. D.'s poetry when I discovered her passion for cinema through Anne Friedberg's essay on *Borderline*, a 1930 silent film that the poet both acted in and helped to edit.[1] In 1995, I rented the only circulating copy from the Museum of Modern Art to screen in my modernism course; about a year later, I chanced upon it airing on Turner Classic Movies as part of a Paul Robeson retrospective. I quickly rushed for a video tape, and by this stroke of luck was able to watch the film repeatedly.

The charge that *Borderline* gave me, I imagined, was akin to the thrill H. D. and other modernists must have felt in response to the emergence of film in its revolutionary ability to represent somatic movements and gestures as they had never been represented before. The body could be deliriously elsewhere, uncannily absent, yet viscerally present. *Borderline* dramatically recasts H. D.'s poetry as cinematic. She claimed that seeing Greta Garbo in *Joyless Street* in 1925 was her "first real revelation of the real art of the cinema."[2] Yet by setting the poems of *Sea Garden* (1916) in the context of early silent film and contemporary film theory, they appear precursors to the embodied "revelations" H. D. experienced. What intensified my excitement about *Borderline* was how its avant-garde montage deftly portrays the way sexual and racial fantasies are inscribed upon the body. In its seventy-five minute length, it exposes the projection and displacement of white desires upon the black body, disrupting the myths formulated by D. W. Griffith's 1915 *Birth of a Nation*, a film often credited with the invention of montage.

Along with her performance in several silent films, H. D. was one of the founders of *Close Up* (1927–33), the first film journal in English to treat cinema exclusively, and she contributed eleven reviews. Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, and Marianne Moore were among its other literary contributors.[3] Prominently, the journal translated Sergei Eisenstein, featured work by the psychoanalyst Hanns Sachs, and articulated a progressive politics that overlapped with its fostering of an avant-garde aesthetic.

H. D.'s explicit involvement with film catalyzed for me a number of questions about the relationship of other modernist poets to cinema. What impact did this medium have upon poets before *Close Up*? What films might they have seen and enjoyed? To what extent were poets intimidated by the upstart medium? What otherwise unexpressed desires were projected upon the screen? What techniques did they borrow, or conversely, what might their poetic styles have anticipated in the medium of film? Aside from the fairly well worn sense that modern poets juxtapose their images through a method akin to film montage, how could this notion be more fully elaborated? This book is the result of my investigation of these largely neglected questions.[4]

H. D. was clearly not the only film enthusiast among modern poets. Stein broadly and retrospectively announced in 1933: "I cannot repeat this too often any one is of one's period and this our period was undoubtedly the period of the cinema and series production."[5] Her intimate relationship to modern painting has eclipsed the cinematic dimension of her writing, yet Stein claimed the "period of cinema" and her place in it as extending back to 1903 when she wrote her epic *Making of Americans* cinematically without knowing it. Likewise, H. D.'s admiration for the medium did not become publicly manifest until 1927 when she began publishing her film reviews.

The period Stein designated, roughly between 1903 and 1933, coincided with the beginnings of "series production" (the ability to reproduce successive identical images), the burgeoning of technical and artistic experiment in early film, and finally the demise of film as a silent medium.[6] It was also during this era that a stunning number of historical shifts irrevocably altered human epistemology and variously rendered modernity as "an experience of crisis."[7] Among the array of scientific discoveries, cultural movements, and political upheavals Stein witnessed, she identified cinema as a foundational term for the syntax of modernism.

Miriam B. Hansen has argued that cinema constitutes "the single most expansive discursive horizon in which the effects of modernity were reflected, rejected or denied, transmuted or negotiated."[8] It is, as Hansen writes, "the critical fixation on hegemonic modernism" that unnecessarily separates artistic practices from "the political, economic, and social processes of modernity and modernization, including the development of mass and media culture."[9] As this book brings into relief, modernists could be profoundly cinematic even when not fully cognizant of it. Even for those modernist poets who were intensely ambivalent about the medium (as we shall see with Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot), cinema's material presence

asserted a tremendous impact upon them. As Michael Wood states, "the principle of montage" along with "the construction of imaginary space through the direction of the gaze" is "quintessentially modernist."[10] I consider the direct historical links between modern poetry and film where and when they can be established, but I also attend to more indirect connections, including those that challenge "the direction of the gaze."

In the spirit of montage, my project links texts and silent films not previously brought together, primarily connecting the American poets, Stein, William Carlos Williams, H. D., and Marianne Moore (hereafter referred to as "the four poets") with the period of silent cinema. The four poets shared an excitement for the vital flux of modernity. H. D., the one in this quartet most affiliated with the high modernist goal of excavating and resuscitating the past, nevertheless admired "the lean skyscraper beauty of ultra modernity."[11] Stein made a kinesthetic practice of refusing literary tradition; Williams sought to draw "the whole armamentarium of the modern age" into his poems;[12] and Moore zestfully absorbed popular culture, including baseball games, travel and fashion magazines, "'business documents and school-books.'"[13] Most important, all four are bound by their enthusiasm for film, expressed both in their critical writing and in their poetic techniques.

With some significant exceptions, the four poets were drawn to European avant-garde films, crossing continental and stylistic boundaries, including Soviet film, French Dada and Surrealism, and German Expressionism. As I will demonstrate, these films not only evoke the "peculiar atmosphere of a modern poem,"[14] but also raise questions about cohesive corporeality, emphasizing bodily rhythms and gestures rather than narrative continuity.

By pairing poetic texts and films, I clarify a central modernist paradox: a desire to include bodily experience and sensation along with an overpowering sense of the unavailability of such experience except as mediated through mechanical reproduction. Cinematic montage and camera work often exposed the body's malleability. Sped up or slowed down, the pacing and piecing of film could recreate the moving "lived" body, while these methods ruptured fantasies of physical self-presence or wholeness. Broadly speaking, film showed that the temporal present could be endlessly repeated; it was mechanical yet created a *felt* immediacy; and consequently, it subordinated the inherited conceit of the Cartesian mind to less aggregated kinesthetic processes. In sum, film crystallized a cultural debate in modernity over the unstable conjunctions between the mind and the sensate body.

The medium of film opened up a new vocabulary for modernist poets not only to challenge modes of mimetic representation, but also to explore and

reconstruct cultural tropes of fragmented, dissociated corporeality, most notably the hysteric and mechanical body, newly fabricated in modernity. The larger argument of this book is that the four poets engaged in an ongoing dialogue that emerges on one axis through the concourse between modern poetry and film, and on another between versions of embodiment generated by the prominent discourses of psychoanalysis and experimental psychology.

Modernist poets were not only of "the period of the cinema," as Stein puts it, but also "of" the period of psychoanalysis; these domains, frequently configured as a twin birth, seem ineluctably part of modernity's production of forms of corporeality.[15] The problematic place in feminist theory of psychoanalysis in general and the figure of the hysteric in particular has been debated at length. My book shares to some extent contemporary film theory's preoccupations with the legacy of Freud. At the same time, I reveal how cinematic writing reshapes psychoanalytic notions of embodiment.

Modern phenomenology, as important to film theory as psychoanalysis, dovetailed with "the new psychology" in its goals of studying the "lived body," how it could be extended, trained, shaped, or mechanically reproduced. Derived from the laboratory studies of the German scientist Wilhelm Wundt in the 1860s and 1870s, experimental psychology privileged physiology, viewing the brain as an organ whose processes could be measured empirically. Vivian Sobchack differentiates phenomenology through its recognition of "the activity of embodied consciousness realizing itself in the world and with others as both visual and visible, as both sense-making and sensible."[16]

The Freudian model is most visible in H. D.'s work, whose therapy with Freud both allowed her to "name" her bisexuality as much as it pathologized her. Williams too borrowed from Freud's theories of masculine desire and amplified upon their fluidity. Stein and Moore, on the other hand, bypassed the psychoanalytic tropes of female hysteria, invoking an alternate but related tradition of experimental psychologists, including Charcot, William James, and Pavlov, who adumbrated bodies styled by conditioned and unconditioned reflexes.

The modern disease of hysteria, a phenomenon central to both psychoanalysis and experimental psychology, is of particular significance to the liaisons between poetry and film for multiple reasons. First of all, hysteria is a disease of the part, and in this sense, a disease exemplary of modernity. As such, it was linked to series production, Ford's assembly line, and the bodily shocks Walter Benjamin attributed to mechanical reproduction. In fact, from Benjamin's point of view, mechanical

reproduction and the emergence of film threatened to render the lyric obsolete. Secondly, the simultaneous prominence and elusiveness of hysteria made it readily adaptable for modern poetry and film. For Louis Aragon, for instance, hysteria was among the "greatest poetic discoveries" and is "a supreme mode of expression" paralleled only by film.[17] It would appear that the hysteric performed her dis-ease, as if in a silent film, through somatic gestures and oblique images rather than through transparently denotative language. Conversely, film had the capacity to induce in the spectator the hysteric's physical symptoms of dislocation, amnesia, suggestibility, and even anesthesia.

Most significantly, modernist hysteria brought into the open the blurred ground between corporeality and consciousness, undermining absolutist categories of sexual difference. Rita Felski reminds us that the hysteric in this period was most often linked with the female body and conflated with that of the "new woman" and the modern feminist.[18] As this book elaborates, the hysteric became contiguous with other fragmented bodies, including the automaton, the bisexual, the femme fatale, the masochist, the fetishist and the effeminized male hysteric. Operating within a kind of hydraulic system, these idiosyncratic bodies, both literal and figurative, populated the modernist landscape, gaining visibility during a period when potentially liberating notions of bodily difference proliferated, and when heightened Aryan ideals of masculinity and whiteness began to be widely disseminated.

Finally, the body of the hysteric fascinated poets as a correlative for what Eliot refers to as "dissociation of sensibility," a concept I touch upon throughout. Literary and film representations of the hysteric confirmed a "compliance," if dissociated, between mind and body. The resulting bodily ego engendered an epidermal poetics that could be cut up and fashioned anew. I thus argue that the hysteric body was not simply a figure depicted *in* the modernist poem or film, but more provocatively, coincided with the fragmented and dissociated bodies created *as* montage.

Eisenstein specifically linked film to modern poetry, clarifying a key methodology for the enactment of hysteric bodies. He theorized a rhythmic dynamism produced through the "collision of independent shots," in which the "*irregularity of the part* exists in relation to the laws of the system as a whole."[19] If film is viewed as a material corpus, the disproportionate, fragmentary shot registers as an "irregular" body part. In principle then, montage fractures while it embodies. Moreover, a montage poetics represents a kinesis where the "irregularity of the part" and its explosive "impulses" reverberate in an economy of hysteria. As we will see, poetic

and cinematic texts supply somatic maps of erotic displacements and investments in fragments.

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF FRAGMENTATION

In 1891, Thomas Hardy expressed a particularly modern phenomenology in *Tess of the D'urbervilles*, a novel that existed at the cusp of a number of cultural transformations. Four years after its publication, Breuer and Freud published *Studies in Hysteria*, and the Lumière brothers produced the first film documentaries, "Arrival of the Train" and "Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory." At one point in the novel, Tess tells Angel that "'[t]he trees have inquisitive eyes'"; he is surprised to discover that she "has feelings which might almost have been called those of the age, the ache of modernism."[20] Like the prototypic male poet/seer in Baudelaire's "Correspondences" who discovers his own sensibility encrypted in the "temple" of nature with its watching leaves, Tess self-consciously intuits herself as both seer and seen. Tess expresses and projects the "ache of modernism," Hardy implies, because her "corporeal blight had been her mental harvest."[21] That Tess's bodily predicament directly and unpredictably impinges upon her mind suggests the "compliance" as well as disconnection realized in the modern hysteric.

Moreover, Tess has a "double and reversible" perspective, which for Sobchack characterizes the phenomenology of film experience, its "communication based on bodily perception as a vehicle of conscious expression" (*Address of the Eye* 9). In effect, a desire for the "directly felt, sensuously available" translates in film as a displaced but "expressed perception of an anonymous, yet present, 'other.'" This "anonymous 'other'" – like the seeing trees in *Tess* – stirs a recognition that the "*I* is someone else," to quote the proto-modernist, Arthur Rimbaud.[22] Modernist cinematography externalized this literary legacy of the doppelganger and perceiving "other."

Film's ability to represent and mediate bodily "otherness" both created and exposed what I will develop as a phenomenology of fragmentation. In brief, poets could be captivated by early cinema's "*embodied existence*" (*Address of the Eye* 4) or "corporeal subjectivity."[23] At the same time, the very mechanics and constraints of the medium as well as the use of experimental film techniques exposed the disintegrative and indeterminate aspects of the body.

Film's role as a specifically embodied medium that has contributed to the revolution in modernist literary practices has been partly obscured because

of the compelling intercourse between modern painters and poets.[24] However, the non-narrative underpinnings of early film corresponded as well to the abstract strategies of painting. Indeed, Malcolm Le Grice argues that the gradual divorce of cinema from the influence of painting and cinema's consequent alignment with narrative was an "historical mistake," leading us to lose sight of early film's brief but nonetheless significant period of radical experiment.[25]

The revolution in painting as in film pivoted upon the fracturing, cutting and reviving of the "lived body." Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" (1911), with its fragmentation of the body and attempt to sequence its motion within time, epitomized the closeness of modern painting to film. In fact, the series photography and motion studies of Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey in the 1870s prefigured the dislocated body in Duchamp's painting. His painting signaled the paradigmatic transition from a static model of art to a cinematic one, subverting the expectations of a human body idealized, pinioned or framed by Cartesian perspective. Further, as Elizabeth Joyce suggests, the painting alluded to the "classical academic nude" while making it "impossible to objectify" or even to assign a fixed gender identification to the figure.[26] This "outrageous" work, like others featured in the Armory Show (1913), underscored modern art's capacity to blur, to enlarge, to cut away outlines, particularly those which fix or delimit gender morphology.

Enter cinema. It made visible a body never visible before – one that is at once whole and in pieces. Cinema's departure from prior representational mediums resided, as Gilles Deleuze proposes, in its turn away from an absolute "higher synthesis of movement," its "abandoning figures and poses" for "the any-instant-whatever."[27] The physical body became visible through parts in continual mutation and flux, displaced as the "film's body," Sobchack's phrase denoting both the materiality of the medium and the spectator's physical investment in it (*Address of the Eye* 23). The visceral yet preternatural mechanisms of film, distinct from painting, projected the body as a mass of moving "parts," and at the same time, enacted Merleau-Ponty's revelation that "[o]ur body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space."[28] Cinematic bodies haunt, permeate, fragment and are fragmented by representation.

The crosshatching between avant-garde painters and filmmakers extended to their relationship to poets, most recognizably those of the French avant-garde. Apollinaire, who like Stein wrote scenarios, invoked a lyric phenomenology, and by 1917 urged poets to take part in the "new discoveries in thought and lyricism" and the physical "liberties" made

possible by cinema.[29] Two years earlier, the American poet Vachel Lindsey had challenged poets to be as inventive as film.[30] In 1921, the French film critic Jean Epstein proposed what he called a "lyrosophy," an unconscious epistemology that structured both film art and modern poetry.[31] Epstein's epistemology was notably kinesthetic, realized through "photogénie," the power of the hypnotic close-up to usurp narrative by tracing the intricate motions of a physical "crisis": "Muscular preambles ripple beneath the skin. Shadows shift, tremble, hesitate. . . . The lip is laced with tics like a theatre curtain. Everything is movement, imbalance, crisis. Crack."[32]

The meshing of film and poetry into an embodied medium, begun in the early 1910s and throughout the First World War when melodramas and physical comedies were popular, continued into the late twenties. For instance, poets (including Apollinaire, Stein, and even Eliot) had already assimilated Chaplin into their lyric avant-garde. Hart Crane's "Chaplinesque" (1921) recreates the poet as clown whose "fine collapses are not lies / More than the pirouettes of any pliant cane."[33] Filmmakers, for their part, turned to poetry as an important resource. Thus, Griffith adapted poems by Tennyson and Browning in several films, and used a fragment from Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" to punctuate *Intolerance* (1916). To offer another example, one of the first lesbian filmmakers, Germaine Dulac was indebted to nineteenth-century Symbolist and Decadent poets and emphasized embodied mental states, using close-ups and distorting shots to denote internal states almost seeping out of the body into the environment. *The Smiling Madame Beudet* (1923) shows her female protagonist, frustrated in her role as wife, plunged into intense depression after she reads lines from a book of Baudelaire. Even more directly, Dulac's experimental film, *L'Invitation Au Voyage* (1927) recreates the atmosphere and images from Baudelaire's poem of the same title.

Among the more literal collaborations, the surrealist poet Robert Desnos inspired, for instance, Man Ray's 1928 *L'Etoile de Mer*. The poet Philippe Soupault created multiple "cinematographic poems" filmed by Walter Ruttmann, works destroyed in the bombing of Berlin during the Second World War. Pound himself briefly collaborated with Fernand Léger on the 1924 experimental film *Ballet Mécanique*. And H. D. made several films with Kenneth Macpherson and Bryher (orignally Winnifred Ellerman), the poet's long-term lesbian partner. Film, it would appear, was ultimately sidetracked not only from painting (as Le Grice suggests) but from poetry as well. While the connections between American poets and filmmakers was never as manifest as it was within the French avant-garde, from the start

film vernacular borrowed many of its tropes from poetics (including the rhythmic splicing of images) which in turn, found its "body" (its material, fleshly expression) in experimental cinema.

In contrast to painting's substance and self-presence, the phenomenology of film, its flammable materiality (literally cellulose nitrate), functioned as an evocative undercurrent in modernist poetic composition. Modernist poems, exposed to and coexistent with the emergent medium of film, likewise attempted to record kinesthetic processes and "lived experiences of time."[34] In its rudimentary form, cinema provoked the sensory experience of the viewer and appeared to cross the surface of the body, enter through the very pores, into the bones and nerves. This might explain why Sergei Eisenstein compared certain montage effects to the dizzying ride of a roller-coaster.[35] According to Siegfried Kracauer, film potentially offered the "redemption" of physical reality partly because "representations of movement do cause a stir in deep bodily layers."[36] In activating otherwise insensible "bodily layers," early film underscored the body's piecemeal, mutable existence.

The history of silent film has been discussed extensively elsewhere,[37] but it is important to stress that it was not until the emergence of sound in the late twenties and the eventual codifying of cinematic conventions that a more stark division between mainstream and avant-garde productions developed. While the "classical period" in Hollywood would perfect a "mechanism for producing an illusion of Renaissance space, flowing movements compatible with the human eye,"[38] early film experimentation conjured up bodies that were deliberately fractured. Griffith's methods, for instance, included the manipulation of parallel action as well as what Deleuze calls "deframing," the disconcerting method of not including the whole body in a frame (*Movement-Image* 17). Further, the silence of early film diverted attention away from denotative meaning and towards partial somatic gestures.

As Tom Gunning points out, "early cinema is not dominated by narrative" but rather partakes of the "sensual and psychological impact" of the fairground, suggestive of a kaleidoscopic sensory experience not circumscribed by Cartesian perspective.[39] Early cinema then was not a primitive phase in a teleological movement, but subverted aims of continuity and coherence for particular effects. Thus a poet such as Williams would see in the medium a match for his own anti-narrative impulse to break with "banality of sequence" and "the paralyzing vulgarity of logic."[40] This overthrowing of linear movement combined with the literary ambition to restore vitalism and the primacy of experience, directives of both Henri Bergson and William James.

Early film, in this context, appeared to subvert what Louis Menand calls the "mechanistic conclusions of traditional empiricist epistemology."[41] Moreover, silent film's status as a form of hieroglyphics promised that an Esperanto or universal language might be attained. At the same time, film increasingly signified a pronounced dualism: a potential for tactile immediacy and an insistence upon disjunctive mediation. Akin to Henry Head's experiments conducted after the First World War to regenerate severed nerves, film both dissected and restored sensibility.[42] In other words, even as mechanical reproduction ultimately erodes immediacy and wholeness, early film carved out new spaces for the dislocated body and revivified sensation.

The four poets had to negotiate not only revolutions in aesthetic representation, but were also intensely aware of the literal bodily disfigurements and psychological traumas caused by the First World War, including the deflation of the myth of an impermeable white masculinity. Shell-shocked bodies might find their experience echoed in the dislocating capacities of film. On the other hand, as Paul Virilio reminds, "the nitrocellulose that went into film stock was also used for the production of explosives," while the tactics of cinematic shooting have physiological effects parallel to those of warfare: "[w]eapons are tools not just of destruction but also of perception – that is to say, stimulants that make themselves felt through chemical, neurological processes in the sense organs and the central nervous system."[43] With such "weapons," filmmakers could hope to shock and restructure experience. For the modern poets studied here, fragmentation might be an aesthetic choice, but it could never be entirely divorced from an awareness of its physical manifestations.

Insofar as narrative can produce a "méconnaissance" of a unified bodily gestalt,[44] the screen (like Lacan's mirror stage) becomes, as Christian Metz famously argues, "a veritable psychical substitute, a prosthesis for our primally dislocated limbs."[45] However, instead of performing an exclusively orthopedic function, early films, especially but not exclusively those created by the avant-garde, could foreground their spectral materiality, shatter a comfortable or seamless verisimilitude, and return the spectator to her serialized, "dislocated limbs." In this way, film montage might expose the way "a unified bodily ego comes into existence only as the result of a laborious stitching together of disparate parts."[46] With dismemberment an aspect of its modus operandi, film often connected the lived body as fragile and ephemeral with "film's body." This is not to minimize the literal traumas and injuries of war but to emphasize that dislocation in multiple forms haunted modernist texts and films.