Film adaptation has always had a love–hate relationship with literary modernism. A creative union seemed almost certain in the 1910s and 1920s, though. Modernist writers were fascinated with visual media; German theorist Walter Benjamin proclaimed film the definitive modern form; and the modernist magazine Close Up (1927–33) was forging aesthetic links between film and literary culture “from the angles of art, experiment, and possibility.”¹ The energies of literary and cinematic modernism in the years either side of World War I promised an imaginative movement beyond the limits of written and visual forms. Many modernist writers could be “profoundly cinematic even when not fully cognizant of it”; filmmakers such as D. W. Griffith, Georges Méliès and Eric von Stroheim were drawn to the written word because it lent early cinema aesthetic validity; and two 1928 versions of The Fall of the House of Usher by French director Jean Epstein and American team James Sibley Watson Jr. and Melville Webber showed what could be achieved by transforming Edgar Allan Poe’s gothic tale into visually provocative cinema.²

However, when it comes to cinematic adaptations of modernist fiction filmmakers have often found themselves faced with major technical problems. Critics Gilberto Perez and Sam Girgus have argued that these problems derive from the way in which modernist culture exacerbates the tension between film as a “reflective” form (representing and documenting) and a “creative” medium (reworking and transforming).³ This tension is true of all adaptations, but is particularly acute within the framework of modernism for three main reasons. First, the commercial pressures on mainstream cinematic production have historically (at least since the early 1930s) demanded slick products that do not challenge viewers, whereas high literary modernism demands scrupulous attention from readers. Second, the interest among modernist writers in unreliable narrators, psychologically complex characters, fragmented perceptions, and mythical allusions are devices that rarely translate smoothly into film without technical complication or
dilution of creative intent. And, third, the modernist disdain of bourgeois culture does not sit comfortably with the liberal ideology that is usually upheld in commercial film.

In order to explore these issues, this chapter will discuss a range of examples from both sides of the Atlantic which demonstrates the problems and creative risks that have arisen in adapting modernist fiction. Historically the solution to the problems of adapting modernist texts has been the tactic of general avoidance, with the nineteenth-century realist novel, naturalistic drama, and genre-based fiction offering easier routes to adaptation. This has been more prevalent in the United States than in Europe, where the dominant tenets of classical Hollywood film – seamless worlds, linear narratives, a stable hierarchy of characters, humanist ideology, and tidy resolutions – have offered quite a different trajectory to that taken by most modernist writers. Even though the American modernists William Faulkner, Nathanael West, and John Steinbeck were employed by Hollywood studios as screenwriters in the 1930s and 1940s, adaptations of their most challenging novels were rare, with producers and directors more often excited by the prospect of adapting realist fiction.

Adapting modernist fiction

William Faulkner offers a classic illustration of the stand-off between the US film industry and literary modernism. Following two decades as a published novelist, Faulkner was drawn to Hollywood in 1932, where he worked periodically through the 1930s and 1940s as a screenwriter, initially for MGM and later for Twentieth-Century Fox and Warner Brothers, with credits for films such as *To Have and Have Not* (1944) and *The Big Sleep* (1946). The first film that Faulkner worked on at MGM with director Howard Hawks, *Today We Live* (1933), was an adaptation of his own short story “Turn About,” but most of his work was strictly of a contractual nature. Tom Dardis notes that Faulkner’s fiction was not in high demand in the 1940s; only after he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949 were studios drawn to adapting his work. Even then, the big studios were interested in his more realistic fiction such as his 1948 novel *Intruder in the Dust* (Clarence Brown, 1949) and *The Hamlet* (1940), adapted as *The Long Hot Summer* (Martin Ritt, 1958), rather than his experimental phase of modernist writing from 1929 to 1936.

Twentieth-Century Fox did make one attempt to adapt the most technically difficult of Faulkner’s novels, *The Sound and the Fury* (Martin Ritt, 1959), but the studio shied away from its most challenging elements, with producer Jerry Wald striving for narrative economy and screenwriters Irving
Ravetch and Harriet Frank Jr. reordering events and editing out the psychologically complex sections. The screenwriters also ensured that two of the chief characters have redeeming qualities: unlike Faulkner’s novel the tormented brother Quentin Compson (John Beal) does not commit suicide and the sadistic Jason (Yul Brynner) is granted the capacity to love.

The chief difficulty in this adaptation is that Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* is told from four different perspectives (three sections are in the first-person and the last in the third-person), with the idiot brother Benjy’s “voice” the first that the reader encounters. This perspectival technique is avoided in the film because it makes for a disorienting sequence of events, with very little establishing material. Not only this, but Benjy’s voice is entirely muted in the film, in contrast to the novel where the reader has access to his sense impressions and his frustrated attempts to speak. Actor Jack Warden struggled to render Benjy’s psychic confusion and resorted to heavy-handed techniques such as wearing a placard advertising a local freak-show to emphasize his character’s idiocy. As such, it is hard to detect Faulkner’s modernist novel as the source text of Martin Ritt’s film. This is not a problem in its own right, but critic Bruce Kawain argues that the studio missed a trick with the adaptation. Whereas Faulkner was forced to translate Benjy’s interior thoughts into words, Kawain argues that the film might have conveyed his sense impressions through “visual montage.”5 On this argument Faulkner’s problem of finding words for Benjy’s unspoken thoughts would not have arisen: “the viewer could simply see that Benjy was young or old, near a pasture or outside a barn.”6

When Hollywood has worked within the terms of the modernist novel it has often led to uneven responses, such as the three cinematic adaptations of Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1926, 1949, and 1974). Critic Wheeler Dixon argues that “not one of Fitzgerald’s novels has been brought to the screen with a true sense of fidelity to the original source material” and without losing “the intensity and power” of his fiction.7 Dixon mourns the loss of the 1926 silent Paramount adaptation directed by Herbert Brenon, which he estimates was probably the most faithful of the three adaptations.8 Dixon is arguably too preoccupied with the issue of fidelity, but his reading of director Elliot Nugent’s 1949 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* is illuminating. This was in part a novelistic adaptation, and in part a reworking of Owen Davis’s 1926 stage play, which Fitzgerald had commented read “pretty badly.” Paramount initially bought the rights for the novel for $16,000, but (in contrast to Dixon’s view) this first adaptation was thought to be over-theatrical, was criticized for using extensive intertitles, and for lacking imaginative direction. In 1949 Paramount released a second adaptation that attempted to redeem some of the novel’s visual qualities (with a
screenplay by Cyril Hume and Richard Maibaum), but it remained theatrical in its self-contained scenes and it modulated the narrative perspective to lessen the subjectivism of Nick Caraway’s cynical view of Long Island in the 1920s.

The 1949 adaptation reworks Fitzgerald’s novel along the lines of classical Hollywood realism. Rather than having the past revealed in snatches, the film fills in the back story through three carefully orchestrated flashbacks given in historical sequence. To ensure that the stable hierarchy of characters is established from the outset, Jay Gatsby (Allan Ladd) is introduced as the chief character in an opening montage in which he is portrayed in archetypal gangster role, whereas in the novel there is a long delay before he appears enigmatically as a guest at his own party. And the symbolic texture of the novel also suffers in adaptation, with localities such as the Valley of the Ashes losing their dramatic impact (it is quite obviously a film set) and Gatsby’s attempt to reclaim lost time (in Fitzgerald’s narrative the clock falls from the mantelpiece as Gatsby nervously waits for Daisy, and Nick ruminates on Gatsby’s attempt to “beat back time” in the final epic lines) is reduced to the clichéd line “it’s time to start over,” moments before Gatsby is shot. Rather than an extended epilogue that conveys crucial information about Gatsby’s past, the film is bookended by scenes in which Nick and Jordan Baker reflect on Gatsby’s life as they visit his grave. This provides a fatalistic account of an individual with vaulting ambition and prevents the viewer from sharing Nick’s begrudging respect for Gatsby in the novel.

Wheeler Dixon concludes that “the result was a curiously tedious, flat, and unimaginative film, with little visual or thematic resonance.”9 In fact, such are the multiple changes that Nugent and screenwriters make to the novel that it is only the storyline and the reputation of the author (a pair of spectacles and an image of Fitzgerald’s novel accompany the opening credits) which identify it as an adaptation. Echoing director Martin Ritt’s reservations about his hand in adapting Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury, Elliot Nugent admitted that his 1949 adaptation did not live up to his cinematic expectations. This was one of the reasons why Paramount commissioned a third color version with a much more lavish budget in 1974, directed by Jack Clayton with a screenplay by Francis Ford Coppola.10

There were other modernist adaptations in postwar America, particularly focusing on the vogue of “American in Paris” movies such as The Last Time I Saw Paris (Richard Brooks, 1954), adapted from Fitzgerald’s short story “Babylon Revisited” (1931), and The Sun Also Rises (Henry King, 1957) from Hemingway’s 1926 novel. But neither of these films could be considered modernist along the lines of the two writers’ experiments with form, perspective, and symbol. At mid-century one had to look outside the United
States to find filmmakers interested in the aesthetic possibilities of the modernist novel, with the Japanese director Akira Kurosawa intensifying the modernist qualities of Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* in 1951 and French director Pierre Chanel directing a low-budget adaptation of *Native Son* (also 1951), starring the author Richard Wright in the lead role as the angry Bigger Thomas. *Native Son* is an interesting case in point of what could not be done in the Hollywood studio system at mid-century, but in this instance it was less to do with formal qualities and more with racial politics. MGM showed interest in adapting Wright’s *Native Son* in 1941, following the success of the stage adaptation where the African American actor Canada Lee played Bigger Thomas, but the studio wanted a white actor in blackface for the lead role. Director Orson Welles reacted to this demand by planning to shoot the film in Mexico where a mixed cast would be tolerated, but the project ended in defeat when Welles could find no financial backers.

In the 1950s isolated cases of modernist adaptation emerged in France with director Alain Resnais’s visually stunning collaborations with Marguerite Duras in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959) and with Alain Robbe-Grillet in *Last Year In Marienbad* (1961). But it was not really until the 1960s and 1970s that they began to appear with some degree of regularity, including adaptations of Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (Orson Welles, 1962), James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (Joseph Strick, 1967), Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* (Luchino Visconti, 1971), Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust* (John Schlesinger, 1974), and Herman Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* (Fred Haines, 1974). But even in the 1970s when the tenets of classical filmmaking had undergone a decade of transition stimulated by the French New Wave and the emergence of “New Hollywood,” modernist adaptations were rare, with a movement back to the realist novels of Jane Austen, E. M. Forster, and Henry James in the 1980s signalling a return to a more parochial Anglo-American literary heritage. There have been some recent attempts to adapt modernist fiction such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (Marleen Gorris, 1997), but filmmakers are still more comfortable adapting turn-of-the-century novels such as *The Golden Bowl* (James Ivory, 2000) and *House of Mirth* (Terence Davies, 2000) rather than high modernist texts from the 1920s, toning down the more experimental qualities of Henry James’s late fiction and the irony of Edith Wharton’s narrative voice.

We should not just look to “straight” adaptations though, or transpositions of fiction to film, to gauge the relationship between literary and cinematic modernism. Part of the problem is that modernism in the film industry cannot be as clearly periodized as it can in terms of literary production. The period 1890–1940 saw an intensification of modernist experimentation for writers on both sides of the Atlantic, whereas the same period marked an
extended cycle in the history of filmmaking, taking in its birth, development, and maturity as an aesthetic and commercial form.

Scott Eyman has argued that the introduction of sound in 1928 represented a fall from the aesthetic possibilities and universal language of silent cinema, making film material “less malleable” where “allusion and metaphor” were replaced by standardized dialogue that did not sit easily with the psychological interiority of modernist fiction. The coming of sound certainly brought with it a stricter demarcation between commercial and experimental film, and when the magazine Close Up shifted from monthly to quarterly format in early 1931 it seemed as if the modernist moment of creative possibility had been lost. For this reason critics usually return most regularly to silent filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, and Walter Ruttmann to identify the modernist style. For example, Sam Girgus hails Vertov’s Man with a Movie Camera as a supreme blend of “artistic creativity and technical innovation with social and cultural consciousness,” while Michael Wood reads it as “a celebration of film, shown as miraculously able to capture motion.”

But even before the coming of sound the modernist novel was problematic for filmmakers. Vertov and Eisenstein were either not interested or did not have the technical resources to adapt modernist novels; instead they were keen to make “cinematographic poems” that absorbed the kinetic energies of modernism. Even pioneering émigré adapters of the silent period such as Erich von Stroheim in Greed (1923) and Victor Sjöström in The Scarlet Letter (1926) returned to realist and naturalist novels to develop their cinematic art. This is not to say that modernism has no place in the development of film, but simply that the transactions between literary modernism and modernist filmmaking are complex and cannot be easily approached by looking at isolated case studies. To this end, the next two sections will consider two key modernist preoccupations – space and time – which open up a set of thematic exchanges between modernist literature and film, before the discussion turns to a recent adaptation, The Hours (Stephen Daldry, 2002), as a means for exploring the problematic modernist interface between fiction and film.

Modernist space

In his two-part philosophical meditation Cinema 1 (1983) and Cinema 2 (1985) French theorist Gilles Deleuze identifies the “movement-image” and the “time-image” as the two fundamental parameters of film, arguing that there was a general transition from “movement” to “time” following World War II. Deleuze rarely refers to modernism in his two books, perhaps because
modernity complicates this historical separation of spatiality and temporality. Instead, he associates classical cinema with the movement-image and post-classical cinema with the time-image as a shift from fixed spatial coordinates towards a cinematic aesthetic “which tends to overflow the real” and “organizes itself into a travelling spectacle.” In *Cinema 2* he looks to postwar Italian filmmakers Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Luchino Visconti to most clearly demonstrate this shift. But the truth is that they and other European directors were only reviving the spirit of early modernism that had been marginalized by the functional filmmaking that dominated the 1930s and 1940s.

Deleuze also underestimates the space of modernity as an urban culture of movement, with the growth of metropolitan centres in Paris, Zurich, London, St. Petersburg, and New York providing a fertile climate for experimentation across a number of cultural forms. The most significant example of this urban concentration was the “city symphony.” Films such as *Berlin: Symphony of a City* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927), *Rain* (Joris Ivens, 1929), and *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929) focused on Berlin, Rotterdam, and Moscow respectively to document the dynamism of modern urban culture.

But the form of the city symphony was established on the other side of the Atlantic by the American photographer Paul Strand and painter Charles Sheeler in *Manhatta* (1921), a film that has no single source text, but can still be considered an early example of adaptation. In this short seven-minute film of a working day in Manhattan, Strand and Sheeler use a variety of modernist techniques further developed in the city symphonies which followed *Manhatta*, including crosscutting, tracking, abstraction, and perspectival shots to convey multiple views of urban modernity. Despite their training in static visual forms, Strand and Sheeler were drawn to moving images to capture city rhythms, interposing the images of Manhattan with lyrics taken from Walt Whitman’s New York poems, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (1881) and “Mannahatta” (1888). In these two poems Whitman fuses documentary realism with a lyrical vision of the democratic pulse of urban culture, with lines such as: “on the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose.”

This mixture of forms is also evident in the literary and cinematic idioms of *Manhatta*, suggesting that Strand and Sheeler viewed filmmaking as a hybrid form combining both visual and narrative technologies. *Manhatta* is entranced by Whitman’s poetry, even though there is no simple correlation between lyrics and images. Whitman’s lyrics can either be seen as reinforcing the impression of New York as “the city of ambition” (as Alfred Stieglitz dubbed it in his 1910 photograph) or they offer ironic juxtaposition to a city
full of smoke and industry that facilitates working life at the expense of community and leisure. Critics are also divided on this issue: Jan-Christopher Horak claims that the lyrics were used as an integral part of the film (reflecting the interest in Whitman among other modernist painters such as Joseph Stella), but Scott Hammen asserts that the lines were added after completion at the Rialto Theatre, where the film was premiered with the alternative title *New York the Magnificent* in July 1921. Whatever the provenance of the Whitman lyrics, as Miles Orvell argues, they serve to “soften the effect of the actual modern city, a city that as pictured is far beyond what even Whitman might have imagined.”

On the other side of the film/fiction divide, the American modernist John Dos Passos was drawn to cinematic techniques to nuance the formal qualities of his fiction, using montage and cross-cutting as an aesthetic feature of his *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930–6). In this way he developed his interest in the Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein from his earlier novel *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), which charts the rapid development of the US from an agrarian to an urban nation. In *Manhattan Transfer* the critic David Minter sees a similar ambivalence to that displayed in *Manhatta*: “the city consists not only of patterns and systems – marvels of architectural design, civil engineering, social planning, and human governance – but also of noisy, disordered, congested, conflicted scenes in which repressed anxieties and animosities return.” *U.S.A.* intensifies the formal experimentation of *Manhattan Transfer*, tracing the series of events over thirty years that led up to the stock market crash of October 1929. Rather than concentrating on plot and characters, the trilogy explores the social, economic, and cultural forces that shaped the nation in the early century. Some sections are conventionally naturalistic, but even here multiple viewpoints are deployed and oral elements jostle for attention amongst scraps of print culture. The first volume of Dos Passos’s trilogy, *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), also uses newsreel and cinematic technique. Biographies of “great men” (Andrew Carnegie, Henry Ford, and Woodrow Wilson) are juxtaposed with advertisements and factual headlines, while the “camera eye” sections (reminiscent of Dziga Vertov’s 1923 description of the “kino-eye”) mimic an unfixed camera shifting dynamically between perspectives.

Dos Passos’s use of the “camera eye” technique was influential on loosening narrative from the control of conventional first-person or third-person narrators, but it was not adopted widely by other American writers in the 1930s because (although *U.S.A.* was a proletariat novel) as a formal technique it was criticized for evading ideological commitment. One author who did echo Dos Passos’s interest in the montage city was the Jewish American writer Henry Roth in his immigrant New York novel *Call It Sleep* (1934), but Roth did not draw explicitly on a film aesthetic.

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On the other side of the Atlantic, however, *Manhattan Transfer* did have a direct influence on the German modernist Alfred Döblin in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929; trans. 1931; adapted by Rainer Fassbinder into a fifteen-hour epic in 1980). In this novel Döblin uses similar techniques to Dos Passos for capturing the chaotic crosscurrents of Berlin, focusing on Alexanderplatz as a gathering point for multiple narrative lines. Döblin shared with Dos Passos an interest in juxtaposing a plethora of cultural forms, including songs, advertisements, timetables, weather forecasts, court hearings, election speeches, and urban noises. The fragmentation of images, texts, and sounds revealed a new urban aesthetic in which the hierarchy between high and low culture was no longer stable. There are differences between Döblin and Dos Passos though. For one, Döblin uses a more consistent narrative perspective (despite a number of unidentified voices) and he focuses more closely on a central character, Franz Biberkopf. In this way Döblin developed an interest in charting the movement of an urban collective while maintaining focus on a single protagonist, which echoes James Joyce’s fusion of personal, public, and mythic narratives in *Ulysses* (1922).

**Modernist time**

When Gilles Deleuze turns his attention to early filmmaking in *Cinema 2* he argues that many films contain internal tensions between concrete and abstract elements, or as he calls it a “cinema of the body” and a “cinema of the brain.” While it is tempting to demote spatial movement to that of unthinking bodies, Deleuze points out that for modernist filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein these tensions are played out in different ways. Even though temporality is both visceral and cerebral for both filmmakers, Vertov’s sustained camera shots reveal temporality as continuous and dynamic in its flow, whereas Eisenstein’s use of montage and cutting suggests that moments of time overlap or occur simultaneously.

In Walter Ruttman’s *Berlin: Symphony of a City*, for example, the space of modernity is defined not just by urban topography, but also by the temporal changes of a day in the life of Berlin. The five acts of the film are signalled by periodic images of a public clock, which we first see at five in morning and last see at midnight. But clock time is just one mode of temporality and is juxtaposed with other processes: machine time, transport time, recreation time, and one woman’s attempt to defeat time by jumping from a bridge. Experiential time (what Henri Bergson called *la durée*) was often in conflict with clock time, with modernists developing a range of techniques to explore this tension, and some such as Vertov arguing that machine time and human time should be brought into a more dynamic relationship.
More important than the different literary and cinematic techniques used to represent rival conceptions of temporality was a reorientation towards the past, with modernity frequently seen as a rupture from nineteenth-century concerns. In modernist texts the past is frequently depicted as an irretrievable place from a previous century with different traditions and conflicting cultural priorities. Some extreme modernists such as the Futurists celebrated unreservedly the emerging technologies of the new century, but the past most often re-emerged as a revenant that haunts and disrupts the present, with many modernists troubled about the direction in which modern culture was heading. This is evident in the ambivalent treatment of New York City in *Manhatta* and the fragmentation of cultural artefacts in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), encapsulating what Leo Charney calls the “drift” of modernity in which “self-present identity is lost” and replaced by ungovernable “moments, fragments, and absent presents.”

Two of the most iconic modernist literary texts to deal with changing conceptions of temporality are Thomas Mann’s novella *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*, 1912; trans. 1925) and Marcel Proust’s epic *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*, 1913–27; trans. 1922–31), both the subject of adaptations in the 1970s and 1980s. The two texts are at the opposite ends of the modernist spectrum in terms of length: *Death in Venice* is a short novella in which time is shown to be running out for the respected German writer Gustav von Aschenbach, while *Remembrance of Things Past* is a sprawling epic that elongates moments of time and demonstrates the ways in which chance encounters involuntarily transport an individual into the past. Despite their manifest differences, both texts treat time with a seriousness of intent that propels Mann’s Aschenbach and Proust’s Swann into worlds in which chronological time is seen as an imposition on the more chaotic flux of experience and desire. Aschenbach has spent too much of his life with a clenched fist writing moral and edifying works for an expecting audience; when he is advised to take a vacation in Venice and becomes fascinated by the young Polish boy Tadzio he finds time falling in on him as desire and a cholera epidemic attack his very being. In contrast, the aristocratic Swann remains in control of his outer world, but finds that in the various episodes of his life, such as his affair with Odette de Crécy in *Swann in Love*, he is often consumed by feelings which he cannot control and which awaken his “passion for truth” that transcends temporality and social etiquette. On this basis, as Deleuze identifies, the temporal forces of decomposition, history, and revelation are intertwined with aesthetics for Proust and Visconti.

Visconti’s adaptation of *Death in Venice* (*Morte a Venezia*, It, 1971) and Volker Schlöndorff’s *Swann in Love* (*Un Amour de Swann*, Fr, 1984) focus on the way in which overwhelming desire collapses the everyday experience
of time. Both films emphasize the visuality of desire, with Swann (Jeremy Irons) fascinated by every sensual gesture of Odette (Ornella Muti), while Aschenbach (Dirk Bogarde) is entranced by the ethereal beauty of Tadzio (Bjorn Andresen) as he follows him around the streets of Venice and is transfixed by him as he plays on the beach. Both adaptations modify the love objects as presented in the fiction: Tadzio does not have the gothic traits that mark him out in Mann’s novella (with his “jagged and pale” teeth of “brittle transparency”), and Odette in Schlöndorff’s film is much more classically beautiful than the exaggerated characteristics she is given in Proust: “her eyes were beautiful, but so large they seemed to droop beneath their own weight, strained the rest of her face and always made her appear unwell or in a bad mood.”

Critics of the two adaptations agree about their powerful visual qualities. Stuart Burrows argues that Visconti’s film is all about “watching” in which the cinema viewer is caught in the protagonist’s homoerotic gaze, but also the camera that focuses in on Aschenbach’s increasingly idiosyncratic behavior as he plays out the role of unrequited lover. The camera not only enhances Tadzio’s painterly qualities (at one moment he is framed by a stained-glass window), but it lingers on Aschenbach’s visage, and records scenes after he has departed or to which he is insensible. This technique of visual lingering and juxtaposition of perspectives appears to stem from Visconti’s close engagement with Proust (although his script for *Remembrance of Things Past* was never made as a film), serving to elongate time at those very instants when the viewer realizes that it is quickly running out for Aschenbach.

Melissa Anderson is much more critical of Schlöndorff’s *Swann in Love*, preferring two more recent adaptations, *Le Temps retrouvé* (Raúl Ruiz, Fr, 1999) and *La Captive* (Chantal Ackerman, Fr/Bel, 2000), as well as Harold Pinter’s unfilmed *The Proust Screenplay*, for developing the novel’s themes. Anderson argues that *Swann in Love* does not capture the subjective voice of the text, choosing instead to focus in on the visual minutiae of the conventional costume drama and the more obvious signs of desire such as the cattleya orchids Swann adjusts in Odette’s cleavage.

Other critics such as Paul Arthur also argue that Ruiz’s film *Le Temps retrouvé* is better at conveying “Proustian structures of consciousness” with “gliding camera movements evoking the ephemerality and instability of memory.” But what Schlöndorff does do well is to contract the temporality of the 200-page section of Proust’s first volume (narrated largely in the third person) into a twenty-four hour period in which the capaciousness of Swann’s desire is in tension with the clock time that marks out the stages of his day.

In fact it is not so much in the visual qualities of the two adaptations, but the musical elements that signal the filmmakers’ attempts to deal with the
modernist qualities of the source texts. Bogarde’s character is an amalgam of Mann’s Aschenbach and Gustav Mahler, the Adagietto from Mahler’s 5th Symphony (1902) lending the film an epic and emotional expansiveness that the visual gaze and circumscribed locality of Venice do not. As such, Aschenbach’s flashbacks collapse aesthetic distinctions into general meditations on modernist art and its assault on nineteenth-century cultural values. Although some critics were unhappy about the obtrusive presence of Mahler’s score, in a film largely devoid of dialogue, music is the primary element that develops the narrative and temporal lines. It also suggests that the dissolution of one writer on vacation in Venice is actually symbolic of a decaying civilization with which time has caught up.

The music in Swann’s Way is less impressive, mainly because there is no equivalent refrain to Mahler’s Adagietto. But the music nevertheless serves both literary and cinematic functions, offering a direct route to Proust’s primary theme of “lost time” as well as providing aural pleasure. This double function is particularly evident early on in the film when Swann is gripped by one of his involuntary memory spasms at a chamber concert. Seconds after he has asked “what time is it?” and prepares to leave the concert he becomes entranced by Vinteuil’s sonata, which plays “the national anthem” of his love for Odette and renders him motionless, unable to break away from his internal drama. Melissa Anderson is right in her assessment that we have no access to Swann’s subjectivity at these moments in the film (unlike Proust’s manifold psychological insights), but such is the rigidity of his body and intensity of his look that it speaks almost as much as the novel’s longer description, in which the music suggests to him “a world of inexplicable delights, of whose existence, before hearing it, he had never dreamed, into which he felt that nothing else could initiate him; and he had been filled with love for it, as with a new and strange desire.” Rather than Proust’s la durée being a smooth uninterrupted stream of consciousness, Leo Charney argues that it is an “erratic vagrancy” full of lapses and moments of arrest. And rather than Visconti and Schlöndorff resorting to voiceover to render these internal states (a technique which would be dramatically risky and much too literary), they use the motionless state of the characters as they watch and listen to dramatize those epiphanic moments so common in modernist novels when time fades away, only to re-emerge seconds later in the tedium of prosaic reality or in the frustrations of desire.

Lost spaces/lost time in The Hours

Whereas Deleuze in Cinema 1 and Cinema 2 suggests a historical shift from movement to temporality as the modus operandi of filmmaking (with World
War II as the turning point), I would argue that the two parameters are always intertwined within modernist texts. We can see the intertwining of these forces very clearly in a recent film that revisits some key modernist ideas: Stephen Daldry’s *The Hours* (2002), adapted from Michael Cunningham’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel of 1998. As Peter Brooker discusses in Chapter 7 there are a number of aspects of Cunningham’s novel that could be labeled postmodern (including its intertextuality and impersonation of literary styles), but the fact that the primary historical figure behind the text is Virginia Woolf and that the three-part narrative is a reworking of Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is significant in terms of signalling a modernist continuum. And these connections are not solely literary: Woolf wrote an essay on “The Cinema” in 1926 in which she argues that cinematic reality takes on a fluid life of its own (“we see life as it is when we have no part in it”), and her major novels *To the Lighthouse* (1926) and *The Waves* (1931) engage with the intricacies of “life” in very cinematic ways.31 But, while Cunningham’s novel can also be read as a piece of fledgling cinema, he admits that his research focused on the modernist novel, with epigraphs from Woolf and Jorge Luis Borges indicating that *The Hours* is poised between modernism and a postmodern reworking of modernist motifs.

*The Hours* moves between three different stories, separated in space and time, but interlinked through the subject matter of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf’s novel focuses on a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares for a party in the West End of London while she contemplates her anxieties and the sacrifices she has felt compelled to make. Cunningham’s rendering of the story is rather different as it is inflected through three alternating perspectives and three different worlds: first, Woolf’s struggle to write *Mrs. Dalloway* in dreary 1920s Richmond; second, the reading of the novel by depressed Los Angeles housewife Laura Brown in the early 1950s; and, third, the acting out of the *Mrs. Dalloway* story by late 1990s New York literary editor Clarissa Vaughan. Adapted by dramatist David Hare, the film retains Cunningham’s alternating perspectives, using well-known actresses – Nicole Kidman, Julianne Moore, and Meryl Streep – to play the three characters. Despite wearing a prosthetic nose to play Woolf (making her virtually unrecognizable), Kidman was the star of the film, primarily because the writer’s story occupies more than a third of the narrative space in Cunningham’s novel and gives birth to the other two stories.

An interesting graphic was used to promote the film in which images of the three characters – Virginia/Laura/Clarissa or Kidman/Moore/Streep – slowly morph into each other, as if this is a clue to the aesthetics of the adaptation. Certainly the three tales reflect and even blur into each other at times, but they focus on three aspects of writing, dealing in turn with author, reader,
and fictional restaging. The film improves on the transitions in the novel, by cutting between them when a certain image (such as fresh flowers) or a particular sound reverberates into another of the character’s lives. This technique lends the film more fluidity than Cunningham’s novel, with fast cutting providing a wave-like motion that is developed in the water imagery of the film, amplified by Philip Glass’s haunting score, in which he uses serial refrains to accent the circularity of the three characters’ lives.

The central tension of *The Hours* is how to have meaningful relationships while also securing material independence and a place in which one can create: the hallmarks of Woolf’s “room of one’s own.” This central tension is creative, but also potentially tragic. In the writing of *Mrs. Dalloway* (the working title of which was “The Hours”) Woolf considered making Clarissa commit suicide, but realized that the death of another character (the shell-shocked war veteran Septimus Warren Smith) would enable her to live: a point that is carried through to the suicide of Clarissa Vaughan’s AIDS-suffering friend Richard (Ed Harris). The central character Laura Brown – the depressed counterpart of the 1950s serene housewife played by Julianne Moore in *Far From Heaven* (Todd Haynes, US, 2002) – also contemplates suicide, but instead opts for escape from her ordinary but loveless marriage. She is herself a manifestation of an invented character “Mrs. Brown,” from two essays Woolf wrote in 1924 – “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” and “Character in Fiction” – a seemingly ordinary figure that is often overlooked by writers because they cannot discern her rich inner world. On this point, Woolf attacked the Staffordshire writer Arnold Bennett for creating ill-formed and shallow characters and having “never once looked at Mrs. Brown in her corner.” As examples of the intertwining of the space and time of modernity, if one aspect of Cunningham’s novel and Daldry’s film explores the temporal threads that connect three different moments (1923, 1951, 2001), then the texts are also interested in the spaces, rooms, and corners in which the characters live.

Marleen Gorris’s earlier 1997 adaptation of *Mrs. Dalloway* struggled to render the interiority of Woolf’s novel, and *The Hours* works through this by projecting the interior world onto two different characters separated by time and space – what Peter Brooker calls the “refunctioning” of the modernist author and source text. *The Hours* suggests a series of temporal and spatial layers that do not add up to a final cut, or a definitive re-writing of Woolf’s novel. Instead resonances and connections abound. Just before Richard’s suicide he comments to Clarissa “I still have to face the hours . . . the hours after the party and the hours after that.” We later learn that Richard is Laura Brown’s son whom she abandoned along with her husband shortly after her attempted suicide; but although Laura escaped to a new life in Toronto, she
herself has to face “the hours after that” and the guilt of leaving her son. There is some relief from the weight of time though. At the end of the novel Clarissa thinks to herself that the consolation of being “devoured by time itself” is “an hour here or there when our lives seem, against all odds and expectations, to burst open and give us everything we’ve ever imagined.”

Even though time will come to obliterate these moments, the possibility of future epiphanies signals the end of Cunningham’s novel which fuses together two separate worlds: Clarissa welcomes into her apartment the fugitive from the past, Mrs. Brown, and gives voice to the Woolfian words: “Everything’s ready.”

Daldry’s film opts for a very different ending, stressing the permanence rather than the transitory nature of time. At the end we are taken back to the film’s beginning with Woolf’s desperate walk to the river. Whereas the opening shot cuts away from the figure before she drowns, at the end Woolf walks all the way into the river, her head slowly disappearing as Kidman’s voiceover stresses the weight of time: “always the years, always the love, always the hours.” What the alternative endings of The Hours show us is that, in both its literary and cinematic forms, imaginative modernist adaptations are still possible. As a late modernist adaptation, The Hours suggests that just as Woolf’s death is replayed so, paradoxically, she and the spectre of modernity are brought back to life.

NOTES

5 Bruce F. Kawai, Faulkner and Film (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1977), p. 28.
6 Kawai, Faulkner and Film, p. 21.
8 The trailer for the 1926 version of The Great Gatsby is all that remains: a 35 mm print of the trailer is held in The Library of Congress and is available on the DVD collection More Treasures from American Film Archives (National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004).
10 The 1974 adaptation is little better than the 1949 version in terms of telling the story from Nick Carraway’s perspective, so crucial to Fitzgerald’s novel: see Joy
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14 As James Chapman notes, Eisenstein was interested in the filmic qualities of fiction. For example, in a 1944 essay he praised the “plasticity” and “optical quality” of Dickens’s prose: Chapman, *Cinemas of the World* (London: Reaktion, 2003), pp. 60–1.


20 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 204.


23 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 94–7.


29 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Volume I, p. 228. It can be argued that Schlöndorff’s camera does not linger on Swann long enough during the Vinteuil
sonata, cutting to others in the room who observe his reaction: see Boyum, *Double Exposure*, p. 263.


33 Cunningham, *The Hours*, p. 226.