

‘Visible Worlds’: The Process of the Image in the Work of H.D.

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'Visible Worlds': The Process of the Image in the Work of H.D.

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This thesis examines the literary deployment of the visual in the work of H.D. (Hilda Doolittle). Beginning with a discussion of the early poetry of *Sea Garden* (1916) and the essay *Notes on Thought and Vision* (1919), I argue that H.D.'s categorisation as an Imagist poet has effaced the political and aesthetic possibilities opened up by her prose and later work. H.D.'s representation of 'womb vision' in *Notes on Thought and Vision* can be seen to anticipate the notion of the 'creating spectator' in the theoretical writings of the Soviet film director, Sergei Eisenstein. Thus, by considering *Sea Garden* alongside developments in early cinema, I re-evaluate the image in H.D.'s early work, and locate her poetics not as 'static' but as kinetic.

H.D. was also directly involved in film-making and in the writing of film criticism. Chapter Two explores how her engagement with the moving image is inscribed into the autobiographical novel *Her*, written in 1927. Examining *Her* alongside the silent film *Borderline* (1930), which H.D. helped to produce, this chapter explores issues of sexual and racial difference which are foregrounded through the formal devices employed in both texts. Chapter Three examines *The Gift*, which was written during the Second World War, in the light of H.D.'s contributions to the film journal *Close Up* (1927-33). This reading not only illuminates the political and ideological implications of H.D.'s use of the visual, it explores the intersections between literary and visual cultures at the beginning of the twentieth century. Accounts of cinema are largely absent from the history of literary Modernism and the thesis therefore goes some way towards a revisionist analysis of the period.

Chapter Four extends the paradigm of the visual in H.D.'s work still further, analysing her memoirs *Tribute To Freud* (1956) and the unpublished *Majic Ring* (1943-44) in the light of her involvement with spiritualism. Both these texts encode a critique of the scientific 'gaze' exemplified by psychoanalysis and offer possibilities for an alternative model of 'seeing' which is predicated upon spiritual, or visionary, experience. Returning to the discourse of the cinema in Chapter Five, I contextualise my reading of *Helen in Egypt* (1961) within debates about synchronised sound in early cinema. I also explore H.D.'s construction of female subjectivity and corporeality in *Helen* in the light of recent feminist film theory.

In many ways H.D.'s work anticipates the preoccupations of recent feminist thinkers such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler. These writers - along with recent feminist film theorists like Mary Ann Doane and Laura Mulvey - provide a theoretical underpinning for the thesis. Such an approach permits a questioning of H.D.'s perceived position as a 'Modernist' poet. Furthermore, in the light of postmodern preoccupations with process, fluidity and flux, it is possible to see how dominant configurations of gender and sexuality are, through H.D.'s work, deliberately, and consistently, unsettled.

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Abbreviations

AN	<i>Autobiographical Notes</i>
B	<i>Borderline Pamphlet</i>
CF	<i>Compassionate Friendship</i>
CP	<i>Collected Poems 1912-1944</i>
H	<i>Her</i>
HE	<i>Helen in Egypt</i>
G	<i>The Gift</i>
MR	<i>Majic Ring</i>
NRR	<i>Notes on Recent Writing</i>
NV	<i>Notes on Thought and Vision</i>
TF	<i>Tribute to Freud</i>

Note on Citation

For ease of reference, citations referring to H.D.'s poetry, prose and memoirs are abbreviated using the initials above. All references to her film writings are cited by year in the usual way.

A number of unpublished sources are used throughout the thesis. References to memoirs, journals and prose writings are abbreviated in the body of the text. Full information regarding dates of composition and archive classification is listed in the section on H.D.'s unpublished works at the end of the bibliography. Letters are referred to by the abbreviation 'L', followed by the year in which they were written. Full dates and archive classification is included in the bibliography. All citations from unpublished sources retain the spelling, emphasis and punctuation of the original.

Two editions of *The Gift* are used in the thesis. The abbreviation 'G' refers to the abridged New Directions version (1982a). The complete version is cited by date of publication as *The Gift* (1998a).

Introduction

The Process of the Image

As Dianne Chisholm points out, ‘until the advent of feminist literary criticism, modernist studies had been content to represent H.D. as one of Ezra Pound’s creations’ (1991, 62). Recalling the often-quoted moment of H.D.’s launch onto the scene of modern poetry, Chisholm reiterates the constructed nature of the Imagist label:

Male-stream canon builders are fond of recapturing that magic moment in 1912 in the teashop of the British Museum where Pound enthusiastically received a poem, freshly scored by the novice Hilda Doolittle, proclaiming prophetically “but dryad, this is poetry!” and scratching “H.D., Imagiste” at the bottom of the page. (*ibid.*)

H.D.’s place within masculinist, literary historiography has largely been influenced by biographical details of her associations with male contemporaries like Pound, D.H. Lawrence, Richard Aldington and Sigmund Freud, with whom she undertook a brief period of psychoanalysis between 1933 and 1934. As Elizabeth A. Hirsch argues, H.D.’s label as the archetypal Imagist poet has served to make her ‘not only *an* example but *the* example, the exemplar, the veritable Image of Imagism - the figure in whom Imagism/Modernism recognized itself’ (1986, 3). Arguing further that she has come to represent in critical history ‘a certain *theory* of the image which is not her own’, Hirsch suggests a disparity between H.D.’s image as a female poet, created by others, and the construction of a visual aesthetic which is her own (*ibid.*; emphasis in original).

This opposition is the point of departure for my thesis. Demonstrating the complex and contradictory nature of H.D.’s engagement with the visual, I challenge the ways in which she has been denied a role as a theorist of images both by her male literary contemporaries *and* by mainstream criticism. In so doing, I explore how her work resists the definitions of the image outlined in Pound’s manifestos.¹ As Hirsch suggests, there is an uneasy tension between H.D.’s iconic status as the visual

representative of Imagism and her role as a viewer, maker or theorist of those images. Clearly, this has implications for a *gendered* reading of her work, since it troubles the notion of the female subject as fixed or passive image. The tension in H.D.'s writing between self-as-image and self as creator or theorist of images is useful in considering how femininity has been culturally encoded. It underscores the notion of *representation* which has preoccupied feminist theory, especially feminist film theory, in recent years. H.D.'s constant oscillation between the positions of active and passive, image and image-maker reveals a textual practice which is often contradictory. Yet it also establishes a site for the contestation of a singular notion of 'identity' or 'sexuality', opening up her writing to a multiplicity of readings.

I begin this Introduction by contextualising my approach to H.D.'s work within the field of critical scholarship and by outlining the methodological and theoretical approaches adopted in the thesis. I then move on to outline the key issues explored, as a foundation for the discussion of specific texts in the ensuing chapters. By examining how the representation of the image - with all its shifting uncertainties - evolves through H.D.'s work, I provide a chronological analysis which lends unity to the collection of diverse texts examined here. I begin, in Chapter One, with a discussion of the conceptual roots of the visual in H.D.'s early poetry. Chapters Two and Three consider how her involvement in film production and the writing of film criticism inform the narrative strategies of her prose narratives, *Her* (1984 [1981]) and *The Gift* (1982a [1969]). Chapter Four extends the paradigm of the visual still further, reading *Tribute To Freud* (1956) and the unpublished typescript, *Majic Ring* in the light of H.D.'s involvement with spiritualism. Both these texts encode a critique of scientific scrutiny and offer possibilities for an alternative model of seeing which is predicated upon spiritual, or visionary, experience. Returning to cinematic discourse in Chapter Five, I read *Helen in Egypt* (1985a [1961]) in the light of recent feminist film theory, whilst contextualising the poem within debates about synchronised sound in early cinema.

H.D. was born in 1886 and died in 1961. My thesis charts a course through her career, which witnessed 'the twin birth of cinema and psychoanalysis around the year 1900' and spanned the devastating effects of two World Wars (de Lauretis 1984,

¹ See, for instance, Pound (1960a) and (1960b).

67). This not only permits a discussion of H.D.'s artistic development but an engagement with the cultural concerns of the time. As I demonstrate, the huge cultural shift in the relationship between spectator and image in the early part of the twentieth century - largely brought about by the growth of cinema as a new art form - is directly inscribed into H.D.'s literary aesthetic. And, as I also show, her response to this new visual dynamic is plural and complex. Not only does her representation of the visual reveal her preoccupation with modes of identity and corporeality, it also contains an awareness of the interconnections of power inherent in the processes of looking and being looked at. H.D.'s critique of Freud's scientific, masculinist gaze exists alongside her search for the terminology of a non-hierarchical model of looking, defined throughout the thesis as 'spiritual'. In this model of looking H.D. positions herself within the text both as 'seer' and as receptor of visionary knowledge as a crucial strategy of *resistance* to the scrutiny of the gaze. A discussion of this visual aesthetic is essential if we are to understand the ways power is encoded in H.D.'s work. As such, her engagement with the visual needs to be given central attention within the body of feminist criticism to which this thesis contributes.

'Keepers of the flame' : critical scholarship on H.D.²

H.D.'s classification as a minor Imagist poet, and her position as the 'muse' of the male-dominated Modernist movement, was largely responsible for the resurgence of feminist interest in her writing in the 1980s and 1990s. Ground-breaking studies by critics such as Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis have been invaluable both in 'excavating' H.D.'s unknown or forgotten writing and in demonstrating the prolific nature of her literary output (see, for example, Friedman 1981, 1990a; DuPlessis 1986).³ But since the primary project of these critics has been to revise the Modernist literary canon, their work is often unquestioningly celebratory. Following in the wake of Friedman and DuPlessis, critics such as Deborah Kelly Kloepfer, Clare Buck and Dianne Chisholm largely focus on the relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis in H.D.'s work (see, for example, Kloepfer, 1989; Buck

² The 'keepers of the flame' refers to the growing number of critics working on H.D.'s work. It is taken from the title of an essay by H.D.'s daughter, Perdita Schaffner (1986b).

³ The two women also collaborated on several articles and an edited volume. See especially Friedman and DuPlessis (1981), (1990 [1981]) and (1990).

1991b, Chisholm 1992). Feminist engagements with psychoanalytic discourse can be usefully deployed to illuminate the monolithic constructions of gender and sexuality in western culture.⁴ Yet such discussions always risk reproducing the limitations of these categories, a danger of which I am aware in my own critical practice. Thus, whilst my thesis touches on H.D.'s relationship with Freud, I seek to trouble the binary thinking on which psychoanalytic constructions of gender and sexuality are founded.

The starting point for my discussion is that H.D.'s writing - to borrow Chisholm's term - is 'heterodoxical' (1991, 62). This heterodoxy represents a challenge to the Modernist paradigm - which I discuss later in the Introduction - and blurs the critical boundaries which have limited the reception of H.D.'s work for almost a century. H.D.'s heterodoxical oeuvre is also the motivation for my *intertextual* approach to her writing. For, in tracing H.D.'s engagement with the image through her involvement with film, psychoanalysis and spiritualism, I draw on a wide critical vocabulary through which to explore the interconnecting strands of gender, representation, sexuality and subjectivity. This cross-disciplinary approach is a departure from the recent 'literary-historical' trend in H.D. scholarship, exemplified by the work of Cassandra Laity, Eileen Gregory and Diana Collecott (Collecott 1999, 1).⁵ Whilst this 'literary-historical' approach is vital in locating H.D.'s work within the Classical and Romantic traditions from which it emerges, it is a method which privileges her early poetry and overlooks a whole body of her lesser-known writing. I acknowledge the importance of situating H.D.'s texts within their cultural contexts. But my intertextual approach also seeks to *unsettle* the very critical and chronological boundaries which have contributed to the marginalisation of her work.

My argument is situated in the gaps within this critical tradition. To date the overriding emphasis of scholarship on H.D.'s work has been focused on her poetry. In 1983 Buck argued that, whilst the 'associative and meditative' nature of some of H.D.'s writing has been regarded by many as puzzling, 'the considerable amount of

⁴ I am aware that 'the west' conflates a whole range of national and cultural differences. When referring to the concept of 'western' or 'the west', therefore, I use the lower case, rather than the upper case 'W', which is the usual convention. In so doing, I aim to foreground how such categories have been discursively-constructed and consciously attempt to avoid reinscribing the cultural privilege implied by the term.

autobiographical, stream-of-consciousness prose, in the form of diaries and fictional narratives, has been condemned [...] or simply ignored' (1983, 54). This still remains the case. Turning my attention to a whole body of lesser-known work, I examine four of H.D.'s prose texts in this thesis. Of these, *Majic Ring* remains unpublished and *The Gift* (1998a) was published for the first time in its unabridged form in 1998. Although H.D.'s involvement with the moving image and the importance of her film criticism have come to light in the past decade or so - primarily through the pioneering work of Anne Friedberg and Charlotte Mandel - this involvement is only explored in a few short essays and articles (see, for example, Friedberg 1981, 1982; Mandel 1983).⁶ There is, as yet, no full-length study of H.D.'s work which examines her literary and discursive deployment of the visual. And, although H.D.'s complex engagement with psychoanalysis has been well-documented, her critique of Freud has rarely been examined in the light of her involvement in spiritualism or film.⁷

At this point it is worth outlining the methodologies of my research. A visit to the H.D. Collection at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University provided invaluable insights into H.D.'s life and writing. Not only did it allow access to her correspondence, it introduced me to a body of her unpublished and little-known work. My analysis of the unpublished typescript *Majic Ring* in Chapter Four is a direct product of this original research and addresses the critical lacuna regarding H.D.'s spiritualism. I argue that, if we are to understand fully the complex and contradictory nature of H.D.'s representation of sexuality, her memoir *Tribute To Freud* needs to be read in the light of *Majic Ring*. My plans to discuss the unpublished typescript of *The Gift* - addressing the gaps left by the New Directions edition - were altered after the complete version, edited by Jane Augustine, was published in 1998. Chapter Three now touches on the differences between these two published versions and I argue that the cuts made by New Directions have suppressed the importance of H.D.'s spiritualist concerns. Some of the silent films examined in the thesis - such as *Borderline* (1930) and *Joyless Street* (1925) - are also relatively inaccessible and my research has necessitated several visits to the British Film

⁵ See especially Laity (1997), Gregory (1997) and Collecott (1999).

⁶ For a more recent discussion of H.D.'s involvement in film and its influence on her literary texts, see Marcus (1998a).

⁷ Accounts of H.D.'s interest in mysticism and her involvement with spiritualism can be found in Morris (1984), Friedman (1990a, 350-4), Sword (1995a, 1995b) and Augustine (1998).

Institute. Thus, the discussion of *Borderline* in Chapter Two constitutes an important contribution, not just to literary scholarship on H.D.'s work but to the discipline of film studies, which is currently concerning itself with reconstructing the history of the cinema.

'Critical relationality': paradigms for reading H.D.⁸

Before moving on to outline my theoretical position, it is necessary to define my understanding of Modernism and H.D.'s position within it. In this thesis I interpret 'Modernism' not only as a chronological marker but as a matrix of ideologies to which H.D. has an uneasy relationship. The 'high' canonical Modernism of writers like Pound, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce celebrated the autonomy of art, privileging aesthetic practices over everyday life. This view needs to be understood, of course, within its cultural context. As Alexandra Lavau points out, such a position was generated within a society which was 'burgeoning under monopoly capitalism' and which witnessed 'new means of communication and the advent of mechanical reproduction which threatened the notion of originality and authenticity in artistic practice' (1999, 509). In one sense, H.D. subscribed to this ethos and her work perpetuated these divisions between 'high art' and 'popular culture', particularly in her early poetry. Yet I also read her work as being outside the paradigm of traditional Modernism. For H.D.'s literary form - her journals, memoirs and autobiographical prose - often rejected, and sometimes consciously challenged, the generic norms of her contemporaries. And, as I argue in Chapter One, whilst H.D.'s early poetry should be read within the Imagist context from which she emerged, it also needs to be read alongside the simultaneous development of *cinematic* modernism.⁹

H.D.'s work in film troubles her categorisation as a literary artist, opening up discussions as to what is constituted by 'Modernism' itself. Yet in privileging the European, silent 'art' film, H.D. also regards the cinematic work of art as an

⁸ I borrow the term 'critical relationality' from Carol Boyce Davies and explain my use of it later in the subsection (1994, 47).

⁹ I delineate canonical 'high' Modernism throughout the thesis with an upper case 'M' to differentiate it from other kinds of non-canonical modernist discourse, including that of film and the Harlem Renaissance, discussed in Chapter Two.

autonomous 'artefact' whose meaning is conveyed through form, rather than content - a notion which is central to canonical literary Modernism. Clearly, H.D.'s relationship with canonical Modernism was a complex one and my project implicitly questions the validity of such critical boundaries which have demarcated her work. I argue that H.D.'s intertextual engagement with a number of discourses - literature, film, psychoanalysis, spiritualism - lends her work a heterogeneity which places it outside the concerns of traditionally-perceived Modernism. In so doing, I recoup her work through a reading which might broadly be described as 'postmodern'. The term 'postmodern', of course, should be subject to the same interrogation as that of 'modern' and I return in due course to my specific use of it.

The notions of the visual which are the focus of my thesis have also been explored in recent feminist thinking.¹⁰ Hélène Cixous challenges the dominance of the scopic in *The Newly Born Woman* by drawing on the utopian possibilities offered by the female voice (1986 [1975]). The philosopher and psychoanalyst, Luce Irigaray, takes the phallogentrism of the male gaze as her point of departure for *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a [1974]). Irigaray's critique of the 'oculocentrism' of post-enlightenment discourse represents a useful starting point for a feminist reading of H.D. (Berry 1994, 231). Reading H.D.'s work alongside that of Irigaray emphasises the ambivalent relationship of both women to Freud's thinking. There are striking parallels between their work. Irigaray explores an alternative economy to the scopic which is founded on touch rather than vision (1985b [1977]). And, as Hirsch argues, H.D.'s 'implicit critique of Imagist seeing is typically supplemented by an alternative discourse rather than a writing practice that itself proceeds imagistically, to give the reader, in Pound's phrase, "new eyes"' (1986, 6).

Such theoretical resonances inevitably raise questions: Irigaray's notion of *parler femme*, which draws analogies between the organs of speech and the female genitalia, has been criticised as biologically essentialist.¹¹ This was not her intention, however. As she points out, her aim is to emphasise *language* rather than corporeal

¹⁰ I am thinking particularly here of Irigaray (1985a [1974]) but also of Rose (1986). Notions of 'the gaze' have also loomed large in feminist film theory. For this, see Mulvey (1989,[1975]), de Lauretis (1984) and Doane (1991, 1996 [1981]).

¹¹ Criticism of Irigaray's 'essentialism' are, by now, well-documented. For debates about this aspect of her work, see Whitford (1991), Butler (1993) and Burke *et al* (1994).

construction and to theorise the 'morphology of the female sex' rather than its 'anatomy' (Irigaray 1990 [1977], 82). Far from succumbing to essentialism, Irigaray rather 'adds to her deconstruction of phallogocentrism another discourse' by 'adding an illusion of reference embodied partly in a vulvomorphous imagery that has often led to her misrecognition as "essentialist"' (Hirsch 1986, 5-6). Judith Butler's rhetorical questioning of Irigaray's work reflects the anxiety about universalising female experience which has been prevalent in feminist scholarship in the west for more than a decade:

Is it possible to identify a monolithic as well as a monologic masculinist economy that traverses the array of cultural and historical contexts in which sexual difference takes place? Is the failure to acknowledge the specific cultural operations of gender oppression itself a kind of epistemological imperialism, one which is not ameliorated by the simple elaboration of cultural differences as 'examples' of the selfsame phallogocentrism? (1990, 13)

In highlighting this tendency to 'globalise' female experience, Butler's analysis 'fills in' some of the ideological gaps left by Irigaray's discourse. Whilst I draw on Irigaray's work throughout my thesis, I also examine her thinking through the lens of Butler's critique. This, in turn, flags up some of the potential problems in H.D.'s own work. As I imply, the tendency towards what Butler terms an 'epistemological imperialism' is problematic, not just in Irigaray's work but also in that of H.D.

I am aware of the possible limitations of a postmodern theoretical approach and acknowledge Eileen Gregory's resistance to '[the] postmodern climate governing H.D.'s reclamation [and] its hierarchies of praise and blame' (1997, 6).¹² As Gregory points out, such readings often 'seek to recapitulate the modernist terms of invalidation that have so dominated the reception of her writing' and thus reinstate the constraints of categorisation which I am here attempting to question (1997, 6). However, it is only by placing H.D.'s writing alongside this postmodern paradigm that the simplistic categorisation of her work as 'modernist' can be challenged. Furthermore, as I suggest, the complex interconnections of sexuality, corporeality and

¹² Although postmodernism seeks to refute fixed categories of meaning, it is necessary to define how I understand the term here. I concur with Alexandra Lavau when she describes a postmodern approach as celebrating 'the heterogeneous, plural [and] antihierarchical' which 'calls into question the validity and authority of a single unified discourse' (1999, 509).

the visual in H.D.'s writing anticipate postmodern constructions of the self, representing what Martin Jay calls 'models of spectatorship and visuality which refuse to be redescribed in entirely linguistic terms' (Brennan and Jay 1996, 3). It is the emphasis that contemporary theory places on plural conceptions of 'the gaze' and 'the look' - and its subsequent foregrounding of 'the constructed nature of the body' - which underpins my argument throughout this thesis (*ibid.*).

In the chapters which follow I also employ the terms of feminist film theory, some of which is informed by psychoanalytic thinking.¹³ Examining H.D.'s texts within the framework of this recent theoretical construct not only offers fresh perspectives on her work, it reinvigorates the terms of H.D.'s engagement with Freud discussed by critics such as Chisholm (1992). A potential risk in engaging with psychoanalytic discourse is a reinforcement of the racial 'otherness' on which Freud's theories are founded. As will become evident, my discussion not only sheds light on the colonising impulse of Freud's 'dark continent' but considers how this impulse is mediated through H.D.'s work. It is not the aim of my project to embark on a postcolonial reading of H.D.'s oeuvre. However, in my discussions of *Borderline* and *Her* in Chapter Two, and *Helen in Egypt* in Chapter Five, I consider H.D.'s problematic engagement with discourses of race, colonialism and imperialism. To date, this issue has been given limited attention within H.D. criticism.¹⁴ In the Conclusion to the thesis, I outline some of the possible directions which scholarship might take in this area.

The potential problems of employing theoretical discourse in a feminist analysis of literary texts have been elucidated by Carole Boyce Davies (1994). Her premise that theory need not be placed in opposition to praxis but should be regarded as a certain mode of 'envisaging' is a useful grounding for my discussion (Davies 1994, 47). Rather than privileging theoretical discourse above the literary, I consider the two as existing in a 'critical relationality', a relationship which is crucial to the political thrust of my project (*ibid.*). Davies defines this method as 'negotiating, articulating and interrogating simultaneously a variety of resistant discourses' which

¹³ I draw especially on Mulvey (1989 [1975]), Doane (1991) and hooks (1992).

¹⁴ Friedman's essay 'Scattered Remnant' was the first to discuss H.D.'s relationship with the race issue (1986). Edmunds offers an astute analysis of H.D.'s complex relationship with issues of African

are dependent on ‘context, historical and political circumstances’ (*ibid.*). Thus, rather than denying the agency of political impetus, theory is essential to a feminist deconstruction of the hierarchies of power and domination. Like Davies I perceive theory not as ‘a reified discourse for the privileged few’ but as offering “‘frames (or modes) of intelligibility” through which we see and interpret the world’ (1994, 41). In this sense, ‘the visual’ is not just a touchstone for my discussion of the image in H.D.’s work, it defines my theoretical perspective.

‘The thing itself’?: H.D.’s definition of the image

In the rest of the Introduction I move on to explore some of the issues discussed in the thesis and provide some of the context for H.D.’s relationship to the visual. Mandel’s suggestion that H.D. ‘thought pictorially’ suggests the fundamental importance of the image to H.D.’s artistic perception (1983, 44). The notion of this image as one in *process* is also explored by Friedberg (1995). Friedberg argues that H.D. conceived of the visual as a palimpsest which is ‘rewritten, revised, re-imaged in superimpositions of three quite separate discourses - first in the poem, then in the film, and finally in the text of analysis on Freud’s couch’ (1995, 1). In order to understand fully the complex interaction of the visual codes in H.D.’s work, it is essential to consider how they evolve through the course of her career - to trace, in other words, the process of the image. Bearing in mind that H.D.’s early poetry anticipates the ‘incipient vision that would gain scope and substance’ in her later writing, I begin at the start of her career, with a discussion of her involvement in the Imagist movement (Gregory 1990 [1986], 130).

In the early years of her career H.D.’s writing was widely known to British and American literary intellectuals living and working in London, largely through her publication in the journals and ‘little magazines’ of the time. Pound published her poetry alongside his own in *Poetry* and her work also appeared in *The Egoist* with that of William Carlos Williams, Ford Madox Ford and T.S. Eliot. Ford himself regularly included her work in *The English Review*. H.D.’s verse was regarded as the prototype for the Imagist movement which consisted of a group of writers seeking to rid poetry

nationalism and colonialism in *Helen in Egypt* and *Hermetic Definition* (1994). For a more recent discussion of H.D.’s representation of whiteness, see Curry (2000).

of the vestiges of nineteenth-century sentimentality. The dissatisfaction of this new group of poets with what they regarded as an outmoded Victorian literary tradition prompted them to look towards the invention of modern poetic forms. This resulted in 'a clearly articulated programme' of poetry, whose concepts were published in F.S. Flint's essay 'Imagisme' in *Poetry* in March 1913 as follows:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing', whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome. (Flint, cited in Hampson 1983, 102)

This compulsion to discover new literary forms also led to the theorisation of a new poetics by Pound, in particular. His definition of the image as 'hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite' became central to the discussion of early twentieth-century poetry and suggests a precision which counters the superfluous 'wordiness' of the *fin-de-siecle* verse (Pound 1915, 3). As Edmund de Chasca notes, however, the tenets of modern poetry became confused with the passage of time and the theoretical terminology altered with the invention of each new movement:

[These definitions] leave as many questions as they answer and vary from one utterance to another. In March 1913, the Image was "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"; by January 1915 it had become "a vortex or cluster of fused ideas [...] endowed with energy". (de Chasca 1978, 155)

Thus, Imagism gave way to Vorticism, a theoretical shift which not only obscured definitions of the image but revealed that Pound was neither 'a systematic or lucid literary theorist' (*ibid.*). Since H.D.'s early poetry has always been considered within fixed definitions of Imagism, revealing the ambiguities in this theoretical paradigm is crucial if we are to re-evaluate her early work. As I argue in Chapter One, the image in her early verse continually challenges the fixity and stasis which Imagism has been seen to represent. Clearly, H.D. herself struggled to define the notion of 'image' early in her career and this is apparent in her writing of *Notes on Thought and Vision* (1982b [1919]). Whilst the concerns of this essay are explored in more detail in Chapter One, what is significant here is its interpretation as a 'feminist manifesto' (Crown 1995, 226). For the *Notes* have been read as a challenge to the phallogocentric

definitions of the image offered by Pound and Wyndham Lewis, who exemplify 'the Futurist and Vorticist obsession with technology' and scientific terminology (Crown 1995, 226). Moving uneasily between the discourses of spirituality and science, the *Notes* function 'simultaneously [as] an interpretation of a vision that cannot be easily remembered or possessed and a gift of scientific data [...] for a male mentor' (Crown 1995, 223). This dualism is central to what Kathleen Crown calls 'the necessary, though difficult, bilingualism of "both/and"' in H.D.'s work, an issue to which I return in the ensuing chapters of the thesis (1995, 231).

Defining 'the image' in H.D.'s work is a difficult task, since her conceptualisation of 'image' is never singular or fixed. John Gage advises caution in discussing 'the critical uses to which this word *image* may be put' (1981, 75). His premise of the restrictive nature of the traditional definition of the poetic image 'as "a mental picture evoked by the use of metaphors, similes and other figures of speech"' informs my own reading of H.D.'s early poetry in the next chapter (*ibid.*). The commonly-held view of her Imagist lyrics as 'static' not only undermines her aesthetic perception, it denies her ability to construct 'functional operations within the poem' (*ibid.*). By examining H.D.'s early work alongside the developing discourse of early cinema, I argue that it needs to be re-evaluated within the context of the moving image. In so doing, I demonstrate that rather than being 'static', her poetry is, in fact, *kinetic*. Film precipitated a natural shift in H.D.'s conceptualisation of the image, for the cinema, with its new technology, came to be identified with 'the modern'. Just as Imagist poetry had been seen as an attempt to move away from late Victorian poetic forms, film represented the movement of art towards modernity. Bryher (Winifred Ellerman) - the woman who in 1918 became H.D.'s lover and lifelong companion - shared H.D.'s passionate interest in film.¹⁵ In her memoir, *The Heart To Artemis* Bryher comments: 'we had to get away from the nineteenth century if we were to survive' (1962, 246). For H.D. and for Bryher film was a medium which represented this escape.

¹⁵ As I suggest later in the Introduction, H.D.'s sexual relationships were plural and shifting. Although she lived with Bryher until the end of her life, her relationship with her was part of a more complex series of bisexual identifications. Bryher herself is an important figure who has been overlooked in discussions of early twentieth century literary and visual culture. She was the heiress to the Ellerman

‘Film, film, film’: modernity, Modernism, visual culture¹⁶

H.D.’s enthusiasm for film is clearly conveyed in a letter to Bryher in 1931. Thanking her for some photographs Bryher had sent, H.D. says: ‘these cards are so lovely and link up with my pre-reading state of mind when pictures meant so much. I suppose that is the reason why I like the films so much’ (L. 1931a). This enthusiasm was shared by the British public. Although cinema had initially been a middle class invention, it soon became a national institution and a widespread form of mass entertainment for a working-class audience (Cooke 1993, 168). By the end of the 1920s there were twenty million people going to see films at Britain’s four thousand cinemas every week (Cooke 1993, 167). The steady growth of cinema’s popularity and the boom in realist and narrative film was, however, criticised by a small minority of British intellectuals. In 1925 Ivor Montagu founded the Film Society with the aim of countering the growing commercialism of Hollywood cinema through the promotion of foreign and avant-garde films. It was in this climate that POOL Productions was formed. This collective company was established in 1927, headed by Bryher and Kenneth Macpherson, her husband of the time. Initially, POOL focused on publishing. Their journal *Close Up*, which was distributed from Territet in Switzerland, aimed at an international audience and was written ‘in the tradition of other “little” literary magazines of the period’ (Friedberg 1998a, 10). Run ostensibly by Bryher and Macpherson, but with regular input from H.D., *Close Up* held similar cultural objectives to the Film Society: to provide a forum for middle-class intellectuals to debate issues within the cinema. As Cooke points out, the co-existence of both these organisations in the mid-1920s created ‘a minority film culture articulated in opposition to the majority film culture based upon the commercial cinema’ (1993, 186).¹⁷

POOL’s foray into the territory of film-making resulted in the production of several films at the end of this decade, including *Wing Beat* (1927), *Foothills* (1929),

shipping fortune, a wealthy woman who was a patron of the arts and who subsidised the work of several modernist writers, including Dorothy Richardson.

¹⁶ The quotation here comes from a letter written by Dorothy Richardson to H.D. in 1930.

Monkey's Moon (1929) and, in 1930, their most ambitious, full-length film *Borderline*, starring the celebrated black actor, Paul Robeson.¹⁸ These films, as Friedberg notes, were shot in Territet and were all privately financed with Bryher's money (1982, 29). They had only a limited audience, largely due to the fact that they were viewed privately and also that some remained incomplete. Even *Borderline*, the best known, had only three or four public screenings in Europe and was unfavourably received in the press (see Friedberg 1981). Although H.D.'s role in the activities of POOL was less visible than that of Bryher and Macpherson, it was, nonetheless, an important one. In total she produced eight reviews and three theoretical essays, as well as two poems on the subject of film, all of which were published in *Close Up*.¹⁹ She wrote the pamphlet accompanying the first screening of *Borderline*, which was produced in order to explain its method and obscure plot. And, as I discuss later, H.D. was also involved in the technical aspects of film-making and contributed to the editing of *Borderline*.

POOL's films were influenced by the largely high brow ethos of European cinema, an ethos which was disseminated through the pages of *Close Up*. H.D.'s daughter, Perdita Schaffner, describes POOL's films as collectively 'avant-garde, weighted with symbolism, [filled with] jumpy sequences, stark staring close-ups, fluttering hands and inconsequential pans' (1986b, 31). For the members of POOL, film represented 'an art form of tremendous aesthetic and social possibilities' (Mandel 1980, 127). The medium clearly influenced the development of H.D.'s literary aesthetic. In the introduction to her mother's novel *Nights* - which H.D. wrote in 1935 under the pseudonym 'John Helforth' - Schaffner draws attention to the novel's use of 'trompe l'oeil [and] mirror tricks' (1986a, x). She states: 'my family was into film-making at that time, and it shows [...] H.D. [was] pretending the book is really a film' (*ibid.*). Schaffner goes on to describe how film had a direct influence on the narrative construction of H.D.'s novel: 'Her technique is cinematic, a restless dizzying

¹⁷ Whilst it is not my project to discuss issues of class and educational privilege or the opposition between 'high art' and popular culture in this period, I acknowledge the potentially elitist position of POOL and H.D. I touch briefly on these issues in the Conclusion.

¹⁸ Fragments of the first three films still survive and are archived at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Since they are only fragments, and not full-length films, I do not include them in the filmography.

¹⁹ For a complete list of these reviews and essays, see Diepeveen (1984).

montage. It darts and zooms. pans in on tantalizing close-ups, veers off again, highlights vignettes in lost corners' (*ibid.*).

This resonance between the syntax of literature and that of film was also being explored by other modernists such as Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen, as well as Gertrude Stein and Dorothy Richardson, both of whom were regular contributors to *Close Up*. Around the same time the intersecting discourses of film and literature were explored by the Russian film director, Sergei Eisenstein, whose writings were published in English for the first time in *Close Up*. In 1929, Eisenstein wrote that 'cinematography is for the first time availing itself of the experience of literature for the purpose of working out its own language, its own speech, its own vocabulary, its own imagery' (1929, 36). H.D. never had any direct contact with Eisenstein but his work was clearly influential. Marcus notes: 'Eisenstein's account of "intellectual montage" as thought made visible was [...] a crucial influence on H.D.'s film writings and on her concept of "thought projection" more generally' (1998a, 102). Whilst the influence of Eisenstein's theory of overtonal montage is evident in H.D.'s work of the 1920s and 1930s, I argue in Chapter One that H.D.'s early writing can be seen to anticipate his theoretical concerns. Clearly, this crossing of disciplinary boundaries interested not only the literary intellectuals of the early twentieth century, but also the makers of film.

An analysis of the cinema and its influence on Modernist literary practice is a relatively new field of exploration.²⁰ The Preface to *Close Up 1927-1933* poses the central question as to 'whether *literary* modernism [...] should be seen in large part as a response to, and an appropriation of, the aesthetic possibilities opened up by *cinema*' (Donald *et al.* 1998, vii; emphasis in original). Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, for instance, is heavily influenced by these new and innovative cinematic techniques, as Bryher's review of the novel's tenth volume, 'Dawn's Left Hand', attests: 'what a film her book could make [...] in each page an aspect of London is created that like an image from a film, substitutes itself for memory, to revolve before the eyes as we read' (Bryher, cited in Marcus 1998b, 153). In its exploration of the interrelationship

²⁰ This analysis is currently attracting more scholarship through conferences such as 'Literature, Film and Modernity' at the Institute of English Studies in January 2000 and 'Literature and Visual Technologies' at St. John's College, Oxford University in September, 2000.

between the representation of the city and the cinematic image. Richardson's novel could be regarded as an archetypal modernist text, rivalling the status of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1980 [1922]). By exploring the resonances between the literary and the visual in H.D.'s texts, my thesis goes some way towards filling the gaps in accounts of literary Modernism whose connection with the development of early film is usually overlooked.

The work of H.D. - like that of Richardson - is situated at the very intersection of the disciplines of literature and film. As Marcus notes, H.D.'s interest in cinema reveals her simultaneous concerns with 'language and symbol, psychoanalysis, mysticism and spiritualism, classicism and the celebration of women's beauty and power' (1998a, 98). In my readings of *Borderline*, *Her*, *The Gift* and *Helen in Egypt*, I explore further the complex relationship between 'modernity' and the process of cinematic spectatorship in H.D.'s writing. Whilst Richardson, Bryher and H.D. all embraced the virtues of cinema, other writers such as Woolf and Lawrence remained equivocal. In her essay 'The Cinema' (1966 [1926]), Woolf criticises the passivity of reception in the cinema as opposed to the active engagement of reading a literary text. Arguing that film spectatorship returns the viewer to a state of infantilism, Woolf states that it 'provides the brain with toys and sweetmeats to keep it quiet and can be trusted to go on behaving like the competent nursemaid until the brain comes to the conclusion that it is time to wake up' (1966 [1926], 268). Similarly, Lawrence's objection to film, as Linda R. Williams argues, is grounded in a 'highbrow literary prejudice' concerned about the 'value' of literature and art in the face of an explosion in visual culture (1993, 8). As Williams further demonstrates, Lawrence's writing 'speaks a diffuse anxiety concerning the infusion of the cinematic into all aspects of that culture to which writing had hitherto been central - the rapid growth of the movie industry and its invasion and possession of our emotional life' (1993, 5). Similarly, despite H.D.'s wholehearted enthusiasm for cinema, her own film writings were tinged with a similar intellectual prejudice. Thus, although H.D.'s ambivalence could be seen to underscore her class prejudices and cultural pretensions, it demonstrates her visionary sense of the future direction of art.

'The art that died'

Close Up's commitment to the establishment of a cinematic avant garde often resulted in an implicit critique of popular culture. As Friedberg notes:

[*Close Up*] created its own canon of 'good objects' - the films of G.W. Pabst and Sergei Eisenstein - and maintained its 'bad objects' - Hollywood and British cinema - in an effort to transform the British cinema itself into an aesthetic form that would live up to its potential and become a 'good object'. (1998a, 322, fn8)

This new twentieth-century art represented, as Bryher put it, 'some framework for our dreams': it offered a vehicle for the 'popular internationalism' of those years (1962, 246). For H.D. and for POOL, silent film represented the dream of a universal language whose aesthetic might help 'recaptur[e] a prelapsarian [...] pictographic language' (Marcus 1998a, 103). The transition to sound which had become widespread in the cinema by 1930, however, led to the gradual demise of *Close Up* from about that time. Bryher refers to film in her memoir, *The Heart To Artemis* as 'the art that died' because 'sound ruined its development' (1962, 246). Returning to H.D.'s opposition to sound in the cinema in Chapter Five, I demonstrate that her position was contrary to that of the film industry - especially Hollywood - which saw sound as a welcome opportunity to increase both cinema audiences and its profit margins.

For the majority of the film industry, synchronised sound - the addition of voice to the moving image - was representative of modernity itself. In 1930 Paul Rotha, for instance, identified sound as 'an independent form of expression, utterly representative of the spirit of the twentieth century', whilst sound technology offered 'the great sound and vision possibilities of the future' (1960 [1930], 411-2). There was a contradiction in the stance taken by POOL and *Close Up*.²¹ Whilst cinema constituted a movement towards modernity, sound not only threatened the utopian dream of internationalism, it also represented the emerging dominance of mainstream culture and the end of the silent film as an artistic artefact. Despite H.D.'s opposition

²¹ It is important to note that the contributors to *Close Up* had varying opinions on the merits of sound in the cinema. Richardson regarded the silent film as inherently 'feminine'. Macpherson associated the

to mainstream film, she is clearly aware of the importance of cinema as a cultural phenomenon. In 1931 she writes: 'I had a terrific fight [...] on the question of writing and film and how my film writing was the apex of a triangle that joined the high brow writers and the low brow film people' (L. 1931b). In the face of criticism about *Close Up* and her *Borderline* pamphlet, H.D. remains firm about her position as 'a sort of Grand Duchess of the Kraft, whether it was film or writing' (L. 1931b). This not only gives some insight into H.D.'s opinion of film as a vital aspect of modernist art, it also reveals where she situated herself in this debate.

An entry in H.D.'s unpublished 'Autobiographical Notes' states that she collaborated with Bryher in the editing of *Borderline*: 'When finished [shooting *Borderline*] K [Kenneth Macpherson] develops a bad throat and Bryher and I work over the strips, doing the montage as K. indicates [...] - very hard work' (AN, 23). Jean Walton suggests that the collaborative production of *Borderline* makes it impossible to differentiate the separate roles of POOL's members. Thus, Walton argues, H.D. had an input into both its form and content:

[T]he film was a collaborative effort insofar as the two women defined the characters they portrayed and took over the daunting job of editing the film when Macpherson became sick after the shooting. They also wrote interpretive and explanatory texts to accompany the film (thus influencing its reception) and doubtless contributed to the film's artistic conception and sexual/racial politics. (1997, 91).

Clearly, H.D.'s contribution to the technical construction of *Borderline* was essential. And this knowledge of film editing is demonstrated specifically in some of her texts - most explicitly, of those discussed in my thesis, in *Her* and *The Gift*. Whilst a consideration of H.D.'s active engagement with the *moving* image refutes her position as Imagist icon, this engagement situated her in a complex dual position. For as Friedberg argues, H.D. 'placed herself into/as two quite separate terms of the cinematic apparatus: she was transfixed as spectator - subject in *front* of the screen [...] *and* fixed as image on the screen' (1982, 30; emphasis in original).

sound film in 'Negro cinema' as an important means of promoting black culture. For further discussion of this, see Marcus (1998b) and Donald (1998a).

H.D. was a keen consumer, as well as a creator, of images and, despite her rejection of popular culture, identified with the ‘stars’ of mainstream cinema. One such star was Louise Brooks, the fêted actress who played Lulu in G.W. Pabst’s *Pandora’s Box* (1929). In ‘An Appreciation’ H.D. writes: ‘I had not visited the sets of Pandora, but had been alive to each development and as keenly concerned as the most screen-struck school girl over the various doings and mots and quaint sallies of the star. Miss Louise Brooks’ (1929, 56). Whilst the ‘appreciation’ in this article is primarily directed at Pabst, H.D.’s admiration for Brooks is clearly apparent. H.D. was also fascinated by the figure of Greta Garbo. Her private papers archived at Yale contain numerous photographs and press clippings concerning the actress with whom she felt she had a deep identification. In *Compassionate Friendship*, she writes: ‘I seem to understand, through identification, her tragic being’ (CF, 80). As we shall see, whilst H.D. embraced the cinema as a vehicle through which to explore subjectivity, she was also acutely aware of cinema’s potential to objectify women through visual images.²² I return constantly to this opposition throughout my thesis. For this process - the shifting power bound up with the image - is a central precept both of H.D.’s representations of gender and her textual practice.

Modes of projection: science, psychoanalysis, spiritualism

Throughout H.D.’s childhood she was surrounded by the ocular apparatus of science. Her maternal grandfather, Francis Wolle, was a microbotanist who painstakingly catalogued thousands of species of algae, identifying them through a microscope. Charles Doolittle, her father, was a distinguished professor of astronomy who nightly went to the observation tower in their Pennsylvania home to view the stars. Given her upbringing and family background, her predisposition to an imagistic way of thinking is not surprising. Throughout H.D.’s career, she consistently links metaphors of the scopic to the scientific research of her male relatives.²³ In order to delineate her relationship with Freud in *Tribute To Freud*, for instance, she draws on

²² H.D.’s relationship to her own image was highly ambivalent. Collecott notes that ‘she carefully controlled the use of photographs of herself that might conflict with her chosen *persona* as the poet H.D.’ and that ‘while [she] enjoyed acting in movies, it was Kenneth Macpherson who attempted to promote her as a star’ (1990 [1986], 175).

her relatives' professions. For she compares the scrutiny of analysis in her sessions with Freud to the scientific observation of her father and grandfather, feeling herself positioned 'between the double lenses of my father's telescope, my grandfather's microscope' (TF, 116).

In any discussion of H.D.'s work it is impossible to ignore the influence of the investigative 'gaze' of science - the gaze of those within the medical and psychoanalytical professions - and its effect upon her writing and self-image.²⁴ As an 'object' of the probing theories of psychoanalysis, H.D. joins that group of women - Freud's patients, friends and contemporary analysts - who became objects, not of the camera, but of another kind of 'gaze', the scrutiny of scientific theory. Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester argue that Freud's methods subjected women to an examination which monopolised their own theoretical reasoning, fixing them into a certain mould: 'Submitting patients to his penetrative gaze and colonizing intelligence. Freud launched a theory which turned all women who deviated from the model, or who self-assertively strove for equal rights, into suitable cases for treatment' (1993, 1).

As a bisexual woman, H.D.'s relationship with Freud, and to psychoanalysis itself, was ambivalent. Certainly she admired its aims: its potential to heal, its influential effect on her work and its important role in exploring modern subjectivity. Nevertheless, her own analysis with Freud subjected her to a discipline founded on explanations of male history and society, which would have located her as psychologically 'neurotic'. As a bisexual, H.D. did not fit into Freud's social matrix or comply with his theories of sexual exchange, whereby women function as commodities for reproduction and as accessories of male power. Freud 'diagnosed' H.D. as the 'perfect bi', an assessment based, in part, on the shifting ambiguities within her domestic circle (Garber 1996, 59). The sexual nature of the relationship between H.D. and Bryher had to be hidden from Bryher's conventional, repressive parents. Both Bryher's marriages of convenience - to Robert McAlmon in 1921 and

²³ For a further discussion of the influence of science on H.D.'s development as a writer, see Mandel (1986).

²⁴ Apart from Freud, H.D. was also influenced by her acquaintance with the sexologist Havelock Ellis and with Erich Heydt, the doctor and analyst who treated her at a Swiss nerve clinic between 1953 and 1954.

Kenneth Macpherson in 1927 - served as a smokescreen for her relationship with H.D. The fact that H.D. had affairs with both McAlmon and Macpherson complicated the sexual dynamics of her 'family' still further.²⁵ Thus, H.D. and Bryher established a subterfuge in their correspondence which characterised the early years of their relationship.²⁶ Given the context of late Victorian repression, such sexual coding is hardly surprising. In part, it was a residual effect of the late nineteenth-century homophobia demonstrated by Oscar Wilde's imprisonment for "'gross indecency" with other men' in 1894 (Bristow 1997, 14). This attitude continued into the early twentieth century, returning to prominence in 1928 during the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928 [1928]). Thus, H.D.'s early writing was produced in a climate in which it was prudent to suppress the expression of lesbian desire. As a result, her autobiographical novels written in the 1920s - exploring what would then have been regarded as a 'deviant' form of desire - remained unpublished until the 1980s and 90s.²⁷

Freud's 'diagnosis' of H.D.'s sexual orientation demonstrates how bisexuality, like homosexual desire, has been pathologised within cultural history. For, as Joseph Bristow notes, the term 'bisexuality' has been a problematic and shifting one throughout the twentieth century, disappearing early from public view and 'consigned to specialist medical textbooks and psychoanalytic writings' (1997, 4). This is exemplified in Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* (1897) and, to some extent, by the socialist politician Edward Carpenter, whose apparently liberatory theories of 'the intermediate sex' and 'homogenic love' actually delineate 'distinctions between the sexes in strikingly orthodox terms' (Bristow 1997, 25). Freud's assessment of H.D. as 'the perfect bi' has generated 'considerable critical discussion, based not on the facts of her life but on the interpretation of those facts' (Garber 1996, 60). But this fascination with biographical

²⁵ It is important to note, however, that in the intellectual and bohemian circles in which H.D. moved, sexual ambiguity was also highly fashionable, a response to late Victorian sexual repression. For further discussion of this, see Davidson *et al.* (1997, 1).

²⁶ H.D. encodes her desire for Bryher through allusions to flowers and the use of colour, particularly white and purple. 'Hyacinth' is addressed to a female lover and filled with references to flowers: 'ice gentian', 'white violet' the 'tuberose' and 'the cyclamen / parting its white cyclamen leaves' (CP, 201-4). Her correspondence to Bryher is also significantly coded. In 1923 for instance, she writes: 'Tomorrow! Darling Child, a thousand kisses and a wealth of purple cyclamen!' (L, 1923). I am grateful to Harriet Tarlo for this insight.

²⁷ These include *Paint It Today* (1992a) and *Asphodel* (1992b), both written in 1921 and *Her*, written in 1927, which I discuss in Chapter Two. The typescript of *Asphodel* was intended to be destroyed but survived, largely due to H.D.'s literary executor, Norman Holmes Pearson.

detail has only resulted in rendering invisible the bisexual dynamic at work within her texts. Such fascination retains the notion of bisexuality as “‘separate” from other identities by positioning it “beyond” or as “critical outside”” (Hemmings 1997, 19). This is highly significant to my discussion of H.D.’s representation of sexuality in this thesis. For it perpetuates a ‘bisexual invisibility’, which leads the bisexual subject to seek other ways of ‘seeing’ or of becoming visible (Davidson *et al.* 1997, 1). This notion of in/visibility is crucial to my reading of *Her* and *Borderline* in Chapter Two. And my understanding of bisexuality as fluidity, plurality or flux, as ‘a category that undoes the notion of category itself’, is one which underpins my reading of H.D.’s textuality in the ensuing chapters.²⁸

In H.D.’s writing the visual operates on more than one level: for she believed that, ‘beyond the surface view understood by the intellectual mind [...] there existed “another side”” (Mandel 1983, 44). Her belief in the meaning ‘beyond the surface view’ prompted an interest in spiritualism. In the early years of the Second World War H.D. joined the London Society for Pyschical Research and was a regular user of its library. Through her regular attendance at the Society’s lectures, she met the medium Arthur Bhaduri, whose seances she attended on a regular basis. In 1943 she also met Lord Hugh Dowding, who had been a Chief Officer in the Royal Air Force during the Battle of Britain and who had published writings on spiritualism. H.D. began a correspondence with Dowding in which she described the images revealed to her during the seances she conducted in her own home. These seances were played out on ‘a small three-legged table that had once belonged to William Morris. This table was ‘connected in her mind [...] with Morris’ alleged spiritualist interests’ and, since she associated it with ‘the Pythia’s tripod at Delphi’, it also suggests her fascination for Egyptian mythology (Sword 1995b, 348). In the end, Dowding dismissed H.D.’s descriptions of her seances as ‘trivial and uninspiring’ (*ibid.*). His rejection subsequently led to her mental breakdown and to the curtailment of her spiritualist ventures .

H.D.’s literary deployment of such visionary ‘seeing’ has political implications for her understanding of sexual difference. For, as I argue in Chapter Four, her

²⁸ My definition of bisexuality in H.D.’s work concurs with those used by Garber (1996, 58-62) and Stott (1997). For further discussion of H.D.’s bisexual identity, see Friedman and DuPlessis (1981,

involvement in spiritualism permitted a questioning of the terms of scientific discourse. In delineating H.D.'s spiritualist concerns, *The Gift*, *Tribute To Freud* and *Majic Ring* all need to be read in relation to each other. In *Majic Ring*, H.D. suggests that *The Gift* was inspired by a visionary experience she had on Corfu with Bryher: 'I used the psychic experience that [we] had had but I worked it into a sequence of reconstructed memories that I made my grandmother tell me, as if in a reverie, or half-dream or even trance' (MR, 118-19). These key moments of visionary insight, which are usually represented as collaborative ventures with Bryher, suggest a model of looking which *reconfigures* the gaze of scientific investigation. Not only does this visionary experience posit a way of seeing which challenges the singular, scientific 'look' but, in underscoring the lesbian dynamic of H.D.'s relationship with Bryher, it can be read as a challenge to the heterosexual norm perpetuated by psychoanalysis. Given that such visionary seeing also expands upon the fixed, static notion of the Imagist image, H.D.'s later texts necessitate a revision of the critical mould into which her work has been cast. Yet, as I point out throughout the thesis, her descriptions of such 'seeing' reveal inherent contradictions. H.D.'s reliance on the vocabulary of the visual indicates her complicity with the dominance of the scopic, even while she seeks to counter its power. And though her 'spiritual' deployment of the visual locates her outside the mainstream canon of Modernism, her representations of such epiphanic moments suggest an engagement with its literary aesthetic.

The subversion of H.D.'s writing lies precisely in her textual practice, her mediation between the singular categories which have limited the understanding of her writing and her literary and sexual identities. H.D.'s oscillation, of course, results both in plurality and in process. 'Process' implies movement rather than stasis, an aesthetic which is inscribed into the poetics of her early poetry. And the evolution of the image in H.D.'s work is also processual, moving forward, spanning the various cultural contexts of modernity which informed her lengthy and prolific career. Turning my attention now to her critical categorisation as an Imagist, I begin tracing the process of the image in the work of H.D.

1990 [1981]), Benstock (1987) and Buck (1991b).

Chapter One

From Imagism to Moving Image

Introduction

In this chapter I explore the origins of the image in H.D.'s early work. Beginning with a discussion of the critical reception of *Sea Garden*, I argue, as do Buck and Hirsch, that Imagism created a critical 'straitjacket' for H.D.'s writing which has effaced the political and aesthetic possibilities opened up by her prose narrative and later work (Buck 1983; Hirsch 1986).¹ For whilst the form of H.D.'s early poetry, on first appearance, adheres to Pound's doctrine of the image, in its refusal of the 'stasis' prescribed by Imagist principles, it fails to fit neatly into this critical paradigm.² In order to understand the complexity of her early poetry, I argue that it needs to be re-evaluated within a broader cultural context, namely, in relation to the development of the *moving image* in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Between the years 1896 and 1906, thousands of short films were produced in Britain. By 1907 the first theatres entirely devoted to the screening of 'the moving pictures' were being built (Street 1997, 4). Between 1911 and 1912, in London, H.D. began writing the poetry which would eventually appear in *Sea Garden*. Influenced by the cultural shift which resulted from the invention of film, her poetry resonates with the dynamic of the moving image. As I argue, her use of metaphor in *Sea Garden* constructs the image as *process* through which the reader actively engages in the text's production. This notion of spectatorship as a collaborative act is also the basis of Eisenstein's notion of 'intellectual montage'. In drawing parallels between the two, this chapter elaborates on the discussion of H.D.'s engagement with film begun in the Introduction. In establishing the connections between literary and cinematic devices, it also sets the scene for my intertextual reading of *Her* and *Borderline* in Chapter Two.

¹ H.D. began writing the poems published in *Sea Garden* in 1912 and the volume was first published in 1916. All references to H.D.'s poetry in this chapter are from *Collected Poems* (1983).

² For further discussion of the principles of Imagism see Pound's 'A Few Don'ts' (1960a [1913]) and 'A Retrospect' (1960b [1918]).

In 1919, in the context of a rapidly developing British and international cinema, H.D. wrote her experimental essay, *Notes on Thought and Vision*. As Friedman notes, the ‘fragmentary flashes and radical juxtapositions’ of the essay suggest H.D.’s ‘anticipat[ion] of the moving image of light - cut, edited and joined according to the principles of montage - that fascinated her in the silent film’ (1990a, 12). And, as I demonstrate, her concept of ‘womb vision’ in *Notes* has resonances with Eisenstein’s notion of ‘the creating spectator’ in ‘Montage in 1938’ (1975 [1939], 34). My reading of their texts unpicks the complex matrix of gender, politics and spirituality contained in their representations of the visual. Thus, in its exploration of the intersection between literary and visual cultures and the discourse of modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century, my thesis moves into new critical territory. For whilst Mandel, Edmunds and Marcus have begun to address the relationship between H.D.’s literary texts and her involvement with film there is, as yet, no full-length account which examines this in detail across a wide range of her work (Mandel 1980, 1983; Edmunds 1994; Marcus 1998a).

This chapter functions as an extension of the Introduction, establishing the context for my discussion of H.D.’s writing in the rest of the thesis. I do not intend to provide extensive close readings of her early poetry here: rather, I focus on how it deviates from the prescriptive tenets of Imagism and how almost a century of critical analysis has limited its reception. As early as 1912, even before the publication of her first volume, *Sea Garden*, H.D. had been defined by Pound as the ‘perfect Imagist’ (Beach 1932, 398). Such categorisation persists some sixty years later in de Chasca’s appraisal of her ‘precision and economy’ and ‘cool perfectionism’ (de Chasca 1978, 153). Bearing in mind Eliot’s proposal that ‘the *point de repère* [...] of modern poetry is the group denominated “imagists” in London about 1910’ I begin by examining the literary context from which H.D. emerged (1965, 58).

'The Poets' Club' of 1909

The poetic movement known as Imagism originated in 1909 with a group of avant garde intellectuals who called themselves 'the poets' club'. Led by T.E. Hulme - an aesthetic philosopher - and the poet, F.S. Flint, the group was later joined by Amy Lowell and by Pound, who became Imagism's best-known proponent. John Gage states that the movement became 'an active voice in English poetics', expressing dissatisfaction with the poetry of the time and attempting to liberate it from its 'overblown, vague and sentimental' expression (1981, 5-8). However, the innovative *vers libre* of the Imagists was not well received. As Gage points out, the Imagists expended 'considerable energy' writing explanatory manifestos for their poetry to counter the prejudice of conservative readers favouring more conventional forms (1981, 51-2). In this respect, as R.G. Hampson argues, Imagism should be considered as 'a critical movement' rather than a creative one (1983, 108).

Hulme's interest in poetry and metaphysics led to his translation of Bergson's *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1912), which explored the relationship between aesthetics and perception. His poetics were subsequently influenced by Bergsonian thinking, especially the premise that 'many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may [...] direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized' (Hampson 1983, 124). Pound soon adopted this theory of the image and it became a central concept of the Imagist ethos.

As William Pratt points out, the ideology 'of the instant' quickly gained currency in the work of the promising young poets of the time:

Hulme understood intuitively that there was a source of inspiration for poetry in the immediate present, in the moment of awareness between past and future. Pound concurred, by his definition, as well as his practice and D.H. Lawrence emphasized the time dimension of Imagism still further by his passionate advocacy of free verse as poetry of the instant. (1992a, 11)

Subsuming the work of Pound and Lawrence under the same heading, Pratt's analysis exemplifies the tendency to generalise the work of the diversity of poets who have been

labelled as Imagists. Notably, H.D.'s name is missing from Pratt's list, emphasising the paradox that although she is credited as the 'purest' Imagist, the importance of her work has been effaced through critical tradition. What this quotation does suggest, however, is one of the principal objectives of Imagist poetry: the attempt to capture and to fix the present moment through language.

Such attempts to capture the quality of 'the immediate present' are also, of course, evident in Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1963 [1942]) and in Woolf's 'moments of being' (1985a [1927]).³ Critical accounts of H.D.'s poetry often focus on her ability to capture the immediacy of 'the instant', as in Friedman's reading of 'Mid-day':

[H.D. uses] a poetic form that dislocates ordinary space and time and asserts the 'presence' of past and future in the lyric moment. 'A split leaf crackles on the paved floor', 'a slight wind shakes the seed pods' in the frozen moment of 'Mid-day'- which is forever. Like the moment frozen into timelessness on the Greek vase painting in Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' [...] the moment in H.D.'s classic lyric encapsulates past, present and future. (1990a, 52)

Friedman's analysis of H.D.'s 'poetry of the instant' subscribes to the 'intuitive' model of perception championed by Hulme. Her reading of the 'timelessness' expressed in 'Mid-day' locates it as a moment of culmination of 'past, present and future'. In capturing the immediacy of 'the instant' which is outside the everyday construct of time, the poem has the appearance of transcending time. Yet despite the illusion of being

'beyond' time, the poem is also situated, paradoxically, within 'the instant' of the reader's experience of the image. As Walter Sutton argues, the Imagist theory of the image is 'untenable' because 'it is inconsistent with the organic nature of the reading process, which involves the gradual and tentative apprehension of the form of a complex and many-sided phenomenon in a shifting time perspective' (1957, 123).

In her reading of 'Mid-day', Friedman overlooks the fact that the impression of 'timelessness' is achieved by H.D.'s use of poetic techniques. As Gage suggests, the

³ Eliot, for instance, defines the transcendent moment in his depiction of 'the still point of the turning world' in *Four Quartets* (1963 [1942], 191).

poetics of Imagism largely depends on a rhetorical strategy which masks the reading process, lending an *illusion* of timelessness:

[In Imagist poetry] the temporal activity of reading may be manipulated in such a way as to give the reader the illusion of instantaneity. What we seek, then, are the ways in which structure may be used to give the reader the illusion of 'no process'. The Imagists chose structures which allowed them to convince the reader that the mind is 'arrested with a picture' by manipulating the way in which the reader's experience 'runs along to a conclusion'. (Gage 1981, 107)

My analysis of the poetry of *Sea Garden*, later in this chapter, examines how, through the use of a number of conscious literary devices, H.D. constructs this illusion of 'no process'. Imagism's notion of 'the necessity to escape action', where 'things are apprehended instantly through vision', implicitly denies the reader an active role in the reading process (Gage 1981, 14). H.D. continually rejected this model of passive reading, both in the prose fiction and memoirs I discuss in ensuing chapters and in the early poetry I address here. In its invitation to the reader to *collaborate* in the text's production, her use of the image continually denies the 'stasis' for which she was so celebrated.

H.D.: the 'crystalline' poet

By denying the possibility of 'the instantaneous, processless image' in Imagist poetry, Gage exposes the inherent tensions between its theory and practice (1981, 20). Whilst this contradiction is at the heart of all Imagist poetry, it is particularly pertinent to a discussion of H.D. The definition 'crystalline', which is frequently used to define the 'static' nature of her poetry, has tended to locate it within 'a discourse that privileges vision over action' (Friedman 1990a, 52). H.D. herself questioned the validity of 'crystalline' as a label in a letter to Bryher: '[They] squeal that H.D. is no longer the pure crystalline...I suppose there is nothing for it but a shell of water-tight and fool proof M[arianne] Moore variety, or T.S.E. [Eliot] wobbling mass-ward [...] but how about and why and in what manner?' (L, 1936). Attempting 'to rewrite herself out of the word that

immobilized her', H.D. sought to find a different meaning for 'crystalline' in her poetics (Friedman 1990a, 54). Writing retrospectively in her journal-essay *Notes on Recent Writing* (1950), she reassessed her poetry of the Imagist period: 'For what is crystal or any gem but the concentrated essence of the rough matrix, of the energy, either of over-intense heat or over-intense cold that projects it. The poems as a whole [...] contain that essence or that symbol, symbol of concentration and of [...] energy' (cited in Friedman 1990a, 54).

The limitations of the static definition of the image were also troubling for Pound. In his *ABC of Reading* (1961 [1934]) he reflected: 'The defect of the earlier imagist propaganda was not in misstatement but in incomplete statement. The diluters took the handiest and easiest meaning, and thought only of the STATIONARY image' (Hampson 1983, 108; capitals Pound's). Although the static nature of the image was appropriate for the short lyric, such stasis could not be sustained in the longer poem. In an essay published in *Blast* in 1914, Pound reinvented the image as 'a radiant node or cluster...a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing' (Hampson 1983, 109; capitals Pound's). With this essay, the new poetic movement of Vorticism was born.

H.D.'s discussion of the 'energy' of her poetry, above, was written some years after the height of Modernism and echoes the 'dynamic form' of the image suggested by the principles of Vorticism (Pondrom 1990 [1985], 99). Pound's essay 'Vorticism' (1914) cites H.D.'s 'Oread' (1913), one of her first poems, as a classic example of Vorticist technique. Cyrena N. Pondrom has argued convincingly that the poems of H.D.'s *Sea Garden* 'provide early poetic models for the important transformation of the static form of imagist doctrine into vorticism' (1990 [1985], 99). Despite this, and the fact that she wrote 'powerful poems which support Pound's definitions of the image and the vortex - *before* he formulated these ideals', critical history fails to credit her with the innovation which may well have shaped the future direction of modern poetry (Pondrom 1990 [1985], 105; emphasis in original).

Pondrom's revisionist reading of H.D.'s early poetry is useful in outlining the limitations of the Imagist paradigm. However, the vocabulary she chooses to describe

H.D.'s writing underscores the contradictions in the discourses surrounding Imagism itself. Describing H.D.'s use of 'hard, clear, autonomous images', her 'economy' and use of 'crystalline structure'. Pondrom returns to the classic definitions of Imagism which her essay seeks to challenge, thus reinscribing the narrow categorisation of Imagism into which Pound's definitions have placed her (1990 [1985], 90, 96). Turning now to a discussion of 'Sea Rose' and 'Mid-day', from *Sea Garden*, and 'Oread', from *The God* (1913-17), I will discuss, with direct reference to the poems themselves, how they deviate from the narrow definition of 'crystalline' offered by critical accounts of Imagism.

The dynamics of sexuality in *Sea Garden*

'Sea Rose' presents us with what appears to be a series of still images, captured in lingering close-up, a device, which, significantly, is also used in film:

Rose, harsh rose,
 marred and with stint of petals,
 meagre flower, thin,
 sparse of leaf,

more precious
 than a wet rose,
 single on a stem -
 you are caught in the drift

[...]

Can the spice-rose
 drip such acid fragrance
 hardened in a leaf?
 (CP, 5)

The structure of the poem reinforces the perception of 'no process', since each image is contained within a separate stanza. As Gage would argue, the reader's mind is 'arrested with a picture' (1981, 107). However, as he also points out, the poem is 'a meditation on the [...] flower's very poverty of typically praiseworthy characteristics', reflecting the speaker's uncertain state of mind (Gage 1981, 98). Tracing the speaker's thoughts

through the poem, the reader is compelled, through the juxtaposition of images, 'to compare the preciousness of the sea rose favorably to the wet rose on stem. and to ask if its fragrance can be matched by the spice rose' (Gage 1981, 97). H.D.'s use of synaesthesia renders more complex the purely visual representation which the poem appears to offer, since the reader needs to draw simultaneously on the senses of sight and smell in order to fully comprehend the poem's meaning.

This technique of image juxtaposition is also employed by Pound in 'Liu Ch'e' (1912) and in his two-line Imagist poem 'In a Station of the Metro' (1912): 'The apparition of these faces in the crowd/ Petals on a wet, black bough' (1975, 53). In both these poems, each image is self-contained: Pound adopts each line as a unit which 'strikes out sharply and cleanly from its predecessor' (Hampson 1983, 104-5). 'Metro' is a classic example of Pound's use of the 'one image poem' which attempts to capture 'the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself' (Hampson 1983, 108-9). However, the movement in the poem is conveyed on the level of form, where the use of 'super-position', in which 'one idea [is] set on top of another', encourages the reader to compare one image with the other (Hampson 1983, 108).

Similarly, H.D.'s use of juxtaposition in 'Sea Rose' invites the reader to make active connections between the individual image of each flower: the sea rose of the first stanza, the single garden rose 'on a stem', the spice rose at the end of the poem (CP, 5). By comparing the 'sea rose' of the title to other types of rose, the speaker's dissatisfaction with the environment, and the resulting emotional tension, is brought into the foreground. Similarly, the use of imagistic focus in 'Mid-day' transmits a sense of mental uncertainty:

The light beats upon me.
I am startled -
a split leaf crackles on the paved floor -
I am anguished - defeated.

A slight wind shakes the seed-pods -
my thoughts are spent
as the black seeds [...]
I am scattered like
the hot shrivelled seeds.
(CP, 10)

The poem mediates between the external environment, in the descriptions of 'light' and the 'split leaf' on the 'paved floor', and the internal psyche of the speaker who is 'startled' and 'anguished'. Oscillating between this 'inside' and 'outside', the reader engages with the speaker's divided state of mind, which is implied - as in 'Sea Rose' - through the poem's use of multiple images.

This psychological splitting is common elsewhere in H.D.'s poetry, often used to indicate sexual ambivalence. 'Fragment Thirty Six', from *Heliadora* (1924), is an example of this, inspired by a fragment from Sappho: 'I know not what to do/my mind is reft' (CP, 165). Rejecting Cassandra Laity's claim that H.D.'s early poetry is 'deliberately androgynous' and Friedman's that the speaker is 'disembodied', I argue that the imagery of *Sea Garden* encodes complex configurations of sexuality and desire (Laity 1990, 113; Friedman 1990a, 47). In the repressive late Victorian context in which H.D. grew up - and in the homophobic climate which resulted from Oscar Wilde's trial at the end of the nineteenth century - sexuality would often have been denied overt expression. In 'Sea Rose' H.D. employs the image of the rose which commonly symbolises love in English literary tradition, especially in the poetry of the Romantic period.⁴ Yet, as well as representing heterosexual love, the rose has also been used as a metaphor for female genitalia in the tradition of lesbian poetry dating back as far as Sappho (Gregory 1990 [1986], 136).⁵

H.D.'s 'Sea Rose', then, mediates between the discourses of heterosexual and lesbian desire, just as it moves between masculinist and lesbian literary traditions: in this sense, her representation of sexuality is inherently bound up with process. In this fluid transition between positions of subjectivity and desire, it is also possible to read her early poetry as an expression of the speaker's bisexuality.⁶ As outlined in the Introduction, the interpretation of bisexuality in H.D.'s texts is often influenced by critics' eagerness to focus on the biographical details of her sexual orientation. Returning to this issue at various points in my thesis, I suggest that, rather than

⁴ See, for instance, William Blake's 'The Sick Rose' (1794) in *Songs of Experience* (1982, 31).

⁵ For a lucid discussion of H.D.'s engagement with Sappho, particularly in her use of flower imagery, see Gregory (1990 [1986]).

⁶ For a further discussion of the bisexual dynamic in H.D.'s early poetry, see Stott (1997).

grounding a discussion of H.D.'s bisexuality in 'fact', it needs, instead, to be understood as a process of *textual* construction.

Read within this context of encoded sexuality, H.D.'s short lyric 'Oread'- an address to the mythical mountain nymphs who act as guides for travellers - is also significant:

Whirl up, sea -
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.
(CP, 55)

Here, again, H.D. makes use of juxtaposition, establishing 'a perfect analogy [...] between ocean waves and pines' (Gage 1981, 66). The poem's portrayal of 'movement' is clearly gendered, the phrase 'pointed pines' suggesting a specifically phallic sexual energy. Pound's choice of 'Oread' as an exemplar for the principles of Vorticism is telling: as Bonnie Kime Scott argues, it demonstrates how 'his aesthetic of the new' is 'liberally strewn with metaphors valorizing male sexual anatomy and energy' (1995, 95).

Citing Pound's definition of the vortex in 'Vorticism' (1914), Kathleen Crown suggests that it draws on the discourse of the maternal: 'All the past that is vital, all the past that is capable of living into the future is *pregnant* in the vortex, NOW' (Crown 1995, 226; emphasis Crown's; capitals Pound's). Pound's use of the discourse of female corporeality is not an attempt to construct a feminine aesthetic, but is a phallogentric reinscription of the cultural stereotypes which surround the representation of the maternal. As Crown suggests - and as we shall see later in my discussion of *Notes On Thought and Vision* - although H.D. 'claim[s] the cultural authority of Pound's Vorticist Maternal, she rejects as destructive its speed and mechanistic energy' (1995, 227). Thus, H.D. colludes, albeit unconsciously, perhaps, with the heterosexist bias in Pound's work. This further suggests H.D.'s ambivalent relationship to the 'phallicism' both of literary modernism and to the discourses of psychoanalysis and to which I return

in my discussion of *Notes*.

As Scott points out, ‘Pound’s basic definition of “image” incorporates technical metaphors derived from scientific terminology’ (1995, 97). Pound states that new poetry should be

as much like granite as it can be...I mean it will not try to seem forcible by rhetorical din, and luxurious riot. We will have fewer painted adjectives impeding the shock and stroke of it. At least for myself I want it so, austere, direct, free from emotional slither. (Pound, cited in Scott 1995, 97)

As Scott attests, Pound’s metaphors here are both ‘machine-like (technical)’ and ‘biologically male (natural)’ (1995, 97). The celebration of the machine as ‘organized energy’ is linked fundamentally to ‘masculine metaphors of the modern’ in Hulme’s philosophies, as well as those of Pound (Scott 1995, 99). This suggests that, within modernist discourse, the construction of a visual aesthetic - as well as the attempt to define ‘modernity’ itself - is always inherently gendered.⁷

‘The age demanded an image’: H.D. and film

In *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), Pound declares that ‘the age demanded an image’ (1975, 98-9). In the early decades of the twentieth century, the impulse towards new configurations of the visual and the obsession with technological advancement found an expression in the cinema. As indicated in the Introduction, attitudes to the new medium of film varied, from Lawrence’s complete rejection of the form to its enthusiastic reception by H.D. and Richardson. But H.D. also took an interest in the technical side of image-making. In her response to a questionnaire circulated by Margaret Anderson’s journal, *The Little Review* in 1929, she wrote:

Just at the moment I am involved with pictures [...] We have almost

⁷ This gendering of the visual aesthetic is also inherent in debates about the emergence of sound in early cinema. In her writings for *Close Up*, Richardson aligned the silent film with the feminine, investing the sound film with masculine qualities. Elsewhere, the sound film itself was commonly perceived as representing the spirit of modernity (see Rotha 1960 [1930]). I touch on this issue further in my discussion of sound in early film in Chapter Five.

finished a slight lyrical four reel little drama [...] and I myself have learned to use the small projector [...] I should like for the moment [...] to know a lot more about camera work. (cited in Friedberg 1982. 28-9)

H.D.'s interest in the technical aspects of film prompted her to appropriate its devices. As Mandel argues, in *Helen in Egypt* this is illustrated by the juxtaposition of 'images of persons, places, objects [...] without chronological explanation' (1983, 40). This juxtaposition establishes an active relationship between author and reader in the reading of the poem: 'As in a film the mind of the reader/viewer collaborates with the poet to invest dissociated images with meanings beyond the individual shots' (Mandel 1983, 40). Although Mandel and Edmunds both examine how film has influenced the writing of *Helen*, critics have overlooked the possibility of film's influence both on H.D.'s *early* poetry and on her prose narrative (Mandel 1980, 1983, 1986; Edmunds 1994). Techniques such as close up and juxtaposition, which were part of the developing methodology of film, were also fundamental devices in H.D.'s literary texts. In particular, her encouragement of the reader to collaborate in the construction of the text shares similarities with Eisenstein's use of cinematic montage. For Eisenstein's use of montage in films such as *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1927), of course, aimed to rouse the spectator to engage in the 'creation' of the image and thus to political action in the Russian socialist revolution.

Of the innovative cinematic devices prevalent in the production of early film, montage was the most frequently theorised in film writing of the time. Eisenstein's definition of montage as 'two pieces of film, placed together [...] to create a new concept, a new quality born of that juxtaposition' bears close resemblance to the technique of juxtaposition in H.D.'s poetry discussed above (Eisenstein 1975 [1939], 4). Indeed, these experimental cinematic methods were not just specific to Soviet cinema but were also used in British films in the 1920s and 1930s. David Bordwell's discussion of the devices of cinematic modernism could read as a description of H.D.'s poetics:

Cinematic modernism is concerned to interrogate linear modes of narration [and] explore psychological traits [...] It explores the visual, rather than the verbal, form being intrusive, and is often presented as the product of an auteur which nevertheless places great stress on the audience's interpretation of the work. (1985, 206-33)

Films such as Oswald Blakeston's *I Do Like To Be Beside the Seaside* (1927) and *Light Rhythms* (1930) - as well as POOL's *Borderline* (1930), discussed in the next chapter - frequently drew on the technique of montage. But montage was not only limited to avant garde films: it became a feature of the British Documentary tradition, made prominent by John Grierson and Humphrey Jennings, the founder of the Mass Observation movement. The Empire Marketing Board Film Unit (1927-33) and the General Post Office Film Unit (1933-39) - together constituting the Documentary Film Movement - produced state-funded films which explored material issues of class that avant garde films like *Borderline* often overlooked.⁸ As Sarah Street argues, Grierson's *Drifters* (1929) was largely influenced by the political modernism of the Soviet cinematic tradition (1997, 157). Drawing inspiration from 'montage techniques used in Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin*', *Drifters* 'shared a billing with *Potemkin* at the Film Society's showing of the banned Soviet classic' (Street 1997, 157). Jennings' *Spare Time* (1939) - although a sound film, produced later than those referred to above - used a range of montage techniques which depicted the leisure activities of ordinary working class people in Britain. Clearly, then, in the early decades of the twentieth century, British literary and cinematic culture engaged, in conscious and unconscious ways, with the theoretical concepts and experimental innovation of Russian film.

Since H.D. did not have had any contact with Eisenstein or his work until the mid 1920s, any engagement with his work was unconscious until then. Her poetry of the Imagist period employs techniques discussed by Eisenstein in his theoretical essays, translated and published by *Close Up* over a decade later. H.D.'s use of technical, cinematic devices in her literary texts suggests an intuitive, even visionary, sense of how the visual aesthetic of the modern age would develop. In her commitment to the construction of a collaborative relationship with the reader, her interest in form and expressions of the inner psyche, her poetry appears more closely allied to the preoccupations of cinematic modernism than to literary Imagism. By considering her writing within this context of film, it is possible to move beyond the constrictive

⁸ Significantly, the Empire Marketing Board existed at the same time as *Close Up*, between 1927 and 1933. However, the aims and objectives of their projects were entirely different: since the Empire Marketing Board was government-funded, its films tended to focus on material issues. As I suggest in the Introduction, in its promotion of European and avant garde films, the objectives of *Close Up* were similar to that of the Film Society.

critical label which has so dominated perceptions of her work.

Image as ‘process’: Fenollosa, Eisenstein, H.D.

Whilst a discussion of the limitations of Imagism is vital to my reading of H.D.’s early poetry, it would be wrong to divorce her work altogether from its literary context. Certainly, there are aspects of Imagist poetics that overlap with the notion of the ‘dynamic’ image in H.D.’s work. In arguing that the image itself embodies action through process, Ernest Fenollosa’s essay ‘The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry’ (1964 [1913]), edited by Pound, is a case in point. Pound had already become interested in the oriental models of Japanese haiku and Chinese ideogram through the influence of Hulme and Flint. Whilst I return to the problems of such ‘orientalism’ later in the chapter, what is significant here is that Fenollosa’s essay became a seminal text in discussions of modern poetry.

Fenollosa’s essay extends an analysis of the connection between perception and the linguistic sign of the ideogram, to the process of reading poetry:

Perhaps we do not always sufficiently consider that thought is successive, not through some accident or weakness of our subjective operations but because the operations of nature are successive. The transference of force from agent to object, which constitute natural phenomena, occupy time. Therefore a reproduction of them in imagination requires the same temporal order [...] the great number of these ideographic roots carry in them a *verbal idea of action*.
(Fenollosa, cited in Gage 1981, 20; emphasis added)

In its focus on the process of ‘transference of force from agent to object’ Fenollosa’s discussion shares similarities with H.D.’s use of metaphor outlined earlier. Significantly, it also has parallels with Eisenstein’s thinking when he suggests that a work of art ‘is a process of arranging images in the feelings and mind of the spectator’ (1975 [1939], 17). Arguing along the same lines as Fenollosa, Eisenstein states that ‘this same dynamic principle lies at the base of all truly vital images, even in such an apparently immobile and static medium as, for example, painting’ (*ibid.*).

A discussion of the similarities between the work of Fenollosa and Eisenstein

also has important implications for reading the work of H.D., for it illuminates the interconnections between literary and cinematic modernism. Eisenstein's essay 'Film Form, 1935' draws on the direct parallels between the devices of film and poetry:

It is important to note that what we have analyzed in respect to the close-up [...] is not a method characteristic of the cinema alone and specific to it. It equally has a methodological place and is only employed in, for example, literature [...] in the field of literary form known to us under the term synecdoche. (1935a, 192)

Returning briefly to H.D.'s poetry, it is possible to see in practice how such connections can be made between cinematic close-up and the literary device of synecdoche.⁹ In 'Sea Rose', as I suggested earlier, the poem depends on the reader making a connection between the 'part' - the single image of the rose - and the 'whole', which is represented by the speaker's state of mind. In making the transition between these two elements, the reader completes the 'action' suggested by Fenollosa's analysis of the reading of poetry. In the light of Eisenstein's writings about film, this analysis of 'Sea Rose' reinforces my argument about the links between cinematic and literary devices in H.D.'s early poetry. The direct comparison of synecdoche to the single, cinematic close-up shot, framed within the context of the moving image, therefore allows us to move beyond the limited descriptions of her poetry as 'static' or 'crystalline'.

Like Fenollosa, Eisenstein depended on oriental models to illustrate his theories of the image. 'Film Form, 1935' draws specifically on the figure of the hieroglyph in order to demonstrate the principles of cinematography:

The point is that the copulation - perhaps we had better say, the combination - of two hieroglyphs of the simplest series is to be considered not as their sum but as their product, i.e. as a unit of another dimension, another power, each separately, corresponds to an object [...] but their combination corresponds to a concept. By the combination of two 'depictables' is achieved the representation of something graphically indecipherable. (Eisenstein 1935a, 192)

The interest shown by Fenollosa and Eisenstein in these oriental models was matched by that of Pound, Hulme and Flint, as well as by H.D., who employs the image of the

hieroglyph right up to the writing of *Helen in Egypt* at the end of her career. This fascination indicates what would now be regarded as a problematic, and unacknowledged, reappropriation of the art and language of another culture. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has referred to such unquestioned 'borrowing' from non-western culture as 'stealing the treasures of the mind' in order to enrich European languages and cultures (1986, 9). This act echoes the theft of national art treasures in the colonisation of Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. Edmunds expands on this inherently racist position in Eisenstein's work, noting that his film writings and definitions of cinema permeate with examples of 'sensual, pre-logical thinking' which have only been revealed to us through the western, ethnographic study of indigenous peoples such as the Bororo Indians and Polynesians (1994, 116). Like Freud before him, Eisenstein 'constantly associate[s] syncretic thinking with ancient and/or primitive societies, people of color, women, the visual image, and the body' (*ibid.*). I return to a discussion of this reinscription of racial stereotypes - in relation to the work of H.D. and Eisenstein - at the end of the chapter.

Eisenstein's premise that the spectator is transported to 'another dimension, another power' through making an active connection in 'reading' the hieroglyph suggests the discourse of the spiritual at play in his work. Furthermore, his reference to 'copulation' suggests direct associations between sexuality and visionary experience, which is, significantly, an aspect of H.D.'s notion of 'womb vision' in *Notes on Thought and Vision*. Moving on to examine further these resonances in the work of H.D. and Eisenstein, I consider in the remainder of the chapter how their conception of the visual - with its intersecting discourses of sexuality, spirituality and politics - makes a significant contribution to discussions of the image in the modern period.

'Womb vision' and 'the womb of fantasy' : H.D. and Eisenstein

H.D. refers to the visionary moment recorded in *Notes on Thought and Vision* as her 'jellyfish experience', which occurred while she was on holiday with Bryher in the Scilly Isles in the summer of 1919. Her retrospective account in the 'Advent'

⁹ Synecdoche (in Greek, 'taking together') is defined as 'a part of something [...] used to signify the

section of *Tribute to Freud* suggests that it took the form of a spiritual vision experienced through the body:

We were in the little room that Bryher had taken for our study when I felt this impulse to 'let go' into a sort of balloon, or diving-bell as I have explained it, that seemed to hover over me [...] There was, I explained to Bryher, a second globe or bell-jar rising as if it were from my feet...I felt the double globe come and go and I could have dismissed it at once and probably would have if I had been alone...It was being with Bryher that projected the fantasy, and all the time I was thinking that this would be an interesting bit of psychological data for Dr. Havelock Ellis. (cited in Crown 1995, 223)

This passage reveals several strands of H.D.'s work explored in the course of my thesis. Her gesture of presenting *Notes on Thought and Vision* to Ellis - who, to her disappointment, failed to be impressed by it - marks the beginning of a continued pattern through her lifetime where her writing functions as a 'sacred' gift, rather than as a commodity within a market system of profit-and-loss.¹⁰ As I argue in my discussion of *The Gift* in Chapter Three, this form of transaction is especially significant in the lesbian dynamic of H.D.'s relationship with Bryher, which, in many ways, troubles the principles of capitalist exchange. The fact that Bryher collaborates in H.D.'s 'projection' of the image, here, is also significant and recurs in her later visionary experience, discussed in Chapter Four.

The visionary moment H.D. describes in *Notes* constitutes a paradigmatic shift in her perception, which she relates to the experience of the birth of her daughter, Perdita, in 1919. Describing the sensations experienced during the vision in uterine terms, she states that her mind became 'a cap, like water, transparent, fluid, yet with definite body, contained in a definite space' (NV, 18-19). Extending the significance of her personal vision to the notion of perception in general, she locates visual consciousness in 'the love region of the body or placed in the foetus of the body' - as well as in the 'brain' - so that it becomes diffused throughout the (implicitly female) body (NV, 19). In one sense, this celebration of the maternal could be seen as a

whole' (Abrams 1981, 65).

¹⁰ I argue in Chapter Three that H.D.'s understanding of the gift has resonances with the anthropological model of 'the gift economy' posited by Marcel Mauss as an alternative to what he terms the 'general economy', or the capitalist system of profit and loss (Mauss 1967). For a discussion of H.D.'s delineation of the gift economy, see Morris (1990 [1986]).

challenge to the masculinist bias of Modernism. Like Pound's definition of the Vortex, however, the discourse of reproduction in *Notes* is clearly located in a heterosexual economy. This serves to reinscribe - rather than to refuse, as Gelpi suggests - 'the misogynist phallicism of Pound and Lawrence' (1982, 13).

Like *Notes*, Eisenstein's theory of 'the creating spectator' also draws on metaphors of reproduction. The following extract from 'Montage in 1938' is a lengthy one which is, nevertheless, worth quoting here, since it shares so many resonances with H.D.'s essay:

The spectator is drawn into a creative act in which his individuality is not subordinated to the author's individuality, but is opened up throughout the process of fusion with the author's intention [...] every spectator, in correspondence with his individuality, and in his own way and out of his own experience - out of the womb of his fantasy [...] creates an image in accordance with the representational guidance suggested by the author, leading him to understanding and experience of the author's theme [...] The image planned by the author has become flesh of the flesh of the spectator's risen image [...] Within me, as a spectator, this image is born and grown. Not only the author has created, but I also - the creating spectator - have participated. (Eisenstein 1975 [1939], 33)

Here, Eisenstein problematically uses 'stereotypes of female intuition and maternal instinct to evoke the strong emotional, visceral, and irrational components of viewing' in the theorisation of cinema (Edmunds 1994, 117). His discussion of the image, which begins with a 'process of fusion' and is then 'born' out of the 'womb of fantasy', clearly depends, like H.D.'s *Notes*, on a heterosexual reproductive economy. The 'spectator' in this extract is notably masculine and, despite the allusions to childbirth and female reproduction, the possibility of a female spectator is denied. Like Pound, Eisenstein's early twentieth-century construction of the image evokes gender stereotypes which are both biologically essentialist and fundamentally heterosexist.

Notes is more complex, however, in its representation of the link between visual perception and the gender of the viewing body, and poses a number of rhetorical questions for which it provides no solution: 'Should we be able to think with the womb and feel with the brain? May this consciousness be centred entirely in

the brain or entirely in the womb or corresponding love-region of a man's body?' (NV, 20). The essay's mediation between spiritual and corporeal experience suggests an alterity which, Crown argues, makes visible 'the physical, sexual and erotic body that enables artistic vision and aesthetic ecstasy' (1995, 215). In its refusal of the binary of body and mind, *Notes* also appears to trouble the precepts of Cartesian philosophy. The 'alternate understanding of body and subjectivity' in the essay, as Crown further points out, is 'perpetually under construction, in process, and culturally permeable and vulnerable [...] it is never static, disavowed or inert' (1995, 220). This notion of identity and the corporeal self as *process* is fundamental to my reading of H.D.'s representation of the image, not just in this chapter, but in the thesis as a whole.

'The spiritual is political': H.D. and Eisenstein

Eisenstein's theory of the 'creating spectator' is, of course, closely connected with his political project of constructing a Soviet national cinema. As Edmunds points out, the practice of using montage began in the cinema hall 'the mental and political awakening' which encouraged the spectator to join in the Russian socialist revolution (1994, 116). The use of montage in Eisenstein's films therefore 'maximiz[es] visual conflict between successive shots' in an attempt to 'shake the spectator out of a passive engagement with the film and into a "higher dimension" of thought, capable of combining antithetical images into new conceptual syntheses' (*ibid.*). Although, for Eisenstein, the moving image is primarily a rhetorical tool, its political possibilities coexist with the 'spiritual' or creative experience of viewing the image.

This representation of the spiritual in Eisenstein's writing is always firmly located within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Significantly, in the passage quoted above, his reference to 'the flesh of the flesh of the spectator's risen image' draws directly on the discourses of Christianity. The implication of redemption, through implicit references to Christ's incarnation and bodily resurrection, is a rhetorical device intended to rouse the spectator to political action in joining the communist cause. In 'Montage in 1938' this Christian discourse is employed again, this time through Old Testament, rather than New Testament, terminology:

The juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into the light that general quality in which each detail has participated and which binds together all the details into the whole, namely into the generalised image, wherein the creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme. (Eisenstein 1975 [1939], 11)

The references to ‘light’, here, suggest both God’s ‘creation’ of light in Genesis and the light from the projector necessary for the viewing of the film. Eisenstein therefore links the experience of viewing to the material conditions of spectatorship and, specifically, to the apparatus and physical environment of the cinema itself. Given the atheistic leaning of socialist and communist theory, the use of such religious vocabulary might seem contradictory, in that it evokes what would be - to a Marxist - the repressive and totalising system of Christianity. However, this vocabulary is appropriate: for the growing number of cinema-goers in the increasingly secular climate of early twentieth-century Europe, the visit to the picture palace was fast replacing the weekly ritual of church-going. As Carol Watts suggests, the medium of film quickly became the new religion of the modern era and *Close Up* contributors wrote about it with ‘the optimism of a Christian socialism’ (1995, 78). In this respect, Eisenstein’s identification of the cinema with religious worship shares similarities with that of Richardson and H.D. Richardson’s column ‘Continuous Performance’, for instance, describes the audience as a ‘congregation’, with the film as ‘a eucharistic form of bread’ (*ibid.*). This suggestion of moral redemption through the viewing of film, in the writing of both Richardson and Eisenstein, indicates their belief that the cinema was a collective visual experience in which it was possible for ‘a community of spectators’ to become ‘educated for modernity’ (Marcus 1998b, 152).

H.D.’s essay ‘Mask and the Movietone’ (1927) similarly draws on the metaphor of cinema as church. Like Eisenstein’s writings, it situates cinema as a collective experience:

We sank into light, into darkness, the cinema palace [...] became a sort of temple. We sank into this warmth and were recreated. The cinema has become to us what the church was to our ancestors. We sang, so to speak, to hymns, we were redeemed by light literally. (H.D., 1927c, 23)

As Friedberg points out, H.D. is ‘fascinated by light’, a fixation which ‘is central to [her]

fascination with the cinematic'(1982, 29). This fascination is generally articulated in mystical terms, where the viewer is elevated from the level of everyday experience. This is most apparent in 'Projector', her poem published in *Close Up* in 1927, which celebrates light as 'bearing us aloft/ enthusiastic/ into realms of magic' (CP, 355). In the extract from 'Mask and the Movietone', above, the description of light and the suggestion of the spectator's 'rebirth' have close resonances with Eisenstein's definition of the 'creating spectator' in 'Montage in 1938'. H.D.'s essay was written in 1927, a decade before that of Eisenstein. So although Marcus argues that 'Eisenstein's account of "intellectual montage" [...] was clearly a crucial influence on H.D.'s film writings', it seems clear that H.D. was engaging with similar ideas long before Eisenstein's own were translated and published in English (1998a, 102).

The allusions to the 'darkness' and 'warmth' of the cinema in the extract from 'The Mask and the Movietone' above suggest a womb-like enclosure into which the spectator retreats to be 'recreated' and somehow re-educated. H.D.'s description of the reproductive economy in 'Mask and the Movietone' therefore continues the 'doctrine of vision' she first proposed in *Notes* in 1919, long before her active involvement with film (NV, 22). The 'jellyfish vision' was fundamental to the formation of H.D.'s understanding of perception. As Gelpi states, it was to be followed by 'other moments of special release and even revelation' throughout her lifetime, including 'the paradisaical vision aboard ship in Greece [...] when the sea-surge seemed suddenly to move in rhythm with a cosmic harmony' and 'the cryptic "writing on the wall" in the hotel room in Corfu' (1982, 8-9). As my thesis shows, these 'projections' of visionary experience in H.D.'s writing are *always* related in similar terms to her spectatorship of film.

Eisenstein's 'intellectual montage' is clearly more politically radical than the film writing of H.D. Yet despite H.D.'s resistance to polemical manifestos like those of Pound and Flint, her film writing reveals an engagement with contemporary culture which perhaps demonstrates more social awareness than it initially suggests. In considering her film essays, it is useful to bear in mind that they were written for publication in *Close Up* and that the journal had a clear aim of promoting internationalism. The preoccupations which dominate H.D.'s essays - her criticism of the addition of soundtrack to film and her enthusiastic celebration of silent film - are the

result of her 'vision of potential community' and an urge to deconstruct linguistic and national boundaries in the desire for world peace (Watts 1995, 78). Clearly, such a desire demonstrates a naïve, and unfulfilled, optimism that 'cinematic art can transcend as well as depict political difference' (Marek 1990, 31). But it also suggests that, for H.D. and Eisenstein, and for other contributors to *Close Up*, film was not just an aesthetic form but a political site through which the subjectivity and national identity of the spectator were demarcated.

H.D.'s ideal of an international language is apparent not just in her film-writing but also in her literary texts, including *Tribute To Freud* where it is expressed, once again, through the figure of the hieroglyph:

The picture-writing, the hieroglyph of the dream, was the common property of the whole race; in the dream, man, as at the beginning of time, spoke a universal language, and man meeting in the universal understanding of the unconscious or the subconscious, would forgo barriers of time and space and man, understanding man, would save mankind. (TF, 108)

The pacifist impulse at the heart of this quotation is also apparent in *The Gift* and *Trilogy*, texts which H.D. wrote during the Second World War. Despite its expression of a desire for world peace, the above quotation also reveals a liberal desire to eradicate 'otherness', namely national or ethnic differences, in creating a 'universal understanding' for 'mankind'. Like Pound, Fenollosa and Eisenstein - and like Freud himself - H.D. draws on the hieroglyph, which, for her, becomes the pre-linguistic sign of a prelapsarian social harmony. As Scott reflects, 'we are only beginning to appreciate the forms of ethnographic control that went into modernists' move into Oriental and African cultures' (1995, 85). Elaborating further on this unquestioning appropriation of the hieroglyph, my discussion of *Helen in Egypt* in Chapter Five considers how, contrary to her aim, her work reinscribes her own privileged, western position through the effacement of racial and ethnic differences.

In this context of 'ethnographic control', H.D.'s celebration of silent cinema - which operated outside of the linguistic markers of nationality - suggests more than simply a naïve internationalism. It reveals a middle-class, liberal intellectualism which

overlooks, or oversimplifies, complex configurations of national identity. This was reflected in the ideology of the POOL collective as a whole. Their production of a special issue on 'the negro' in the cinema in August 1929 and their exploration of inter-racial desire in the making of *Borderline* would certainly have been regarded as radical and shocking at the time (Donald 1998a, 33). Yet, although the intention was to open up debates about the social power of cinema and 'the race question', ultimately their position largely reinforces the hegemony of white European, dominant ideology. As Donald argues, POOL's attempt to examine the dynamics of race remains 'trapped within a racialized discourse characteristic of its time', namely in the obsession of avant garde, modernist artists and intellectuals with 'nativism' (1998a, 33). This contradiction, between the impulse towards internationalism on the one hand, and the reinscription of a privileged racial identity on the other, is explored further in the next chapter.

Considering H.D.'s writing in relation to early developments in visual technology not only suggests new critical directions for a reading of her work, it also challenges the literary critical tradition which has fixed her poetry as 'crystalline' and 'static'. As I have demonstrated, the techniques of her early verse are underpinned by the notion of *process*. This means that her writing can be read, not just within the literary context of Imagism, but also in the light of *cinematic* modernism and the moving image. In turn, since the invention of film signalled a huge cultural shift in the perception of the visual, this also clears the way for a consideration of the wider social and political implications of her representation of the visual. The theoretical definitions of the image posited by Eisenstein and Pound have certainly received more critical attention than H.D.'s essays and film writings. Yet her work, like theirs, demonstrates the centrality of visual culture in early twentieth-century perceptions of 'modernity'. And by encoding the spectatorship of film as a *feminised* process, H.D.'s work - like that of Eisenstein - suggests that modernity itself is a discourse that is ultimately *gendered*.

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underlying conservatism. Conversely, H.D.'s deployment of the visual in *Her* can be read as a subversive opposition to dominant heterosexual norms. In this respect, H.D.'s novel not only represents a challenge to the scrutinising 'gaze' of psychoanalysis, it also troubles the medical discourse which has pathologised homosexual and bisexual desire for almost a century.

The cinematics of *Her*: the male gaze

Her traces the complex, triadic relationship between the protagonist Hermione Gart (Her), her fiancé, George Lowndes and Fayne Rabb, the woman who subsequently becomes Her's lover. H.D.'s use of visual metaphors encodes the representations of both heterosexual and lesbian desire. In Her's relationship with George this is conveyed through Her's perception of herself as aestheticised object:

He wanted Her, but he wanted a Her that he called decorative. George wanted a Her out of the volumes on the floor, out of the two great volumes. He wanted Her from about the middle, the glorious flaming middle, the Great Painters (that came under Florence) section. George regarded Her, was saying 'You are so damned decorative'. There was something stripped of decoration, something of somewhat-painful angles that he would not recognize. (H, 172)

In describing Her's perception of herself as decorative 'artist's model', H.D. comments on her own authorial position. In the reference to the 'volumes' of 'Great Painters' she not only draws attention to the marginalisation of women as image in western culture, she ironically points to her own exclusion from masculinist literary tradition and her marginalised position 'out' of the 'great volumes'. In this passage Her is fully aware of her objectification through the dominance of the visual. Yet, throughout the novel, she is also complicit in that objectification, for she claims that she needs George to 'correlate for her, life here, life there', to 'define and make definable a mirage, a reflection of some lost incarnation' (H, 63). Thus, H.D. perceives women's position within the scopic economy as contradictory. For, although she acknowledges that its power can be oppressive for women, she also recognises the vital role it plays in their acculturation.

The masculinist power inherent in the relationship between Her and George culminates in the novel's 'seduction' scene:

Now more than ever she knew they were out of some bad novel. Sound of chiffon ripping and the twist and turn of Hermione under the stalwart thin young torso of George Lowndes. Now more than ever thought made spiral, made concentric circle toward a darkened ceiling. (H. 173)

H.D. ironically evokes the conventions of the romance novel, a technique which is meant to convey Her's ambivalence to her 'seduction'. In one sense, the reference to 'chiffon ripping' can be read as Her's *identification* with the fictional heroine of the bodice-ripping 'bad novel' - an attitude which signals her acceptance of the terms of heterosexuality. At the same time, however, H.D.'s ironic tone *undercuts* this possibility and the opposition between George's active male body - suggested by his 'stalwart' torso - and Her's 'decorative' passivity encodes her critique of masculinist power. These simultaneous, yet conflicting, readings suggest that, for H.D., the power relations within heterosexual desire are shifting and contradictory. Significantly at this point, H.D. uses Her's full name, Hermione. This locates Her's proper name within the novel as a site of shifting subjectivity through the experience of sexual desire - for she is both *herself* (Her) and *not herself* (Hermione). As we shall see later, this oscillating subjectivity represented by the name is also vital in H.D.'s portrayal of the lesbian dynamic between Her and Fayne.

Since the narrative of *Her* pivots around instances of gazing and seeing, it is fruitful to turn to Laura Mulvey's essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' which analyses the dynamics of power in the act of looking (1989 [1975]). Mulvey's theory is grounded in psychoanalytic theory. Specifically, she draws on Freud's theory of scopophilia - or pleasure in looking - and Lacan's notion of the mirror phase to define the gendered position of the film spectator. In a much-cited passage, she argues:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded

for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (1989 [1975], 19; emphasis in original)

Mulvey's thesis depends on two elements in relation to the gaze: voyeurism and spectatorship. She argues that narrative cinema positions the film spectator as male by privileging the look of the male protagonist at female characters *in* the film. The camera, which follows the look of the male protagonist, situates the female character as object. And the (male) spectator identifies with the look of the male character, assuming a voyeuristic position in relation to the female object.

Whilst Mulvey focuses on models of spectatorship within mainstream cinema, her essay provides a useful framework for a discussion of the narrative strategies of *Her*. For not only does H.D.'s novel situate Her as the 'looked-at' object of George's gaze, it positions the reader, who 'watches' the seduction scene, as a *spectator*. As the 'seduction sequence' unfolds, the narrative viewpoint becomes a kind of 'camera obscura' with the ceiling functioning as a lens:

The ceiling came down, down. The ceiling became black, in a moment it would crush down, crushing Her and George Lowndes under a black metallic shutter. The ceiling was a sort of moveable shutter like some horrible torture thing out of Poe's tales. (H, 173)

On the one hand the reader of H.D.'s text, like Mulvey's hypothetical film spectator, becomes a 'voyeur', whose gaze at Her is aligned with that of George. On the other hand, H.D.'s description of Her's pain also disturbs the reader: in describing the ceiling as 'some horrible torture thing out of Poe's tales', H.D. implies Her's horror at the stifling nature of heterosexual sex.⁴ This both alerts us to the dangers of our own voyeurism and renders visible the objectification involved in the process of looking. Moreover, if we accept that H.D. herself was objectified as the icon of Imagism, as discussed in the Introduction, then this passage also represents her challenge to her own inscription as image into the discourse of Modernism (Hirsch 1986, 3).

⁴ The reference to Poe here could be read as another ironic comment on the masculinist literary tradition. Whilst she draws on Poe's use of the gothic genre to imply Her's horror, it could also suggest that, for H.D. herself, the male literary tradition is as stifling as heterosexual desire is for Her.

Examining *Her* alongside Mulvey's work can reveal important insights into H.D.'s narrative technique. Such a reading raises questions about the nature of *power* in H.D.'s literary deployment of the visual and about the ways in which the act of looking constructs subjectivity. However, there are limitations to Mulvey's analysis, which she herself acknowledged in 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"' (Mulvey 1988 [1981]). Jane Gaines posits that Mulvey's work 'tak[es] gender as its starting point in the analysis of oppression' (1994 [1986], 177). Through this privileging of gender, Mulvey overlooks interlocking configurations of sexuality, race and class which also constitute subjectivity.⁵ I return to the relationship between the visible and issues of race later in the chapter. For the moment, I am interested in Gaines' critique of the heterosexist bias of Mulvey's work. She argues:

[Mulvey's] theory canceled the lesbian spectator, whose viewing pleasure could never be construed as anything like male voyeurism. Positing a lesbian spectator would significantly change the trajectory of the gaze. (Gaines 1994 [1986], 179)

In overlooking the concerns of sexual difference, and theorising the gaze of the spectator as singular, Mulvey's theory might be seen to re-enact the masculinist power bound up with the gaze. As Gaines points out, '[when] feminists have theorized women's sexuality, they have universalized from the particular experience of white women' (1994 [1986], 186).⁶ So although Mulvey seeks to undermine the scopic, her work unintentionally reinforces its dominance by rendering *invisible* other forms of difference. Gaines argues for alternative models of looking. Operating through metaphors of visual distortion which encode lesbian looking, H.D.'s challenge to the power of the male gaze in *Her* might be seen to anticipate Gaines' critique. For in 'queering' the look deployed in her literary narrative, H.D. both deflects the trajectory of the male gaze and makes visible the heterosexist bias inherent in western culture.

⁵ It is important to bear in mind that Mulvey's essay was written against a backdrop of women's activism in the so-called 'second wave' of feminism. As such, her theory was predominantly a challenge to the hegemony of Hollywood narrative cinema and did not set out to challenge other notions of difference. For further discussion of the limitations of Mulvey's approach, see hooks (1992), Gaines (1994 [1986]) and Stacey (1994).

⁶ Gaines' argument that Mulvey reinforces 'white middle-class values' could equally be applied to *Her* and *Borderline*. Whilst it is not my project to analyse issues of class and educational privilege - and the tensions between 'mainstream' and 'avant-garde' - this is an important issue to which I return in the Conclusion to the thesis (1994 [1986], 177).

Distortion: 'queering' the gaze in *Her*⁷

Before discussing H.D.'s challenge to the scopic in *Her*, it is necessary to trace its origins to the psychoanalytic discourse from which it originates. In 'The Sexual Aberrations', Freud purports that scopophilia is fundamental to the development of the (hetero)sexualised subject (1977 [1905]). This establishes the visual as the primary site in which heterosexual desire is constructed. Freud's theory suggests that desire functions through looking at the desired object - who is, by implication, female and 'passive' - and that this is necessary both to the generation of (hetero)sexual desire and ultimately, for the purposes of reproduction.⁸ Following Freud, Lacan argues that the scopic drive is maintained by the absence of the object which the voyeur attempts to see, screened off from the spectator's access by a metaphorical 'curtain':

What he is trying to see [...] is the object as absence. What the voyeur is looking for is the shadow behind the curtain [...] What he is looking for is not [...] the phallus - but precisely its absence (1977, 182-3).

According to Freud and Lacan, the desire constructed through the scopic reinforces and keeps in place the separation between subject and desired object. Psychoanalytic theory therefore inscribes a 'visual or "oculocentric" bias [...] implicit in patriarchal models of knowledge' and reinscribes the gender binaries which hold together the fabric of heterosexual desire (Berry 1994, 231).

Although in *Her*, as we have seen, H.D. draws on the vocabulary of the visual to delineate heterosexual desire, she also uses it to convey the lesbian dynamic between Her and Fayne. But, in so doing, she seeks to challenge the heterosexist assumptions at the heart of psychoanalytic thinking. Visual metaphors encode the

⁷ My reading of the visual dynamic in *Her* and *Borderline* as 'queer' is informed by Horne and Lewis, who define the term as 'a transgressive difference from what are perceived as heterosexist norms' (1996, 1). This allows for the possibility of plural subjectivities which 'encompass a variety of desires and hybrid identities' and alter perception itself (Horne and Lewis 1996, 1).

⁸ Freud writes: 'Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused: indeed natural selection counts upon the accessibility of this pathway [...] when it encourages the development of beauty in the sexual object' (1977 [1905], 69).

love between Her and Fayne - particularly in H.D.'s use of mirror imagery.⁹ This is evident from their first encounter, when Her is invited to the house of a mutual friend in order to meet 'a girl I want to *see* you' (H, 34; emphasis added). At the description of their first kiss, Her's image of herself is reflected back through that of Fayne, a symmetry which is reinforced by H.D.'s use of Her's proper name as a pronoun:

Her bent forward, face bent toward Her. A face bends towards me and a curtain opens. There is a swish and swirl as of heavy parting curtains. Curtains part as I look into the eyes of Fayne Rabb. (H, 163)

In contrast to the sequences between Her and George, this moment of female intimacy resists a singular position of power. As Friedman argues, it is an instance of looking which is 'mutual not hierarchical' (1990a, 115). It denies what Mulvey terms *to-be-looked-at-ness* (1989 [1975], 19). And it not only threatens the stability of the relationship between Her and George, it *reconfigures* the heterosexual gaze. H.D.'s use of 'curtains' is significant here. Whilst they form an actual backdrop to Her's view of Fayne in the room in which they meet, H.D. deploys them as a metaphor for enlightenment or realisation: as Her sees Fayne - and as the 'curtains part' - she also 'sees' the truth about her sexual orientation. Paradoxically, since H.D. otherwise appears to *challenge* psychoanalytic thinking, there are interesting resonances with Lacan's discussion of the scopic drive, quoted above. For when the curtains in front of Her 'part', she discovers the truth about her desire for Fayne, filling the absence constructed through desire and finding what Lacan calls the 'shadow behind the curtain'. Of course, H.D. was writing before Lacan. But her use of such metaphors suggest an engagement with the notions of seeing, looking and knowing which are central to the discursive construction of desire in psychoanalysis.¹⁰

As Collecott argues, *Her* 'constantly returns to the trope of the female lovers gazing eye-to-eye' (1986, 349). At the first meeting between Her and Fayne, the

⁹ H.D. uses such 'mirroring' throughout her work to delineate the construction of female subjectivity and desire. In the first section of *Palimpsest* (1926), for instance, Hipparchia regards her reflected image as a split self, but identifies with an 'other' who is indeniably 'black', like the negative of a photograph: 'Mingled in some horrible phantasy, vision superimposed, she saw with her own eyes, white Hipparchia who from her own ice and green sea-water looked out to regard, as her reflected image, dark Olivia' (H.D. 1968 [1926], 66).

¹⁰ Philippa Berry points out the connections between theory - which originates from the Greek 'theorin', to contemplate - and the scopic bias of western culture. She argues that, as a result, there is an 'association between a privileged model of knowledge and notions of clear vision which subtends Western thought' (1994, 231).

presence of a convex mirror in the room produces a distorted reflection of the seated group of guests around the table. The convex mirror comes to function, here and throughout the novel, as a metaphor for non-heterosexual desire:

Across the table, with its back to the little slightly convex mirror, facing Her Gart and Jessie, was this thing that made the floor sink beneath her feet and the wall rise to infinity above her head. The wall and the floor were held together by long dramatic lines of curtain falling in straight, pleated parallels [...] Don't look at the eyes that look at you. 'A girl I want to see you'. The girl *was* seeing Her. (H, 52; emphasis in original)¹¹

Here the convex shape of the mirror distorts the image which is reflected back. Thus, the phallogentric power of the gaze, always present in the dynamic of the relationship between Her and George, is *deflected* - and challenged - through the possibility of the two women's desire for each other. There is an irony implied in this passage: since 'Fayne *was* seeing Her' there is an implicit suggestion that George does not. So although, earlier in the novel, Her believes George to be essential to her self-actualisation, it is Fayne, who becomes formative in Her's realisation of her subjectivity. It is important to note the distinction here between H.D.'s use of 'looking' and 'seeing'. For whilst 'seeing' is associated with the visual, it implies a realisation which is *spiritual*, rather than investigative. As in *The Gift* and *Tribute To Freud*, discussed in Chapters Three and Four, H.D. locates this 'seeing' as feminine. Such 'seeing' is always located in opposition to the act of 'looking', which she associates with the scrutiny of the masculinist gaze.

Whilst in *Her* Fayne is the recipient of Her's 'gaze', she also functions as the instrument through which Her is able to see. As such, she represents a clarity of vision through which Her is able to perceive the truth about George:

The two eyes of Fayne Rabb were two lenses of an opera glass and it was Hermione's entrancing new game to turn a little screw, a little handle somewhere (like Carl Gart with his microscope) and bring her into focus [...] You put things, people under, so to speak, the lenses of

¹¹ Woolf suggests that women have been, paradoxically, both object and possessor of the look (1977 [1929], 35). Descriptions of mirror reflections, which suggest an exploration of the nature of female subjectivity, are common in the work of many modernist narratives written by women. See, for example, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*: 'she looked in the glass [...] that was her self' (Woolf 1976 [1925], 34).

the eyes of Fayne Rabb and people, things come right in geometric contour. 'You must see George Lowndes'. (H. 146)

The association of Fayne's eyes with the lenses of 'an opera glass' is significant: for this connection with song and the voice could be seen as oppositional to the scopic.¹² Yet there are contradictions in this implication. Whilst the possibility of song suggests an alternative to the visual, H.D.'s use of ocular metaphors underscores the scopic as the primary means of representing desire. Fayne's eyes are like 'lenses' which Her likens to the microscope of her father, Carl Gart. And, as suggested in the Introduction, for H.D. the optical instruments of science are usually bound up with the scrutiny of the masculinist, investigative gaze. This is exemplified in *Tribute To Freud* where, placed under the lens of the microscope, H.D. feels herself constructed through the view of the scientist: 'If I let go (I this one drop, this one ego under the microscope-telescope of Sigmund Freud) I fear to be dissolved utterly' (TF, 116). Thus, whilst H.D.'s description of Her as the 'scientist' - who actively *looks* rather than being looked at - suggests a feminist strategy, it also signals her dependence on the very masculinist discourse she seeks to undermine.

Since my chapter explores some of the resonances between H.D.'s literary text and *Borderline*, it is worth drawing a brief comparison with the film at this point. In *Borderline* the characters played by H.D. and Bryher in the film evoke what Andrea Weiss calls 'androgynous visual codes' (1992, 20). This is implied through the masculine appearance of the character played by Bryher - who has short cropped hair and smokes a cigar - and by H.D.'s 'unglamorized elegance' which 'suggests at times a feminized man' (Weiss 1992, 18). These 'codes' would have allowed the women to remain strategically 'invisible' within the heterosexual cultural norm and could also be seen as a challenge to society's heterosexist bias.¹³ For, as Weiss suggests, in portraying the characters of H.D. and Bryher on the sexual 'borderline', the film plays out Edward Carpenter's theory of the 'intermediate sex' (1992, 18). Lesbians were able to use aspects of this "medical discourse" [as] a means by which they could

¹² Cixous aligns song and the female voice with an economy which is non-specular in *The Newly Born Woman* (1986 [1975]). I discuss in more detail how voice represents a challenge to the scopic economy in my discussion of *Helen in Egypt* in Chapter Five.

¹³ Although, as noted in the Introduction, *Borderline* was seen by a limited, and largely intellectual audience, who would have valued its avant garde ethos, the homophobic fears generated by the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall in 1928 would still be prevalent.

become visible to each other' through the medium of film (1992, 20). *Borderline*, like *Her*, therefore takes issue with the ways in which the scopic bias of psychoanalysis and science reinforce gender binaries and heterosexual privilege.¹⁴

There is a further intertextual resonance I want to explore in my reading of *Her*, for H.D.'s literary deployment of the visual and her equivocal relationship to science have striking parallels with the work of Irigaray. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* Irigaray challenges the dual traditions of male-dominated psychoanalysis and post-Enlightenment philosophy (1985a [1974]). Whilst it is not my project to undertake an Irigarayan analysis of H.D.'s work, the resonances between these writers are rich.¹⁵ Both women engage with the discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis. And both challenge the hegemonic discourse of science which was formative to their intellectual development. Irigaray attended Lacan's *Ecole Freudienne* from which she was famously expelled after the publication of *Speculum*. As indicated in the Introduction, H.D.'s early years were shaped by the discipline of science. Irigaray's conceptualisation of the specular economy and the ways in which the specular oppresses female subjectivity therefore provides a useful point of departure through which to consider the narrative strategies of *Her*.

In *Speculum* Irigaray draws analogies between the investigative gaze of psychoanalytic theory and the speculum of gynaecological enquiry which scrutinises female sexuality. She employs the vocabulary of the visual to illustrate her point: 'The speculum [...] may, quite simply, be an instrument to dilate the lips, the orifices, the walls, so that the eye can penetrate the interior. So that the eye can enter, to see, notably with speculative intent' (1985a [1974], 144-5). Yet in order to counter the masculinist power she terms 'specula(riza)tion', Irigaray *redeploys* the imagery of the visual (1985b [1977] 30). And she acknowledges the political potential of working within the very paradigm which limits women:

¹⁴ Although there is the hint of a lesbian relationship between Bryher, the hotel manageress, and the barmaid (Charlotte Arthur), the film does not explore the dynamics of this desire in any depth and Bryher's apparently central role as the proprietor of the hotel is, in fact, a marginal one.

¹⁵ For discussions of Irigaray's notion of 'specul(ariz)ation' see Whitford (1991), Burke et al. (1994) and Vice (1996). For a discussion of the resonances between H.D. and Irigaray, see Hirsch (1986).

If indeed it is a question of breaking with a certain mode of specula(riza)tion, this does not imply renouncing all mirrors or refraining from analysis of the hold this plane of representation maintains [...] But perhaps through this specular surface which sustains discourse is found not the void of nothingness but the dazzle of multifaceted speleology. A scintillating and incandescent concavity, of language also, that threatens to set fire to fetish-objects and gilded eyes. (Irigaray 1985a [1974], 143)

Like H.D.'s image of the convex mirror, the 'specular surface' described by Irigaray challenges the singular gaze. Both women reconfigure the terms of the scopic in order to construct a politics which is oppositional. The fact that both H.D. and Irigaray engage with psychoanalysis is significant. Irigaray's point of departure for her critique of the scopic bias inherent in western discourse is Freud's notion of woman as absence or 'lack' which has become central to psychoanalytic thinking.¹⁶ H.D.'s novel challenges the heterosexist norms upheld by Freud. In this sense, representations of the visual in the work of both women are highly complex. For whilst H.D. and Irigaray appear to oppose the power of the specular by 'attempting to redirect and reform that "looking" which is implicit in theoretical or philosophical activity', they could also be seen to collude with it (Berry 1994, 231).¹⁷

In *Her*, however, H.D. does not employ metaphors of distortion simply to deflect the trajectory of the male gaze, she also constructs an *alternative* way of seeing. For her use of the mirror image suggests a different visionary perception which extends beyond ordinary human experience: 'Her mind was too astonished to perceive how she could turn, perceive as a mirror the whole of the fantasy of the world reversed and in that mirror a wide room opening' (H, 76).¹⁸ This new field of vision opens out further in the image of the two convex mirrors joining into one, suggesting a fusion of Her's and Fayne's identities. The image connects the two women in their view both of the world and of each other:

Everything is great seen in its right perspective, but George will never see that [...] for a moment she realised her head - the bit here, the bit

¹⁶ Of course, some contemporary feminist film theory also has its basis in Freudian psychoanalysis. In addition to Mulvey (1989 [1975]), I am thinking particularly of Kuhn (1982) and Kaplan (1983).

¹⁷ Employing the terms of masculinist discourse is, of course, a conscious oppositional strategy on the part of Irigaray. For further discussion of Irigaray's use of mimesis, see Whitford (1991, 70-2).

¹⁸ I return to this notion of visionary seeing, and how it is associated particularly with a feminine way of seeing, in Chapters Three and Four.

there, the way it fitted bit to bit - was two convex mirrors placed back to back. The two convex mirrors placed back to back became one mirror [...] as Fayne Rabb entered. (H, 138)

The image of the 'two convex mirrors placed back to back' appears to be a strange one through which to celebrate the intimacy and emotional bond between two women. However, it should be remembered that, since H.D. was writing in the aftermath of the Radclyffe Hall trial of 1928, *Her* was produced in a homophobic climate. It may well have been safer to allude to lesbian identification in disembodied terms, rather than to represent physical desire between women in more explicit ways. Ultimately, in *Her* the convex mirror not only distorts the angles of mirrors and lines of looking, it suggests a *non-speculative* desire between Her and Fayne. It allows an appropriation of a look in which they are able to see further, through an expansive field of vision. Whilst this signals H.D.'s use of the vocabulary of the scopic economy, it also suggests her attempt to 'queer' the gaze and to *open up* the field of vision. Thus, it both 'remove[s] the presumption of a heterosexual viewer' and seeks to 'inscrib[e] a queer presence' into the activity of spectatorship (Horne and Lewis 1996, 1).

***Her and Borderline* close-up: psychoanalysis, modernity, film**

The opening pages of H.D.'s novel reveal Her in a state of nervous tension. After failing her degree course she has returned to her parental home and is walking around the garden. The narrative viewpoint oscillates between an external view of Her - mediated through the perspective of the omniscient narrator - and Her's inner emotions. This movement is intensified by the shift between proper name and pronoun:

Her Gart went round in circles. 'I am Her', she said to herself; she repeated, 'Her, Her, Her'. Her Gart tried to hold onto something; drowning she grasped, she caught at a smooth surface, her fingers slipped, she cried in her dementia, 'I am Her, Her, Her'. (H, 3)

H.D. delves into Her's interior consciousness and, in so doing, conveys Her's attempt to locate her own shifting subjectivity. 'Dementia' is the first of several allusions in the novel to psychoanalytic concepts and is used ironically here. Towards the beginning of the novel Her remarks that 'she had not then dipped dust-draggled,

intellectual plumes into the more modern science that posts signs over emotional bog and intellectual lagoon (“failure complex”, “compensation reflex”) to show us where we may or may not stand’ (H, 4). Although H.D.’s deployment of psychoanalytic terminology implies a mistrust of the discipline of science, her use of it also suggests her desire to be perceived as ‘modern’. This is crucial to H.D.’s representation of subjectivity in the novel and, as we shall see, is also a factor in the formal construction of *Borderline*.

Whilst H.D. reveals her knowledge of psychoanalysis in *Her*, an examination of the novel’s narrative strategies demonstrates her simultaneous engagement with the devices of film. Friedman argues that the narrative of the novel operates ‘more like a camera than a Jamesian center of consciousness’ (1990a, 107). It encodes the complex oscillation of identity as it ‘zooms from its position of distance and knowledge into the interior of Hermione’s consciousness, often rendered in sequences of images’ (*ibid.*). Throughout the novel, images are created and magnified, distorted and manipulated, through H.D.’s use of close-up focus. As in the poem ‘Sea Rose’, discussed in the last chapter, H.D. produces a series of intense, detailed images which are meant to reflect Her’s psychological state. The close-up images exemplified by the ‘fabulous bee [with] its magnified magnificent underbelly and the roar of its sort of booming’, suggest not only Her’s heightened sensitivity in her time of emotional crisis, but an awareness of a meaning beyond the images, the ability to ‘attain a wider vision’ (H, 13).

I argue in Chapter One that whilst close-up is a characteristic method of H.D.’s so-called ‘static’ Imagist poetry, it actually invites the reader to collaborate in the text’s production. Similarly in *Her* these close-up ‘shots’ are inherently *dynamic*, conveying a continual movement between the protagonist’s internal consciousness and her external environment:

Her eyes peered up into the branches. The tulip tree made thick pad, separate leaves were outstanding, separate bright leaf-discs, in shadow. Her Gart peered far, adjusting, so to speak, some psychic lens, to follow that bird. She lost the bird [and] tried to focus one leaf to hold her on to all leaves. (H, 4-5)

In the first line of this extract, the use of 'Her' as pronoun allows us access to Her's own consciousness. The viewpoint then shifts in the next sentence to the third person - signalled through H.D.'s use of the proper name - so that the reader views 'Her Gart' objectively. Here, Friedberg's analysis of *Borderline*'s formal construction is relevant, and might equally apply to *Her*: for she argues that the film organises images and scenes so they 'contribut[e] to the psychological *effect* on the spectator' (1981, 137). H.D.'s knowledge of film-making techniques, suggested by the narrative shifts which evoke the movement of the camera, is thus directly inscribed into her literary text.

As noted in the Introduction, the birth of psychoanalysis coincides with that of film around the year 1900 (de Lauretis 1984, 67). At the beginning of the twentieth century both film and psychoanalysis were enthusiastically discussed in intellectual circles. H.D., Bryher and Macpherson had a strong interest in the emergent discipline of psychoanalysis - and in its investigation of the modern 'subject' - which informed both the editorial columns of *Close Up* and the content of their films. Marcus suggests that the journal itself played a significant role in the development of the 'symbiotic' relationship between psychoanalysis and film (1998c, 240). And in its investigation of the subject, *Borderline* represented 'an unprecedented liaison between cinematic and psychoanalytic theory' (Friedberg 1981, 131). Walter Benjamin's writing reveals how both film and psychoanalysis appeared to offer new possibilities for representations of space and the modern subject:

By close-ups of things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects [...] the film [...] extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Now [...] we calmly and adventurously go travelling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear; it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject [...] The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses. (1992 [1936], 229-30)

Benjamin links psychoanalytic practice with the techniques of film-making, describing the scientific investigation of this new discipline in the familiar terms of the visual.

Benjamin connects both disciplines with *expansion* and, by extension, with modernity and progress. This ‘expansion’ of the boundaries of the modern subject is conveyed in *Her* and *Borderline* specifically through the device of the close-up. In *Borderline*, the close-up is used to explore interior subjectivity. Its use underscores POOL’s modernist experimentalism, since it is often used as part of a montage sequence which serves to rupture the narrative linearity of the film.¹⁹ In *Her*, the close-up is the means by which Her ‘attain[s] a wider vision’, a notion which clearly has resonances with Benjamin’s descriptions of ‘expansion’ (H, 13).²⁰

Yet, if the close-up offers a means of investigating interior subjectivity, it also has the potential to fetishise, to objectify and to reinforce cultural difference. Mulvey notes how in film the body of the woman is often ‘stylised and fragmented by close-ups’ (1989 [1975], 22). And Doane reminds us that, although the close-up is ‘crucial in the organization of cinematic narrative’ it has always represented ‘a violent fragmentation of the human body’ (1991, 46).²¹ Whilst the close-up in *Borderline* is used to explore the modern subject, crucially that subject is *raced*. In *Borderline*’s introductory pamphlet to the film, H.D. describes the effect of ‘a flash of white hand or the high lights across the knuckles of a black hand’ as an intrinsic part of the film’s ‘abstract method’ (B, 223). Hands become a recurrent motif in the film. Astrid’s hands on the telephone receiver at the beginning of the film, for instance, are juxtaposed with two close-up shots, swiftly intercut, of Pete’s right and left hand. When, at the end of the film, Pete and Thorne make peace through a handshake, we are given a lingering close-up of the white hand clasping the black one, symbolising the resolution of racial difference.

¹⁹ This is most clearly exemplified in the sequence between Thorne and Astrid, in which a close-up of Adah’s face is superimposed onto Thorne’s suitcase. I discuss this sequence later in the chapter.

²⁰ The importance of close-up as a cinematic technique persisted well into the century. Siegfried Kracauer, thirty years later, suggested that the close-up ‘reveal[s] new and unsuspected formations of matter’ for the spectator and produces images which ‘blow up our environment in a double sense’ and ‘enlarge it literally’ (1960, 45).

²¹ Doane relates an anecdote - taken from Lilian Gish - which relates the ‘apocryphal Billy Bitzer story’ of D.W. Griffith’s ‘invention’ of the close-up which was countered on economic grounds: “‘We pay for the whole actor, Mr Griffith. We want to see all of him’” (see Doane 1991, 46). Griffith, of course, was the director of *Birth of a Nation* (1915), the film which is ‘often cited as the moment of the coagulation of the classical system of narrative’ and which examines race relations in the context of the American Civil War (Doane 1991, 227).

The attempt to identify with the negro 'other' through the imagery of hands is also evident in a brief - and possibly tokenistic - moment in *Her*. As Her helps Mandy - the Gart family's black servant - to stone a bowl of cherries, the narrative focuses on their hands in what appears to be a moment of silent identification: 'Her slipped a white hand into the bowl, black arm lifted from the deep bowl' (H, 27). Friedman interprets this 'joining [of] black and white hand as if they were part of the same body' as an 'unspoken bond' between the two women (1986, 105). Yet in neglecting to elaborate on the fact that Mandy's role is one of domestic servant, Friedman's reading of this moment potentially conflates cultural difference by eliding the complex relationship between race and class. Whilst H.D. implies an identification between these two women in this visual moment in the novel, she also places Mandy in *opposition* to Her, a technique which merely reinforces Her's white, middle-class privilege.

bel hooks has shown that, in representations of racial difference, the imagery of hands often evokes discourses of slavery: it effectively reduces black people to 'the machinery of bodily physical labour' (1992, 168). hooks argues that 'whites cultivated the practice of denying the subjectivity of blacks (the better to dehumanize and oppress)' and that in early twentieth-century, affluent American society, blacks 'were simply *invisible* to most white people, except as a pair of hands offering a drink on a silver tray' (*ibid.*; emphasis added). Whilst POOL regarded the close-up as an experimental new visual technique which connoted modernity, its use in *Her* and *Borderline* has troubling political implications. For although the close-up makes the black body *visible* in these texts, it also fragments and fetishises that body and denies the possibility of subjectivity. I return, later in the chapter, to a more detailed analysis of *Borderline* and its contradictory representation of race. It is important however, to bear in mind the issues at stake in discussions involving race, corporeality and notions of the visible. For, as Gaines argues, 'while white feminists theorize the female image in terms of objectification, fetishization and symbolic absence, their black counterparts describe the body as the site of symbolic resistance' (1994 [1986], 186). Gaines' comment is a reminder of the hazards of cross-cultural reading and, above all,

of the importance of *specificity* in discussions of cultural difference.²² Only then can feminist critical practice avoid perpetuating - albeit unconsciously - the very oppression which it has always sought to challenge.

The Harlem Renaissance: in black and white²³

Before I continue my textual analysis of *Borderline* and *Her*, it is fruitful to consider the cultural context from which they emerge. The production of both the film and H.D.'s novel - as well as the journal *Close Up* - coincided with the height of the Harlem Renaissance, 'a movement of black political figures, writers, painters, film-makers and musicians in the New York of the 1920s' (Donald 1998a, 34). Lerone Bennett argues that the Harlem Renaissance represented 'the emergence of a new racial spirit, militant and uncompromising' which found its expression predominantly in literature (1993 [1975], 269). Thus, although the movement was an aesthetic one, it also had a political thrust. It was as significant to the development of black consciousness as the Niagra Movement, founded in 1906, which called for 'complete social and political equality' and marked the beginning of the civil rights protest tradition in America (Hutchinson 1995, 141).

The roots of the Harlem Renaissance movement can be traced back to late nineteenth century ideas about nativism and black consciousness. Like the negritude movement of the 1940s and 1950s it sought to celebrate 'the sum of the cultural values of the black world', that is to say 'a certain way of speaking, singing and dancing; of painting and sculpturing, and even of laughing and crying' (Senghor 1993 [1970], 27-8).²⁴ Writers of the Harlem Renaissance, such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, sought to emphasise - and bring to prominence - expressions of black culture. Their work experimented with 'Black English, music and myth, linguistic and formal innovations' and therefore paralleled 'the general modernist

²² I feel it is important here to acknowledge the specificity of my own position. Being 'white', 'middle-class' and 'heterosexual', I carry the privilege of the dominant norms discussed in this chapter.

²³ My subtitle is taken from the book of the same name by George Hutchinson (1995).

²⁴ Negritude was promoted primarily through the writing of the West Indian poet, Aimé Césaire and the Senegalese intellectual and political activist, Léopold Sédar Senghor. The links between negritude and the Harlem Renaissance are relevant here, for although negritude 'is philosophically and historically particular to French colonisation, it has an anglophone counterpart [...] in the movements of African, Caribbean and African-American pan-Africanism' (Williams and Chrisman 1993, 24).

disruptions of language, mythic systems and conventional genre boundaries' (Friedman 1986, 95, fn7). In its aim to promote the homogeneity of 'Negro art', the negritude movement has been criticised for its essentialism, an accusation which Senghor attempted to counter (1993 [1970], 27). Although the Harlem Renaissance was a far more complex cultural phenomenon than is generally acknowledged, it also fostered a tendency to essentialise African culture.²⁵ As Donald argues, the discourse of the Harlem Renaissance is permeated with stereotypes of '[black] physicality, a certain naturalness, and ultimately that primitiveness necessary for a modernist aesthetic's challenge to the suffocating reality of bourgeois life' (1998a, 33).

This stereotyping was clearly evident in the responses of white intellectuals to the movement, who welcomed it as an opportunity to appropriate 'native' culture as a means of revitalising outworn European artistic and moral values. Macpherson's photoplay for *Borderline* was already underway at the same time that *Close Up* ran a special issue on 'the negro film' in 1929 as a forum for exploring the question of race in the cinema (Donald 1998a, 34). Macpherson's enthusiasm for the notion of 'black cinema' also led him to write a contribution for Cunard's *Negro* (1934), an extensive anthology of writing by black and white authors about African-American culture. He envisaged 'a confederated Negro Socialist Cinema' which would be a necessary 'precondition for an effective universal cinema' (Donald 1998a, 35). As Donald argues, this became a central and unquestioned tenet of *Close Up*'s modernism (*ibid.*). Clearly, such an impulse was motivated by the journal's internationalist ethos, yet, to the contemporary reader, it could be seen as a kind of 'cultural eugenics' (*ibid.*). It is vital to take into account the discourses of race which were inscribed into the construction of *Her* and *Borderline*. For these attempts to explore black identity suggest 'the fascination of jaded whites with the primitive and the exotic' (Hutchinson 1995, 1). And such racial stereotyping, as we shall see, is reproduced in both texts through their depiction of simplistic archetypes of 'the native'.

²⁵George Hutchinson argues: '[The] response to the exclusion of African American writers from modernism [...] has been to polemically position African American modernism as the subversive 'other' to a white modernism conceived along very traditional lines [...] little careful attention [has been given] to the forms of uncanonical 'native' (white) modernism with which the African American renaissance was intimately related' (1995, 14).

The white intellectuals who forged links with prominent black figures of the Harlem Renaissance - including Paul Robeson - were, for the most part, wealthy and influential. Nancy Cunard, the heiress to the Cunard shipping fortune - who 'scandalized aristocratic society with her black lover and political causes' - and Carl Van Vechten, the writer of the controversial bestseller *Nigger Heaven* (1926) were 'key bridge figures between the black and white avant garde' (Friedman 1986, 96).²⁶ H.D. had a long acquaintanceship with Cunard which lasted from the 1920s through to the 1950s. This may have influenced her own fascination for 'the negro' for, as Friedman suggests, the heavy bracelets she wore in *Wing Beat* may have 'indirectly alluded to Cunard, whose African bracelets were her trademark' (1986, 97 fn12). Feminist scholarship regarding H.D.'s interest in black culture has tended to overestimate her involvement in the Harlem Renaissance. Scott, for instance, maintains that 'Pound knew Nancy Cunard but was not connected, as H.D. [was] to the exciting developments in black literature occurring in Harlem and in the new medium of cinema' (1995, 94). Yet H.D.'s experience of the Harlem Renaissance was, in fact, a dislocated one: although she was fascinated by the developments of the movement, she did not actually visit Harlem herself in this period. Thus, her understanding of the cultural and artistic developments of the Harlem Renaissance was mediated through the lens of *white* perceptions of it and gleaned second-hand from friends. In this respect, Friedman's discussion of H.D.'s 'connections with the people and art of Afro-America' is somewhat open to question (1986, 104).

Macpherson, H.D.'s lover, was a regular visitor to Harlem and part of 'the white crowd for whom "the Negro was in vogue"' (Friedman 1986, 98). At the time, Macpherson was married to Bryher. Although their marriage assumed the appearance of a heterosexual union, it permitted Bryher to maintain her intimate relationship with H.D. and Macpherson to indulge in a number of 'extra-marital' affairs with both black men and black women. Whilst this implies a shifting sexual ambiguity, it could also be seen as a troubling exoticisation of the sexually-abundant racial 'other'. These sexual ambiguities underscore the racism which *Borderline* sought to diminish and it

²⁶ Friedman states that *Nigger Heaven* 'sensationalised black life at the same time that it exposed patterns of discrimination in New York' (1986, 96). Cunard, like Bryher, was the daughter of a powerful shipping magnate who 'rebelled against her family's wealth and used what money they controlled to sponsor the arts and promote progressive political causes' (Friedman 1986, 96-7).

is vital to take them into account when considering the film's production.²⁷ For both the cast of *Borderline* and those involved in its production displayed 'the preoccupations, desires, and interrelationships of white modernists that are "projected" onto their black acquaintances' (Walton 1997, 91). As we shall see, these desires are encoded through the film's formal methods, complicating the film's anti-racist agenda. And it is *Borderline*, with its contradictory representations of race, to which I now turn my attention.

The dynamics of race in *Borderline*

Borderline is a 'deliberately elliptical' film (Dyer 1987, 131).²⁸ It seeks both to reject linearity and to subvert the methods of narrative cinema. Before moving on to discuss the dynamics of race in the film, it is worth outlining its plot and form. Set in an alpine resort in Switzerland, the film traces the racial and sexual tensions between a black man called Pete (Paul Robeson), his black partner Adah (Eslanda Robeson), and a white couple called Thorne (Gavin Arthur) and Astrid (H.D.). In spite of his relationship with Astrid, Thorne has been having an affair with Adah, but this is broken off at the beginning of the film. Pete, Astrid and Thorne are all staying in the same small hotel, the proprietor of which is played by Bryher. The film's early scenes explore the relationship between Thorne and Astrid, who pace the floor of their room and fidget neurotically - Astrid with her shawl, Thorne with a knife. These images are intercut with shots of Pete who, by contrast, is at ease, reposing on his bed.

In the course of the film Pete and Adah are reunited and their reconciliation takes place against the backdrop of a waterfall in the Swiss mountains.²⁹ Later, Pete

²⁷ Whilst Friedman acknowledges that the 'interracial erotics in H.D.'s circle' may be 'tainted by covert forms of racism', she offers no sustained discussion of this (Friedman 1986, 104). Her essay therefore disregards the racist impulse underpinning H.D.'s fascination, and that of her contemporaries, with these black artists and writers.

²⁸ It is for this reason that POOL found it necessary to distribute a pamphlet explaining the plot and form of *Borderline* on its first screening. I refer to H.D.'s composition of this pamphlet in the Introduction.

²⁹ Dyer traces the discursive constructions of white race to nineteenth century genealogies and myths which focus on mountains. Thus, 'white' identity came to be associated with the virtues of 'clarity and cleanliness of air [...] the sublime, soul-elevating beauty of mountain vistas, even the great nearness to God' (1997, 21). Read in this light, the choice of a Swiss village for the setting of *Borderline* is ironic, given its objective of exploring black identity through Robeson as its 'star'.

has a disagreement with Thorne in the hotel bar and, as a result, is requested by the mayor to leave the village. Meanwhile, Astrid's jealousy at Thorne's affair with Adah provokes her anger, prompting her to call him 'nigger lover'. Later, in their room, Astrid and Thorne have an argument, which ends with Astrid being stabbed by the knife we saw earlier in Thorne's hands. Her stabbing and death are not shown directly but represented through a series of swiftly intercut close-ups of various objects - a fluttering curtain, a stuffed bird on the table by the window. As a result, it is not clear whether her death is deliberate or accidental. Thorne is accused, but then acquitted, of her murder and the film ends with the two men making their peace before Pete departs from the village.

Borderline's consciously anti-racist agenda is revealed through a conversation between the hotel proprietor and one of the residents and conveyed through the intertitles. The elderly female resident states, "If I had my way not one negro would be let in the country". This is quickly defended by the Bryher character, whose subsequent question, "why blame the negroes?" clearly spells out POOL's political objective for making the film. Combined with Astrid's accusation of Thorne as 'nigger lover', later in the film, this remark establishes an interesting opposition between white liberal masculinity - represented by Thorne - and white femininity as 'racist'. If we accept that colonialist attitudes are founded on a paternalistic discourse which 'has often emphasised the importance of white reproduction and especially of white women's responsibility in its regard', Astrid's remarks could be seen as an interesting attempt to reverse the social, cultural and political power of racism (Dyer 1997, 27). Thus, on the level of narrative, *Borderline* attempts to diminish racial difference by pitting 'black purity' against 'European decadence' (Cripps 1977, 209-11). Ironically, this binary of black and white is, strictly speaking, inaccurate, since Eslanda Robeson, who played Adah, was actually of mixed race origin. Her presence in the film therefore troubles its attempt to categorise race in a binary way.

As Dyer notes, the imagery of *Borderline* is organised 'around the basic antinomy of black and white at every level, aesthetic, metaphorical, ethical, ethnic' (1987, 131). Although the film consciously seeks to oppose racism, its technical devices, such as lighting and montage, constantly reinforce the binary between black

and white. This occurs, for instance, in the opening sequences of the film, where shots of Astrid's stark white face are quickly followed by those of Pete in profile. Such use of lighting anticipates the racial tension which culminates later in the film in the conflict between Pete and Thorne. When watching the film at the British Film Institute, it was striking how the lighting suggests in obvious ways the characters' racial identities. Yet the use of lighting for this purpose is contradictory. Paradoxically, shots of white light on the river and the large, white clouds serve as a backdrop for the shots involving the black characters played by the Robesons. Such an attempt to situate Pete and Adah as 'natural' and 'pure' - and thus in opposition to the brooding, neurotic behaviour of the white characters, Astrid and Thorne - reveals how the film's apparently liberal politics are consistently undercut by its form.

These contradictions in POOL's racial politics are also evidenced in the setting of the 'reconciliation' scene between Pete and Adah, which is filmed outdoors against a backdrop of clouds, mountains and fast-flowing rivers. A number of intercut shots between Pete's face and the waterfall behind give the impression of his overflowing joy at being reunited with Adah and are meant to suggest his abundant sexual desire. This troubling attempt to convey black sexuality as 'natural' - as opposed to the repressed neuroticism of the 'overcivilized' white couple, fretfully pacing up and down their hotel room - reinforces the cultural stereotypes of 'primitive' and 'exotic' sexuality.³⁰ Furthermore, like the portrayal of Mandy in *Her*, it suggests that blackness can *only* be constructed through its opposition to whiteness, a notion which ultimately reinforces the hegemony of white identity. Again, these contradictions are accentuated by the film's formal devices. In the *Borderline* pamphlet, H.D. indicates that the use of montage in these 'waterfall' shots gives the impression of Pete's face being superimposed onto the waterfall behind, an effect which is achieved through the scrupulous cutting and pasting of film:

The effect of the Negro and the waterfall seems at times a mechanical super-imposition of short shots. It is not. An effect almost that of super-imposition but subtly differing from it is achieved by the meticulous cutting of three and four and five inch lengths of film and

³⁰ Similarly Mandy in *Her* represents H.D.'s evocation of the 'black mammy' stereotype, the figure of the servile domestic who would be immediately recognisable in American literary and visual culture. For further discussion of this, see Christian (1985).

pasting these tiny strips together [...] in very much the same manner that you would fit together a jig-saw puzzle. (B, 230)

This montage technique, which deliberately - and ‘meticulously’ - creates the effect of the superimposed image is, ironically, at odds with the film’s representation of ‘natural’ sexuality. The use of ‘clatter montage’ in this sequence invites comparisons between Pete and Astrid, who is cooped up in her hotel room.³¹ This ‘flickering double exposure’ has the result of ‘linking the two “opposite” characters’ of the black man and the white woman (Walton 1997, 96). Despite this connection, however, as Jean Walton points out, neither character appears in the same frame or scene in the course of the film (*ibid.*). The effect of this separation, as Walton argues, is that ‘Pete is indissolubly tied to [Astrid] as the blackness that the film abjects to confirm her “purity”’ (1996, 96).³²

This issue of ‘purity’ is crucial to the film’s racialised construction of gender. Astrid’s ‘purity’ is constructed not just by her opposition to Pete, but also to Adah. In contrast to Astrid, who is situated as *Borderline*’s ‘white-cerebral’, Adah functions as a disposable object of sexual exchange between the two men which perpetuates the stereotype of black women’s sexual voracity (B, 221). Adah’s role, like that of Mandy in *Her*, is little more than a supporting one, functioning as a point of reference for the other characters. When Thorne attempts to leave Astrid after their argument in the hotel room, for example, Astrid’s rage and jealousy is conveyed through a sequence of clatter montage. The image of Astrid flying hysterically across the room towards Thorne’s feet is repeated in the film several times. A view of Adah’s face, which is superimposed onto the suitcase Thorne is carrying, flashes momentarily on the screen, suggesting to the spectator the reason for Astrid’s anger. As Walton points out, this scene ‘does not give us the character’s [Adah’s] psyche, but rather that of the montage’s presumed “viewer”: Astrid. Adah’s face functions as the index for the “labyrinth” of a white woman’s mind, but never as the threshold of Astrid’s own

³¹ I take my definition of ‘clatter montage’ from that of Eisenstein, when ‘montage pieces of two frames are edited in sequence’ (See Eisenstein 1957, 55).

³² Despite the film’s liberal politics, this may also be a result of the desire to avoid scandal, since, at the time, even the suggestion of a sexual relationship between a black man and a white woman would have caused an outrage. There was a scandal when Robeson appeared in *All Gods Chillun Got Wings* (1924) alongside a white actress. This greatly affected its reception, since critics at the time were more interested in this than in Robeson’s performance in the play (Kellner 1984, xx).

psyche' (1997, 97). In the *Borderline* pamphlet H.D. states that these 'swift flashes of inevitable sequence', which show Adah's face, in fact depict the 'borderline' subjectivity of Astrid, the *white* woman (B, 223). Thus, the explanatory pamphlet to *Borderline* itself betrays the film's unconscious validation of white identity through its opposition to 'black'.

From a narrative point of view, Adah's role in *Borderline* is marginal. She disappears from the film before its ending. After she and Pete have been reconciled we do not see her again and are only reminded of her presence - paradoxically, through her absence - by the close-up of a handwritten note explaining her departure. In this respect, Donald's argument that the film creates 'a space for the [...] 'mulatto' woman, where a white woman/black man parallelism would exclude her' is somewhat open to question (1998a, 34). Read in the light of the Harlem Renaissance - alongside such texts as Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1986a [1928]) and *Passing* (1986b [1929]) and Jessie Fauset's *There Is Confusion* (1924) and *Plum Bun* (1928) - *Borderline* appears to uphold the stereotypical representation of the 'tragic mulatta', caught irreconcilably between the cultures of black and white.³³

Despite the racial differences between Adah and Astrid, there are also similarities between them. These are revealed when considering the film's homosocial subplot, through the identification between Thorne and Pete. Throughout *Borderline* Adah and Astrid are constructed only by their relationships to the male characters. Whilst both women are needed, in the first instance, to identify the heterosexuality of the two male characters, their continued presence would prohibit the identification between the two men at the end of the film.³⁴ Although the two men are initially brought into contact by their sexual sharing of Adah, paradoxically, their interracial and homosocial bonding in the final scenes is only made possible by Adah's departure and Astrid's death. Given that the white western woman functions as the marker of heterosexuality within dominant ideology, the fact that such

³³ See Christian (1985) and Wisker (1989) for further discussion of the use of female stereotypes in African and African American writing.

³⁴ Dyer largely focuses on a male homoerotic reading of the film, arguing that the ending of the film - which depicts Pete and Thorne resolving their differences - is the one with the most 'emotional weight' in the film (1987, 132).

identification can only take place through Astrid's violent death could be seen to further the film's 'queer' subtext.

I am aware of the potential dangers of conflating notions of racial and sexual difference and of the importance of specificity in any discussion of these. However, the main focus of my discussion here is a comparison of the treatment of sexuality in *Her* with the treatment of race in *Borderline*. For both these cultural differences are subsumed by the dominance of the scopic. Inevitably, these issues are connected, yet since my discussion of *Borderline* focuses on racial difference I do not seek to unravel the complexities of their interconnections here. The exploration of race in *Borderline* pivots around a paradox of visibility and invisibility. In one sense, the film's use of lighting and formal devices such as montage and the close-up seek to make visible the conditions of black subjectivity. Further analysis of these visual devices, however, reveals that 'blackness' in the film is always constructed in *relation* to 'whiteness'. Ultimately, whilst POOL consciously sets out to valorise 'the negro' as a means of redressing the social inequalities of race, its formal construction underscores the hegemonic nature of white identity.

Both *Her* and *Borderline* seek in their different ways to explore the different axes of cultural difference. Thus, an intertextual consideration of these texts underscores how notions of visibility are fundamental in politicising debates about racial and sexual difference. As Doane argues, 'Otherness, whether sexual or racial, is usually articulated as a problem of the limits of knowledge and hence of visibility, recognition, differentiation' (1991, 212). Gaines reminds us that the realm of the visible is potentially heterosexist as well as colonising:

Lesbians have charged that cultural theory posed in psychoanalytic terms is unable to conceive of desire or explain pleasure without reference to the binary oppositions male/female. This is the function of [...] heterosexual assumption [...] that unacknowledged structure not only built into Lacanian psychoanalysis, but also underlying the basic divisions of Western culture, organizing all knowledge, yet escaping any close examination. (1994 [1986], 179).

When read alongside recent feminist film theory, the visual distortion in the narrative of *Her* can be read as an oppositional strategy both to 'heterosexual assumption' and

When read alongside recent feminist film theory, the visual distortion in the narrative of *Her* can be read as an oppositional strategy both to 'heterosexual assumption' and to its construction within psychoanalysis. Ironically, this method of reading H.D.'s work is revealed through the theoretical lens of Mulvey's theory, which is itself founded on psychoanalytic discourse and downplays other axes of cultural difference such as race and class. As Gaines suggests, this mode of looking permitted by cultural theory is also embedded in *western* assumptions which erase the specificity of race and national identity. And this can also be seen in the production of *Borderline*. The film betrays its conservative position, despite POOL's attempt to use cinema as a medium through which to shed light on a controversial political issue. This inherent conservatism can be detected through a consideration of POOL's avant garde ethos, which privileges form rather than narrative content.

A reading of *Her* and *Borderline* reveals how the visible itself can be seen as 'a source of knowledge, control and contact with the world' (Dyer 1997, 44-5). Yet it is by analysing the visual techniques of both texts that their differences are revealed. For if H.D.'s deployment of the visual in *Her* can be considered subversive, then it is the paradox between the visible and the invisible which, in the end, reveals the limitations of POOL's attempt to pursue its political objectives.

Chapter Three

The Gift: an 'endless store room of film'¹

Introduction

In the last chapter I placed the literary narrative *Her* and the film *Borderline* alongside each other as a means of exploring the influence of cinema on H.D.'s formulation of the visual. This chapter focuses on *The Gift* - which was written between 1941 and 1944 - and extends my discussion of H.D.'s engagement with the moving image still further.² Although her direct involvement with film-making and film criticism ceased in the 1930s, after the demise of the silent film, her awareness of the *social* implications of cinema extends beyond this decade. My discussion of her work on film in this chapter provides us with a deeper understanding of the ideological implications of the visions portrayed in *The Gift*. For H.D., as for Bryher and the other *Close Up* contributors, silent film offered the possibility of 'a single language across Europe' and of moving beyond the demarcations of national identity (Bryher 1962, 246). This desire for synthesis is also a fundamental aspect of *The Gift* - written in the midst of the Second World War - where, through the processes of memory, H.D. reconstructs the 'lost' community of the Moravian Protestant church in which she grew up. Thus, by examining H.D.'s writing on the cinema, we also gain insights into the complex notion of community developed in *The Gift*.

H.D.'s notion of community not only relates to *collective* social organisation, but extends to incorporate the private 'community' of her lifelong partnership with Bryher. In *The Gift* the representation of H.D.'s and Bryher's relationship can be understood in terms of Marcel Mauss' theory of the 'gift economy' (Mauss 1967).³

¹ The quotation in the title of this chapter is taken from the unpublished typescript of *Majic Ring*.

² Although *The Gift* was first published in an abridged version by New Directions in 1982, the complete edition remained unpublished until 1998. This chapter will address the differences between these two versions. References to the New Directions edition (1982a) are abbreviated to G in the body of the text. References to Augustine's complete edition are cited as H.D. (1998a).

³ Although there is no specific evidence of H.D.'s familiarity with Mauss' work, her library contained 'tomes on the history of religion and mythology, archaeological investigations, and explorations of the customs of archaic society', all of which suggest a similarity in their interests (Morris 1990 [1986], 59).

As I demonstrate, H.D.'s deployment of the 'gift' seeks to unsettle traditional notions of capital exchange. This functions through her imaginative construction of a community founded on peace and reciprocation, values glimpsed through the 'visions' of her Moravian ancestors. By tracing the connections between these visions and the notion of the gift, I explore how H.D. locates the visual as a point of entry to an 'alternative' economy. This, in turn, gives the reader access to the spiritual values of H.D.'s childhood, reconstructed through the writing of *The Gift*.

In *The Gift* memory is conveyed in visual terms: indeed, the text's composition is itself equated with the process of watching a film. Mandel argues that H.D.'s experience of film editing is demonstrated in the text's exploration of '[the] mental realities of time [...] defined by pictorial pace' (1999, 347). Like H.D.'s fiction of the 1920s and 1930s, the memoir establishes a dynamic of *spectatorship* through the use of devices such as flashback - a narrative technique commonly used in literature, as well as in film - and the cinematic 'voice over'. Borrowing techniques from the cinema in the writing of her literary narrative, H.D. searches the recesses of her memory, and, in so doing, unlocks an 'endless store room of film' (MR, 250). As I argue in this chapter, for the reader this transforms the process of reading H.D.'s literary text into one of *viewing*.

Like *Notes on Thought and Vision* there is a direct link in *The Gift* between the discourse of the spiritual and that of the visual. In *The Gift*, however, the representation of spirituality is never straightforward. The boundaries are often blurred between organised religion - specifically, the Christian faith in which H.D. grew up - and Egyptian and native American spirituality and mysticism. This is the result of H.D.'s own ambivalence to Judeo-Christian monotheism. For, although her representation of the spiritual is largely predicated upon her knowledge of Christianity, and although she celebrates its values of peace and community, she also perceives it as a belief system underpinned by hierarchical and masculinist notions of power. To the contemporary reader, H.D.'s appropriation of Egyptian and native American spirituality may appear to collude with what Butler terms 'epistemological imperialism' (1990, 13). However, I demonstrate that her use of its discourse is in

fact a *strategy* designed to trouble what she perceived to be the inherent restrictions of Christianity.

It is important in this chapter to mention *The Gift's* publishing history, since the cuts made by New Directions in the first, abridged edition erased vital material relating to H.D.'s visionary experience. Until the appearance of the University Press of Florida edition in 1998 - which was edited and annotated by Jane Augustine - the only available published text was the New Directions version. First encountering the original typescript of *The Gift* on a research visit to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, I was struck by how the editing process had suppressed much of the material relating to film and memory and to visionary experience, all of which inform this chapter.⁴ Mandel comments that Augustine's edition restores 'H.D.'s unique status as a visionary artist of the twentieth century' (1999, 344). What emerges from the previously unpublished sections of *The Gift* is H.D.'s perception of herself as 'a receptor of mystical truths' and of her writing as 'an inscription of spiritual energy towards universal love and peace' (Mandel 1999, 344). By focusing on the gaps left by the New Directions version, my discussion contributes to the reconstruction of the text initiated by Augustine's volume.⁵ Thus, in examining the interconnections between H.D.'s understanding of community, her literary deployment of the visual and her awareness of the social and political implications of film, my reading of *The Gift* promotes these vital new developments in the critical scholarship on H.D.'s work.

H.D.'s Moravianism: *The Gift* and its context

Since H.D.'s representation of community and peace stem directly from her Moravian upbringing, I begin by exploring *The Gift's* representation of her childhood

⁴ The New Directions edition of *The Gift* also elides references to H.D.'s interest in spiritualism and the occult, discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

⁵ Augustine similarly suggests that the editing of the manuscript for the New Directions edition has effaced the spiritual significance of the gift to H.D., resulting in 'a shift of emphasis, probably to make the text conform to a familiar marketable genre, the memoir of childhood' (1998, 1). I discuss how Augustine's complete volume represents a restoration of the text's spiritual 'value' later in this chapter. For a commentary on the text's publishing history see DuPlessis (1984).

in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.⁶ Whilst the Moravian faith itself has no formal creed, the notion of unity in the community of the church - the Unity of the Brethren or the 'Unitas Fratrum' - is fundamental to its organisation. For the early Moravian settlers, the emphasis on equality and community was paramount: the congregation was arranged into communal living groups which placed together those of the same age, gender and marital status. As a result, the traditional concept of the family did not exist in Moravian settlements for, as Morris points out, 'the entire community was considered one family' and 'all Moravians worked for the community which, in turn, housed, fed, clothed and supported them' (1990 [1986], 61). Thus, *The Gift* is underscored by the importance of the extended family and a sense of *alternative* social organisation from that of the 'patriarchal, nuclear family' (*ibid.*).

In the dual time scheme of *The Gift* H.D. mediates between her childhood past in the Moravian community - which is related through the voice of the young narrator, Hilda - and the narrative present of wartime London. Crucial to the text are the reflections of Mamalie, H.D.'s maternal grandmother, who through the powers of 'psychic recall' describes an encounter between the newly-arrived Moravian settlers and the native Americans at 'Wunden Eiland' in 1741 (Schaffner 1982, xiii). This meeting is represented as a defining moment in the text, since it marks the founding of 'a secret powerful community that would bring the ancient secrets of Europe and the ancient secrets of America into a single union of power and spirit, a united brotherhood, a *Unitas Fratrum* of the whole world' (G, 135; emphasis in original).⁷ Transcribed onto a 'scroll of flexible deerskin', the account of the meeting at Wunden Eiland between the Moravian settlers and the native Americans, is discovered almost a hundred years later by Mamalie's first husband, Christian (G, 86). In decoding the scroll, Christian assumes the importance of a religious 'founder' for, through the

⁶ Although H.D.'s memoir is based on biographical fact, it is important to point out that my discussion will focus on its *textual* representation of her life. My use of 'H.D.' in this chapter refers both to H.D. as author of the text and to 'H.D.' as the adult narrator of the text, who is to be differentiated from the childhood narrator, 'Hilda'.

⁷ H.D.'s vision of the fusion of the two cultures could be perceived as a problematic romanticisation of native American spirituality. Furthermore, it neglects to acknowledge the colonising project which was at the heart of this encounter. From their arrival in Georgia in 1735 and Pennsylvania in 1740, the first Moravian settlers were involved in a missionary enterprise which sought to convert the 'Indians' in the area. A concise history of the Moravian church is provided at the web site: <http://home.ptd.net/~boddie/moravians.html>

translation process, he discovers the secrets of native American spirituality which were assimilated into the Moravian faith at Wunden Eiland:

Christian, who was no mean scholar, glimpsed here a hint in Hebrew or followed a Greek text to its original, and so pieced out the story of the meeting, deciphered actually the words of the strange pledges passed, strange words spoken, strange rhythms sung which were prompted, all alike said, by the power of the Holy Spirit. (G, 86)

Christian achieves his 'guided' reading of these unknown languages by piecing together fragments from the deerskin scroll. This knowledge is manifested as spiritual vision, a 'gift' which originated at Wunden Eiland and was passed down through ensuing generations, arriving 'in turn to Anna Von Pahlen, to John Christopher Frederick Cammerhof; to John Christopher Pyrlaens, who was not only a scholar and authority on the Indian languages but a musician as well' (G, 86). Thus, through Christian's spiritual and creative enlightenment, the legacy of the gift is revived.

The account of the initial meeting at Wunden Eiland occurs, literally, at the heart of the text, in the chapter entitled 'The Secret'. Hilda, the child narrator, is unable to make sense of her grandmother's enigmatic ramblings and the significance of her words are only clarified through the passage of time:

Mamalie told me this story which I did not altogether understand but pieced together afterwards - I mean long afterwards, of course, because the 'thing' that was to happen, that was in a sense to join me in an emotional understanding, in intuition anyway, to the band of chosen initiates at *Wunden Eiland*, had not yet happened. (G, 85)

Mamalie's telling of the story depends on her ability to piece together fragments of Moravian history and, in so doing, she reconstructs the charged emotional significance of the meeting at Wunden Eiland. In turn, H.D.'s 'piecing together' of Mamalie's story 're-enacts' Christian's translation of the deerskin scroll and marks her own initiation into the spirit of the gift. In this way, the secret or 'the strange thing' - which is 'synonymous with the Gift' and becomes the text's central, hermeneutic riddle - is finally revealed (Schaffner 1982, xiv). Thus, the text itself becomes a journey towards the realisation of a forgotten or buried inheritance and a spiritual

power. As we shall see, this is a journey which depends on *seeing* or visionary experience.

H.D.'s mother's family, the Wolles, were 'direct descendents of the *Unitas Fratrum*' and 'part of the leadership of the Moravian community' (Morris 1990 [1986], 62). Her uncle, J. Fred Wolle - who was taught music from a young age by her mother, Helen - founded the Bach Choir, which, even today, remains an important element of the Moravian church's culture. In H.D.'s memoir, Fred's musical talent is designated as a special 'gift':

They didn't think any of us were marked with that strange thing they called a gift, the thing Uncle Fred had had from the beginning [...] But where did he get the gift, just like that? Why didn't Mama wait and teach us music like she did Uncle Fred when he was a little boy? Mama gave all her music to Uncle Fred, that is what she did. That is why we hadn't the gift, because it was Mama who started being the musician, and then [...] she gave it away [...] she should have waited and given the gift to us. But there were other gifts it seemed. (G, 11-12)

The gift, here, is represented as plural - 'there were other gifts it seemed' - and, as the narrative unfolds, H.D. demonstrates its various manifestations. Whilst the gift emerges as remarkable individual insight or ability - in the case of Christian and Fred - it also represents a special inheritance within the Moravian community, passed on from one generation to the next. As we shall see, this notion of legacy or 'relay' is crucial to the representation of community in *The Gift* (see Morris 1990 [1986]). H.D.'s gift of seeing is a complex activity which is at once both private and public. For it mediates between the realm of the spiritual - which H.D. regards as personal - and that of social, which also contains political implications.

Hilda's 'dispossession' of the gift is continually challenged throughout the text, since, in the course of the narrative, the adult narrator, constructs herself - like Christian - as spiritual 'seer' and - like Fred - as artistically 'gifted'. There is an ironic undertone to Hilda's objection that the gift has not been passed on. For, although history credits her uncle with the founding of the Bach Choir, and thus with an important contribution to Moravian ritual, H.D. reasserts the fact that his musical

abilities were fostered by her own mother. This implies H.D.'s construction of a specifically matrilineal, and revisionist, history of the Moravian tradition. In this sense it has resonances with her representation of the 'female community' she shares with Bryher in the text's narrative present, sustained by the notion of her own gift. The 'gift' of spiritual seeing in *The Gift* is therefore a *feminine* one. In this respect H.D.'s representation of the 'gift' has resonances with Cixous' more recent notion of the 'gift' in *The Newly Born Woman* (1986 [1975]) and I return to the parallels between these two texts at the end of the chapter.

Related through Hilda's childhood consciousness, the gift appears, at first, to be an elusive concept. Yet, through the course of the text, its associations with a matrilineal legacy of wisdom and visionary ability are slowly revealed. As Augustine argues, the gift functions both as 'artistic giftedness' and as 'an eternal creative feminine spirit' bestowed by H.D.'s maternal ancestors. Indeed, the legacy itself begins with a female, Anna Von Palen, envisaged by H.D. as 'the Gift's chief bearer who unites in peace the Native Americans and the European settlers' (Augustine 1998, 13). Anna plays a significant role in the text by facilitating relations between the Moravian community and the native American people. Her initiation into the 'tribe' is not only a gesture of peace but also establishes a system of exchange - predicated upon shared knowledge and spiritual values - which stands in opposition to the capitalist economy of the Pennsylvanian colonists. In this way H.D.'s construction of community, as we shall see, is intrinsically linked to the notions of commodity and exchange which mark that community's identity.

The succession of Moravian ancestors possessed of the gift are all, of course, H.D.'s maternal relatives. Naming them in list-like succession, H.D. evokes the genealogies of Christianity in the Old Testament Book of Genesis. Since the text focuses on the gift's descent through a *female* lineage, H.D.'s appropriation of the masculine genealogies of Christianity might appear to be at odds with her purpose in writing *The Gift*. Julia Kristeva suggests that the biblical stories of the Old Testament - God's creation of the world; Adam's naming of the animal kingdom - can be interpreted as a masculine desire for order, 'the search for the motivation of names which is found in a supposed etymology' (1989, 98). Read in the light of Kristeva's

premise. H.D.'s text could then be read as the *reconstruction* of an alternative 'etymology' - that of her maternal family history.

Whilst H.D.'s memories are firmly rooted in the landscape and architecture of her Bethlehem childhood, she also has the ability to *envision* sacred places further afield, primarily as a means of shutting out her fear. In the midst of an air raid at the end of the text, for instance, she experiences an imaginative journey which she equates to the experience of sailing on a ship:

I was on a great ocean liner and the ship might or might not go down. And then there would come that moment when [...] there was a stronger image of myself; at least *I did not see myself, but I was myself* [...] in places that had been the surroundings of my childhood, or whether as sometimes, it seemed in one of the vast cathedrals of Italy or in a small beehive that was a tiny Byzantine church outside Athens or was actually the beehive tomb of the prehistoric King Agamemnon outside Mycanae, or whether it was the dome of a Mohammedan tomb on the sands of Egypt [...] whatever it was, now all *the accumulated wealth of being and impression* would go down with the ship that was rising and falling. (G, 133; emphasis added)⁸

This passage raises several important issues which underpin the discussion of visionary experience in this thesis. It foregrounds the notion of the visual as a catalyst for spiritual experience, since H.D.'s ability to 'transport' herself to Greece or to Egypt depends on seeing an *image* of another self in these unfamiliar surroundings. Yet, paradoxically, the phrase 'I did not see myself but I was myself' suggests an opposition between the experiential and the visual. Whilst H.D.'s texts often locate the visual as a site of epistemological privilege, she appears to acknowledge here that there are other realms of sensory experience on which knowledge is based.⁹ And, in turn, this implies that there are limitations to the political effectiveness of vision in her writing. In alluding to 'the accumulated wealth of being and impression' H.D. also imbues the ability to 'see' - in that single, visionary moment - with associations of material wealth. This is significant to H.D.'s perception of *seeing* as a gift: for, as we

⁸ *Majic Ring* also makes associations between visionary experience and a voyage by ship. H.D. first met Peter Rodeck, who was to be a formative influence on her visions in Corfu, on her boat journey to Greece with Bryher in 1920. I discuss this encounter in more detail in my analysis of *Majic Ring* in the next chapter.

⁹ I return to this disparity, and how it informs H.D.'s representation of spectatorship, in my discussion of *Majic Ring* in the next chapter.

shall see. H.D. perceives her gift as being in opposition to the norms of capital exchange.

In its description of ‘the Mohammedan tomb on the sands of Egypt’, this passage also reveals H.D.’s interest in sacred Egyptian objects and artefacts. Indeed, her writing as a whole is permeated with allusions to Egyptian culture and spirituality, a fascination which remained alive until the completion of *Helen in Egypt* in 1955. In *Tribute To Freud*, she describes the objects in Freud’s consulting room as symbols of knowledge and wisdom, drawing associations between these and the Egyptian practice of furnishing the tombs of the Pharaohs with precious objects to furnish the spiritual afterlife. As suggested in Chapter One, this fascination for Egyptian custom, and its unquestioned reappropriation of another culture, might well be regarded as problematic by the contemporary reader. Such fascination exemplifies the impulse towards ‘primitivism’ in early twentieth-century European literary culture, suggested, for instance, in the work of Virginia Woolf and Stevie Smith.¹⁰ At the same time, however, H.D.’s use of this kind of imagery suggests a desire to trouble ‘the old Judeo-Christian binaries of the body and soul, spirit and matter’ (Friedman 1990a, 10). Dyer argues that the central mystery of Christianity is its belief that ‘somehow there is in the body something that is not of the body which may be variously termed spirit, mind, soul or God. This is the distinctive inflection that Christianity gives to Western dualistic philosophy’ (1997, 16). Thus, H.D.’s suggestion of a spiritual afterlife, conveyed through her deployment of Egyptian burial customs and description of sacred sites, could be regarded as an attempt to unsettle the binaries of Christian thinking. Significantly, however, the allusions to Egyptian pyramids in this passage are placed alongside references to Christian places of worship. This suggests that she engages equally with the *western* European traditions of Roman Catholicism - ‘the vast cathedrals of Italy’ - and the Greek Orthodox church, represented by the ‘tiny Byzantine church outside Athens’. Thus, *The Gift* appears to offer a complex fusion of non-western spiritualities with the Judeo-Christian tradition. This, I argue, conveys the immense importance H.D. attaches in *The Gift* to the encounter at Wunden Eiland. For it is here that the exchange of the ‘ancient secrets’ of the Moravian faith and

¹⁰ See, for instance, Woolf’s ‘The Mark on the Wall’ (1985b [1917]) and *The Waves* (1988 [1931]) and Smith’s *Novel on Yellow Paper* (1991 [1936]).

native American tradition created ‘a secret powerful community [...], a *Unitas Fratrum* of the whole world’ (G, 135; emphasis added).

Film: ‘a single language across Europe’¹¹

The reveries and fragmented memories related by H.D. in *The Gift* are largely prompted by her experience of the London air raids. As a result of this, critics have often read the text as her attempt to escape the horrors of the Second World War.¹² Morris, for instance, interprets H.D.’s celebration of the maternal line both as an antidote to the violence around her and to the capitalist system of which war is a by-product: ‘The mother, or grand-mother stands [...] at the source of H.D.’s creativity in *The Gift* [...] The generative power she represents [...] is H.D.’s answer to the culmination of the market economy in division and destruction’ (1990 [1986], 69). Clearly, H.D.’s refusal of the ideology of war is an important element of her feminist aesthetic in *The Gift*. Whilst her experience of the destruction wreaked by the bombing gave her the impetus to write the text, the focus of my discussion here is the visual. H.D.’s understanding of the cinema as a social space, and of silent film as a means of transcending national boundaries, is crucial to my argument. For in *The Gift*, the spiritual values of *community* are reconstructed through H.D.’s representation of the visual, specifically through her metaphors of *seeing*. This literary deployment of seeing operates primarily in a visionary sense where, establishing herself as a ‘seer’, H.D. forges psychic connections with past events and past ancestors. And, as in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, seeing becomes the locus for the complex interconnections between the spiritual and the political.

In a literal sense, the activity of ‘seeing’ was also central to the experience of the majority of the British public at the time of *The Gift*’s composition. For, at this time, spectatorship as a public, and a collective, experience was occurring on a daily basis in the cinemas of wartime Britain. As Street indicates, the war had a huge

¹¹ The quotation in my subtitle is taken from Bryher’s *The Heart to Artemis* (1962, 246).

¹² Critics such as Donna Hollenberg and Trudi Tate have interpreted H.D.’s antipathy to war in the light of biographical details, relating the experience of her miscarriage, for instance, as the result of her trauma at the onset of the First World War. See Hollenberg (1991) and Tate (1997).

impact on the birth of national British cinema (1997, 50). The importance of film as a tool of propaganda was immediately recognised and British film-makers set out to produce films which would stress the need for 'unity' (*ibid.*). Thus, in the British cinema of the mid-1940s, the war generated an impulse to 'produce images which would create a sense of national collectivity' (*ibid.*). On the one hand, the 'collectivity' resulting from such spectatorship is highly relevant to my reading of *The Gift*. For, as I demonstrate, H.D.'s construction of community operates by inviting the reader to *share* her private vision of the past as a means of countering the destruction of war. On the other, the aims of British cinema to boost the nation's flagging morale and to foster patriotism in its promotion of the war effort, operate in complete opposition to *The Gift's* expression of pacifism.

How might a discussion of the political implications of cinema illuminate the notion of community which underpins *The Gift*? In order to answer this question - and since H.D.'s film writings reveal important insights which illuminate the construction of her literary texts - I want to turn my discussion to a consideration of the pacifist objectives of the journal *Close Up*. As indicated in the Introduction, the journal was sponsored by Bryher and contained regular contributions from H.D. Its lifespan, from 1927 to 1933, witnessed the beginnings of the increasing tension in Europe which erupted with the start of the Second World War. On the whole, as Jane Marek points out, the journal took a critical view of 'the problem of the mass coercion used to promote war' and the use of film as a tool for propaganda (1990, 30). Bryher's voice, especially, is resoundingly pacifist and her essay 'What Shall You Do In the War?' is particularly strident in this respect:

Let us decide what we will have. If peace, let us fight for it. And fight for it especially with cinema. By refusing to see films that are merely propaganda for any unjust system [...] above all, in the choice of films to see, remember the many directors, actors and film architects who have been driven out of the German studios and scattered across Europe because they believed in peace and intellectual liberty. (1998 [1933], 309).

Two key issues emerge from this passage. Firstly, given the fact that avant garde culture is usually more preoccupied with form rather than content - and with

aesthetics, rather than politics - Bryher's piece demonstrates an unusually close engagement with the current political climate. Secondly, her reference to the artists who are 'driven out of Germany' and 'scattered across Europe' anticipates the enforced exodus of the holocaust. Implicitly, there is a desire to include these expelled film artists in a community of intellectuals across Europe who believe in 'peace and intellectual liberty'. And, significantly, Bryher's words have a resonance with those used by H.D. in *The Gift* when she speaks of her gift of a 'vision of [...] peace' which enables her to see into the past and to reconstruct the future (G, 135).

Street argues that, despite the 'vanguard rhetoric' of *Close Up*, the journal was 'primarily interested in aesthetic rather than political aspects of film' (1997, 153). Certainly, Bryher's attitude in the above quotation appears to be consistent with 'European modernism's general internationalism and cosmopolitanism' which focused on aesthetics (Street 1997, 152). However, whilst *Close Up* is often seen as a mouthpiece for the liberal avant garde, the journal took seriously issues of national identity. For it was founded on a real urgency to construct itself as 'transnational' and to advocate 'a transnational cinema' (Friedberg 1998a, 12; emphasis in original). Since *Close Up* had correspondents in Moscow, Berlin, Paris, Geneva, London, New York and Los Angeles, it played a significant role, as Friedberg notes, 'in a growing community without borders' (1998a, 10).¹³ It is vital to take into account H.D.'s stake in *Close Up* and her understanding of the ideological implications of film. For the internationalist ethos at the heart of the journal was inscribed, as we shall see, into the narrative of *The Gift*. Thus, whilst critics such as Morris have traced the connections between H.D.'s visions of 'a single powerful community' and a 'united brotherhood' in her Moravian *spiritual* heritage (G, 135), my thesis demonstrates how the notion of community in *The Gift* was *also* influenced by her engagement with the *visual* culture of the 1920s and 1930s.

¹³ It should perhaps be pointed out here that this 'community' constituted a privileged *minority* of intellectuals, made up of an 'internationally disperse [sic] group of patriots dedicated to developing the potential of the film as an art' (Friedberg 1998a, 10).

Cinema: 'an increasing congregation',¹⁴

H.D.'s visions of 'a single powerful community' in *The Gift* are underpinned by a complex set of ideas which she developed further in her film writing. In the pages of *Close Up*, which preoccupied itself with theorising film for a scattered community of intellectuals, there is a diversity of attitudes towards class, educational privilege and the role of film in contemporary culture.¹⁵ What is significant, however, is the way in which the journal's contributors - H.D. and Richardson, in particular - envisage the experience of cinematic spectatorship as a form of *collective* viewing which reinforces social cohesion. There are both continuities and differences in H.D.'s and Richardson's representations of the relationship between viewing and community. Since these representations illuminate my reading of *The Gift* in this chapter, it is worth unpacking them further before returning to a discussion of the text itself.

Richardson refers to the cinematic audience as a 'congregation'. As Watts argues that the notion of 'cinema as church' is a common motif in Richardson's film writings, in which she 'constantly refer[s] to a vision of potential community' (1995, 78). In 'The Increasing Congregation', first published in December 1927, Richardson extends the analogy between church and cinema, suggesting that the shared experience of spectatorship and the *social* space of the cinema is, in itself, a leveller of class differences: 'Never before was such all-embracing hospitality save in an ever-open church, where kneels madame hastened in to make her duties between a visit to her dressmaker and an assignation, where the dustman's wife bustles in with infants and market-basket' (Richardson, 1998b [1927], 171). The suggestion that cinema might *erase* class differences, albeit temporarily, implies, in one sense, a naïve optimism on Richardson's part. On the other hand, it does, at least, demonstrate an *awareness* of the differences of class within the 'community' of the audience.¹⁶

¹⁴ The quotation in my subtitle is taken from one of the subtitles of Richardson's 'Continuing Performance' columns (see Richardson 1998b [1927], 170).

¹⁵ Whilst these issues are all important to a discussion both of the avant garde ethos fostered by *Close Up*, and to the journal's understanding of 'community', it is not the main focus of my argument here. I return to these issues, however, in the Conclusion.

¹⁶ It is worth pointing out that Richardson did not share the same privileges of wealth and class as H.D. and Bryher. She worked as a secretary for a number of years whilst writing *Pilgrimage* and for this

The suggestion that cinema represents a place of refuge and retreat - especially for women - is a strand which runs throughout Richardson's film writing. In her first column, in the first edition of *Close Up*, she describes the audience at the cinema on a Monday. 'composed almost entirely of mothers [...] tired women, their faces sheened with toil' (Richardson 1998a [1927], 160). In the transformative space of the cinema they are afforded a temporary release from the drudgery of domestic work: 'At last the world of entertainment had provided for a few pence, tea thrown in, a sanctuary for mothers. an escape from the everlasting *qui vive* into eternity on a Monday afternoon' (*ibid.*). Richardson's observations suggest the immense popularity of film at the time, given that, on a Monday - traditionally, the day for doing the household's weekly washing - working class women felt drawn to the cinema. This recognition of the crucial role of mass entertainment in the lives of ordinary people, establishes Richardson's voice in the journal as a 'dissenting one', conveying less of the 'aggressive avant-gardism' so apparent in the voices of Macpherson, H.D. and Bryher (Marcus 1998b, 152). The title of Richardson's column, 'Continuing Performance', is itself significant in this respect. For it implies 'her concern with the cinematic as *a way of seeing* and as a total and totalizing experience, rather than with films as artefacts' (Marcus 1998b, 151-2; emphasis added).

Reading Richardson alongside H.D. is instructive, for whilst Richardson takes into account the notions of class in her analysis of the cinema as 'hospice, refuge and church'. and of its physical space as a point of collective contact, H.D. appears to overlook the issue of class in her imagined community of spectators (Marcus 1998b, 159). Richardson's emphasis on film spectatorship focuses on *material* issues: the comfort of the auditorium, the price of the ticket, the 'tea thrown in'. For H.D., on the other hand, the transformative power of film occurs through the individual spectator's experience of the flickering shadows cast by the projector and the power of light which gives 'hope/to the impotent' and eases 'worn/dusty feet' (CP, 352). Thus, for H.D., whilst the cinema is a public space which precipitates transformation, that transformation is always expressed as a *personal* revelation within a context of

reason she was, perhaps, more aware of the working class position than some of the other *Close Up* contributors.

spectatorship which is collective. Similarly, as we shall see, whilst H.D.'s visions reinforce her private relationship with Bryher in *The Gift*, they also function as a means of access to the community of readers H.D. constructs in her writing of the text. So, whilst this oscillation between the positions of public and private in H.D.'s work suggest the complexity of her understanding of the visual it also diffuses the effectiveness of the visual as a political medium. This has important repercussions for a reading of *The Gift* and is an issue to which I return in due course.

Projection: 'all the light within the light'¹⁷

What emerges from H.D.'s writings about film is that the visual becomes a means of accessing deeper levels of awareness. The poem 'Projector', written especially for *Close Up* in 1927, exemplifies H.D.'s use of the discourse of Christianity as a means of conveying film's potential for spiritual transformation. This functions primarily through metaphors of light, always a key symbol for spiritual experience in H.D.'s writing:

Light reasserts his power
reclaims the lost;
in a new blaze of splendour
calls the host to reassemble
and to readjust
all severings
and differings of thought,
all strife and strident bickering
and rest.
(CP, 349)

Significantly, in H.D.'s poem, light is not only personified but is gendered as masculine. These allusions to light situate the poem within the patriarchal discourse of the Old Testament, specifically implying God's creation of light at the beginning of Genesis.¹⁸ H.D. also implies an engagement with the New Testament which resonate

¹⁷ The quotation in my subtitle is a quotation from H.D. in *The Little Review* in 1929, cited in Friedberg (1982, 28).

¹⁸ As I argued in Chapter One, H.D.'s appropriation of metaphors of light also has resonances with the vocabulary used by Eisenstein in 'Montage in 1938' (1975 [1939]).

with the description of the cinema audience in Richardson's writings. The reference to the 'readjustment' of 'severings/ and differings of thought', for instance, compares with Richardson's discussion of the cinema's 'all-embracing hospitality' which welcomes poor and wealthy alike. H.D.'s use of 'host' is similar to Richardson's 'congregation'. It also has resonances with Richardson's description of film as 'eucharistic bread' which suggest the Christian ritual of communion, thereby relating film spectatorship as an epiphanic, and a *collective*, experience (1998c [1927], 168). This notion of communion – mediated through H.D.'s deployment of vision – is also, as we shall see, an important factor in her construction of community in *The Gift*.

As I have suggested, associations between the process of viewing and spiritual experience are common in H.D.'s work. Like Eisenstein's work, her writing suggests a relationship between the spiritual and the *political*. 'Projector' demonstrates H.D.'s belief that film is itself a powerful social tool, implying that 'cinematic art can transcend as well as depict political difference' and play 'an extremely important role in the future' (Marek 1990, 31). Significantly, the extraordinary spiritual 'visions' H.D. experienced throughout her lifetime - beginning with the 'jellyfish' experience in the Scilly Isles and including the Corfu visions discussed in the next chapter - are invariably related through metaphors of light. As Friedberg points out, these visions were themselves 'projection experiences which clearly replicate the filmic system' (1982, 30). In *Notes on Recent Writing*, H.D. describes *The Gift* itself as a direct visual 'recording' or projection of her memories: 'the Child actually returns to that world, she lives actually in those reconstructed scenes, or she watches them like a moving picture' (NRR, 53). Whilst this notion of projection has 'its roots in mythology and religion', H.D. also uses the term, like Freud, in a cinematographic sense, where 'the subject sends out into the external world an image of something that exists in him in an unconscious way' (Chisholm 1992, 92). As indicated in Chapter Two, H.D. and her contemporaries perceived close parallels between the medium of film and the discipline of psychoanalysis, a relationship which underpinned *Close Up*'s perception of modernity. These similarities intersect in the production of *silent* film which was commonly associated with the unconscious. For instance, in his *Close Up* article of 1930, C.J. Pennethorne Hughes argues that 'the film is the dream of the post-war world [...] to some extent the subconscious - the transmuted and regulated

dream life of the people' (1998 [1930], 260; 262). Marcus argues that *Close Up* played a significant role in the interrelationship between these 'twin sciences and technologies of fantasy, dream, virtual reality and screen memory' (1998c, 240). The association between spectatorship and memory as a *technological* aspect of film is an important one in my discussion here. For, in *The Gift*, H.D. delineates her childhood memories through metaphors of film as technical *process*.

As I suggested earlier, the editing of the New Directions edition of *The Gift* has effaced the importance of the relationship between memory and film. This is reinstated in Augustine's text, apparent in the description of the 'long strips of continuous photographs' which are 'stores in the darkroom of memory' (H.D. 1998a, 49-50). This relationship also extends to H.D.'s writing of *Majic Ring*, which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter: 'These [memories] may have been random projections from that great store-house where we are told all the past is rolled and neatly filed and edited, like the endless store-room of film. waiting for the suitable moment to be projected and re-projected' (MR, 250). Here - in the description of the rolls of film in an 'endless store room' - H.D. implies the 'commodification' of viewing technology. In so doing, she connects the process of viewing to notions of wealth and abundance which, as we shall see, is highly significant to H.D.'s perceptions both of the gift and of the visual. For it suggests the contradictory nature of *The Gift*'s representation of the visual. On the one hand, *The Gift*, for H.D., is a celebration of the visual realm. On the other, as we shall see, she locates the gift economy as non-specular, and in opposition to dominant modes of thinking

In *The Gift* H.D. sets out to establish a specific connection between seeing as a process of mental projection and the 'value' of this action as a way of reinforcing the bonds of 'community':

I only remembered that I had had this power, the power had gone now; I was a middle-aged woman, shattered by years of tension and terror, and now I sat in a chair and only remembered that I had been caught up in a vision of power and of peace and that I had remembered my grandmother's words exactly. (G, 135)

Once again, H.D. makes explicit that her desire for social transformation stems from the memories of her grandmother's visions. But there is an interesting contradiction here: despite the link between 'seeing' and collective social experience, this passage depicts a visionary 'seer' who undergoes her visions *alone*. This results, in part, from H.D.'s conception of viewing as an individual activity - which we have seen already in her film writings - and is demonstrated by her description of a 'magic lantern' she bought for Perdita in a letter to Bryher in 1928. Written in the code language she and Bryher frequently adopted in their correspondence, the letter demonstrates the importance of film to H.D. ('cat'), Perdita ('pup'), Bryher ('dog') and Macpherson ('small dog'):

The magic lantern is so that tonight I can slip in little bits of film. I have already peeled and prepared the films for the private show I give one CAT tonight. The lantern is pup's Christmas present...so does a wise cat salve its cat-conscience. It will purr over little big pictures of Veytaux, of Dog and small Dog...The Cat believes with all its nine cat hearts and souls and brains in the film, in we us [sic] as opposed to them there monkeys who say "our big producers". Even if we are never shown anywhere, cat loves and believes in us. (L, 1928)

Several important points arise from this extract. Significantly, since H.D. admits to needing to 'salve' her conscience, it suggests her guilt at the self-indulgence of watching film alone. This implies that she regards the viewing of film as an activity which should be *collective*. Here, again, is a contradiction in H.D.'s formulation of the visual. Given that she also portrays viewing as a private activity, this suggests that the limitations to her representation of spectatorship as a social activity. Furthermore, H.D.'s letter establishes an opposition between the more widely-shown mainstream productions of the commercial film industry - run, she suggests, by 'monkeys' - and the private reels shot by 'we us': herself, Bryher and Macpherson. Despite her fascination with these home-made reels of film, she implies that they are ultimately intended to be watched in private, since they are either too obscure or too experimental to be shown in public.

This underlying paradox in H.D.'s perception of spectatorship is also apparent in *The Gift*. Like the poetry and prose H.D. produced earlier in her career, the memoir reinforces her connection with the reader through its invitation to collaborate in the

text's construction. In this respect, as a modernist narrative which troubles nineteenth-century realism and the existence of an omniscient narrator, *The Gift* works, like film itself, to rouse 'the spectator's "collaborating creative consciousness"' (Watts 1995, 77). Like film which, for H.D., had the potential to foster international relations, the text reinforces social connections through its visual dynamic. Conversely, however, *The Gift* also functions as H.D.'s *personal* journey through the labyrinths of her memory. The representation of the visual in the text therefore operates on the level of both public and personal. Thus, H.D. is able to explore a mode of spectatorship which is collective but which is also, as Friedberg points out, 'a *privatized* form of reception' (1982, 29; emphasis added). Such a contradiction reveals the complexities in H.D.'s awareness of the political implications of her spiritual 'seeing'. Ultimately, it suggests that her understanding of spectatorship is also influenced by the avant garde ethos of Modernism. For whilst she recognises the importance of film as a social activity, she also regards it as an art form which is private and aestheticised.

The cinematics of *The Gift*: voice-over and flashback

The discursive style of H.D.'s film reviews suggest that her interest in film lay not so much in the analysis of individual images but in the *process* of spectatorship itself. For example, in the essay 'Conrad Veidt: The Student of Prague', rather than providing the reader with a retrospective analysis of the film, H.D. conveys her immediate reactions to its narrative:

The music ought, it is evident, be making my heart spring but I don't like student songs and these Heidelbergish melodies especially leave me frigid. There's something wrong and I have seen those horses making that idiotic turn on the short grass at least eight times. What is it? I won't stay any longer. (1998c [1927], 120)

As Marcus argues, this 'performative running commentary on the processes of spectating' is a common feature of H.D.'s film reviews (1998a, 101). It assumes a form of "inner speech", acting as a screen onto which the film images can be

projected' (*ibid.*).¹⁹ This device of 'commentary' is also employed in her literary text *The Gift* where narrative voice and visual image are closely intertwined.²⁰ In an early scene of the memoir, the image of Hilda and her two brothers sitting on a sofa combines with a direct address from the narrator which is intended to guide the reader's 'viewing':

You yourself may wonder at the mystery in this house. the hush in this room; you may glance at the row of children on the horsehair sofa and at the plaque of mounted butterflies, or at the tiny alligator, who is varnished and whose name is Castor or whose name is Pollux, the children can not tell you for no one has been able to answer that question for them. (G, 26)

Like H.D.'s prose fiction, which utilises close-up as a means of involving the reader in the active process of viewing, *The Gift* contains moments of intense focus on the characters' surroundings. In one instance towards the end of the text, where the adult narrator recalls her conversation with Mamalie, the actions and observations of childhood are remembered in vivid and precise detail across the distance of time:

Now it seems, while I pour out water from the pitcher into the glass, that I am Hilda pouring out water from a washstand jug that has roses and a band of dark blue that looks like a painted ribbon round the top. The tooth-mug matches the pitcher. There is a soap dish with a little china plate, with holes in it, that is separate so that the water from the soap will drip through. The basin has the same roses. (G, 92)

Here the narrator's senses are heightened by the solemnity of the occasion of learning the forgotten 'secrets' of Moravian history from her grandmother. Paradoxically, despite the clear visual detail through which H.D. invites the reader to share the moment, the narrative evokes a sense of detachment. The 'adult' narrative voice, relating the image of her childhood self, operates here almost like a cinematic 'voice over', where the direct intervention of the narrator from a distance - usually across a

¹⁹ There is an implication here of a link between performance, or performativity, and spectatorship, to which I return in my discussion of *Majic Ring* in Chapter Four.

²⁰ An instance of this 'performative running commentary' also occurs in H.D.'s *Bid Me To Live* (1960) when the protagonist, Julia, is part of a cinema audience full of soldiers. As Tate argues, 'the narrative interweaves images from the film with Julia's vision of the crowd of doomed men' and this operates as a series of questions and snippets from popular wartime songs (1997, 256). This reinforces my argument above that H.D.'s vision of peace is informed by her experience of visual culture, especially cinematic culture.

period of time - is signalled by the gap between the image on the screen and the soundtrack.

Hayward argues that the device of voice-over in film 'bridges the gap between the past and the present [in which] the present is speaking about the past': as such 'the voice-over represents a subjectivity that is a controlling of the past' (1996, 127).²¹ Whilst the first-person narrative voice in this extract from *The Gift* relates to the narrative present, the image to which it corresponds is rooted in the past. In addition to accentuating the temporal split in the narrative, this technique simultaneously represents two distinct 'selves'. Although H.D. appears to invite us to share her visions, this process is rendered more complex through the division between image and voice which suggest a divided identity. This reinforces the tension between the public and private aspects of spectatorship outlined above: it suggests that, although H.D. embraces the ideal of a spiritual vision as a way of reinforcing social connections, the political effectiveness of that ideal is limited. For, ultimately, whilst her representations of vision in *The Gift* appear to reaffirm notions of community and social cohesion, they also underscore the individual and the private.²²

The Gift's constant mediation between past and present is also achieved through the narrative device of flashback. This technique, termed analepsis in literature but also commonly used in film, is a means of returning to an earlier, clearly-marked 'subjective moment' in a character's life (Hayward 1996, 122). As a 'representation of memory and of history' cinematic flashback dates back to the beginnings of film history [...] thus coinciding with the birth and burgeoning of psychoanalysis' (*ibid.*).²³ It is the concept of *cinematic* flashback, therefore - rather than literary analepsis - which informs my reading of *The Gift*, since there it enacts a similar retrieval of 'history' through 'psychic thought processes' (H.D. 1998a, 49). This transition between past and present is usually represented by a visual image. At

²¹ Hayward further discusses how the techniques of flashback and voice-over in mainstream film noir, such as Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944) and Michael Curtiz's *Mildred Pierce* (1945) serve to underscore the masculinity of the male protagonist. For a discussion of how voice-over and synchronisation serve to reinscribe gender representation, see also Silverman (1990).

²² This technique also underscores the importance of the voice and cinematic sound in the representation of subjectivity, which I explore in more detail in Chapter Five.

²³ Hayward states that the technique of flashback can be traced back to 'at least 1901' to Ferdinand Zecca's *Histoire d'un Crime* (1996, 122).

the end of the memoir. for instance, the narrative focus shifts suddenly from the memory of the night of Mamalie's telling of the 'secret' to the middle of an air raid in London:

Now Mamalie was speaking and there was a rattle of the curtain rings as the curtains blew a little inward. It wasn't a thunderstorm, no, it was a star that was going to fall on the house. It was a shooting star that was going to fall on the house and burn us all up and burn us all to death. Bryher is looking at me; she does not know why I am able to sit here. I am sitting here because there is a star [...] There was a promise and there was a gift. (G, 134)

The transition between 'past' and 'present', from one temporal dimension to another, is a smooth one: the image of the shooting star provides a link between turn-of-the-century Pennsylvania - which in turn relates back to the ceremony at Wunden Eiland in 1741 - and 1940s London.²⁴ The visionary clear-sightedness suggested in this passage is directly related to the emotional tension evoked by the bombing raids. H.D. therefore claims that war enables her and Bryher to come 'face to face with the final realities. We have been shaken out of our ordinary dimension in time and we have crossed the chasm that divides time from out-of-time or from what they call eternity' (G, 141). H.D.'s heightened senses allow her access to what she calls 'another dimension' which is, once again, related in the vocabulary of the cinema: 'Our peculiar situation afforded us, not one glimpse of the unrolling film or the tapestry which Fate or our unconscious impulses had woven for us, but we were able, night after night, to pass out of the unrealities and the chaos of night-battle, and *see clear* (H.D. 1998a, 212; emphasis added).

As I have stated, the editorial cuts made to *The Gift* by New Directions have resulted in the effacement of the text's emphasis on vision. Its references to the narrative present, which describe wartime London and H.D.'s life with Bryher, are kept to a minimum and are concentrated towards the end of the memoir. In the complete edition, however, the narrative present operates as a 'frame' for the narrator's visual images and childhood memories. The New Directions editing

²⁴ There are also resonances here both with the Star of Bethlehem which guided the Three Kings to the newborn Christ in the New Testament and also with Morning Star, the native American with whom

process has changed the thrust of the memoir, from a text which explores the nature of spiritual and literary inheritance to one which merely documents the details of H.D.'s past. As Mandel points out, the New Directions edition 'aimed for a simple storytelling as a memoir of H.D.'s childhood in Pennsylvania recollected in World War Two London, thereby neglecting primary material concerning the mystical religion and history of her Moravian heritage' (1999, 344). This was undoubtedly a strategic decision, based on the memoir's potential sales, in order to make it more palatable for a wider readership (Augustine 1998, 1).

The New Directions edition of *The Gift* also removed references to H.D.'s interest in 'the occult'. So, whilst brief reference is made to Hilda's mother visiting a fortune-teller in the New Directions version, the section is heavily truncated. In Augustine's edition, the description of the visit suggests specific connections between the occult activity of fortune-telling and the ability to 'see':

We did not 'see things', we did not conjure up the dead or see ghosts. But now, through some curious combination of circumstances, distance in time, in space, fever and turmoil of present-day events, certain chemical constituents of biological or psychic thought-processes are loosed - whatever thought is, nobody yet knows - and the film unrolls in my head. (H.D. 1998a, 53)

Clearly in the editing process of the New Directions *Gift*, there is a minimisation of references to film and the 'mystical' process of seeing. As a result, critical accounts of the text have not been able to explore fully the significance of H.D.'s representation of vision, and its link with epistemology.²⁵ In the next chapter, which discusses H.D.'s interest in spiritualism and the occult, I seek to close this critical gap.

So far in this chapter, I have explored how H.D.'s references to the visual in *The Gift*, particularly her continual allusions to film, evoke memories of the Moravian ritual of her childhood. This establishes a sense of community into which the reader is invited whilst simultaneously deflecting the horrors of war underpinning the text's

Anna von Pahlen is exchanged in *The Gift*. This use of the metaphor of the star further reveals the connections between H.D.'s understanding of the spiritual and her literary deployment of the visual.

composition. At the heart of *The Gift*, Mamalie's story relates 'a tale of encounter, mutual recognition and visionary gift exchange between two cultures, both despised by the canny white traders' (Morris 1990 [1986], 74). This exchange is crucial to *The Gift*'s vision of community. It is also fundamental to the representation of exchange between H.D. and Bryher, whose values of reciprocation trouble notions of a capitalist market economy. Finally, I want to unravel the complex interconnections between money, writing and desire in the text's representation of the relationship between the two women. Thus, whilst H.D.'s writing of *The Gift* is underpinned by the values of unity and community, she also seeks to question traditional notions of exchange through her evocation of an *economy* of the gift. And, as we shall see, by unpacking H.D.'s vision of an alternative economy, we can fully confront the ideological implications of her 'visionary politics'.

The economy of the gift

Before embarking on how the notion of the 'gift economy' illuminates my reading of *The Gift*, I need to elucidate some theoretical principles. The concept has been appropriated by such poststructuralist thinkers as Bataille, Derrida and Cixous. However, as Morris explains, '[it] achieved its classic elaboration in the work of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss', who 'first discerned the extent to which primitive societies are organized by obligations to give, receive, and reciprocate' (Morris 1990 [1986], 52).²⁶ Morris cites an example from Mauss' work in order to explain how the gift economy functions:

Mauss' most striking example is the Pacific island Kula ring, a circular route along which the island tribes pass red shell necklaces clockwise and white shell bracelets counterclockwise. As the gifts travel along the ring, their motion is beyond the individual ego: each bearer is part of the group and each donation is an act of social faith. This

²⁵ As I demonstrate more fully later in the chapter, by including the previously unpublished sections of *The Gift*, Augustine's edition has served to 'restore' the notion of the text itself as a spiritual legacy, thereby underscoring H.D.'s original expression of *community*.

²⁶ Morris' essay overlooks the fact that both Mauss' anthropological research and H.D.'s literary representation of it, are informed by an ethnography of 'primitive cultures'. It is important to acknowledge the problems of translating the meaning of the 'gift' in Mauss' examination of Maori culture to H.D.'s affluent European context.

paradigmatic example of gift exchange collapses the precise distinctions so carefully elaborated by capitalist economies. (Morris 1990 [1986], 52)

Mauss himself describes the gift as symbolic of the bond between human beings, defining it as 'property and a possession, a pledge and a loan, an object sold and an object bought, a deposit, a mandate, a trust; for it is given only on condition that it will be used on behalf of, or transmitted to, a third person' (1967. 22). Thus, the donation of the gift establishes a connection between between giver and recipient, but, beyond that - since there is always the promise of its ongoing transmission - it sustains social contact within the community as a whole. This act of giving and receiving is also, ultimately, a manifestation of the sacred, which is itself 'a privileged moment of communal unity' (Lechte 1994, 99). Clearly, in *The Gift*, there are resonances between Mauss' theoretical concept of the gift and H.D.'s representation of the spiritual knowledge gleaned from her grandmother.

I have suggested that the representation of community in *The Gift* depends on the reader's willingness to collaborate in the reconstruction of H.D.'s extraordinary visions. This connection with the reader occurs primarily through H.D.'s use of the first person plural narrator - exemplified in the description of the visit to the fortune teller quoted above - which serves as a direct invitation to share in both her memories and her visions. If the reader accepts this invitation, then 'we do in fact receive knowledge that connects us into her community' (Morris 1990 [1986], 66). But this bond is not only expressed through H.D.'s choice of pronoun: it is also firmly underpinned by the text's structure. As Morris points out, in the revelation of the 'secret' H.D.'s narrative organisation 'functions to turn [the text] into a collaboration' (1990 [1986], 74). Mamalie 'works back into her vision, then forward from it, she projects onto Hilda the identities of those who surrounded her in the past, identities Hilda in turn takes up and plays out to keep Mamalie in her trance' (*ibid.*). What my reading of *The Gift* demonstrates is that this 'collaboration' is made possible through H.D.'s representation of the *visual*, both through Mamalie's 'projection' of her vision onto her young grand-daughter, Hilda, and the later reconstruction of that visionary moment by the older narrator, H.D. And it is with the benefit of retrospective vision that H.D. is ultimately able to make sense of Mamalie's words:

It was as if I were there all the time, in understanding anyway, of the thing that had happened before I was ten, the 'thing' that had happened to me and the 'thing' I had inherited from them. I, the child, was still living, but I was not free, not free to express my understanding of the Gift, until long afterwards. (G, 85)

Since H.D. is able to reconstruct the past, 'long afterwards' through the writing of her memoir, the text therefore *contains* the gift of her ancestral heritage. Moreover, her desire to 'express her understanding of the gift', to reciprocate or to return it, is also inscribed into the composition of *The Gift*. Thus, the representation of the gift economy operates through the text's production and transmission, so that the text *itself* becomes a gift given to the reader. There is, of course, a paradox here. In the climate of modern literary publishing, at least, a text must become a commodity - which is bought and sold in a market economy of profit and loss - in order to be read and disseminated. If we also consider *The Gift*'s subsequent editing by New Directions in this light, there is a further irony. Since long sections of the original typescript of *The Gift* were elided in order to make it more 'marketable' this inserts the text, at the expense of its possible location in a gift economy, into a system of capital exchange (Augustine 1998, 1).²⁷

H.D., Bryher and 'economy'

H.D. regards the inheritance of the gift in the text as a responsibility she cannot bear alone: 'I could not achieve the super-human task of bringing back what had been lost, so the Promise might be redeemed and the Gift restored' (G, 135). Thus, not only does H.D. continually call to the reader to 'see' her visions and to become the gift's beneficiary, she also regards it as a contract of intimacy with Bryher, who both precipitates her memories and - like the reader - shares them with her. In this sense, as H.D. acknowledges, the two women are represented in the text as *each*

²⁷ Paradoxically, whilst the publication of *The Gift*'s typescript facilitates its dissemination to a wider readership, this imbues it with the status of commodity within a market economy. This could be seen as an interference with the gift economy, an act which 'poisons' the gift. Morris argues that 'the law of the

*other's 'gift': 'Bryher was my special heritage as I had been hers' (G, 137). Since my reading of *The Gift* seeks to analyse the textual representation of the relationship between these two women - and since I focus on H.D.'s *discursive* deployment of the gift economy - I will not dwell too long on the biographical details of H.D.'s life. Nevertheless, the role which money played in the relationship between H.D. and Bryher is significant.*

Bryher's fortune subsidised the day-to-day living of the two women. It allowed them to undertake numerous journeys to Europe and further afield. And, of course, it also financed both the shooting of films and the production of *Close Up*. H.D. had a share in Bryher's financial inheritance which afforded her time and leisure to write and the ability to move with ease between London and Switzerland - locations which facilitated and sustained her writing. Bryher also paid for H.D.'s psychoanalytic sessions with Freud in 1933. For this reason, some of H.D.'s critics and biographers have implied that Bryher 'bought' H.D. Janice Robinson, for instance, states that 'Bryher was paying for the analysis and she demanded a first-hand account of the proceedings' (1982, 262). These 'proceedings' were, indeed, recorded in H.D.'s prolific correspondence to Bryher in that period which Robinson interprets as Bryher's 'return' on her investment (*ibid.*). It is possible to read Bryher's 'patronage' - the exchange of her money for H.D.'s literary output - as a straightforward transaction. Thus, in *The Gift*, 'Bryher was my special heritage as I had been hers' would signify a straightforward transaction: the exchange of money for art (G, 137). Certainly, H.D.'s correspondence, frequently evokes the vocabulary of 'value' in relation to her work. A letter written in 1924 refers to the poems she is writing for Bryher as 'chiseled [sic], polished gems [...] labourously [sic] wrought for the Fido's [Bryher's] birthday' (L, 1924). Yet, whilst the reference to the 'polished gems' signifies the 'value' of H.D.'s poetry for Bryher, and suggests analogies with an exchange system founded on profit and loss, it also suggests that their value is contained in the writing process itself. Thus, since these poems are 'chiseled' and crafted, significantly, as a 'gift' for Bryher's birthday, their value also exists *outside*

gift culture dictates that what she receives must be disseminated [...] the gift uncirculated the present (Gift)' (1991, 246). becomes, like the German word *gift*, a toxin or poison' (1990 [1986], 70).

the economy of capital exchange.²⁸

H.D.'s letters constantly express a need for Bryher's presence to restore order into her life: 'come home and take the affairs of the hectic household back into your competent hands', she pleads (L, 1923). On her frequent European journeys H.D. also relied heavily on Bryher's linguistic abilities and her knowledge of foreign currency. Thus, her letters are full of such questions as to how much to tip the French porters and queries which relate to the cost of hotel rooms. In one letter - again written in 1923 - H.D. describes how she has been affected by her row with the hotel proprietor, having miscalculated the amount she owed: 'I really feel very weepy for you know I don't find these rows stimulating and it has been *hateful* today' (L, 1923; emphasis H.D.'s). These biographical snippets suggest H.D.'s overriding reliance on Bryher's practical and *emotional* support, as well as on her financial resources. Clearly, the 'value' of H.D.'s and Bryher's relationship is predicated upon more than the exchange of money. Morris locates the reciprocation between the two women as being 'in opposition to the marketplace' (1990 [1986], 55-8).²⁹ Whilst this analysis is an interesting one, it should be remembered that such an alternative model of exchange is made possible only *because* Bryher's wealth was so abundant. Thus, the two women are able to stand *outside* the system of financial exchange precisely because they both profited from Bryher's position *within* it.

How is this economy of exchange between H.D. and Bryher represented in *The Gift*? During the air raid at the end of the memoir, H.D. fixes on Bryher's face as a means of blocking out both her fear and the noise around her: 'She looks at me. Her face is as carved and cold as a Chinese mask, not white, not yellow, not brown or gold. There should be bronze faces and brown and gold faces, there should be the meeting - what was it that Mamalie had tried to tell me?' (G, 133). The sight of Bryher's face evokes for H.D. the significance of the meeting at Wunden Eiland:

²⁸ Of her earlier analysis with Hans Sachs in 1931, H.D. writes to Bryher: 'Do realize [sic] that I appreciate this analysis gift from the bottom of my heart' (L, 1931c).

²⁹ Morris claims that H.D. 'firmed her new alliance with Bryher by giving Bryher responsibility for [H.D.'s] child' (1990 [1986], 55-6). She therefore interprets Perdita as a token of exchange in the relationship between the two women. Since my analysis of the gift exchange between H.D. and Bryher focuses on the text itself, in which Perdita never directly appears, I do not intend to pursue this argument any further here.

through Bryher, H.D. is able to connect back to Mamalie's wisdom and vision and, in turn, to her matrilineal ancestry. Bryher is therefore *essential* to H.D.'s own process of vision, enabling her to see the 'truth' at the core of her revelatory experience: 'The Gift was a Gift of Vision, it was the Gift of Wisdom, the Gift of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctus Spiritus' (G, 135). This has clear resonances with Mauss' notion of the gift. For, whilst it constitutes an exchange of one thing for another - Bryher's consolatory presence exchanged for H.D.'s ability to 'see' and, further, to inscribe that 'seeing' as artistic artefact - it also implies a value *beyond* that of their mutual giving. The text suggests that the gift of vision and wisdom, like the gift of Mauss' anthropological theories, will be *returned*. Thus, like Mauss' Pacific Island Kula ring, the gift is circulated in an ongoing act of reciprocation: 'I had gone round and round, and now I had made the full circle, now I had come back to the beginning [...] Bryher was my special heritage as I had been hers' (G, 137).

Ultimately, the gift passed between H.D. and Bryher is also sacred, in the sense in which the term is used above: as 'a privileged moment of communal unity' (Lechte 1994, 99). As we shall see, this 'communal unity' is not limited to *The Gift*, since H.D.'s texts consistently locate Bryher's presence as crucial to the 'seeing' of her extraordinary 'visions'. In this way, to borrow Butler's terms, the proximity of the two women serves to 'reconfigure conventional notions of reciprocity and respect' (1993, 46). However, whilst this 'moment' of spiritual intensity constitutes one of intimacy for H.D. and Bryher, it is also associated with the public ritual of Christian *confirmation*, an ordaining of 'the Gift of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctus Spiritus'. Through the text's suggestion of this ritual, the reader is 'confirmed' into a community through the 'gift of tongues'. H.D.'s appropriation of the 'third person' of Mauss' theoretical model can therefore be interpreted in two ways. For, whilst the gift of H.D.'s ancestors is passed on to Bryher in a private gift of eternal return, it is also given - as a creative gift and as a spiritual manifestation - to her reader.

In order to illuminate how H.D.'s representation of the gift in *The Gift* is a specifically feminine one, it is worth noting its resonances with Cixous' *The Newly Born Woman*. Cixous refers to the market economy of capitalist exchange as the 'empire of the Selfsame', aligning it with masculinity and normative heterosexuality

(1986 [1975], 78). By contrast, she identifies 'a self, proper to woman' in which she has a 'capacity to deappropriate herself without self-interest' (Cixous 1986 [1975], 87). Cixous therefore maps Mauss' theory of the gift onto a matrix of sexual difference, in which the relationship between a *feminine* self and (an)other exists in an ongoing reciprocation of love and desire. In *The Gift*, we can also see how this relates to H.D.'s notion of exchange. At Wunden Eiland, the Indian woman, Morning Star, is baptised as a Moravian, whilst Anna Von Pahlen is initiated into the community of the native American tribespeople. In this exchange, which establishes the 'chain' of the spiritual legacy transmitted throughout the text, H.D.'s gift is formulated in an economy which 'gives *for*' (Cixous 1986 [1975], 87; emphasis in original).³⁰ Thus, the giver of the gift in the ritual at Wunden Eiland 'doesn't try to "recover her expenses" but gives with 'open hands' (*ibid.*).

Since H.D.'s gift is located *outside* the 'empire of the Selfsame', her text, when read in the light of Cixous' thinking, could be read as a challenge to phallogocentric notions of 'self-interest' (Cixous 1986 [1975], 87). Significantly for my reading of the relationship between H.D. and Bryher in *The Gift*, Cixous equates writing itself to 'working' - in the sense of it being a sacred discipline (1986 [1975], 86). This 'undoing [of] death's work by willing the togetherness of one-another' is 'infinitely charged with a ceaseless exchange of one with another [...] A course that multiplies transformations by the thousands' (*ibid.*). The act of writing *The Gift* could therefore be regarded as H.D.'s confirmatory gesture of her love for Bryher and as the desire for social 'transformation'. Thus, rather than representing a 'return' on Bryher's investment, the 'ceaseless exchange' of H.D.'s text counters the ideology of war resulting from masculinist systems of capital exchange.

In Mauss' theory the 'general economy' - that which Cixous calls the empire of the Selfsame - depends on 'an economy of loss [...] and expenditure' (Lechte 1994,

³⁰ The encounter on Wunden Eiland, in which Morning Star is 'exchanged' for Anna von Palen could also be read in the light of Irigaray's essay 'Women, the Sacred and Money' (1986 [1984]). Irigaray argues that, although women's position in the religious and social rites of sacrificial religions provides the foundations for social kinship, women themselves are consistently denied a place in their performance. In one sense, H.D.'s writing of *The Gift* attempts to redress this through her representation of the gift as a *matrilineal* inheritance. On the other hand, it also underscores the fact that women 'function universally as the objects of every kind of exchange, economic, familial, sexual, psychic, aesthetic, religious, linguistic' (Connor 1992, 170).

99). Cixous perceives this loss as a masculinist concept which ‘turns the gift into a gift-that-takes’ (1986 [1975], 87). The gift economy, on the other hand, is ‘essentially a system of reciprocity’ whose central aspects of ‘excess and luxury’ are the result of the gift being continually given and received (Lechte 1994. 99). This is also relevant to *The Gift*, where H.D. continually associates both her memories and her visions with spiritual value: ‘These [memories] may have been random projections from that great store-house where we are told all the past is rolled and neatly filed and edited, like the endless store-room of film, waiting for the suitable moment to be projected and re-projected’ (MR, 250). In this quotation from *Majic Ring*, where H.D. describes the memories inscribed in *The Gift*, both the memories and their store-room are *endless*, abundant, in excess. Since they are always accessed in, and through, the text by the act of ‘seeing’, then H.D.’s representation of the visual in *The Gift* can *itself* be located as an economy which stands outside the ‘empire of the Selfsame’.

The ‘excess’ of the gift economy, which, for Cixous, is always associated with femininity, allows for ‘a wonderful expansion’, the excitement of ‘unexplored places’ (1986 [1975], 86). This association between visionary ‘seeing’ and the feminine is also, as we shall see in the next chapter, a significant factor in *Tribute To Freud* and *Majic Ring*. In these texts the two women, who, ‘for lack of a definite term, we must call psychics or clairvoyants’ (TF, 46), enact a form of collaborative viewing, visionary experience which also ‘challenges the heterosexual matrix of desire theorised by psychoanalysis’ (Connor 2000, 201). Significantly, since there is an implication here that the two women are an *audience* who watch these images *together*. H.D.’s formulation of visionary experience is, once again, underscored by her experience of film spectatorship.

Further insights into H.D.’s deployment of the visual are yielded by reading *The Gift* alongside Cixous’ reformulation of the gift economy. For Cixous connects her economy of the gift with *jouissance*, a realm of bodily experience which both opposes the dominance of the specular and *reconfigures* ways of seeing:

Feminine light doesn’t come from above, doesn’t fall, doesn’t strike, doesn’t go through. It radiates, it is a slow, sweet, difficult, absolutely unstoppable, painful rising that reaches and impregnates lands, that

filters, that wells up, that finally tears open, wets and spreads apart what is dull and thick, the stolid, the volumes. (1986 [1975], 88)

Like *The Newly Born Woman*, *The Gift* delineates a way of seeing which is feminine. Thus, H.D. anticipates not only Cixous' feminist politics but the postmodern thinking which constructs alternative modes to that of the visual.³¹ These resonances with Cixous also reveal the *contradictions* inherent in H.D.'s representation of *seeing*. For, despite the privilege which H.D. constantly attaches to the visible in *The Gift*, her construction of a 'visual economy' of female spiritual vision challenges the dominance of the scopic. Like Cixous' gift of 'feminine light' - which is situated in opposition to the 'sun' (sol) of the masculine scopic economy - the alternative economy in *The Gift* reveals H.D.'s oppositional sexual politics (Cixous 1986 [1975], 88). Yet H.D.'s delineation of feminine vision in *The Gift* is also contradictory. It operates within a *private* realm of seeing and this implies that the political effectiveness of collective or public seeing - which is suggested by her film writings - is ultimately limited.

At the end of *The Gift*, once the air raids have finished, Bryher comments on the sounding of the 'all-clear'. The suggestion is that H.D.'s visions of 'universal love and peace' have protected the two women from destruction (Mandel 1999, 344). For H.D. the 'all-clear' itself resonates with the 'voices' of her past Moravian ancestors: 'Philippus, Lover-of-horses [...] Anna, Hannah or Grace' (G, 142). In this sense, the 'all-clear' symbolises H.D.'s own visionary 'clear-sightedness'. Through the private community she has built up with Bryher - and in the relay of the gift which she passes on to the reader - H.D. can ultimately see clearly the visions of her Moravian childhood and the history of her past maternal ancestors. In *The Gift* it is ultimately the vision *itself* - rather than the gift of H.D.'s Moravian ancestry - which has become the text's central significance. And this important new insight into *The Gift* can only be fully understood in the light of H.D.'s film writings which indicate her awareness of the *ideological* implications of film.

³¹ Alternatives to the scopic economy are also suggested in the work of Irigaray (1985a [1974]; 1985b [1977]) and Derrida (1985).

Chapter Four

‘The darkened room’: spiritualism and projection in *Tribute To Freud* and *Majic Ring*¹

Introduction

The central premise of my thesis so far has been that H.D.’s involvement with film influenced both her literary texts and the construction of her visual aesthetic. In this chapter I shift focus slightly to consider how her representation of ‘seeing’ in *Tribute To Freud* (1956) and the unpublished typescript *Majic Ring* is informed by her interest in spiritualism.² This interest is highly relevant to her engagement with film, since film itself could be described, like the spiritualist seance, as the making visible of that which is ‘mysterious’ to an assembly of people (Morris 1984, 423). And, as I have already argued, H.D. portrays her spiritual visions in specifically cinematic terms, defining herself as a member of an *audience* which is collective. It is possible, then, to identify parallels between film - which is created, cut and pasted in the ‘dark room’ to be viewed by an audience in a darkened auditorium - and the ‘darkened room’ of spiritualist or occult activity.³

H.D.’s representation of spiritualism, like her engagement with film, reveals the *political* strategies at work in her literary or discursive deployment of the visual. In this chapter I examine specifically how H.D.’s portrayal of ‘visionary seeing’ can be read as a challenge to dominant constructions of gender, sexuality and desire. This challenge is not without its contradictions: despite H.D.’s contestation of dominant gender norms, her texts also depend on Freud’s thinking which *presupposes* a binary system of gender and privileges heterosexual desire. Beginning with a brief outline of

¹ This phrase is taken from the title of Alex Owen’s book *The Darkened Room* (1989). My understanding of the contradictions inherent in spiritualist practice is informed by Owen’s account of the spiritualist movement in England in the late Victorian period.

² *Tribute To Freud* constitutes two separate journal-essays based on H.D.’s analysis with Freud. ‘Writing on the Wall’ was completed in 1944 and ‘Advent’ in 1948. Both were published together for the first time as *Tribute To Freud* in 1956. In this chapter I refer to the Pantheon edition, published in 1956.

³ I return to a more direct focus on the medium of film in the next chapter when I discuss H.D.’s evocation of voice in Helen in Egypt in the context of the introduction of sound to early cinema.

the revelatory visions contained in *Majic Ring* and *Tribute To Freud*. I move on to consider H.D.'s textual representations of these visions and how they encode and revise notions of gender, sexuality and identity. I argue, in the process, that both texts, like the spiritualist seance, can be read as a 'contextual site for the subversion of [a] gendered selfhood' (Owen 1989, 11).

H.D.'s 'Corfu' visions: texts and contexts

H.D.'s interest in spiritualism is an aspect of her life and work which is rarely discussed by critics.⁴ In part, as discussed in the last chapter, this elision is due to the erasure of the sections of *The Gift* which allude to her preoccupation with the occult. It is also due to the fact that those works which document her spiritualist involvement - namely *Majic Ring* and *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (1947) - have not yet been published.⁵ Despite *Majic Ring*'s 'important insights into H.D.'s personal history' and its illumination of 'her spiritualist concerns and her creative process in general', its unpublished status has inevitably limited its readership (Sword 1995b, 347). Helen Sword is one of the few critics who has published on *Majic Ring*, a text which she argues 'has been ignored even by the most assiduous of H.D. scholars' (*ibid.*). My discussion here of the spiritual concerns of *Majic Ring* therefore excavates - to borrow an expression from Sword - 'unmined literary gold' (1995b, 347).

Since *Majic Ring* is unlikely to be as familiar to the reader as H.D.'s published work, it may be useful to outline its composition. H.D. worked on the text between 1943 and 1944, at the same as she was writing *The Gift* and the first section of *Tribute To Freud*.⁶ At that time she was also regularly attending seances and lectures on

⁴ For a brief overview of H.D.'s involvement in spiritualism see Friedman (1981, 173-5) and Guest (1984, 260-2). Sword (1995b) gives a more extended discussion of this in her essay on *Majic Ring*.

⁵ I read the typescript of *Majic Ring*, which stretches to some 310 pages, on my research visit to the Beinecke library at Yale. It is archived in the H.D. collection along with *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (1947) which also records her spiritualist activities. Rather than referencing *Majic Ring* as an unpublished source in the usual way, I abbreviate it to MR and cite the page number of the typescript in the body of the text. All spelling, punctuation and emphasis in the quotations from *Majic Ring* are from H.D.'s original typescript.

⁶ At around the same time, between 1942 and 1944, H.D. was also in the process of writing *Trilogy* (CP, 505-612). Given that I am concerned with her *narrative* representation of spiritualism in this chapter, however, and since I also seek to pay attention to the lesser-known *Majic Ring*, I do not address the concerns of her long poem here.

spiritualism given by the London Society for Psychical Research. *Majic Ring* is perhaps best described as a synthesis of memoir, novel, epistolary and journal forms. As Sword acknowledges, it is 'untidily written, loosely structured and frequently arcane in its references' (1995b, 347). It both 'meditates on H.D.'s past visionary experience' and 'reflects her day-to-day circumstances at the time of composition' (Sword 1995b, 349). Yet it is 'not an autobiographical memoir in quite the same sense as any of H.D.'s other works' (*ibid.*). Nor is it a *roman à clef*, even if H.D. obscures the 'real' people in the text through her use of code names, as she does in *Asphodel*.⁷ The first section of *Majic Ring* is made up of the actual letters H.D. sent to Hugh Dowding - 'Lord Howell' in the text - the RAF Chief Marshal and spiritualist writer with whom she tried, unsuccessfully, to initiate a correspondence about her seance visions. The second part contains a series of journal entries which record the seances H.D. attended between 1943 and 1944.⁸ The remainder is an extended meditation on the visions she experienced in, and on the way to, Corfu with Bryher in 1920.

During her journey to Greece on board the 'Borodino', H.D. met the artist and spiritualist Peter Rodeck, to whom she formed a 'psychic' attachment that profoundly influenced the rest of her life. In *Majic Ring* H.D. describes this encounter in terms of a hallucinatory vision involving Rodeck's fictional persona, 'Peter van Eck'. Standing at the rail of the 'Borodino', Delia feels she is 'on the deck of a mythical ship [...] a ship that had no existence in the world of ordinary events and laws and rules' (MR, 152). *Majic Ring* also contains an account of the 'series of hallucinated dance scenes' which H.D. enacted for Bryher in their hotel room on their last night in Corfu (Sword 1995b, 353). In the course of these 'tableaux vivants' H.D.'s fictional persona, Delia, assumes a number of imaginative identities which are variously listed as a tree, 'an Indian medicine man', a female mountain-spirit and 'a Tibetan "priest of some high mystery"' (Sword 1995b, 353). Through these dance scenes, Delia experiences a spiritual or psychic connection with a native American 'Indian girl'

⁷ In *Majic Ring* H.D. becomes 'Delia Alton', the name she adopted as her author's pseudonym for the text and one which 'she would frequently invoke in connection with prophetic and mystical experience' (Sword 1995b, 349). Bryher is renamed 'Gareth' and 'Ben Manisi' is her code name for Arthur Bhaduri, who, as stated in the Introduction, was the medium with whom H.D. met on a regular basis between 1943 and 1944.

named Minnie ha-ha: 'My Indian girl manifested in a way I have never heard spoken of nor read about. Yet though I gave myself gladly and willingly to this tableau vivant I was not prepared for the entity or the Spirit to manifest other than as a living silent picture' (MR, 221). Of course, this reference to the 'living silent picture' of H.D.'s spiritual experience invites comparisons with the silent films with which she was involved during the 1920s.

As I suggest later in the chapter, H.D.'s representations of both the hallucinatory vision of van Eck and the tableaux vivants unsettle traditional configurations of identity, sexuality and desire. For whilst they establish the visual as the primary means of identification with a desired other, they also *undermine* the power of the 'dominant scopic economy' (Irigaray 1985b [1977], 26). H.D.'s description of the spirit of Minnie ha-ha as a 'living, silent picture' implies a tension between Delia's *image* of the spirit entity and the *performance* of that identity. This 'disparity between seeming and being' is also a preoccupation in recent theoretical feminist scholarship on female corporeality, to which I return at the end of the chapter (Doane 1991, 46).⁹ And, as we shall see, both spiritualism and H.D.'s extrapolation of it, trouble the mind-body dualism of western philosophy which has been the target of feminist thinkers such as Butler and Grosz (Butler 1993; Grosz 1994).

Since my thesis is concerned with H.D.'s attempts to *destabilise* the inherent power of dominant ideology, I feel it necessary to comment briefly on the contradictions in H.D.'s appropriation of non-western cultures. From a biographical point of view, her construction of native American spirit entities in *Majic Ring* was perhaps influenced by her acquaintance with the medium Arthur Bhaduri, who had 'a Native American called Kapama, or K, as his principal control or spirit guide'

⁸ H.D. kept notes of all the seances she attended. These are appended to the typescript of *Majic Ring* and provide a vital context to the visions she records in the text.

⁹ Doane's analysis here refers specifically to the figure of the femme fatale in film noir. As she acknowledges, 'feminist film theory must be especially sensitive to issues of iconography, of vision and its relation to forms of knowing, because femininity in modernity has become very much a question of hypervisibility' (1991, 14). Notions of corporeality and representation have been debated, not just in film studies but also in feminist philosophy, literature and gender studies. See, for instance Irigaray (1985b [1977]), Butler (1990, 1993), Grosz (1994), Bronfen (1992) and Horner and Keane (eds.) (2000).

(Augustine 1998, 17).¹⁰ H.D.'s choice of Minnie ha-ha as the 'control' of *Majic Ring* reveals her reification of the 'special highly inspirational tradition' of native American spirituality (MR, 288). As Augustine argues in her discussion of *The Gift*, this stems from H.D.'s belief that, 'because she was American, baptized [as a] Moravian and gifted with her maternal [...] legacy of "second sight"', native Americans would come through the medium 'with the specific intention to communicate with her' (1998, 17-18).¹¹ H.D.'s evocation of native American spirituality exemplifies what hooks terms 'imperialist nostalgia', a yearning for the indigenous beliefs and practices which have been erased or altered through the dominance of a colonial power (1992, 189).¹² Whilst this is motivated by a desire to facilitate harmonious social relations, when considered alongside recent post-colonial discourse, it reproduces simplistic racial stereotypes. Thus, post-colonial theory can be seen to function as a lens through which to read H.D.'s work: it reveals the contradictory nature of her relationship with power in what Edmunds calls 'the contemporary politics of colonial dismantlement' (1994, 97). As we shall see later, such paradoxical relationships with the power relating to gender and *sexual* difference are also reproduced in *Tribute To Freud* and *Majic Ring*.

H.D. describes her 'writing-on-the-wall' - the central revelatory vision of *Tribute To Freud* - as a 'series of shadow or of light pictures' (TF, 61). These images appear like a 'picture or [...] illustrated poem, taken out of the actual dream or day-dream content' (TF, 76). And like the projected *moving* images of the cinema, they appear in front of her, on the wall 'between the foot of the bed and the wash-stand' (TF, 65). H.D.'s description of her 'writing' echoes Freud's own analysis of dreams

¹⁰ A 'control' is 'the spirit in the beyond who contacts other spirits and who speaks to and through the medium' (Augustine 1998, 17).

¹¹ This identification with native American spirituality is clearly demonstrated in the 'Notes' which accompany the typescript of *The Gift*. As Augustine demonstrates, the Notes reveal H.D.'s belief that the 'uniquely peaceful and non-exploitative relations with Native Americans, based on common religious understandings' were made possible by Moravian history (1998, 15). As I suggest in Chapter Three, this view neglects to take into account the colonising impulse at the heart of the Moravian missionary project.

¹² H.D.'s representations of racial identity require careful elaboration. Certainly, there remains a great deal of scope for criticism which takes into account H.D.'s engagement with issues of 'race'. To date, the most informed account of H.D.'s relationship with the processes of colonisation can be found in Edmunds (1994). Discussions of H.D.'s unconscious privileging of whiteness can be found in Curry (2000). For a discussion of H.D.'s involvement with the Harlem Renaissance see Friedman (1986) and for an account of the racial dynamics at work in POOL's film activities see Walton (1997) and Donald (1998a).

and thus appears to reinscribe the vocabulary of psychoanalytic discourse.¹³ In this sense, *Tribute* functions, literally, as a 'tribute' or a eulogy to Freud's contribution to twentieth-century thinking. For, in describing her writing on the wall as the 'hieroglyph of the unconscious [...] of the Professor's discovery and life-study' (TF, 70), H.D.'s text appears to *venerate* the work of the man she calls 'the Professor'.¹⁴ However, H.D.'s engagement with Freud in the memoir is complex and highly contradictory and *Tribute* can also be read as a critique of his thinking.¹⁵ H.D. consistently refers to herself, not as Freud's *patient*, but as his *pupil* - an 'amateur dabbler with the theories of psychoanalysis' (TF, 55) - with whom he enters into intellectual debate. In a letter written to Bryher during her analysis with Freud in 1933 she comments how she feels 'instrumental in some way in feeding the light [to him]' regarding his theories of sexuality and gender (L, 1933). On the one hand, this locates H.D. as an example of the 'untutored other' on which classical psychoanalysis was founded (Gambrell 1997, 156).¹⁶ On the other, it also suggests her *refusal* to be pathologised as Freud's analysand. Thus, H.D. complicates the terms of psychoanalytic discourse: she simultaneously works *within* it and enacts a critique *of* it, situating herself 'on the borderline between the opposed positions of the "analysand" and the "analyst"' (Gambrell 1997, 157). As we shall see later, this notion of the 'borderline' is a significant one, both in terms of H.D.'s challenge to dominant ideology and in relation to my own critical methodology.

You will recall that in Chapter Three I suggested that Bryher's presence is crucial to H.D.'s ability to 'project' her visionary images in *The Gift*. Similarly, in both *Tribute* and *Majic Ring*, H.D. establishes a model of collaborative viewing which

¹³ The terminology H.D. uses to describe her 'writing-on-the-wall' vision has resonances with Freud's definition of the interpretation of dreams. Freud states: 'The interpretation of a dream is completely analogous to the decipherment of an ancient pictographic script such as Egyptian hieroglyphics. In both cases, there are certain elements which are not intended to be interpreted (or read, as the case may be) but are only designed to serve as determinatives, that is to establish the meaning of some other element. The ambiguity of various elements of dreams finds a parallel in these ancient systems of writing' (Freud 1964a [1913], 177).

¹⁴ There are interesting parallels here with the notion of the text as a 'gift' which I discussed in the last chapter. Like *Notes on Thought and Vision* which was 'dedicated' to Havelock Ellis, *Tribute* constitutes a 'gift' to Sigmund Freud. For a further discussion of this dynamic of exchange between H.D. and Freud, see Morris (1990 [1986], 56-8).

¹⁵ For accounts of H.D.'s engagement with Freud's work and ideas, see Holland (1969), Riddel (1979), Friedman and Duplessis (1981) and Chisholm (1992).

¹⁶ Gambrell cites 'the female hysteric' and 'the anthropologists informant' as examples of the 'untutored other' (1997, 156).

appears to *resist* Freud's 'penetrative gaze' and 'colonising intelligence' (Appignanesi and Forrester 1993, 1). However, since H.D. relies heavily on the realm of the visual to construct and represent desire in *Tribute* and *Majic Ring*, these texts could also be seen to reinscribe what Doane calls 'the ideology of the visible', which privileges the eye as the site of epistemological power (1980, 47-8). Turning now to consider H.D.'s contradictory position with regard to dominant constructions of gender, I explore how these contradictions are encoded in her portrayal of *vision*.

Projection: H.D. and Bryher 'seeing it together'

H.D.'s description of the 'writing-on-the wall' vision in *Tribute* is protracted over a number of pages. The vision consists of a series of abstract images projected onto the wall of the hotel bedroom: the head and shoulders of a soldier in profile, a chalice, a ladder and a winged angel who she calls Victory or Niké'.¹⁷ Bryher - who is standing alongside H.D. - encourages her to sustain the intense concentration needed to see the vision. Her presence is therefore crucial to H.D.'s projection of these images: 'I can turn now to [Bryher] though I do not budge an inch or break the sustained crystal-gazing stare at the wall before me. I say to Bryher [...] "Shall I stop? Shall I go on?" Bryher says without hesitation, "Go on"' (TF, 70). As in *The Gift*, this act of viewing connects H.D. to the rest of the 'audience', which consists both of Bryher and the reader(s) of the text. And as a result of this collective 'spectatorship', the interpretations of these images become plural: they can be read, as H.D. states, 'in two ways and more than two ways' (TF, 75-6). Again, like the visions delineated in *The Gift*, H.D. acknowledges Bryher's emotional support in the act of 'seeing': 'I knew this experience, this writing-on-the-wall before me [...] could not be shared with anyone except the girl who stood so bravely there beside me' (TF, 72).

Given H.D.'s involvement in spiritualism at the time she was composing *Tribute To Freud*, it is likely that her notion of spiritual 'seeing' - such as that of the 'writing-on-the-wall' - was influenced by her experience of seances. In the vision which took place in H.D.'s and Bryher's hotel bedroom - and which, in turn, is

recorded in *Tribute To Freud* - there is a dynamic of intimacy which parallels the charged, yet invisible, eroticism of the seance. In the act of *looking together* at the images on the wall, the two women share an identification which is based on *proximity*. This counters the psychoanalytic models of heterosexual desire posited by Freud and Lacan, which depend upon *distance* between the viewed object and the desiring subject.¹⁸ Yet, like the tableaux vivants of *Majic Ring* discussed later, there is a contradictory relationship here with the dominance of the visual. For whilst H.D.'s use of the trope of looking appears to reinforce the power of the scopic, this act of looking ultimately challenges the singular invasive 'gaze' of the scientific model, to which Freud, as a 'very famous doctor' would have subscribed (TF, 51).

Clearly, the 'writing-on-the-wall' images of *Tribute* are not the product of a seance. But it is worth briefly contextualising this visionary moment within the dynamics of the spiritualist seance. Alex Owen acknowledges in her discussion of nineteenth-century spiritualist practice, that whilst the gaze was prevalent in the relationship between the (invariably female) medium leading the seance and her admiring sitters, there was also an important emphasis on *touch* and physical proximity (1989, 228). The sitters at the seance usually touched hands or linked arms around a table. Following the manifestation of a spirit entity, they were often permitted to touch the medium and 'to feel the clothed body of a materialised spirit in order to determine whether she was fully formed and whether she was wearing undergarments' (*ibid.*). Such proximity often fostered 'undercurrents of sexual intrigue within spiritualist circles': it legitimised erotic pleasure in a place which was at once public - given that a number of people gathered there - and private, since the seance usually took place in the medium's home (Owen 1989, 218).

Read in the light of H.D.'s involvement in spiritualism, this moment of collaborative viewing between H.D. and Bryher in *Tribute* unsettles what Irigaray terms the 'specula(riza)tion' of the 'dominant phallic economy' (1985b [1977], 29).

¹⁷ Of course this series of abstract images invites comparisons with the clatter montage effect of *Borderline*, discussed in Chapter Two.

¹⁸ Lacan, for instance, delineates the relationship between (male) subject and desired object in terms of absence: 'what he is trying to see [...] is the object as absence. What the voyeur is looking for is the shadow behind the curtain [...] What he is looking for is not [...] the phallus - but precisely its absence' (1977, 182-3).

As a *shared* moment of feminine (visual) insight it also anticipates the ‘autoeroticism’ of Irigaray’s libidinal economy of the tactile, a ‘different economy’ which is predicated upon *proximity* (1985b [1977], 24; 29). In this textual representation of vision, H.D. questions those formulations of gender and sexuality partly derived from psychoanalysis: like Irigaray, she contests the notion that ‘female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters’ (1985b [1977], 23). Thus, *Tribute* encourages the reader to see Freud through a critical and ironic lens, which undercuts the eulogy inferred by the title. This moment of collaborative female viewing foregrounds the complexity of the interrelationships between the visual and the erotic in spheres both public and private. And, ultimately, it suggests a convergence between the *erotic* and the *sacred*, which is often denied in western culture. I return to these issues later in the chapter when I move on to discuss the representation of the tableaux vivants in *Majic Ring*.

In the final image projected onto the wall in *Tribute* H.D. sees the manifestation of a female figure, an angel - Niké or Victory - which she refers to as ‘my own especial sign or part of my hieroglyph’ (TF, 83). Niké advances up the ladder past a series of ‘half-S’ patterns ‘like question marks without the dot beneath them’ (TF, 81). She then moves towards a series of ‘tent-like triangles’ which remind H.D. of ‘past battles’ but which also anticipate ‘shelters to be set up in another future contest’ (TF, 83). At this point in the text, H.D. becomes exhausted through her concentration on the image and by the sudden realisation that ‘there would be another war’ (TF, 83). It is Bryher, alongside her, who brings the reading of the vision to its conclusion:

I shut off, ‘cut out’ before the final picture [...] Bryher, who has been waiting by me, carries on the ‘reading’ where I left off. Afterwards she told me that she had seen nothing on the wall there, until I dropped my head in my hands [...] as I relaxed, let go, from complete physical and mental exhaustion, she saw what I did not see. It was the last section of the series, or the last concluding symbol - perhaps that ‘determinative’ that is used in the actual hieroglyph, the picture that contains the whole series of pictures in itself or helps clarify or explain them. In any case, it is apparently a clear enough picture or symbol. She said it was a circle like the sun-disk and a figure within the disk; a man, she thought, was reaching out to draw the image of a woman (my Niké) into the sun beside him. (TF, 84)

The 'tent-like triangles' which symbolise the shelters of a battle suggest H.D.'s fear of war. As in *The Gift*, this image reveals her pacifist impulse and, by extension, the intimate connection between the spiritual and the political in her work.¹⁹ What interests me here, however, is the way in which H.D.'s portrayal of this vision levels a challenge at *sexual* politics. She reiterates Bryher's vital role in the projection and interpretation of her visions, admitting that 'without her [...] I could not have gone on' (TF, 72). Here, the *process* of seeing - whereby the two women stand alongside each other and collaborate in their interpretation of the vision - reinforces the dynamics of desire between H.D. and Bryher. Yet, simultaneously, this lesbian identification is undermined. For, standing alongside Nike, the male figure 'within the disk' - the symbol of Helios the sun god - represents the possibility of a *heterosexual* dynamic which intrudes upon the moment of shared intimacy between the two women. The Niké-Helios image further reveals H.D.'s contradictory engagement with Freud's theories of sexuality. On the one hand, given that Helios represents the introduction of a *masculine* presence into the vision, Freud's 'diagnosis' of H.D.'s 'writing on the wall' as maternal identification - a 'desire for union with [the] mother' (TF, 65) - is overturned. On the other, the image might *affirm* the heterosexual model of Freud's reading, in which the mother - as 'the literal bearer of children' - functions as the 'sign' of heterosexuality itself (Dyer 1997, 29).²⁰

This enigma of the Niké-Helios symbol assumes yet more significance when read in the light of *Majic Ring*. We discover in *Majic Ring* that one of the sails of the 'Borodino' is decorated with a 'sun-disk': inside the disk is a symbol, with 'two wings spread, not outside but in the sun' (MR, 62), corresponding to the image of the angel, Niké, in *Tribute To Freud*. Specifically, this sun disk image symbolises H.D.'s encounter with Rodeck, for she writes in *Majic Ring*: 'I met a man on the boat on the way to Greece. This man was never really seriously in my life and I have not seen him for many years. But there were strange repercussions - I had a curious psychic

¹⁹ In 1945 H.D. received a number of messages in seances from pilots who had been killed in the Battle of Britain 'warning her of the dangers [...] that would result - or so she interpreted their communications - from the atom bombs recently dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki' (Sword 1995b, 348). Further interesting connections could therefore be made between H.D.'s spiritualist activities and her impulse towards pacifism.

²⁰ Collecott argues that H.D. identified with the Greek goddess Athene Nike who 'combined the most active qualities of the old goddess and the young male gods who had partly superseded her' (1990

experience in Greece with the friend I was with after this man left us' (MR, 63). Thus, the Niké vision delineated in *Tribute* is connected with - or overlaid upon - Delia's encounter with van Eck in *Majic Ring*. H.D. never makes specific reference to van Eck in the narrative of *Tribute*. His presence constitutes, in Derridean terms, a 'trace', since he is absent from the text of *Tribute* whilst also being present within it (Derrida 1976 [1967]).²¹ For as H.D. acknowledges in her descriptions of the 'writing-on-the-wall': 'we were two gathered together, if not three. The third was invoked [...] I did not actually call him' (MR, 192).

Despite the suggestion of a lesbian erotic in this visionary moment of *Tribute To Freud*, there is always the shadowy suggestion of a male presence who remains *outside* the text. Thus, although *Tribute* could be said to establish an instance of looking which subverts the heterosexual male gaze, the vision itself is founded on the representation of H.D./Delia's desire for Rodeck/van Eck in *Majic Ring*, which continually *frames* the representation of 'writing-on-the-wall' visions. This palimpsestic method - in which one text is overlaid onto another - has resonances, of course, with the technical process of cinematic montage. Indeed, Collecott relates the narrative of *Tribute* to H.D.'s involvement in film editing, noting its 'dense layering of material from different moments in the writer's history' which involves the reader in 'a vertiginous process of "re-snapshotting"' (1990 [1986], 170). Extending further Collecott's analysis of this literary device, I argue that the narratives of both *Tribute* and *Majic Ring* need to be read in relation to each other - as *superimposed*. Such an intertextual reading not only foregrounds H.D.'s knowledge of cinematic devices, it yields important insights into her representation of desire. For it reveals how H.D.'s texts enact at a narrative level the possibility of bisexual desire which is fluid and plural. Significantly, as we shall see, this fluidity of desire is also a significant aspect of her representation of *visionary* experience. Deferring for the moment a more detailed discussion of bisexuality, I want to emphasise that H.D.'s shifting formulation of desire is *always* related to her construction of the visual. This operates

[1986], 161). The fact that this also 'harmonizes with [Macpherson's] visions of H.D. as an adorable androgyne' complicates the sexual dynamic of this Niké-Helios vision still further (*ibid.*).

²¹ In her Preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak interprets Derrida's use of 'trace' as 'the mark of anterior presence [...] the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present' (1976 [1967], xv-xvii).

as much through H.D.'s reappropriation of the technical devices of *cinema* as it does through her textual representation of the visionary moment.

The visionary experiences of *Tribute* and *Majic Ring*, then, suggest positions of desire which move continually into and outside of the dominant paradigm of heterosexuality. It is fruitful, at this point, to draw on the concept of 'insider-outsider activity', which has been deployed by critics such as Alice Gambrell and Teresa de Lauretis (Gambrell 1997; de Lauretis 1987).²² This 'insider-outsider' position permits a '*thinking within and against* dominant theoretical vocabularies within which questions of "difference" are [...] insufficiently problematized' (de Lauretis, cited in Gambrell 1997, 1; emphasis in original). This model is a useful one through which to read H.D.'s work. For, it is relevant, not only to H.D.'s complex engagement with alterity - which is evident in so much of her writing - but also to her position 'inside and outside the ideology of gender' and her 'conscious[ness] of that twofold pull, that doubled vision' (de Lauretis, cited in Gambrell 1997, 13). This notion of 'double vision' has resonances, of course, with H.D.'s literary texts - in particular with the 'doubled vision' of Her and Fayne in *Her* and H.D. and Bryher in *Tribute To Freud*. To read H.D.'s writing within this theoretical framework is to rethink her position within the paradigm of Modernism. For her oscillation between an *appropriation* of psychoanalytic discourse and a *refusal* of its rigid constructions of gender emphasises the 'philosophical faultlines within present-day remappings of the field of "modernism"' (Gambrell 1997, 5, 13).²³ And it offers an 'interstitial cultural space as a vantage point' from which to view the dominant ideology' (*ibid.*). The (postmodern) reader then, like H.D. herself, becomes a 'specular border intellectual', identifying convergences between the concerns of modernism and postmodernism and moving *between* its dual discourses (Gambrell 1997, 13). Viewing H.D.'s texts through the lens of postmodernism thus troubles the grand narrative of Modernism in which her writing has, historically, always been read. As I have argued elsewhere, this not only illuminates 'the contemporaneity of [her] thinking about gender difference', it

²² Gambrell's phrase 'insider-outsider activity' is adapted from the 'insider/outside debate' within the social sciences and is therefore apposite to a discussion of H.D.'s writing - and particularly *Tribute* - which engages with 'the hybridization of psychoanalysis, literature and anthropology' (1997, 35).

²³ This has resonances with Chisholm's assessment of H.D.'s 'heterodoxical modernism' which I discuss in my Introduction (1991, 62).

articulates ‘a resistance to a *singular* definition of the notions of “body” or “sexuality”’ (Connor 2000, 199; emphasis added).

Spiritualism: resisting the dominant ideology?

Spiritualism, according to Owen, has always been capable of ‘sabotaging the mechanics of power inherent in the [...] codification of gender difference’ (1989, 11). Before I move on to delineate H.D.’s formulations of gender and sexual difference in *Majic Ring* I first need to elaborate on the complexities involved in the practice of spiritualism. Placing H.D.’s spiritualist concerns in a historical context, I draw on Owen’s survey of the ‘golden age’ of spiritualism in England at the end of the nineteenth century. Owen argues that spiritualism was ‘a deeply contradictory discourse’, one which was informed by, and yet challenged, a set of dominant ideologies in relation to identity (1989, 233). Although Owen focuses primarily on the preoccupations of spiritualism fifty or sixty years before H.D. was involved with it, her study is relevant, nevertheless, to my discussion here. Not only does Owen’s research draw on configurations of gender which were predominant in the late Victorian context in which H.D. grew up, it amplifies paradoxes within those constructions which inform my own discussion of H.D.’s visionary experience in *Tribute* and *Majic Ring*.

Generally, the spiritualist movement has been associated with the feminine: indeed, in the nineteenth century, the majority of mediums were women. Thus, spiritualism ‘emerged contemporaneously with the consideration of women’s proper role and sphere which became known as “the woman question”’ (Owen 1989, 1). At a time when ‘respectable’, middle class women were rarely seen in the workplace, spiritualist practice ‘permitted women an active professional and spiritual role largely denied them elsewhere’ (Owen 1989, 6).²⁴ Paradoxically, however, seances often

²⁴ Clearly, it is also important to be aware of the complexities of the class issues bound up with notions of spiritualist practice and mediumship. Although Owen notes the firmly held belief that ‘any individual, male or female, rich or poor, could become the conduit for a dialogue with the spirits’, in practice it was largely a middle-class pursuit (1989, 5). In the unpublished typescript *White Rose and the Red* (1948), a fictional account of the interrelationships in the circle of William Morris, H.D. makes reference to the seance as ‘a new fashion or after-dinner pastime’ (WRR, 35).

took place in a domestic setting: this had the effect of *reinforcing* the ideal of moral and spiritual superiority conferred on women which 'was best exercised within the confines of the home' (Owen 1989, 7). Nonetheless, for the growing number of women who led or facilitated seances, spiritualism offered a temporary escape from the strictures of Victorian morality and the oppressive ideal of 'the angel in the house' (Owen 1989, 1).²⁵

Spiritualist practice both foregrounded 'troubled issues of female [...] authority' and challenged the systemic power of structures such as the Christian church and orthodox medicine (Owen 1989, 1). Spiritualism's belief in natural healing, for example, resulted in a rejection of 'the autocratic interference of a medical profession' which 'understood nothing of the ways of the spirit and sought only to impose control over the powerless body' (Owen 1989, 108).²⁶ Responding to the threat which spiritualism posed to its underlying principles, the (largely male) medical profession tended to pathologise spiritualist practitioners. The trance-like behaviour often displayed by the medium during the seance was therefore often diagnosed as 'hysterical or cataleptical ecstasy' (Owen 1989, 147). Owen gives an example of the account of one doctor who asserted that 'the community of [spiritualist] believers contains a large proportion of weak-minded hysterical women, in whom the seeds of mental disorder [...] are only waiting for a new excitement to ripen into maturity' (1989, 139; 147). Since hysteria was regarded as 'a condition which had unsavoury sexual and expressive connotations', female spiritualists were, in one sense, repressed by the powerful patriarchal system of the medical profession, even whilst their activities appeared to represent a subversive challenge to it (Owen 1989, 139).

Let me draw some comparisons between the contradictions within the spiritualist movement and the representation of spiritualism in H.D.'s fictional texts.

²⁵ The phrase originates from Coventry Patmore's poem 'The Angel in the House' which 'has come to typify the Victorian ideal of womanhood' (Owen, 1989, 7, fn 12).

²⁶ Owen notes that 'natural healing and the healing gift were vital aspects of spiritualist life, ethics and culture' (1989, 107). Spiritualists employed such methods as herbalism, homeopathy, hydropathy, mesmerism and the laying on of hands. They had a firmly-held belief in the close connection between the 'immortal spirit' and the 'healthful mortal body' and the fact that 'body and spirit worked in unison and must be properly addressed if true cure was to take place' (Owen 1989, 108). Significantly, this also relates to my discussion of the challenge which H.D. levels at the mind-body dualism within western culture - which I discuss at the end of the chapter - which is thrown into relief in her representation of spiritualism.

The categorisation of female mediums as hysterics also suggests a link with psychoanalysis, since, along with Jean Charcot, Freud worked with patients diagnosed as hysterics in the 1880s. As I have already pointed out, in *Tribute* H.D. refuses the role of the patient in her psychoanalytic sessions with Freud: by extension, she also refuses his tendency to locate femininity as 'other' and to pathologise sexual desire which 'deviates' from the heterosexual norm. Significantly, Freud's hysterical patients were often photographed in the psychiatric clinics in which they were institutionalised. This prompts Elisabeth Bronfen to argue that although 'in aesthetic discourse it may primarily be the feminine body which functions as the signifier for the masculine gaze [...] in medical discourses it is the body of the insane or diseased which comes to represent the physician's gaze' (2000, 118). If, like Bronfen, we read Freud's work on hysteria as an attempt to 'capture the body in an image' and to 'arrest [...] its contingent and mutable meaning in a disciplinary schema', then H.D.'s understanding of the power of the scopic can be linked to her attempt to challenge the phallogocentric institution of psychoanalysis (2000, 117).

Psychoanalysis, of course, constructs gender as a binary system, privileging heterosexuality as a normative model of desire. For H.D., as a bisexual, Freud's theoretical model would have been both limiting and repressive.²⁷ In one sense, the discourse of spiritualism endorsed such binary

thinking with regard to gender and sexual difference. For, in the context of the seance, 'mediums surrendered and were then entered, seized, possessed by another' so that spiritualism appeared, in many ways, to reaffirm dominant gender roles and re-enact 'prescriptive notions' of female (hetero)sexuality (Owen 1989, 218). This contradicted the fact that the medium's extraordinary visionary abilities endowed her not just with a special status, but with *power*. Beneath the apparently conventional construction of gender, spiritualism also embodied 'shifting attitudes to women and the uneasy negotiation of [...] gender norms' (Owen 1989, 1). The seance itself could therefore be read as a site of *contestation* of dominant notions of identity, gender and

²⁷ A letter which H.D. wrote to Bryher during the course of her analysis with Freud exemplifies her disagreement with his theories: 'What got me was his [Freud] saying that the homo woman is simply frank and truthful but that the whole of domestic woman hood is exactly the same, but has built up its cult on deception. Well he did not say deception. He just flung out the idea. I screamed at him "but the supreme compliment to woman would be to trust woman with this great secret"' (L, 1933).

desire. The successful seance depended upon the medium's possession by a spirit - which could be 'feminine or masculine, mother or son, father or daughter' - and which was invested by the sitters' 'fantasy' or 'elusive reality' (Owen 1989, 222). By definition, such desire was 'unmeasurable and unobtainable: the tantalising Other of the unconscious' (*ibid.*). It also meant that positions of desire between medium and sitters were *interchangeable*. Thus, the seance initiated a 'complex interchange of desire' which 'bore witness not to the emergence of particular sexual drives or needs as in a binary model of sexual difference, but rather to the disclosure of the polymorphous nature of desire' (*ibid.*). In this sense, H.D.'s interest in spiritualism gave her a means to *resist* the dominant norms of gender and sexuality which were propounded by psychoanalysis. To answer the question as to how this represents a position of *political* subversion to gender norms - and to unpack H.D.'s contradictory relationship with these - I now turn to a discussion of *Majic Ring*.

H.D., spiritualism and the scopic

Although, spiritualist mediums tended, historically, to be female, the medium in *Majic Ring*, Ben Manisi, is male. This raises interesting issues relating to gender and power in H.D.'s portrayal of spiritualism. Whereas, in the seance led by a female medium there is a possibility of *subverting* patriarchal power, in *Majic Ring* Delia falls under the thrall of Manisi's masculine power. Significantly, Delia's identification with Manisi is conveyed through the trope of the mirror:

We are like a mirror and a candle or lamp. My mind detached yet with a certain passionate devotion to the vision acts as the mirror and he 'sees' the vision and the pictures, but he would not 'see' exactly these scenes alone, I am sure, would he progress in this particular path of vision with anyone else. (MR, 271)

There are contradictions, here, in the way H.D. delineates Delia's fascination for Manisi. In one sense, since Delia perceives her ability to 'see' the vision as crucial to

Manisi's mediumship, this description is reminiscent of the intimacy H.D. shares with Bryher in *The Gift* and *Tribute To Freud*. As I suggest in my reading of *Her* in Chapter Two, the trope of the mirror in H.D.'s writing is usually suggestive of an identification between women. Here, however, is a moment of *heterosexual* identification, expressed in imagery and terminology which, elsewhere in H.D.'s writing, usually encodes lesbian desire. But there are further paradoxes here. Given that the identification between Delia and Manisi functions 'like a mirror and a lamp', desire is delineated as psychic, rather than physical. For Delia's 'passionate devotion' - like the lesbian identification between Her and Fayne in the novel *Her* - is *disembodied* and directed at the *vision itself*, rather than at Manisi's body. Thus, in this moment - which in the context of the seance would permit erotic desire - the erotic is subsumed by the sacred, and the existence of the physical is suppressed. This binary between the corporeal and the spiritual, or mental, is inherent both in spiritualist practice and post-Enlightenment western culture. And, as we shall see later, it is a binary which *Majic Ring* seeks to challenge.

H.D.'s portrayal of Delia's identification with Manisi reveals how, once again, she privileges the visual in her portrayal of spiritual experience. This is also evident in the descriptions of Delia's meeting with van Eck. At the moment when she is standing on the deck of the 'Borodino' and 'sees' van Eck, Delia appears both to scrutinise and be scrutinised:

As I stared, I felt that Mr van Eck had turned, his arm lay along the deck rail, he was looking not so much at me as through me. I felt that he was looking through me, but the X-Ray of his regard was the same timbre, or tone of the opaque-blue water, of the shadow, or rather the darker tone or blue, this side of the ship [...] I forgot Mr van Eck and I did not, after all, turn and meet his eyes, for his eyes it seemed now, were my eyes. I was seeing his vision, what he (though I did not of course realize it) was himself projecting. (MR, 167)

Significantly, here, H.D. uses the scientific metaphor of the 'X-Ray' to convey the look which van Eck directs at her. Although elsewhere in her writing she is ambivalent to the medical profession - evident in her contradictory relationship with

Freud - here she depends on its vocabulary in order to convey its power.²⁸ However, although van Eck's 'X-Ray regard' of Delia appears to be one of scrutiny, its power is undermined, both by the comparison of his gaze to the 'tone of the opaque-blue water' of the sea around the ship and through the suggestion that Delia was seeing his vision - 'what he [...] was himself projecting'. If, again, we read this in the light of the collaborative 'seeing' of *Tribute To Freud* and *The Gift*, the power of the heterosexual male gaze in this moment of visionary experience is undercut still further.

This equivocal relationship with the visual is extended to Delia's description of a glass ball which 'actually had come to me [...] addressed, as far as I could identify it, in the writing of Peter van Eck' (MR, 130). Delia uses the glass ball as a means of 'replaying' the 'writing-on-the-wall' vision, which in *Majic Ring* she refers to as her 'Greek scene':

For years I used my little glass ball as a focus or centre for concentration and had great comfort at one time, in projecting or calling up the Greek scene in that small lense [sic]. The scene changed and yet it never changed. If I had been a painter I could have drawn those pictures: they were perfectly projected, they differed but were always of the same consistent beauty. There were crystal-pictures, whether or not my little ball is glass or precious rock-crystal does not matter. (MR, 130)

Here, through the character of Delia, H.D. invests herself with the power of mediumship, drawing on the image of the crystal ball which was a common prop for fortune tellers and occultists. Significantly, Delia's possession of the glass ball allows her to project these 'crystal pictures' from the past in a process similar to that of film, suggesting analogies, as in *The Gift*, between spiritual visions and the spectatorship of film. Thus, whilst the initial projection of H.D.'s 'writing-on-the-wall' vision depends on Bryher, it is Rodeck's gift of the crystal ball to H.D. which facilitates her reconstruction or memory of those 'perfect projections'. Again, like the Niké vision discussed above, whilst *Tribute* permits a moment of female identification in the joint vision of H.D. and Bryher, a reading of *Majic Ring* reveals that Rodeck's influence is crucial to the retrospective *representation* of that vision.

²⁸ Like the tension between science and art in *Her*, this suggests that although H.D. consistently refused scientific thinking, she also employed it as metaphor. This is exemplified, for instance, in *Her's*

Let us take stock of my argument so far. I have argued that the psychic visions described in *Tribute To Freud* are also dependent on the portrayal of van Eck in *Majic Ring*, for as Delia states: 'I had a curious psychic experience in Greece with the friend I was with after this man left us' (MR, 63). I have also suggested that a reading of the two texts as superimposed onto each other, reveals H.D.'s knowledge of film editing. Such an intertextual reading also foregrounds H.D.'s construction of desire. For, reading the narratives of *Tribute* and *Majic Ring* in relation to each other foregrounds the possibility of *multiple* identifications which resist the notion both of a 'unified fixed, single self' and a limited binary position in which the subject must choose *between* heterosexual or homosexual desire. If we accept Stott's definition of bisexuality as 'an acknowledgement of plurality and flux', then reading *Tribute* and *Majic Ring* in relation to each other also foregrounds the *bisexual* dynamic in H.D.'s representation of visionary experience (1997, 33). Since these representations of desire exist simultaneously and in relation to each other, H.D.'s palimpsestic construction of her 'spiritualist' narratives challenges binaries by continually alluding to the presence of a third. Such an analysis of H.D.'s bisexuality is a departure from the school of criticism which analyses it in the light of biographical fact rather than depending on its *representation* within the texts themselves.

I have touched on the issue of bisexual desire at several points of this thesis and suggested that it is encoded in H.D.'s writing from the very beginning of her career. What interests me here is how H.D.'s spiritualist concerns allow the possibility to explore the construction of her 'polymorphous' positions of desire. As suggested in my discussion of *The Gift* and *Tribute*, H.D. often genders her revelatory visions as feminine, since they connect her to her matrilineal Moravian heritage and reinforce her identification with Bryher. At the same time, her spiritualist activities fostered H.D.'s intense identifications with men - such as Rodeck, Dowding and Bhaduri, for example - relationships which were also inscribed into her 'spiritualist' texts.²⁹ Thus, H.D.'s textual practice, as well as the representation of sexuality within her texts, deploys *multiplicity* as a means of subverting hegemonic ideology. My

description of Fayne as 'some amplification like myself like amoeba giving birth' (H, 158).

²⁹ For an account of H.D.'s 'romantic thralldom' with a number of men through the course of her lifetime and how these are inscribed into her texts, see DuPlessis (1990a [1979]).

discussion of H.D.'s spiritualist concerns in these texts opens up new ground for scholarship on her work, since it also considers the *political* dimensions of her representation of spiritual experience. It also reveals how, by reading H.D.'s work in the light of postmodern preoccupations with process, fluidity and flux, the complex notions of power bound up in dominant configurations of gender and sexuality are, deliberately and consistently, unsettled.

H.D., spiritualism and the performative

I have argued that the visionary 'seeing' of H.D.'s texts, like the spiritualist seance, constitutes a challenge to normative gender roles. I want to turn my attention now to the 'materialisation' seance which permitted what Owen describes as 'the *ritualised* violation of cultural norms' (1989, 203; emphasis added). This notion of ritual is an important one in the staging of 'manifestation' seances, which were often 'daringly theatrical displays of psychic powers' (Owen 1989, 1). On such occasions, the medium would emerge from behind a cabinet - sometimes dressed in the clothes of the opposite sex - to enter into the full view of the sitters.³⁰ The tableaux vivants of *Majic Ring* evoke a similar sense of theatricality through Delia's 'acting out' of her spirit manifestations. Whilst her performance can be read within the historical framework of female mediumship which I have already outlined, it can also be read in the light of recent feminist thinking.³¹ For these current theoretical debates, like *Majic Ring*, seek to theorise the constructed nature of identity and locate *performance* as a means of subverting dominant gender norms.

Like the 'writing-on-the-wall' visions of *Tribute*, the dance scenes of *Majic Ring* are first related in terms of the visual: Delia sees herself, and sees Gareth watching her, through 'the wide-rimmed mirror that hung at a slight tilt' in their hotel

³⁰ Owen notes that 'the terms of the materialisation seance were understood clearly by all [...] The beginning of the seance was signalled by the seclusion of the medium behind the curtain of the cabinet, the hand-holding, prayers, singing of the sitters seated without, and the lowering of the lights. This scene-setting provided a framework for the transition into a transformative space and directly paralleled a theatrical presentation' (1989, 221).

³¹ Here I am thinking especially of Butler's notion of performativity (1990, 1993).

room (MR, 182). This view inspires Delia to begin her performance of the dance scenes:

As I turned I saw Gareth in the mirror sitting on the edge of the rather grim bedstead and I thought "But I must make her laugh". I did not make her laugh but I saw myself in the mirror at a slight slant, as if I were tilting forward. (MR, 182)

Like the narrative of *Her*, the mirror is slightly distorted - in this case 'tilted' - which suggests a deflection of the gaze through which heterosexual desire is constructed. As we have seen, H.D.'s use of the trope of the mirror usually emphasises a *psychic* rather than a physical connection. Yet in *Majic Ring* the physical intimacy between the two women is expressed more overtly, through Gareth's request to Delia to delay dressing and to put on the 'soft shantung slip' which makes her look 'like a Greek thing' (MR, 185). Dressed only in her underslip, Delia then begins to perform the tableaux vivants which she conjures up for Gareth's pleasure:

As I stepped forward, I said "Greek" and took up a mock heroic pose as of a Persephone with a basket, on a black and red pottery Greek amphora. "Or this" I said and struck an attitude as if of a huntsman attacking a wild boar. I meant to be funny with my tableaux vivants but Gareth did not laugh. She said, straightening her shoulders and sitting upright on the iron bed "it's beautiful" [...] I was the actors, the whole of the *dramatis personae*, Gareth was the audience. (MR, 188-90)

A number of key points which follow from this passage. Firstly, this scene suggests a 'private mediumship', enacted in the darkened room of the Corfu hotel shared by Delia and Gareth. As an act of *spectatorship* which is private - occurring behind the closed door of the hotel bedroom - it has parallels with the tensions between public and private viewing outlined in my discussion of *The Gift*. As a private moment of intimacy - whereby Gareth watches the semi-clad Delia perform her dance scenes - it also throws into relief the issues of power which are bound up in the scopic and the tensions between the notion of (active) performance and (passive) looking. For whilst Delia is passive and fixed by Gareth's desiring gaze, she nonetheless troubles that passivity through her performance, as 'the whole of the *dramatis personae*' in her tableaux vivants.

As I have noted, the materialisation seance was itself a *spectacle* in which the emergence of the (usually female) medium from behind a curtain signals her entry into the 'dominant scopic economy' (Irigaray, cited in Owen 1989, 227). Doane acknowledges that the visual has always been associated with the 'knowable' in which the ability to 'see' also permits access to knowing (1991, 46). However, the fact that the psychic vision takes place in the dimension of the 'unknown' - through the manifestation of the mysterious or the invisible - suggests a paradoxical 'disparity between seeming and being' (Doane 1991, 46). Whilst the representation of the tableaux appears in one sense to reinforce the dominance of the scopic, H.D. is equally aware of the contradictory relationship between seeing and epistemology. For, as Delia states, 'the peculiarity of the "seeing" here is that I am at the same time "being" the picture too' (MR, 250). Thus, as an instance of spiritual reverie or 'extreme ecstasy' Delia's performance questions the very notion of representation itself, since 'the cultured subject is thrown back onto the real materiality of its corporeal existence' (Bronfen 2000, 110).

Yet Delia's experience is not delineated solely in terms of the visual. *Majic Ring*, as Sword notes, 'is full of [...] instrumental metaphors' in which Delia is also described as a 'wireless set' (1995b, 357). Delia maintains, for instance, that in the course of the seance, she and Gareth

have been a sort of receiving station, I, the positive receiving agent that gave off the sounds as a gramophone [sic] record repeats songs and words from operas and plays. But I am not the whole machine. Gareth's intense psychic quality is concealed, she is like the inner springs and wheels, or the careful wrapping around live-wire'. (MR, 244)

There is a sense, here, of the symbiosis involved in the visionary experience of the two women which is by now familiar to the reader. What differs in this extract is that the experience is delineated in terms of *sound* rather than vision, an issue discussed further in the next chapter. Whilst focusing on sound and the voice could be read as a *rejection* of the scopic, there are potential problems in claiming sound as a means of feminist opposition to the scopic economy, as I suggest in the next chapter. Certainly

in *Majic Ring*, as Sword recognises, the use of 'mechanical and technological metaphors to explain the workings of divine inspiration' has the result of domesticating visionary experience (1995b, 358). This not only 'render[s] a mysterious unknown force familiar and comprehensible', it could also be seen to defuse any political subversion which might be contained in H.D.'s temporary shift of emphasis away from vision and towards the portrayal of sound (Sword 1995b, 358).³²

Sword suggests that H.D.'s use of the curious wireless image ultimately results in disembodiment and a *denial* of corporeality:

Despite H.D.'s emphasis on the partnership aspect of visionary apprehension, her image of the poet as a receiving station eventually allows her in *Majic Ring* to combine notions of passive receptivity (associated with her mother's Moravianism) and of active scientific ordering (associated with her astronomer father) in a single, hermaphroditic image describing the vatic energies of Freud's 'perfect bi'. (1995b, 358)

Certainly, H.D.'s use of such an image could be read as a retraction from the potential subversion offered by lesbian desire which, even in the 1940s when *Majic Ring* was written, would have been regarded as taboo. Yet, *Majic Ring*, like the seance itself, reveals a theatricality which makes possible 'the *staging* of desire' (Owen 1989, 222; emphasis added). The dance scenes of *Majic Ring* are rendered even more complex by both women's assumption of masculine identities. H.D.'s choice of the name Gareth for Bryher conforms to Bryher's view of herself as a boy 'escaped into the wrong body' (L, 1919). Delia's assumption of several *masculine* guises - the huntsman; the medicine man; the Tibetan priest - compounds the complexities of the lesbian erotic between the two women still further.³³ Thus, *Majic Ring*, like the materialisation seance, constitutes 'a deep-seated challenge to systems of inscription and dominance' (Owen 1989, 234). Delia's performance, like the seance, momentarily denies the fixed nature of binary gender construction. For it is 'a tableau

³² Sound was also an important element of the seance, in which the sitters would often sing in order to evoke the spirits. In *Majic Ring* Minnie ha-ha is also described through her use of voice: 'She was not saying anything, she was not singing so much as simply breathing. But the breath of her spirit-body formed a pattern in the air which it is true I translated into rhythm. I did not hum nor sing but the voice of a bird or the voice rather of a mountain river ran through my throat' (MR, 224).

³³ Similarly, Owen suggests that the seance encouraged 'cross-gendered behaviour par excellence' since female mediums frequently adopted 'masculine' characteristics and male identities (1989, 217).

of displaced desire' which is enacted for the pleasure of the female other, thus unsettling the dominance of heterosexual desire (Owen 1989, 234). If we also accept John Berger's claim that 'in aesthetic practice since the Renaissance men act while women use their bodies to appear', then H.D. appears to be not only troubling the power of the scopic, but blurring the boundaries of gender construction itself (cited in Bronfen 2000, 117).³⁴

The 'disembodiment' which Sword detects in *Majic Ring* is, in one sense, a result of H.D.'s engagement with spiritualist discourse itself. For, since this scene delineates the manifestation of the spiritual or sacred, its effectiveness also *depends* on a denial of the corporeal and of the erotic. This dichotomy between body and mind or spirit is one of the central paradoxes at the heart of spiritualist practice:

At one level what happened in a materialisation séance was, quite literally, a fleshing out of metaphorical representations of death. And yet, paradoxically, this fleshing out could occur only via a denial of carnality and bodily integrity. Spiritualist materialisation, the evocation of the physical manifestation of a spirit, re-enacted corporeality - and with it the erotic - in the very place (spirit) where both must be denied. (Owen 1989, 223)

In *Majic Ring*, H.D. reveals her understanding, to borrow the terminology of Elizabeth Grosz, that 'bodies and pleasures' are 'the sites for possible resistance to the particular form power takes' (1994, 155). Since Delia's body itself becomes a political site for contesting the norms of gender and heterosexual desire, *Majic Ring* also has resonances with Butler's work, in its awareness that the 'materiality of the body' carries with it 'a certain effect of power' (1993, 34). Delia's enactment of the spirit visions is an instance of what Grosz refers to as 'an embodied subjectivity or a psychical corporeality' (1994, 22). Thus, H.D., like poststructuralist thinkers such as Foucault, Butler and Grosz, levels a challenge at the dichotomy between body and mind which has been firmly embedded in western culture since the Enlightenment.

³⁴ The text not only also underscores the notion of the constructed nature of gender, it actually *enacts* what Kristeva terms the subject in process (1984 [1974]). Delia's assumption of *a number* of roles or identities - exemplified by her phrase, 'I was the actors, the whole of the dramatis personae, Gareth was the audience' - also has resonances with Butler's definition of gendered identity as 'corporeal style' (1990, 139).

H.D.'s involvement with the spiritualist tradition, as Augustine points out, 'suggests an interesting direction for intertextual studies of her wartime oeuvre' (1998. 17). Following Augustine's lead, my discussion of *Tribute To Freud* and *Majic Ring* allows for an exploration of some of the intertextual connections which have so far been left untouched by critical scholarship on H.D.'s work. My own analysis of the connections between H.D.'s wartime narratives unlocks further significance in the reading of these texts. For, in considering them as palimpsests, whereby one is overlaid on the other, I demonstrate how H.D.'s textual method employs the cinematic processes of 'superimposition' and film editing, even after her direct involvement with film had come to an end. Furthermore, my discussion reveals how the plural and shifting positions of desire and constructions of gender in her texts can only be fully understood by reading *Tribute To Freud* and *Majic Ring* in relation to each other.

H.D.'s portrayal of 'performance' in *Majic Ring* works to unsettle the dominance of the scopic and the rigid constructions of gender theorised by thinkers such as Freud. Furthermore, this performance has resonances with issues of gender and representation prominent in contemporary thinking. This suggests that H.D.'s work, in many ways, anticipates current strands of theoretical debate. Yet, whilst H.D. seeks to unsettle traditional models of sexuality and desire, an analysis of her 'spiritualist texts' reveals how - at times - she reverts to dominant modes of thinking. This calls into question the extent to which her narrative strategies can be considered subversive. Placing H.D.'s spiritualist involvement within the historical context of the spiritualist movement as a whole reveals her further challenge to normative configurations of gender. Ultimately, H.D.'s representations of spiritual experience in *Tribute To Freud* and *Majic Ring* challenge the mind-body binary assumed within western philosophy and culture. They also enact a fluidity of positions of desire which imply that the subject, like the revelatory visions in *Tribute* and *Majic Ring* - and like the moving image in the cinema - is always *in process*.

Chapter Five

‘There is a voice within me’: *Helen in Egypt*¹

Introduction

Reading *Helen in Egypt* - with its anamorphic shifts and imagistic fading - is a specular experience.² Indeed, Edmunds draws analogies between *Helen* and POOL's film *Borderline*, noting that ‘in their tenuous and ambiguous relationship to material bodies [...] the poem's cast evokes the cinema’ (1994, 100). In this chapter I consider H.D.'s construction of the ‘material body’ of Helen in *Helen in Egypt*. I examine the interconnections between H.D.'s literary deployment of the visual and her representation of female subjectivity, engaging both with the preoccupations of recent feminist film theory and with H.D.'s writings about *early* cinema. For, as I demonstrate, H.D.'s perceptions of the celebrated screen actress Greta Garbo, as well as her own performance as Astrid in the film *Borderline*, inform her portrayal of Helen in *Helen in Egypt*, which was written over twenty years after her direct involvement with film.

In the course of this chapter, I also explore H.D.'s representation of the female voice. Given that my thesis is concerned predominantly with vision, this shift of emphasis may seem at odds with the trajectory of my argument. Yet it is possible to locate the voice as a site of strategic *resistance* to the dominance of the visual. For, as Kaja Silverman suggests, a woman who is ‘heard without being seen’ positions herself ‘beyond the control of the male gaze’ and therefore has the potential to ‘disrupt the specular regime’ (1990, 313). Whilst this notion of resistance informs the work of such writers as Irigaray and Cixous, the validity of a politics grounded in the voice is one which has been contested within feminist scholarship. Placing *Helen in Egypt* within the context of these debates provides a framework through which to explore the contradictory nature of H.D.'s evocation of the female voice. Such contradictions

¹ The quotation in the title comes from *Helen in Egypt* (HE,175). All references to the poem refer to the New Directions edition (1985a) and appear in the body of the text abbreviated to HE. Following the format of the printed text extracts from the prose sections of the text are italicised.

are further illuminated by H.D.'s objections to the addition of synchronised speech in film and by her reaction to the tape of her reading of *Helen in Egypt* which was recorded in Switzerland in 1955. For, as we shall see, despite H.D.'s fervent opposition to voice in the sound-track of film, the recording of *Helen in Egypt* gave her a liberating sense of the power of her own voice.

The difficulties of analysing *Helen in Egypt* have been noted by several critics.³ Whilst any interpretation of a text is a subjective experience, this is particularly true of reading *Helen in Egypt*. For, as Edmunds notes, 'even a matter as simple as establishing the plot is rendered complex by the confusion H.D. creates around the ordinarily stable narrative elements of character, setting and event' (1994, 100). Certainly, the poem's complex time scheme and its continual shifts of location - from Zeus's 'Amen temple' in Egypt (HE, 1) to Leuké, 'l'isle blanche' (HE, 109) - make it impossible to locate the narrative within a fixed spatial and temporal framework. Since my discussion of the poem dwells largely on the plurality and play of identities in H.D.'s construction of female subjectivity, an attempt to summarise the text as a whole would constitute a reductive departure from the spirit of her project.⁴ Seeking instead to expose the seams of textual construction which reveal H.D.'s feminist critique, I keep any summary of the poem's 'plot' to a minimum. In so doing, I foreground the refusal of narrative closure in the poem. This strategy parallels the concerns of H.D.'s own project: to challenge the linear notion of quest at the very heart of the classical, epic text.

Helen in Egypt: mythology and history

It is useful to begin by contextualising *Helen in Egypt* within the classical tradition from which it emerges. For H.D., the poem's composition marked the

² *Helen in Egypt* was composed between 1952 and 1955 and was the final piece of H.D.'s work to be published before her death in 1961.

³ Edmunds discusses the difficulties of writing about and analysing *Helen in Egypt* (1994, 100-2). Alicia Ostriker also states: 'To analyze *Helen in Egypt* in a strand-by-strand fashion is to unweave, to pull threads from a fabric. Helen's quest invites a strenuous mental effort of meditation, intense reflection, associative leaping; but it resists the logocentric intellect' (1987, 227).

⁴ See Edmunds for a lucid interpretation of the poem's 'plot' (1994, 102-4).

culmination of a preoccupation with mythology throughout her career.⁵ As a reformulation of the myth of Helen of Troy, her poem is one of a series of revisions which includes Euripides' play, *Helen*, and Stesichorus' *Pallinode* (c.640-555 BC).⁶ In Stesichorus' poem, Helen is relocated from Greece to Egypt. Although this move could be seen to exonerate Helen from blame for the Trojan war, it merely reinscribes her as sexual commodity, since she 'remain[s] faithful to Menelaus throughout the Trojan War, stowed away in Egypt under the protection of its virtuous King Proteus' (Hirsch 1986, 6).⁷ In *Helen in Egypt*, the 'true' Helen is also 'transposed or translated from Greece to Egypt' (HE, 1), whilst the Helen 'left behind' on the ramparts at Troy is actually a 'phantom' or 'the shadow thrown/ of a reflection' (HE, 5). But H.D. does not simply duplicate Stesichorus's variant. Rather, her poem seeks to unsettle mythological discourse itself by revealing the *processes* through which Homer's tale constructs Helen as an image or icon of western femininity. Moreover, by re-enacting the 'division of the female image' in Stesichorus' *Pallinode*, *Helen in Egypt* functions as a *satire* of Stesichorus' mythical revision (Hirsch 1986, 6; emphasis in original). In this sense, *Helen in Egypt* challenges both male narratives, attempting to transform 'the androcentric cultural tradition which has shaped and often thwarted [women's] experience' (Friedman 1977, 164).⁸

H.D.'s 'antiepic' position is also evident in the narrative organisation of *Helen in Egypt* (Gregory 1997, 218). Helen's 'linear journey through space and time' is rendered complex by her 'inner journey into the layers of dreams and memory, and the out-of-time dimension of "enchantment"' which constitutes the search for her own subjectivity (Friedman 1977, 168). The prose headnotes, added in 1955 after the completion of the verse sections, complicate the poem's structure still further.

⁵ H.D.'s interest in the Helen of Troy myth evolved gradually through her career. In 1923 she wrote the short lyric poem, 'Helen' which explored the position of the woman whom 'all Greece hates' (CP, 154-5). I illustrate how she also drew on the Helen myth in her film writings later in the chapter.

⁶ Although the myth of Helen of Troy is well-known, it is worth briefly outlining it here. In Book 3 of Homer's *The Iliad*, Paris, Helen's lover challenges Menelaus, Helen's husband, for possession of Helen. Helen comes to the walls at Troy to watch the battle between the Trojans and the Achaians. In Homer's version, she is 'deeply conscious of her guilt' and also 'conscious of herself as manipulated by forces she cannot control'. See Martin Hammond's Introduction to *The Iliad* (1987, xxiv).

⁷ In Homer's version of the myth, of course, Helen's infidelity with Paris precipitates the Trojan war. H.D. explicitly refers to Stesichorus's text in the opening of *Helen in Egypt*.

⁸ Gregory argues that 'critics [...] have persistently read [*Helen in Egypt*] in terms of the epic genre, because of its apparent revision of Homer' (1997, 218). She suggests that H.D.'s engagement with the classical tradition is much more detailed than this and argues that Euripides' tragedy was H.D.'s main source for writing *Helen* (1997, 221-2).

Although they appear to function as a hermeneutic frame through which to understand the verse, their significance is debated in critical accounts of the poem. Buck asserts that they unite the voices of H.D. and Helen and differentiate them from the male narratives contained in the verse (1991b, 133). Alicia Ostriker, on the other hand, interprets the ‘flickering alternation between prose and verse in *Helen in Egypt*’ as the representation of ‘a *single* mind having an urgent dialogue with itself’, thus reflecting Helen’s confusion as she moves ‘toward feminine self-identification’ (1987, 227-8; emphasis added). I situate my own reading of *Helen in Egypt* in the gaps left within this scholarly debate. Rather than conflating the voices of author and fictional character, as Buck does, I argue that the constant movement between prose and verse *contests* the notion of authorial voice - an issue to which I return later in the chapter. In this sense, rather than being a dialogue *within* Helen’s own mind, as Ostriker suggests, *Helen in Egypt* reveals H.D.’s conscious attempt to trouble both a single, dominant authorial voice within the poem and, by extension, the ownership of mythological discourse itself. And, whilst I concur with Friedman’s reading of *Helen* as a ‘rediscovery and creation of a women’s mythology’ as a way of unsettling the mythological quest narrative, my own reading of the poem demonstrates how Friedman overlooks the *complexities* of H.D.’s engagement with myth (1977, 165). For H.D. also works *within* the discursive framework of mythological narrative, thus endorsing its literary and cultural privilege.⁹ Ultimately, then, whilst H.D.’s ‘antiepic’ text questions masculinist dominant ideology, her attempt to subvert this ideology is fraught with contradictions.¹⁰

One such contradiction in the poem is the tension between H.D.’s appropriation of the historical material of myth and her apparent effacement of the ‘real’ historical moment in which *Helen in Egypt* was written. Surprisingly, few

⁹ Of course, this could be perceived as a further example of the ‘insider-outsider activity’ discussed in the last chapter (Gambrell 1997, 13).

¹⁰ The epic form was also adopted by several of H.D.’s male contemporaries. *Helen in Egypt* can therefore equally be regarded as a challenge to the dominant literary ideologies of Modernism. Hirsch claims that *Helen in Egypt* was written ‘partly as a rejoinder to Pound’s *Cantos*’ in which the heroine is strategically constructed as ‘nothing more nor less than a textual effect’ (1986, 6). L.M. Friebert, on the other hand, comments that although *Helen in Egypt* adheres to some of the conventions of epic, it also has parallels with other modernist texts such as T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Pound’s *Cantos* and Williams Carlos Williams’ *Paterson* which constitute a twentieth-century departure from the genre pattern. Friebert also suggests the poem’s break with generic tradition by placing it in the context of the ‘objectivist style espoused by so many former Imagists’ (1980, 167).

critics have drawn attention to this disparity.¹¹ It is not the aim of this chapter to embark on a detailed discussion of the colonial relationship between Egypt and imperial Britain in the years following the Second World War. However, it is important to sketch the historical events which frame the poem's composition. In January of 1952 - the year in which H.D. began writing *Helen in Egypt* - the Egyptian refusal to co-operate with a British plan to occupy Cairo resulted in a mob uprising and the burning of the capital city. In 1953 Egypt was declared a republic. In 1955 - just months before H.D. began working on the prose captions of *Helen* - the British troops were eventually evacuated from Egypt. Yet, despite the poem's production within this turbulent political climate, H.D. concentrates on a representation of a *mythical* Egypt of the past. Thus, her nostalgic portrayal of 'an Egypt laid bare by excavators' is not only a product of her fascination with Egyptian culture - a notion which I touch on throughout my thesis - it appears to erase a vital moment in the history of African decolonisation (Edmunds 1994, 97).¹²

H.D.'s textual engagement with 'postwar Egyptian nationalism' is a complex one, but it is not the sole focus of my project here.¹³ The significance to my argument of the poem's historical elisions will become clear throughout the course of the chapter. I am interested in the ways in which *Helen in Egypt* is a site for the *convergence* of H.D.'s contradictory relationships to dominant ideology. There are several paradoxes at work in the poem. In one sense, although H.D.'s practice of 'revisionist mythmaking' exposes the power imbalance in cultural configurations of *sexual* difference, it nevertheless reinforces the hegemony created by discourses of race, colonialism and imperialism. And whilst Helen's quest for a voice *within* H.D.'s text appears to unsettle the privilege afforded both the visual and mythological discourse, it is at odds with the 'silencing' *by* the text of the Egyptian resistance to British colonialism. These paradoxes, as we shall see, underscore H.D.'s complex relationship, not just to the classical literary tradition, but to the dominance of

¹¹ Edmunds (1994) gives a more detailed discussion of the historical and political background to both *Helen in Egypt* and *Hermetic Definition*.

¹² In touching on these issues of colonialism and imperialism I extend the discussion of H.D.'s representation of race begun in Chapter Two.

¹³ Edmunds argues that H.D. simultaneously 'attempts [...] to set up a redemptive relationship between ancient myth and her contemporary moment' in the poem as a means of apologising for Britain's imperial position (1994, 96). There is clearly scope for further discussion of this in a future project.

masculinist power. A consideration of how these contradictions are textually encoded in *Helen in Egypt* is the primary concern of this chapter.

The veiled woman: resisting/colluding with the male gaze

The image of Helen on the ramparts at Troy is a frequently-repeated trope in *Helen in Egypt*. It is rendered more complex both by the text's chronology and its representations of memory. When, at the beginning of the poem, Achilles meets Helen on a deserted beach, he announces "I have seen you upon the ramparts/ no art is beneath your power" (HE, 16). Whilst the reader encounters Achilles' view of Helen through his *memory* of her on the ramparts, the description of his actual first sighting occurs later in the text. The temporal complexity surrounding this instance of looking is also evident in Helen's interaction with Paris. In the middle section of the text - when Helen is on Leuké, in a liminal space 'back in time, in memory' (HE, 115) - she encounters Paris at the moment before his death, when he catches sight of her fleeing King Priam's palace and leaving behind her veil 'caught on a fallen pillaster' (HE, 123). In his 'afterlife', Paris recalls seeing Helen on the ramparts at the exact moment as she is also seen by Achilles. Thus, Paris's view of Helen on the ramparts is analeptic, like Achilles' view, a memory, in which '*we see, through the eyes of Paris, an earlier Helen*' (HE, 125). However, since H.D.'s use of textual flashback also situates it 'back in time', Paris' view of Helen on the ramparts is also *proleptic*, projecting forward - within the chronology of the text - to a moment 'after' his death (HE, 115).

On a formal level, these instances of visual doubling are constructed through the textual superimposition of images of several 'different' Helens. As such, they exemplify further the palimpsestic technique discussed in Chapter Four. Again, this method of superimposition can be related to H.D.'s activity of film editing. For, as Mandel notes, H.D.'s arrangement of the images in the poem which 'operate as flashback or flash-forward', and reappear through memory or repetition, parallels 'the editing process of a filmmaker who cuts and reassembles camera shots as visual objectifications of time' (1983, 42-4). What is further significant is that, in the prose

caption preceding Achilles' first sighting of Helen in the verse. H.D. aligns the view of the reader with that of her male character: 'So at last we see, with the eyes of Achilles. Helen upon the ramparts' (HE, 49). This not only foregrounds the *process* through which Helen is objectified - by prompting the reader to identify with the character who is looking at her - it also, significantly, establishes H.D.'s use of a 'directorial' narrative voice (Mandel 1983, 38). The fact that this sentence in the prose imitates the instruction of the film 'director' suggests, perhaps, the construction of a dominant authorial voice.¹⁴ Yet, by encouraging the reader to identify both with Helen's objectification and with Achilles' gaze, the statement *contests* the notion of a singular position of power associated with the voice. Thus, in this imagistic moment, H.D. troubles both the situation of the 'authorial voice' in the prose and the construction of power bound up with the visual.

Although Mandel's discussion of the poem's formal and poetic strategies is a useful one, she does not elaborate on the *political* ramifications of H.D.'s literary deployment of the visual.¹⁵ H.D.'s use of superimposition suggests a plurality of selves for Helen which can be read in two ways. In one sense, it implies Helen's deliberate denial of her imposed identity as the Helen responsible for the Trojan war. It could also be read as Helen's disempowering loss of self within the patriarchal order: 'how are Helen in Egypt and Helen upon the ramparts together yet separate?' (HE, 63). Yet there is a further, or simultaneous, possibility: that through the very division of her image Helen is able to *elude*, or even counter, the gaze of 'the Greek heroes' who look at her (HE, 20).

These contradictions in the representations of the gaze in the text pivot around the recurrent motif of Helen's veil or scarf.¹⁶ As Helen flees Priam's palace, her veil becomes a sign or trace of the self she has left behind. When she stands on the ramparts at Troy, Achilles and Paris see it 'flutter/ out towards the tents' (HE, 139). For Achilles, the veil represents the 'power' that draws him to her:

¹⁴ Of course, this 'directorial' voice could equally be read as that of the stage director, which also suggests a connection with the notion of performance.

¹⁵ Mandel identifies 'at least seven poetic techniques which correspond to film editing practice': these include close-up, montage, 'word dissolve' and use of 'the moving camera eye' (1983, 39).

I saw her scarf
 as the wind caught it,
 one winter day; I saw her hand
 through the transparent folds,

and her wrist and her throat
 but that was long ago,
 in the beginning,

before I began to count
 and measure her foot-fall
 from turret to turret;

if I remember the veil,
 I remember the Power
 that swayed Achilles.
 (HE, 56)

To further understand the *process* through which Helen herself has been prevented from 'construct[ing] an image or truth [...] of her "own"', it is useful to return to recent feminist film theory (Hirsch 1986, 6). In this instance of Achilles watching Helen on the ramparts, she connotes what Mulvey terms 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (1989 [1975], 19). Here, the trajectory of Achilles' 'gaze'- that is, the movement of the narrative viewpoint from hands to wrist to throat - fragments Helen's body and fetishises it. H.D.'s use of the veil motif in *Helen* also has resonances with Doane's discussion of the 'veiled woman' as a trope in classical cinema, 'a site [which] acknowledges the precariousness of vision' (1991, 46). In classical Hollywood film, the threat posed by the veil to epistemological structures of looking is usually *contained*: for it fetishises the woman's face as surface or screen.¹⁷ Read in this way, the 'transparent folds' of the veil in *Helen in Egypt* - which partly obscure Helen's hands from Achilles' view - could be seen as a *screen* which reflects back the male gaze. Yet, although the veil conceals what is behind it, it simultaneously *invites* the look and, by extension, the desire of the (male) spectator. So whilst Helen attempts to resist the gaze of the men who construct her, she is also constantly trapped within the 'blind reflection of the sighted male' (Hirsch 1986, 6). Since it is possible '[to] trace a poetics or theoretics of the veil in the texts of literature, psychoanalysis, and

¹⁶ H.D. herself draws attention to this in Book Three, Chapter Four of 'Leuké' in the phrase: 'again, the veil motif' (HE, 138).

philosophy as well as that of the cinema', H.D.'s use of the veil reveals her simultaneous engagement with these interconnecting discourses (Doane 1991, 46).¹⁸ For Freud female sexuality itself was 'veiled in an impenetrable obscurity' (Doane 1991, 54-5). Thus, the complexities of H.D.'s engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis are further revealed through her use of the veil motif in *Helen in Egypt*. And, in turn, the veil functions as a symbol of H.D.'s contradictory relationship to the scopic economy.

Paris describes Helen's veil, later in the poem, as a 'lode-stone, a lode-star' which 'drew Achilles to Egypt' (HE, 138):

your scarf flew,
a visible sign
to enchant him,
to draw him nearer;

whoever could break this spell,
would enter into a circle
of new enchantment.
(HE, 138-9)

It is significant in both these extracts that Helen's veil does not actually cover her face but that she draws attention to it by waving it in her hands. If we accept that the veil is associated with seduction, then H.D.'s use of it as a symbol foregrounds the power bound up with seduction itself and in the woman's potential to seduce. Hence, Helen herself becomes a signifier for female sexuality, a 'visible sign' of beauty, seduction and power (HE, 138).¹⁹ This has further resonances with the discourse of film: for Sue Vice suggests that the female body 'like the cinematic image, is the site of representation, most itself when covered or veiled, and possesses no hidden secret or signified behind the mask' (1996, 176).

¹⁷ Doane cites examples from Josef von Sternberg's *Dishonoured* (1931) and *The Devil Is a Woman* (1935), both of which feature the iconic Marlene Dietrich. Dietrich was also another one of the classical Hollywood stars who was admired by H.D.

¹⁸ In the discourse of metaphysics 'the function of the veil is to make truth profound, to ensure that there is a depth which lurks behind the surface of things. The veil acts as a trope that allows one to evade the superficial, to complicate the surface by disallowing its self-sufficiency' (Doane 1991, 54-5).

The motif of the veil is also evident in H.D.'s screen performance as Astrid in *Borderline*.²⁰ In the scene where Astrid and Thorne row over Thorne's infidelity with Adah, Astrid paces up and down the room, clutching at her 'fluttering' shawl with 'jagged quick movements' which are exaggerated by the rapid intercutting in the film (Dyer 1987, 132). In this sense the scarf functions as a signifier for Astrid's neuroticism. Since her neurotic behaviour in the film is always situated in opposition to Adah's calm demeanour, it is also a sign of Astrid's 'white' femininity. When Thorne moves to the door, suitcase in hand, as if to leave Astrid, she 'flies across the room in her "feminine" shawl' and throws herself at his feet, begging him to stay (Walton 1997, 99). Thus, Astrid's scarf - like Helen's veil in *Helen in Egypt* - is associated not just with seduction but with the conscious knowledge of its power. As Walton notes, femininity in *Borderline* becomes a kind of masquerade, a *performance*, a strategy which offers 'self-protection in a patriarchal social sphere' (1997, 99).²¹ Similarly, as we shall see in the next section, Helen's disguise as Isis in *Helen in Egypt* is a performance which confounds Achilles and serves to unsettle the 'patriarchal order' within the text. Reading *Helen in Egypt* in the light of H.D.'s performance in *Borderline* illuminates several important issues. Not only does it reveal, as Mandel argues, that the techniques of film influenced the writing of *Helen*, it also shows how the construction of Helen is reliant on the representation of race and gender in the dynamics of POOL's *moving picture*. Such an intertextual reading extends further the possibilities offered by Walton's analysis of Astrid's 'masquerade' in *Borderline*. For, if the character of Helen is informed by H.D.'s cinematic *performance* of a female character, then the very construction of Helen as passive image - as she appears in the male classical tradition - is called into question.

¹⁹ This notion is repeated throughout the text, where Helen is consistently associated with the hieroglyph.

²⁰ As noted in the Introduction, although Macpherson is credited with the writing, shooting and editing of *Borderline*, it is highly likely that H.D. had some input into the content of the film, given the close collaborative working relationship between H.D., Bryher and Macpherson.

²¹ Masquerade was first purported as a theory by Rivière (1929). Doane argues that it has the effect of 'doubl[ing] representation: it is constituted by a hyperbolization of the accoutrements of femininity' (1991, 26). It is important to be aware of the limits of its subversive potential since it can be seen to reinscribe problematic gender and racial stereotypes. For a discussion of the problems of masquerade in relation to H.D.'s work, see Walton (1997).

Helen/Garbo: masquerade and the femme fatale²²

In Helen's encounter with Achilles in *Helen in Egypt*, she 'masquerades' as Isis, the Egyptian goddess of fertility. Before I embark on a discussion of this, let me briefly summarise their meeting on the deserted beach in the 'Pallinode' section of the poem. Achilles, who has been shipwrecked, encounters Helen on the sand and builds a fire from driftwood. We are told that he is unaware of Helen's identity: he 'knew not yet, Helen of Sparta/ knew not Helen of Troy/ knew not Helena, hated of Greece' (HE, 14). Speaking 'ironically into the night', Helen declares herself to be 'a woman of pleasure', disguising her real identity - and her virtue - through hinting at her promiscuity (HE, 12). In order to confirm her identity as a 'woman of pleasure' she changes her appearance by blackening her face with the embers of the charred wood from the fire. Thus, she transforms herself into a '*prophetic femme noir of antiquity*' (HE, 15):

How could I hide my eyes?
 how could I veil my face?
 with ash or charcoal from the embers?

I drew out a blackened stick,
 but he snatched it,
 he flung it back,

"what sort of enchantment is this?
 [...]
 are you Hecate? are you a witch?
 a vulture, a hieroglyph,
 the sign or name of a goddess?

[...]

where are we? who are you?
 where is this desolate coast?
 who am I? am I a ghost?"
 (HE, 16)

Although Helen's disguise exposes the deception at the heart of the representation of the female body - and in this sense is a feminist strategy - it also underscores H.D.'s

²² This subtitle is adapted from the title of Mandel's essay 'Garbo/Helen: The Self Projection by H.D.' (1980). I have reversed Mandel's order since this section focuses first on Helen.

problematic portrayal of racial identity. As Edmunds argues, the change in Helen's skin colour characterises the 'embodied thinking' implied in Eisenstein's work as a 'racial trait' (1994, 121).²³ Furthermore, Helen's transformation of herself into 'Isis' appears to perpetuate the stereotype of the black woman as a primitive exotic of libidinous excess or sexual promiscuity. Crucially, since Helen now becomes 'Hecate' or a 'witch', H.D.'s poem here equates 'black' - however unconsciously - with 'evil'. This, of course, reinforces the hegemonic privilege of whiteness, revealing similarities with the representation of race and national identity in *Borderline*. By blackening her face with charcoal, Helen *performs* her racial 'conversion': 'I *became*', says Helen 'what his accusation made me/ Isis' (HE, 23; emphasis added). Thus Helen's deception is itself a masquerade: it becomes, to borrow Walton's description of *Borderline*, an attempt at 'self-protection in a patriarchal social sphere' (1997, 99). For, in trying to disguise her real identity, Helen seeks to hide from Achilles' wrath and to exonerate herself from blame for the war. In the process, she not only alters her own identity but rewrites her own history - outside the parameters of the masculinist discourse which has constructed her.

When read in the light of H.D.'s film essay 'The Cinema and The Classics I: Beauty' (1927a), Helen's masquerade as Isis assumes further relevance to the construction of femininity in *Helen in Egypt*. The essay, which refers to G.W. Pabst's film *Joyless Street*, celebrates the beauty of the film's star, Greta Garbo and laments Garbo's move to Hollywood. H.D. describes Garbo's beauty in terms of 'whiteness': she is a 'Nordic flower', a 'camellia' who represents 'purity' and demonstrates 'icy, mermaid-like integrity' (1927a, 27-32).²⁴ However, when H.D. turns her discussion to Garbo's performance in the Hollywood production of *The Torrent* (1926), she suggests that this 'pure' beauty has been destroyed. Focusing on Garbo's heavy make-up and theatrical costume in the film, H.D. stresses the artificial quality of the actresses' appearance:

Greta Garbo [...] could not be, but by some fluke of evil magic, the same creature I saw with sewed-in, black lashes, with waist-lined, svelte, obvious contours, with gowns and gowns [sic] [...] with black-

²³ You will recall that Eisenstein's 'syncretic thinking' and its problematic association with primitive peoples is discussed in Chapter One.

²⁴ Significantly, the Helen of H.D.'s 1923 poem 'Helen' is also delineated by her whiteness. H.D. portrays her as having 'white face', 'white hands' and 'cool feet' (CP, 154-5).

dyed wig [...] A beauty it is evident, from the Totem's stand point, must be a vamp, an evil woman, and an evil woman [...] must be black-eyed. (1927a, 27)

Rather than appearing as a 'camellia', as she does in *Joyless Street*, Garbo has been turned into 'the most blatant of obvious, crepe, tissue-paper orchids' (H.D. 1927a, 26-7).²⁵ Primarily, H.D.'s essay is a criticism of Hollywood's hegemony and seeks to defend the avant garde ethos of the marginalised European film. The essay also suggests H.D.'s awareness of femininity as a cultural construction. For H.D. this fact is exposed through the processes of visual representation – for, as Mandel puts it: 'all the world stares at Helen, and at the woman on screen as portrayed by Greta Garbo' (1980, 134). Thus Garbo, the screen star - like the mythical Helen of Troy - is constructed by an *image*. What is further significant about H.D.'s essay is that in constructing Garbo's femininity as *white* she also implies that such whiteness is *natural*: for whilst she praises the camellia, she denigrates the 'most blatant of obvious, crepe, tissue-paper orchids'. This unconscious privileging of white femininity has further resonances with *Borderline*. Having watched *Borderline* and *Joyless Street* consecutively at the British Film Institute, it was striking how the techniques of lighting and close-up shots in both films emphasise the stark white faces of H.D. as Astrid and Garbo as 'Grete Rumfort'.²⁶ This suggests that Garbo's appearance in *Joyless Street* informed H.D.'s own understanding of her role as Astrid in *Borderline*, three years later. And, as we shall see, it also influenced H.D.'s later construction of Helen in *Helen in Egypt*.

In order to reinforce the connections between Helen and Garbo, it is useful to draw on Doane's discussion of the femme fatale.²⁷ Although the figure of the femme fatale originated in literature and art, it is in the cinema where she has her most spec(tac)ular elaboration and where she assumes a number of filmic guises - as 'the vamp of the Scandanavian and American silent cinemas, the diva of the Italian film,

²⁵ In criticising the artificial appearance of Garbo as 'crepe, tissue-paper orchid' in the Hollywood production - as opposed to the camellia - H.D.'s vocabulary in the essay underscores the privilege of an identity which is white, European and 'natural'.

²⁶ Marcus argues that *Joyless Street* became H.D.'s 'cinematic touchstone' (1998a, 96). POOL enthused about Pabst's work in *Close Up* and may have been influenced by his formal techniques in the making of *Borderline*.

²⁷ Mandel (1980) also draws comparisons between Helen and Garbo. However, my argument does not cover the same critical ground since I examine their position within the dominant discourses which construct them.

the femme fatale of film noir of the 1940s' (Doane 1991, 2). Whilst she is invariably beautiful, she is also 'situated as evil and is frequently punished or killed' (*ibid.*). Yet - since 'she never really is what she seems to be' - the femme fatale is a contradictory figure, 'a secret, something which must be aggressively revealed, unmasked, discovered' (Doane 1991, 1). In this sense, Helen is a classic example of the femme fatale. The whole of *Helen in Egypt* pivots not only on her search for her own identity but also on the division of her image as phantom and reality.

For H.D., Garbo represents pure beauty made 'evil' by the Hollywood 'Totem'. Helen is a 'symbol throughout centuries of mythology and literature of the twin images of woman - beauty and evil' (Friedman 1977, 166). Significantly, H.D.'s essay on *Joyless Street* makes explicit comparisons between Garbo and the mythical Helen: 'Helen who ruined Troy seems to have taken shape, but this time it is Troy by some fantastic readjustment who [sic] is about to ruin Helen' (1927a, 28-9). This comparison suggests that the cultural constructions of beauty and femininity are embedded, for H.D., in the myth of Helen of Troy and that both Helen and Garbo are constructed by their *representation* within dominant masculinist systems. And, ultimately, it also reveals that H.D. equates the hegemony of the classical literary tradition with the 'myth-making machine' of the increasingly popular Hollywood cinema.

Helen's quest for a voice: identity, sexuality, politics

So far in this chapter, my discussion of *Helen in Egypt* has focused on the *visual* and, in particular, how this underpins H.D.'s representation of the female subject. Yet, as I have suggested throughout my thesis, H.D.'s engagement with the dominant regime of the scopic is complex and contradictory. Whilst in many ways her texts privilege the visual realm, she recognises, like Irigaray, that its predominance is always associated with 'the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks' (Irigaray 1985b [1977], 25). Thus, the marginalised position of women within the scopic regime can be equated with their silence in patriarchal discourse. In the remainder of the chapter, therefore, I want to turn my attention to the voice.

The 'blurb' of the Carcanet edition of *Helen in Egypt* (1985b) suggests that voice in the poem is inexorably bound up with image. The text is defined as 'a lyric narrative [with] each scene and change of voice introduced by a short prose interlude'. The question of who 'speaks' relates both to the characters within the poem's fictional framework and to the wider cultural context of its authorship. For, as Hirsch points out, both the male characters in *Helen in Egypt* and the male authors in the history of the mythical tale all relate Helen's story *for* her:

Collectively they repeat 'inside' the text the process of mythmaking that constitutes its 'outside' or context, that is of mythmaking conceived as a (dominant) culture's collective writing and rewriting of a tale which thereby acquires the force of (psychological and cultural) fact'. (1986, 6)

The silencing of women in and by patriarchal discourse has become a familiar debate within feminist scholarship. Deborah Cameron, for instance, argues:

Women's voices [are] for the most part silent - or rather, silenced, for it is not just that women do not speak: often they are explicitly prevented from speaking, either by social taboos, restrictions or by the more genteel tyrannies of custom and practice. (1990, 4)

In *Helen in Egypt*, the silencing of Helen is precipitated by Achilles, who 'seizes' her throat when he discovers the true Helen beneath her disguise as Isis. Significantly, since his silencing of her is prompted by his rage at her deception, this connects the notion of female 'voicelessness' with notions of visual representation. Helen's attempt to deceive Achilles ironically, only leads him to 'recognise' her as 'Helena, cursed of Greece' and to discover the very Trojan identity she wishes to hide (HE, 16). Before this 'strangling', Helen's voice is a strong one: 'I am a woman of pleasure/ I spoke ironically into the night' (HE, 11-12). The ability to speak her 'pleasure', or tell her story, becomes a central aspect of Helen's search for self-actualisation. Thus, in *Helen in Egypt* Helen's search for her lost voice is always linked to her search for her 'true' identity.

Helen's meeting with Theseus, 'the legendary hero king of Athens', constitutes a pivotal point in the poem (HE, 159).²⁸ 'Baffled and buffeted and very tired from her journey' (HE, 151), Helen is encouraged by Theseus to rest and to tell her story: 'How did you get here, Helen/ do you know?' (HE, 147). 'Theseus' sympathetic ear contrasts directly with Achilles' attempt to silence Helen and, through conversation with him, her memory returns and she is able to piece together the fragments of her past lives and histories:

I drifted here
 blown (you asked) by what winter-sorrow
 but it is not sorrow;
 draw near, draw nearer;
 do you hear me, do I whisper?
 there is a voice within me,
 listen - let it speak for me.
 (HE. 174-5)

Once Helen recovers her ability to speak, she assumes a number of voices which coincide with her plural identities. The first voice is that of the 'heroic' Helen who expresses 'the rage of the sea, the thunder of battle, shouting and the Walls' (HE. 176-7). Her voice then becomes lyric, 'a song rather than a challenge' which 'takes us back to Egypt' (HE, 178). In this sense, H.D.'s representation of voice becomes the site for the *contestation* of identity itself and the means through which Helen's numerous lives and subjectivities are articulated. Crucially, the oscillation between Helen's 'heroic' and 'lyric' voices mirrors the alternation between prose and verse as one of the fundamental textual strategies of *Helen in Egypt*. As Hirsch argues:

The echoing, querying voice(s) of the text - chiefly of Helen 'herself' and the narrator who doubles her - effect a spatio-textual disorientation and dislocation that propels us, together with Helen, into an imaginative 'space' where feminine (self-) images proliferate beyond any horizon of truth - or of deceit (1986, 7).

This mediation between various voices reveals H.D.'s challenge to mythological discourse and the hegemony of male mythical narratives. For the plurality of

²⁸ In the poem Helen 'finds her way to another lover whose story is not so familiar to us as that of Paris and the early suitors' (HE, 147). According to mythological tradition, Theseus purportedly fell in love with Helen when she was a child and left her to be brought up by his mother.

discourses both within and outside of the text ultimately offer a challenge to the notion of a singular, unified authorial voice.

Although Achilles' stranglehold suppresses Helen's voice, ironically it also reveals her ability to 'speak' her identification with Achilles' mother, Thetis:

O Thetis, O sea-mother,
I prayed, as he clutched my throat.

with his fingers' remorseless steel,
let me go out, let me forget,
let me be lost

O Thetis, O sea-mother, I prayed under his cloak,
let me remember, let me remember,
forever, this Star in the night.
(HE, 17)

Buck reads the poem from a psychoanalytic perspective, arguing that Helen's desire for Thetis in the text is always merely a 'ghosting' of Achilles' Oedipal desire for his mother: in this sense, 'the story which locates [Helen's] desire is that of the man and the man's mother' (1991b, 138). Yet this is at odds with H.D.'s own suggestion of the simultaneous desire of both Helen and Achilles for Thetis, which can only be revealed through Helen's speaking of Thetis' name:

How did she know the word,
the one word that would turn and bind
and blind him to any other?

[...]

how did she know that her Thetis
[...]
would brand on his forehead
that name, that the name

and the flame and the fire
would weld him to her
who spoke it.
(HE, 277-8)

Buck's reading overlooks both the fundamental importance of the representation of voice in the sexual dynamic between Helen, Achilles and Thetis, and H.D.'s portrayal of sexual desire as plural and complex. There are a *series* of triadic relationships here. Whilst Helen and Achilles *both* identify with Thetis, it is Helen's subversive utterance of Thetis' name which also 'welds' Achilles to her. There is a tension, however, between Helen's 'voiceless' position in the heterosexual economy and the words she is able to speak, in a prayer, to Thetis. In its suggestion of bisexuality, this moment encodes what Cixous terms 'transgression': the subversive possibility of a challenge to monosexuality and to heterosexual desire (1986 [1975], 92). The nature of Helen's desire for Thetis is not fully revealed until the end of the poem. Helen's utterance of the 'secret, unpronounceable name' of Thetis in 'a whisper, a breath' is the culmination of Helen's struggle to articulate the unspeakable desire encoded in this moment with Achilles and throughout the text (HE, 279). Thus, Helen's *speaking* of this unnameable desire is the binding factor for all three characters in the text. As such, Helen's use of the voice levels a challenge both at the dominance of the visual and at the heterosexual dynamic which has constructed her - not only through the gaze of Achilles and Paris but, by extension, through that of all the 'Greek heroes' in the Trojan war (HE,20).

Helen's identification with Thetis suggests that the voice 'lend[s] itself readily as an alternative to the image, as a potentially viable means whereby the woman can "make herself heard"' (Doane 1986, 346). This has resonances with notions of feminine language purported by the 'French feminist theorists'.²⁹ Cixous, for example, envisages this 'Voice' which 'sings from a time before the law' as being itself a challenge to masculinist discourse, for it is through 'accept[ance] of the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than in silence' (1986 [1975], 93). Criticisms of such thinking as being grounded in biology, and therefore, problematically essentialist, are, by now, well-documented.³⁰ Doane speaks of one of the dangers of 'a political erotics of the

²⁹ I am conscious of the apparent reductionism of this term. Whilst it is useful shorthand to refer to the notions of 'writing the body' and 'feminine writing' associated with the work of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, I do not wish to elide the differences between them. Cixous' discussion of the pre-oedipal voice in *Newly Born Woman* and Irigaray's 'parler femme' are particularly pertinent to my discussion here (see Cixous 1986 [1975]; Irigaray 1985b [1977]).

³⁰ See, for instance, Moi (1989 [1985]), Grosz (1989), Stanton (1989) Banting (1992) and Butler (1993).

voice' as a collapse into a 'romanticism or mysticism which effectively skirts the problems of epistemology, lodging itself firmly in a mind/body dualism' (1986, 346). Toril Moi also calls into question Cixous's 'lyrical, euphoric evocation of the essential bond between feminine writing and the mother as source and origin of the voice to be heard in all female texts' (1989 [1985], 114). Ultimately, the association of the voice with the mother - surrounding the child in a 'sonorous envelope' - advocates a return to the maternal body which, in turn, could be read as a reification of the heterosexual economy and a reinscription of its phallogentric power (Doane 1986, 343).

If we accept that the voice can also be used as an 'instrument of interdiction of the patriarchal order', then a discussion of voice 'is particularly problematic from a feminist perspective' (Doane 1986, 346). For as Doane argues, 'to mark the voice as an isolated haven within patriarchy or as having an essential relation to the woman, is to involve the specter of feminine specificity always recuperable as another form of "otherness"' (*ibid.*). Psychoanalysis is one such example of this 'patriarchal order': thus, a feminist politics located in the voice risks repeating 'Freud's most important move - the displacement from the "look" to the "voice", from the visible to language' (Doane 1991, 44). Significantly, whilst Helen eventually finds her voice in *Helen in Egypt*, it is only through the (masculine) 'listening ear' of Theseus.³¹ In one sense, then, using voice as a political strategy through which to counter the dominance of the visual risks a reinscription of women's marginalised position in patriarchal discourse. This, of course, has been one of the major criticisms of the French feminists' thinking. As Cameron notes, in one sense 'notions of women's or feminine language just aid and abet anti-feminist thinking' (1990, 10-11).

This theoretical debate emphasises the dangers of a utopian reading of *Helen in Egypt* which depends on the evocation of the female voice.³² Whilst it may be tempting to read the representation of voice in H.D.'s poem as an oppositional strategy to the power of the male gaze, it is important to be aware of the potential dangers and the contradictions in doing so. H.D. was aware of both in the writing of

³¹ Significantly, critics have linked the character of Theseus to Freud. Edmunds, for instance, argues that the poem 'has strong autobiographical underpinnings' and that H.D. 'takes Freud as the model for Theseus' (1994, 95). I do not pursue this possible connection but, given my argument that the voice is privileged above the visual in psychoanalysis, this suggestion is an interesting one.

Helen in Egypt. This is evident in a number of ways: firstly, the notion of voice in the poem is never completely detached from that of the image. For the doubling of Helen's voice - which moves between 'heroic' and 'lyrical' - also links to the division of her *image* and thus to the text's central riddle: 'how are Helen in Egypt and Helen upon the ramparts together yet separate?' (HE, 63). Moreover, the association between power and the female voice is consistently troubled throughout the text. Helen's sister, Clytaemnestra never speaks directly in the poem. Whilst this appears to reinforce the notion of voice as a site of patriarchal oppression, on the other hand, as Edmunds points out, this may be because it is 'so subversive that it can be admitted into the poem only indirectly [...] through the speech of Paris' (1994, 101). Helen says of Clytaemnestra: 'I am not happy without her' (HE, 68). The two are 'inseparable/ as substance and shadow/ as shadow and substance', an identification which can be seen to carry the threat of incest (HE, 68). Similarly, whilst it is the voice of Thetis which calls Helen out of Egypt at the end of the 'Pallinode' section, her voice is never directly heard at this point in the text. It is precisely this continual location and dislocation of the female voice which destabilises both the voices of the male characters in the poem and the narration of Helen's story within the male classical tradition.

'I had found myself': H.D., voice and synchronisation

The plurality of identities in *Helen in Egypt* becomes more apparent in the recorded reading of the tape H.D. made in 1955. The tone and pitch of H.D.'s voice change as she differentiates between its prose and verse sections. This changing intonation not only signals H.D.'s *performance* of the characters in the poem it also suggests her own assumption of the identity of Helen. In *Compassionate Friendship* she describes her reaction to the sound of her voice reading the poem aloud, aligning herself with Helen in the projection of a desired self emerging through her reading:

I was alone and felt that I had an alter-ego, this Helen, speaking with my own voice but with a self assurance that I generally lack in everyday life [...] I seemed to lose myself, to be myself as hardly ever in my

³² However, as Moi notes, 'utopian thought has always been a source of political inspiration for feminists and socialists alike' (1989 [1985], 121).

life before. It seemed that I had missed my vocation. This is what I would like to have done always - always and always. It wasn't singing, it wasn't acting but it was both [...] I had found myself, I had found my alter-ego or my double - and that my mother's name was Helen has no doubt something to do with it [...] This is myself, Helen out of the body, in another world, the eidolon of the legend. But she is not alone. There she meets the legendary Achilles, a phantom but a reality. There I, there Helen, lives out her wars. There in the second long-playing disc is Helen with Achilles on one side, on the other Helen with Paris. (CF, 15-17)

This extract suggests that, for H.D., the recording of *Helen in Egypt* offers an extension and an amplification of the writing for the printed page. It also implies that the verbal enactment of the literary text is able to liberate the suppressed female voice represented in the poem, just as it allows H.D. to assume a number of different personas. H.D. becomes Helen, the mythical lover of Paris and Achilles, becomes Helen, her own mother, becomes the actress who has finally found her voice but has 'missed her vocation'. The recording enables H.D. to articulate and explore her 'alter-ego' and - like the Helen of the text - to inhabit momentarily the pluralities and positionalities made possible by reading the text aloud. In this sense, H.D.'s deployment of her voice creates 'a fundamental rent in the ideology of the visible' (Doane 1980, 52). Yet there is also a contradiction here: for in reading her poem aloud, H.D. returns to the oral form by which the male classical epic would have been transmitted.³³ Seen in this way, any subversion offered by the voice - and by H.D.'s act of revisionist mythmaking - is, in the end, limited.

H.D.'s further comments on the recording of *Helen in Egypt* suggest the impossibility of escaping entirely the masculinist power she associates with the classical tradition. She describes the poem as possessing two 'god-fathers' who influence her performance of the text: one is her literary executor, Norman Holmes Pearson, and the other is her doctor and analyst, Erich Heydt. H.D. states: 'I think the Helen has two god-fathers, for when Erich sat behind my right shoulder at the second reading I seemed to lose myself, to be myself as hardly ever in my life before' (CF, 16). This description signals the inherent paradox in H.D.'s authorship of *Helen in Egypt*. For whilst her poem seeks to revise the Helen myth - and the male-dominated

³³ As Martin Hammond points out, oral transmission has a particular effect on the form of the epic poem which is likely to make use of 'thematic formulas - repeated situations, with or without variants,

tradition represented by Homer, Euripides and Stesichorus - she regards her male mentors as vital to the writing and production of the poem. Thus, H.D. oscillates between two contradictory positions. On the one hand, H.D.'s perception of herself depends upon on these male figures. On the other, the use of voice in her performance momentarily allows her - through loss of 'myself' - to challenge the notion of identity itself as singular and homogeneous. This, of course, has resonances with Helen's own struggle throughout the text to come to terms with her own doubling: 'how are Helen in Egypt and Helen upon the ramparts together yet separate?' (HE, 63). And, like Helen's own experience within the literary text, this 'doubling' can be read in two ways: as freedom from a constructed identity and - as suggested in my discussion of Helen, above - as a disempowering loss of the 'self' within the patriarchal order.

Whilst H.D.'s evocation of voice in *Helen in Egypt* can be seen as a site of resistance to masculinist power, she recognises the limitations of that power - namely, that it is firmly embedded in the scopic economy and in patriarchal discourse. For the poem is constantly aware that women's acculturation is dependent on that patriarchal discourse and of the dangers of constructing 'a political erotics' which relies on the female body or on the voice. In this sense, H.D. is 'inevitably caught up in the double bind which feminism always seems to confront' (Doane 1986, 346). She recognises that, although the female body has always been a site of oppression, it is also the site through which that oppression can be contested. Voice in *Helen in Egypt* becomes a place where identities are both appropriated and questioned. Thus, the poem explores and encodes the shifting nature both of subjectivity and of the discourses which construct it.

When discussing the voice in *Helen in Egypt*, it is surprising that critics overlook the issue of H.D.'s opposition to cinematic sound. Clearly, H.D. wrote the *Close Up* articles which discuss this issue long before the publication of *Helen*. Yet her objections to the synchronisation of the voice in film are vital to an understanding of the contradictory nature of her portrayal of voice in *Helen in Egypt*. It is important to acknowledge that the resistance to 'sound' in avant garde circles was not a criticism

repeated sequences of events, parallel narrative structures' (1987, xi). *Helen in Egypt* employs a technique of repetition particularly, as argued above, in the trope of Helen on the ramparts.

of sound *per se* but of the addition of *speech* to the image (Donald 1998b, 79). This was largely due to the belief - in the avant garde circles in which H.D. moved - that sound synchronisation brought with it a dependence on a 'synchronized national language' which would ultimately 'destroy the universality of the cinema, and so its internationalism' (*ibid.*).

To the writers and editors of *Close Up*, the addition of sound-track was generally perceived as a supplement which interfered both with film's coherence and with its integrity as an art form.³⁴ In 'The Mask and the Movietone', written after watching a demonstration of the new 'Movietone' sound, H.D. laments the move towards realism represented by synchronisation:

Is there any more damaging revelation than art revealed? Art is cut open, dissected so to speak by this odd instrument. Movietone creates and recreates until we feel that nothing can remain hidden, no slightest flaw of movement of voice or personality undetected. (H.D. 1927c, 29)

H.D.'s objections focus on the technical apparatus which reveal the process through which the film is constructed. Rather than the meaning of the film remaining 'hidden' - and therefore subjective within the experience of each spectator - the addition of sound *imposes* meaning onto the spectator. Again in 'The Mask and the Movietone' H.D. writes: 'Here is art, high art, but is it our own art? Isn't cinema just a matter (or hasn't it been) of inter-action?' (1927c, 22). For H.D., sound impinges upon the collaborative role of the 'creating spectator', to return to Eisenstein's phrase: it inhabits the hermenutic spaces otherwise filled in by the spectator, in the attempt to construct the meaning of the film.

This opposition to sound diverges somewhat from the view of Eisenstein in the late 1920s. In 1928, along with Pudovkin and Alexandrov, Eisenstein published the Soviet 'Statement on Sound' which was translated in *Close Up* later that year.³⁵

³⁴ It is important to note that not all of *Close Up*'s contributors opposed sound completely. Macpherson, for instance, was enthusiastic about the use of sound in Alfred Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929) and acknowledged that sound was a complicated new issue in the cinema which also had potential for the development of a 'sound-sight' aesthetic. See Donald (1998b, 81).

³⁵ I am grateful to Jonathon Rayner for drawing my attention to these issues and for his insights into Eisenstein's use of sound in *Alexander Nevsky*.

Whilst acknowledging that sound ‘is a two-edged invention’ with the possibility to be commercially exploited, Eisenstein also recognises that this ‘new orchestral counterpoint of sight-images and sound-images’ potentially constitutes an effective political tool (Eisenstein *et al.* 1998 [1928], 83-4). Rather than perceiving cinematic sound as diminishing the role of the active spectator, as H.D. does, Eisenstein regards the juxtaposition of sound with image as an extension of visual montage. This is exemplified in *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) when Eisenstein seeks to enhance the political message of the film by adding Profokiev’s musical score and creates a jarring effect intended to provoke the spectator. The differing opinions of H.D. and Eisenstein represent a departure from H.D.’s engagement with the thinking of the Soviet director, a fact overlooked by Edmunds in her discussion of the influence of Eisenstein on the poetics of *Helen in Egypt* (1994).

in the process of film editing, image and sound - which are separately produced in filming - are joined together. In ‘The Mask and the Movietone’, H.D.’s observations on the synchronised voice emphasise the fact that image and sound appear as separate entities:

The doll actually lifts its eyes, it breathes, it speaks - it *speaks*. This is no mechanical voice off, it is the vision itself, the screen image actually singing with accuracy and acumen [...] Voice follows face, face follows voice, face and voice with all their subtle blending are accurately and mechanically welded. They are *welded* - that is the catch. (1927c, 20)

H.D.’s chief objection to sound is that, despite the intrinsic *heterogeneity* of the sound film, commercial film-makers strive, paradoxically, for a realistic, *homogeneous* effect. Since the use of sound soon became widespread in film-making, and since mainstream cinema seized on its new technology as a means of profiting from the popularity of sound, the late 1920s witnessed both Hollywood’s growing hegemony and a rapid growth in cinema audiences.³⁶ H.D.’s opposition to synchronised sound in the cinema is clearly at odds with her later recognition of the voice as a liberating site for female identity, experienced through her reading of *Helen in Egypt*. And these

³⁶ It is vital to bear in mind the economic and material issues which surrounded cinema’s transition to sound. For an illuminating discussion on the role of sound in Hollywood’s growing monopoly on film in the late 1920s, see Gomery (1980).

opposing positions shed interesting light on H.D.'s contradictory construction of voice in her long poem.

Once again, by considering H.D.'s writing in the light of more recent film theory the political implications of her work can be fully understood. Whilst Doane, like H.D., objects to the use of the synchronous voice in (current) mainstream cinema, she also recognises its potential to disrupt the 'totality' of the visual:

Sound carries with it the potential risk of exposing the material heterogeneity of the medium: attempts to contain that risk surface in the language of the ideology of organic unity. In the discourse of technicians, sound is 'married' to the image and [...] one of the basic goals of the motion picture industry is to make the screen look alive in the eyes of the audience. (1986, 336)

Doane's discussion clearly has a political thrust: she challenges 'the hierarchical placement of the visible above the audible' which is 'not specific to cinema but a more general cultural production' (1986, 339). Furthermore, her analysis is relevant to contemporary feminist debates about corporeality, for she argues that classical mainstream film 'has a stake in perpetuating the image of unity' both within identity and the body, a 'oneness' which is 'the mark of a mastery and a control' (Doane 1986, 345). In this sense, heterogeneity becomes a site for opposition to the visual, even whilst this strategy may be a limited one, since it is grounded in 'the politics of the voice' and the body (Doane 1986, 344).

How does Doane's theoretical writing illuminate the concerns of H.D.'s work? Given that 'the sound-track has received much less theoretical attention and analysis than the image', H.D.'s writing on sound makes an important contribution to discussions about sound in accounts of the history of the cinema (Doane 1980, 47). Clearly, this refutes the view, discussed in the Introduction, that H.D. was denied a role as a *theorist* of images. Like Doane, who argues the necessity of reversing the 'subordination of sound to image' by considering the 'heterogeneity of the cinema', H.D.'s writing on the synchronised voice opens up possibilities for rethinking the hegemony of the visible (1986, 339). This hegemony is challenged by the voice which - as I have shown - can be seen to have limited political potential. But it is also challenged by the heterogeneity of identities. This is a central factor in *Helen in*

Egypt. for H.D. constantly reminds us of Helen's plural subjectivity in the poem: 'Helen - Helen - Helen/ there was always another and another and another' (HE, 187).

H.D.'s attitude to synchronised speech in the cinema highlights several contradictions in *Helen in Egypt*. Her consistent opposition to sound results in part from her internationalist position, a pacifist stance based on the desire to promote peace through the eradication of racial difference. In one sense, H.D. assumes a similar position in *Helen*, since her deployment of myth in the poem effectively effaces the specificity of Egypt's contemporary history and, in particular, the Egyptian resistance to colonisation during the poem's composition. Yet, paradoxically, since H.D.'s poem also *silences* the history of the Egyptian struggle for decolonisation, her revisionist mythmaking could be seen to *reinforce* the racial otherness on which the colonial project is founded. These contradictions shed light on H.D.'s representation of voice in *Helen in Egypt*. For her rejection of synchronised sound at the end of the 1920s is firmly rooted in her *opposition* to dominance, represented by Hollywood and mainstream cinema. Ultimately, whilst H.D. is aware of the voice's potential to subvert the dominance of the visual, her film writing - specifically, her criticism of cinematic sound - reveals the equivocal nature of her relationship to the *image*.

Conclusion

From Imagism to Postmodernism

Borderline ends with a shot of Bryher, as the hotel proprietor, closing the account book after the guests have departed. In concluding this particular book I offer points of departure for future scholarship on H.D.'s work.

My thesis inevitably leaves aspects of H.D.'s work untouched. I have not engaged, for example, with H.D.'s Hellenism, which has been thoroughly examined in the recent work of Gregory and Collecott (Gregory 1997; Collecott 1999). Nor do I pursue H.D.'s anthropological interests, even though my discussion of *The Gift* touches on this topic. The complete edition of *The Gift* is timely and invaluable in opening up possibilities for an anthropological approach to H.D.'s writing. Augustine's inclusion of the notes which accompany the composition of the text illuminate the details both of H.D.'s Moravian tradition and her perceptions of her links with native American history. As such, these notes provide a wealth of material which can be usefully deployed in future discussions of H.D.'s work.

Similarly, it has not been my project to embark on a detailed discussion of issues of class, education and mass popular culture, yet I am aware of the financial privilege enjoyed by H.D. which gave her licence to indulge in her numerous artistic ventures. At a time when the boundaries between high art and popular culture are increasingly eroded, debates about this opposition are as relevant now as they were at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Friedberg comments, 'the obituaries of the cinema are already being written' (1998, 26). Thus, in a climate in which film studies is concerning itself with reconstructing the history of the cinema, it is even more important to focus on H.D.'s involvement in film in terms of her contribution to the history of the cinema as well as to literary history. In a postmodern era where 'images become digital and are no longer photographically based [...] interactivity transforms spectators into "users", new technologies change almost everything about cinema' (*ibid.*).

In drawing on notions of the visible and the image, my thesis does offer new ways of seeing H.D.'s work. Her formulation of the visual not only functions as a unifying theme through which to examine her work, it permits the exploration of a number of concerns - literary, cinematic, spiritual, psychoanalytic - across her oeuvre. The title of the final chapter of *Paint It Today* (1992a) - 'Visible World' - is apposite for my own discussion of H.D.'s use of the image. For my thesis seeks to open a window onto the varied 'worlds' of her career. H.D.'s involvement in film and her position in the artistic *milieu* of European cinematic modernism offers a fresh perspective through which to read her literary texts. A consideration of her production of the moving image - both through her editing of film and her writing of film commentaries - necessitates a revision of her position within literary historiography as the 'Image of Imagism' (Hirsch 1986, 3). This process began in the 1980s through the pioneering work of Friedberg and Mandel, and has been continued by Marcus. Yet a sustained discussion of the resonances between film and H.D.'s prose, as well as her early work, has been lacking in critical scholarship. 'Cinematography', writes Jean-François Lyotard, 'is the inscription of movement' and, ultimately, H.D.'s involvement with film reveals how *process* is a central concern in her work (1978, 53). For it is through a consideration of the moving image that the fluidity and flux - both of sexuality and self - are inscribed into her literary texts.

H.D.'s foray into the 'spirit world' has also remained largely untouched by critics. In this respect my discussion of *Majic Ring* is groundbreaking, for it not only offers a sustained analysis of this little-known text, it does so in conjunction with H.D.'s interest in film as well as her engagement with psychoanalysis. The narrative strategies of *Majic Ring* also offer new perspectives on the methods of *Tribute To Freud*, which reinvigorate the terms of H.D.'s engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis. The texts which delineate H.D.'s involvement with the spiritualist tradition, as Augustine argues, offer 'an interesting direction for intertextual studies of her wartime oeuvre' (1998, 17). Significantly, as I have shown, those texts explore the ways in which spiritualism, for H.D., was a means of challenging the limiting binaries of gender and sexuality upon which psychoanalysis was founded. There is clearly a great deal still to be done on H.D.'s spiritualist concerns. Although the unpublished typescripts of both *Majic Ring* and *The Sword Went Out to Sea* are

difficult texts, being enigmatic and loose in form, their publication in edited and annotated volumes would significantly further critical considerations of this aspect of her work.

Whilst I have touched on issues of race, colonialism and imperialism in each of the chapters of this thesis, they have not been a central focus of my discussion. Clearly, H.D. cannot be appropriated as a 'post-colonial' writer. Yet her writing often exposes the hegemony of white identity and the white assumptions that construct a culturally *invisible* power with which she often, unintentionally, colludes. In order to analyse fully the conditions of racial oppression, deconstructing the category of white *itself* is a political necessity. For, as Dyer points out, 'as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially *seen* [...] they/we function as a human norm' (1997, 1; emphasis added). Theoretical discussions of whiteness are a relatively new departure in cultural studies, yet these discussions always carry with them the risk of reproducing supremacist notions of monolithic 'whiteness'. Furthermore, given that the 'whiteness studies' which originated in the United States has largely focused on white, male-authored texts, the field risks the reinforcement of a patriarchal order by effacing issues of gender and sexual difference (see, for example, Roediger 1991, Allen 1994). This imbalance has been addressed by a number of feminist critics in the UK and the US (see, for instance, Ware 1992; Frankenberg 1993; Bonnett 1993 and Hill 1997). As a white woman whose work often upholds these privileged categories, H.D.'s writing - albeit unconsciously - constructs white identity as 'the (white) point in space from which we tend to identify difference' (Carby 1992, 193). Whilst discussions of whiteness are only beginning to come to prominence, there remains scope for an analysis of H.D.'s work which discusses the intersection of race and gender and the contradictions which are often bound up with her representation of these (see Curry 2000).

H.D.'s work in film opens up potential discussions of cultural difference in a number of ways. As Marcus notes, the 'complex representations of film culture and language' and 'the national, racial, democratic and commercial ideologies' within modernism have yet to be explored fully (1998a, 103). *Borderline*, which sought to promote black culture, was funded by Bryher's inherited fortune accumulated, ironically, through shipping and the commerce of the British Empire. This irony

underscores the contradictions, not just in POOL's representation of racial difference but in its relationship to dominant ideology. Vocal in its opposition to mainstream cinema and the arrival of sound, the final shot of *Borderline* could be read as POOL's statement on Hollywood's increasing economic monopoly of the cinema world. For POOL, Hollywood also represented cultural hegemony which signalled the demise of the 'good object' of the European silent art film (Friedberg 1998a, 322, fn8). There is more to be said about H.D.'s involvement in these debates: for POOL's experimental films were produced in relation to, and as a reaction against, the growth of cinema as mass entertainment. From *Borderline*'s very opening, which depicts a train speeding across Europe, the film sets out to investigate both the modern condition and the progress suggested by modernity. *Borderline*'s aim to investigate the nature of 'modernity' resulted in the reinscription of an avant garde aesthetic which suggests an artistically 'correct' privilege. And, although POOL's film seeks to promote 'political correctness', their contribution to a kind of counter-cinema, reinforces 'correct pleasure [as] a very privileged pleasure' (Gaines 1990 [1984], 87).

As I have suggested throughout this thesis, H.D.'s literary texts - with their focus on heterogeneity and shifting categories of self and sexuality - can be seen to anticipate postmodern preoccupations with plurality and flux. Indeed, Garber argues that H.D.'s sexuality is not so much an example of bisexual modernism but of 'sexual postmodernism' (1996, 62). It is necessary to question how subversive H.D.'s bisexuality is. Bisexuality in H.D.'s circle was fashionable, as it was with that 'well known [...] site of modernist sexual experimentation', the Bloomsbury Group (Davidson *et al.* 1997, 1). The impulse to blur the boundaries of gender represented yet another way of leaving behind the norms of late Victorian society. Yet, as Merl Storr acknowledges, the concept of bisexuality 'is not necessarily clearer now than it was in the 1890s - in fact, it is arguably less so, sedimented as it is with all its past meanings and uses' (1999, 5). In one sense, then, there is a political necessity to appropriate H.D. for a cultural history of bisexuality. Garber, of course, has begun this process, but her discussion of H.D. in *Vice Versa* only runs to 4 pages (1996, 59 - 62).

Critics of H.D.'s work have often tended to overlook the distinction between the biographical details of her bisexual identifications and its textual representation in her

work. This is not to deny the political potential of her writing. For representation, as Dyer acknowledges, is 'one of the prime means by which we have any knowledge of reality' (1997, xiii). The real subversive potentialities lie, in the end, in a consideration of the *textual* representations of bisexuality in H.D.'s writing. For the textual practice of her writing exceeds the 'either/or' offered by heterosexual and homosexual positions. H.D.'s bisexuality can be read as mapping a lesbian aesthetic onto that of the heterosexual and can also be read as oscillating between these two libidinal economies. On either interpretation, her writing both defies singularity and opens up heterogeneous spaces which allow for the contestation of a series of dominant norms.

Within the critical scholarship on H.D.'s writing there remains a space for further study that reads her work within this framework of textual bisexuality. I conclude with Clare Hemmings' definition of 'the bisexual I/eye' which 'does not see itself reflected back in the object of its gaze, but foregrounds bisexuality in its various forms and functions' (Hemmings 1997, 14). This is another potential project and my work here has illuminated future directions which could be taken in discussions of H.D.'s work. Ultimately, for H.D., bisexuality represents 'a way of looking, rather than a thing to be looked for' (*ibid.*). It is alternative 'ways of looking' which have been central to my readings of all the texts discussed here.

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