

TOUCHING DOROTHY RICHARDSON:  
APPROACHING *PILGRIMAGE* AS A HAPTIC  
TEXT

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The 'haptic' – referring variously to the sense of touch and its artificial replication, to kinaesthesia and to the emotionally touching – is a term currently gaining scholarly attention in the fields of film theory, sociology and computer science. This article aims to explore the role of the haptic in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* sequence, as a means of assessing not only the vital importance of the haptic sense within Richardson's oeuvre, but also the ways in which this haptic fascination might in fact be symptomatic of experimental modernist literature more generally. If this is the case, then study of the haptic must accommodate the literary, alongside the cinematic, the social and the technological. Here, the haptic will be considered at the level of content (where Richardson makes us touch her subject), and at the level of form (where the reader's own haptic sense is engaged). While an approach to literature that foregrounds tactile perception and related sensations appears at first a counter-intuitive move, understanding *Pilgrimage* as a haptic text aids its establishment as an exemplary literary expression of modernity.

Dorothy Richardson's interest in the possibilities of the cinematic, as well as the literary, form has now become a commonplace of Richardson scholarship. Through the work of Kristin Bluemel, Susan Gevirtz, Laura Marcus, Elisabeth Bronfen and others, Richardson's standing as a prescient commentator on the emerging form of the cinema has been productively explored.<sup>1</sup> Within this

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<sup>1</sup> Kristin Bluemel, *Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism: Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997). Susan Gevirtz, *Narrative's Journey: The Fiction and Film Writing of Dorothy Richardson* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996). Laura Marcus, Introduction, *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* James Donald et al (eds), (London: Cassell, 1998), pp.150-159. Elisabeth Bronfen, *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text*, trans. Victoria Appelbe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

body of work, several scholars have sought to connect the author's writing on the cinema with the formal innovations of her literary output. Richardson's style is described by Bluemel as 'an exercise in making words do what is more commonly accomplished by the [ ... ] camera'.<sup>2</sup> Winifred Bryher, Richardson's fellow writer for the film journal *Close Up*, noted, in a 1931 review of the author's novel *Dawn's Left Hand*, that it would make, if filmed, 'The real English film for which so many are waiting'.<sup>3</sup> She goes on to observe that it 'begins (as perhaps all films should) in a railway carriage. [ ... ] And in each page an aspect of London is created that like an image from a film, substitutes itself for memory'.<sup>4</sup> Richardson's connection with and enthusiasm for the world of cinema is beyond doubt. She wrote extensively for *Close Up*, the particular aim of which was to explore the potential of cinema as art. She gave consideration to silent films and, grudgingly, to talkies, and was interested in commercial 'movies', as well as films with avowedly more complex artistic aspirations. Her regular column 'Continuous Performance' is clearly written by an avid cinemagoer, and in fact she figures a visit to the cinema as an experience verging on the spiritual. Yet a claim that Richardson aims simply to echo the cinema in the form of her literary writing does not follow from these enthusiasms. In this paper it will be suggested that the connection between the cinema and the innovations of Richardson's literary work is one deeper than mere analogy. It is the haptic sense that defines the process of film viewing and of Richardson reading, and that establishes both as peculiarly modernist experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> Bluemel, op. cit., p. 136. While Bluemel is referring to an early sketch entitled 'A Sussex Auction', she also sees this development of form as crucial to the construction of Richardson's *Pilgrimage* sequence.

<sup>3</sup> Bryher. Review of *Dawn's Left Hand*, by Dorothy Richardson, *Close Up*, 8, 4 (1931): 210.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.210.

## The Quintessential Modernist Mode: Defining the Haptic

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term ‘haptic’ as both a noun and an adjective denoting something ‘Of, pertaining to, or relating to the sense of touch or tactile sensations [ ... ]. Having a greater dependence on sensations of touch than on sight, esp. as a means of psychological orientation’.<sup>5</sup> The earliest citation given in support of this definition is from John Shaw Billings’ *The National Medical Dictionary* of 1890, in which the definition reads: ‘Pertaining to touch, tactile’ and the term is said to be ‘in current use in [ ... ] medical literature’.<sup>6</sup> The *OED* also lists a 1939 quotation from the journal *Mind*, which suggests that the haptic is a designation indicating a combination of two streams of information: “There is the notion of pure “touch”, and there are “kinæsthetic experiences”, and we can have the one without the other; but when we speak of “the world of touch”, or “tactile æsthetics”, we are referring to the data provided by an intimate combination of them both and for this sense Prof. Révész uses the adjective “haptic””.<sup>7</sup> The haptic is, then, contrary to Billings’ definition, something more than touch. It is the combination of an intentional reaching and touching with the human skin, in addition to the appreciation of movement by the body as a whole.

The kinaesthetic element of film spectatorship makes the haptic a concern of film theory in its most phenomenological reaches. The fundamental connection between hapticity and the moving pictures of the cinema is explored most comprehensively in the work of Giuliana Bruno, notably in her *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*. Bruno’s own definition of the haptic is worth quoting at length:

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Haptic’, 1 April 2006 <<http://www.oed.com.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Haptic’, *National Medical Dictionary*. John Shaw Billings (ed.) (Edinburgh and London: Young J. Pentland, 1890).

<sup>7</sup> ‘Haptic’, op. cit. See also W. J. H. Sprott. Rev. of *Die Formenvelt des Tastsinnes*, by G. Révész. *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy*, 48, 191 (July 1939): 359-366.

As the Greek etymology tells us, haptic means ‘able to come into contact with’. As a function of the skin, then, the haptic – the sense of touch – constitutes the reciprocal *contact* between us and the environment, both housing and extending communicative interface. But the haptic is also related to kinesthesia, the ability of our bodies to sense their own movement in space. [ ... ] this book considers the haptic to be an agent in the formation of space – both geographic and cultural – and, by extension, in the articulation of the spatial arts themselves, which include motion pictures. [ ... ] Here, the haptic realm is shown to play a tangible, *tactical* role in our communicative ‘sense’ of spatiality and motility, thus shaping the texture of habitable space and, ultimately, mapping our ways of being in touch with the environment.<sup>8</sup>

Several terms within this helpful definition are of importance. Firstly, Bruno echoes the work of Révész in her mention of the kinaesthetic sense. Secondly, she sees the haptic, that is the haptic body, as a creator of space as well as a perceiver of it in a way that recalls Henri Lefebvre’s contentions about the spatially generative abilities of the body in *The Production of Space*.<sup>9</sup> In addition, both the Lefebvrian connection and the claim that human bodies are able to ‘sense their own movement in space’ imply a phenomenological heritage, one also indicated by the *OED*’s use of the term ‘orientation’. Finally, Bruno writes of the ‘habitable’ nature of space thus perceived, an early gesture toward her more complex claim that a shift toward the haptic is a shift toward the habitable, a theory carrying Heideggerian echoes in its suggestion of emplacement.<sup>10</sup> The mention of ‘environment’, which underscores the concern with habitation, may also be a reference to the work of American psychologist James Jerome Gibson’s ecological model of sense perception.<sup>11</sup> Gibson draws attention to the crucial

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<sup>8</sup> Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), p.6.

<sup>9</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* Trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Bruno, op. cit, p.250.

<sup>11</sup> See James Jerome Gibson, *The Perception of the Visual World*, Leonard Carmichael (ed.), (Westport: Greenwood, 1974). Also James Jerome Gibson, *The*

secondary kinaesthetic element within the faculty of the haptic.<sup>12</sup> For Bruno, then, the haptic is a reciprocal touching between the body and its environment, which enables the apprehension of that environment, the creation of a space, a sense of bodily motion and an inhabitation or emplacement. While Bruno, Gibson, Prof. Révész and the *OED* agree that the haptic combines the sense of touch with a broader ability of the human body to perceive its own motion, it must also be noted that the haptic sense is activated by travel and spatial experience, and that such experience may be emotional as well as physically sensory, an emotional journey. As Bruno explains, ‘Motion pictures – the realm of (e)motion – wed the voyage of the analytical imagination to the pursuit of sensual pleasures’.<sup>13</sup> Bruno favours the term ‘motion pictures’ as a denotation that foregrounds the importance of travel or movement in the cinema’s form of representation. This particular phrase also gives emphasis to the varied responses of the spectator in terms of a sensual or physical response of the body, and an emotional response of the mind. How the tripartite haptic sense – combining touch, kinaesthesia and the emotionally touching – works not only in a cinematic but also in a literary context is a complex story.

Joseph Frank’s article ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature’ is familiar to modernist scholarship. The article was published in the *Sewanee Review* in 1945, and attempted a reassessment of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s 1766 essay ‘Laokoon, or, the Limits of Painting and Poetry’. Revisiting ‘Laokoon’, Frank surveys the literature of the early decades of the twentieth century, and asks whether Lessing’s distinctions between the arts still hold good. Frank’s crucial identification of the modernist literary avant-garde’s transgression of this boundary between the simultaneity of the plastic arts and the sequential nature of literature is the source of subsequent critical interest in his essay. If Bruno is correct in her contention that the haptic is ‘an agent [ ... ] in the articulation of

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*Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, Leonard Carmichael (ed.) (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Rodaway. *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (London: Routledge, 1994) p.42.

<sup>13</sup> Bruno, op. cit, p.173.

the spatial arts'<sup>14</sup>, then it must surely play a role in literature which is now, according to Frank, taking on a 'spatial form'. Hidden in a footnote to Frank's essay, and customarily overlooked by criticism, is a key to where an understanding of the haptic condition of modernist narrative might begin:

German art criticism, in the last few decades, has experienced a veritable renaissance along the lines marked out by Lessing, although he seems to have had no direct influence on these writers. Numerous efforts have been made to trace the evolution of esthetic forms – usually called style by the Germans – by establishing certain categories of perception and correlating these with various climates of feeling and opinion. Among these critics, perhaps the best known is William Worringer.<sup>15</sup>

William Worringer, whose debt to Lessing Frank leaves unclear, was certainly indebted to another thinker on the nature of art, and the father of the concept of the haptic in artistic practice: Alois Riegl. Riegl's notion of the *kunstwollen* (artistic will), which explained shifts in the artistic styles of historical civilisations via an appreciation of shifts in the spatial perceptions of those civilisations, was influential during his lifetime and beyond. His contribution to art historical knowledge is therefore obliquely referred to in Frank's mention of 'certain categories of perception' and 'various climates of feeling and opinion'. This links in turn to Lessing's interest in the Greek division of arts according to the human faculties of perception, an interest that seems to be fully developed in the following century by the fascinating work of Riegl.

Art historical studies have frequently focused on Riegl's conceptualisation of the *kunstwollen*. Influential as this notion has been, it is the less frequently discussed work on the haptic that Riegl completed in his writing on Egyptian art which is crucial to subsequent readings of the cinema and, ultimately, to an

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Frank, 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature', *Sewanee Review*, 53 (1945): 240.

understanding of the literary work of Richardson. For Riegl, Egyptian culture is a key subject of study, offering the starting point for what he sees as a shift from a planar to a perspectival means of spatial representation in art, as well as a shift from haptical to optical human perception and thus a major shift in the *kunstwollen*.<sup>16</sup> Planar art of the Egyptian period that requires a nearsighted appreciation at close quarters and invites touch thus gives way to a more distanced optical engagement that gives the illusion of depth. In an important essay entitled 'Late Roman or Oriental?' of 1902, Riegl notes that 'It is thus [ ... ] essentially through the sense of touch that we experience the true quality, the depth and delimitation of objects in nature and works of art'.<sup>17</sup> In a footnote to the same essay, Riegl explains the alteration of his terminology in which he makes use of the term 'haptic' in place of the more conventional 'tactile': 'It has been objected that this designation could lead to misunderstandings [ ... ] and my intention has been drawn to the fact that physiology has long since introduced the more fitting designation 'haptic' (from *haptēin-fasten*)'.<sup>18</sup>

In his much-discussed essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Walter Benjamin applies the notion of a haptic art to the cinema, drawing upon Riegl but reversing his *kunstwollen* teleology such that hapticity becomes the expression of modernity.<sup>19</sup> For Benjamin, cinema's form is thus 'primarily tactile, being based on changes of place and focus which periodically assail the spectator'.<sup>20</sup> Further, haptical cinema provides a route to understanding the relationship of human perception to the contemporary environment in the broadest sense, since 'the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by

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<sup>16</sup> Antonia Lant, 'Haptical Cinema', *October*, 74 (1995): 50.

<sup>17</sup> Alois Riegl, 'Late Roman or Oriental?' Trans. Peter Wortsman. *German Essays in Art History*. Gert Schiff (ed.) (New York: Continuum, 1988), p.181.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p.190. This supports Billings' contention that the term 'haptic' is in current use in 1890.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), pp.216-7.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, p.231.

contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation'.<sup>21</sup> Benjamin's contentions here begin to sound like a manifesto for the prioritisation of the haptic sense as a means of tackling the modernist historical 'turning point' – the dominance of the visual sense will not do, even when faced with an ostensibly visual medium such as the cinema. Antonia Lant neatly summarises Benjamin's description of the cinema as haptic, as having to do with touch, a claim that at once is counter-intuitive, and yet describes the particular impact of this new medium in modernity: 'in cinema, although it had no actual tactile properties of its own (in the dark the screen offers no modulated surface to feel), the shock effect of the bombardment of spectators by images was physical, quite unlike the contemplative relation of the viewer to a work of art that relied on distance for its aura and effect'.<sup>22</sup> If considering the cinema of the modernist period to be best appreciated through haptic means is quite a conceptual leap, then the description of modernist *literature* as haptic may seem improbable.

It is by no means the intention of this paper to suggest that modernist literature offered a modulated surface to the reader, any more than modernist cinema was able to offer a modulated surface to its viewers. Lant's comments, noted above, clarify this point. Writing available to the touch of the human hand already exists, of course, in the form of brail (the full system of which was first published in 1829, spreading beyond its native France after 1868, when what is now the Royal National Institute for the Blind began to promote its use).<sup>23</sup> The surface of the non-brail modernist page, and the modernist screen, remains flat. However, using a broadened notion of the haptic that includes not only the reaching and touching of the human skin but also the kinaesthetic sense and the emotionally touching allows us to bring literature into the haptic fold, and to argue that it partook of this quintessential mode of representation, and of perception, as outlined by Benjamin. My use of the term 'haptic' is allied to

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>22</sup>Lant, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> See RNIB, 'RNIB Past and Present', 20 September 2008 <[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)>.

Benjamin's and to Bruno's, and is therefore considerably wider than the use of the term employed in the other fields in which it appears. As mentioned above, the term was important to nineteenth century physiologists (note Billings' mention of its wide use by 1890), and later to art historians. Today, the term lingers on in medical studies of the perceptual experiences of the blind, and still has some relevance in the art historical field. However, it is more prominent in contemporary sociology, which has offered several attempts at a cultural history of touch, or of the human skin.<sup>24</sup> It is, however, most commonly used within the field of computer science and informatics, where 'haptics' (with a noun-creating 's') constitutes an emerging, and rapidly developing, sub-field. Here, 'haptics' refers to the science and study of touch in both 'real world' and virtual environments. Haptic interfaces allow interaction between the human body and the computer through the sense of touch, making particular use of 'force feedback' interfaces, which create a resistive force detected by the user's fingertips, giving the illusion of what Bruno would call a 'grasping touch', or actual skin contact. The computing field also contains those working towards non-ocular visualisation programmes for the blind or visually impaired. Thus, the virtual replication of the experience of touch is possible, in other words it is detected by the human body as an instance of contact. Further, haptics are adequate to provide 'visualisation' possibilities for the blind, suggesting that the experience of the 'visual' is a mental process, and is not determined by the means whereby that information is passed to the brain. These indications from other fields hint at the way in which modernist literature might create a haptic experience for its readers, without manipulating the touch of the human skin or the extended hand. However, despite the currency of the term 'haptic' in these other contemporary fields, it is not customarily applied to literature, either in denoting a textual strategy or in describing a mode of reading.

In his consideration of the paintings of Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze picks up the story of Riegl, and makes use of his

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<sup>24</sup> See Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004). See Constance Classen (ed.), *The Book of Touch* (New York: Berg, 2005).

terminology of the haptic in describing the *'violent manual space'* of Bacon's oeuvre.<sup>25</sup> It is Bacon's status as 'an Egyptian', a painter of form and ground on a single plane, which makes this haptic designation an appropriate one.<sup>26</sup> Deleuze suggests that strategies of painting employed by Bacon create a modification of a tactile-optical space, in which properties of touch are subsumed within the look of the eye.<sup>27</sup> Deleuze's recognition of the significance of Riegl and his concept of the haptic highlights the importance of the haptic mode of reception of the visual arts from ancient times to the present day. From Frank's re-reading of Lessing, to the footnoted Worringer, to the foregoing explorations of Riegl, to Benjamin's understanding of the cinema, to Deleuze's description of the Egyptian Bacon, a circuitous path is drawn that sees the haptic as central to modernist plastic arts. Frank's 'spatial form' claim opens up the possibility of transferring this haptic reception from the plastic to the literary form. That Frank uses 'cinematographic' to describe literature making use of this spatial form is of great significance;<sup>28</sup> it is the common mobilisation of the haptic sense that connects the cinema and the most experimental literature of the modernist period.<sup>29</sup> With Benjamin

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<sup>25</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003), p.127. Deleuze is, however, inaccurate in his suggestion that Riegl 'coined' the word *haptisch* in response to criticism (p.195). While Riegl did seek a new way of describing the role of touch in ancient art, he openly admits that he takes his revised terminology from the field of physiology. See Riegl, op. cit, p.190.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp.135.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp.154-5.

<sup>28</sup> Frank, op. cit, p.230.

<sup>29</sup> In this article I use the term 'cinema' to refer to film, 'cinematic' to describe film-like perceptions or experiences, and 'cinematographic', following Frank, to denote literature that echoes the form of film. At the time of Richardson's writing, the shortened term 'cinema' had largely replaced 'cinematograph' for the description of the building showing films. While in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century 'cinema' at first indicated the apparatus of the camera or a scene suitable for representation in film, by the 1910s, 'cinema' was the dominant term for the film house itself. See Henry V. Hopwood, *Living Pictures: Their History, Photo-Production and Practical Working with a Digest of British Patents and Annotated Bibliography* (London: Gutenberg Press, 1899), p.184. Douglas Sladen, *The Tragedy of the Pyramids: A Romance of Army Life in Egypt* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1909), p.90.

as a catalyst, the use of the haptic concept as a point of departure for the study of the modernist literary text becomes possible – if we can ‘touch’ the cinema screen, perhaps we can also ‘touch’ the text.

### Dorothy Richardson’s Touching Texts

In the ‘Continuous Performance’ column, ‘A Thousand Pities’, Richardson refers to ‘the thoughtlike swiftness of movement made possible by the film’,<sup>30</sup> and a relationship can be traced between this swift (e)motion of the camera in a cinematic context, and the cinematically inflected stream of consciousness style which she deploys to depict thought in *Pilgrimage*. Those writers who first and most famously experimented with stream of consciousness narrative are frequently those who are also said by subsequent criticism to be cinematographic in their style – ‘thoughtlike swiftness’ perhaps explains this coincidence of observations. Discussing John Dos Passos’ *Manhattan Transfer* in her column ‘Almost Persuaded’, Richardson suggests that in his use of language a ‘barrier’ was ‘splintered’, a ‘barrier against which modern art has flung itself in vain’.<sup>31</sup> This barrier has been ‘fist-punched’ by ‘all those novelists [ ... ] who in pursuit of their particular aims, produced texts retrospectively labelled cinematographic’.<sup>32</sup> In her use of the term cinematographic, and her suggestion that it is a critical term already in use, Richardson pre-empts Frank’s use of the same terminology. She knows that a productive formal confluence is occurring between literature and cinema, one that is breaking down the barrier between forms. In a column entitled ‘Captions’, Richardson writes that ‘Art and literature, Siamese twins making their first curtsey to the public in a script that was a series of pictures, have never yet been separated. In its uttermost abstraction art is still a word about life

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<sup>30</sup> Dorothy Richardson, ‘A Thousand Pities’, *Close Up*, 1.4 (1927), p. 167.

Pagination for ‘Continuous Performance’ columns refers to James Donald et al (eds) *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Dorothy Richardson, ‘Almost Persuaded’, *Close Up*, 4.6 (1929), p. 191.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

and literature never ceases to be pictorial'.<sup>33</sup> The phrase draws together these two art forms, and undermines the formal categorisations that Lessing established in his 'Laokoon'. Here Richardson makes a claim for the contravention of the boundaries between art and literature a full eighteen years before Frank published his own observations in 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature'.

Richardson's inaugural 'Continuous Performance' column is one place of note in which the cinema can be seen to be related to the haptic. Such a relationship may help to explain the true nature of the transition of her cinematic ideas from the film-writing of her *Close Up* columns, to her literary work in *Pilgrimage*. Richardson recounts a return to the theatre after many years of film attendance, and notes in the former art 'some essential failure to compel the co-operation of the creative consciousness of the audience'.<sup>34</sup> The statement implies that the cinema does claim such a power to captivate, and this is confirmed when Richardson goes on to observe that 'Such co-operation cannot take place unless the audience is first stilled to forgetfulness of itself as an audience'.<sup>35</sup> This forgetfulness of audience status is essential if the audience is to achieve 'the plunge in to life that just any film can give'.<sup>36</sup> The 'co-operation of the creative consciousness of the audience' (my emphasis) is an aim that recalls Bruno's description of the reciprocity of haptic cinema, and facilitates an (e)motional journey, a touching experience enabled by moving pictures. Describing the audience experience in a column published just three months later under the title 'The Front Rows,' Richardson explains that a position in the front row of a cinema audience presents particular problems:

There was indeed no possibility of focusing a scene so immense that one could only move about in it from point to point and realise that the business of the expert front-rower is to find the centre of action and follow it as best he can. Of the

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<sup>33</sup> Dorothy Richardson, 'Captions', *Close Up*, 1, 3 (1927): 165.

<sup>34</sup> Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance', *Close Up*, 1, 1 (1927): 161.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p.161.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p.161.

whole as something to hold in the eye he can have no more idea than has the proverbial fly on the statue over which he crawls.<sup>37</sup>

This description may be compared with Riegl's categorisation of the nearsightedness of the haptic appreciation of Egyptian art,<sup>38</sup> and the sense of touch is referred to in the phrase 'something to hold in the eye', which itself recalls Bacon's 'tactile-optical space', as well as in the image of the crawling fly.

In a crucial column entitled 'The Film Gone Male', written in 1932 when the *Pilgrimage* project was well under way, with ten volumes already published, Richardson states that:

Memory, psychology is to-day declaring, is passive consciousness. Those who accept this dictum see the in-rolling future as living reality and the past as reality entombed. [ ... ]. For these straight-line thinkers memory is a mere glance over the shoulder along a past seen as a progression from the near end of which mankind goes forward. [ ... ] But there is memory and memory. And memory proper, as distinct from a mere backward glance [ ... ] gathers, can gather, and pile up its wealth only round universal, unchanging, unevolving verities that move neither backwards nor forwards and have neither speech nor language.<sup>39</sup>

For Richardson, memory itself is the great spatialiser, in that it disrupts the linear narrative flow of consciousness in order to pile up its riches, layering past events upon the moment. With this appreciation of memory comes a demand for a flexibly spatialised form of narrative, and the cinema seems to offer an appropriate model. It is memory that is responsible for some of the most innovative textual depictions of space within the *Pilgrimage* sequence, since central protagonist Miriam's consciousness recalls past experiences which are always tied to the concrete spaces in which they occurred. In this way, past experiences of concrete or

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<sup>37</sup> Dorothy Richardson, 'The Front Rows', *Close Up*, 2, 1 (1928): 172.

<sup>38</sup> Riegl, op. cit, p.68.

<sup>39</sup> Dorothy Richardson, 'The Film Gone Male', *Close Up*, 9, 1 (1932): 205-6.

tangible spaces are ‘pile[d] up’ around her current space of dwelling through recollection. Thus the concrete spaces of Miriam’s urban adventures, the emotional or psychological space of her consciousness, and the recollected spaces of past experience interweave in a narrative that is radically spatial rather than sequential, despite its overall *kunsterroman* journey towards the moment when Miriam truly commences writing. Even this journey is, in this sense, a continuous performance rather than a teleology, since *Pilgrimage*’s end propels the reader back to its beginning – the moment of authorship.

### Touching Semi-Private Space – Babington

*Pilgrimage* is obsessed with acts of touch, with tactility and with haptic experiences in the broad, tripartite sense outlined above by Bruno. Haptic scenarios within the content of the novel sequence ultimately point the reader toward observing that the form of the text itself makes use of the haptic mode – a mode that creates for the reader of *Pilgrimage* a haptic experience. Analysing three kinds of space within Richardson’s novel sequence – semi-private, public and domestic – in addition to a consideration of the author’s own depiction of reading, will help to illustrate this complex point, as all make marked use of the haptic. It is of particular importance to address Richardson’s use of the garden space in *Pilgrimage*. The garden of Miriam’s family home at Babington, as a site of memory, is one of the crucial figures through which Richardson creates a spatial simultaneity in her narrative, making use of a cinematographic approach that disrupts the linear or chronological flow of the story and, in so doing, offers an insight into the hidden territories of Miriam’s consciousness. Carol Watts has described Richardson’s short story ‘The Garden’, which again depicts Babington, as ‘the fullest narrativization of the scene that serves in Richardson’s work, then, as a form of ur-memory’,<sup>40</sup> and we might note the superimposition

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<sup>40</sup> Carol Watts, *Dorothy Richardson* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1995), p.20.  
Dorothy Richardson, ‘The Garden’, *Journey to Paradise*, Trudi Tate (ed.), (London: Virago, 1989), pp.21-24.

implied in Watts' use of 'ur' here. The garden returns throughout the early part of the novel sequence, each time superimposing its remembered space upon the concrete space of Miriam's present existence. The garden is at once a distinct concrete space in which experience has unfolded, and a recollected space that, through memory, she often drags into simultaneity with a chronologically subsequent spatial experience.

Through the garden space, then, it can be seen that recollection brings about a simultaneity of spaces, and Bronfen has pointed out that simultaneity was a dream of Richardson's. In an interview of 1929, when asked 'What should you most like to do, to know, to be?' Richardson replied that she wished to know 'How to be perfectly in two places at once'.<sup>41</sup> This aspiration toward simultaneity is enacted through Miriam in her relationship with the spaces of *Pilgrimage*. The Babington garden is first introduced as a space of Miriam's recollection when she receives a letter from the family at home while staying in Germany: 'The little German garden was disappearing from Miriam's eyes. [ ... ] why had she not stayed . . . just one more spring? . . . how silly and hurried she had been, and there at home in the garden lilac was quietly coming out'.<sup>42</sup> The space of the German garden at which she is looking from her position in the *saal* retreats as she reads Harriett's letter, and the Babington garden is superimposed through the action of memory. The remembered garden, brought into Miriam's consciousness via the letter from Harriett, becomes of greater significance than her present location, despite its temporal and geographical distance. As Bronfen explains, 'In the course of memory work it [the actual material space] becomes ever more fictional [ ... ]. At the same time, however, by virtue of this temporal distance and this transformation into an imagined place, the space of the past is felt to be increasingly *real*'.<sup>43</sup> Bruno's reading of the proto-cinematic entertainment offered by the picturesque garden of the nineteenth century is relevant here. Of

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<sup>41</sup> Cited in Elisabeth Bronfen, op. cit, p.1.

<sup>42</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* Vol. 1 (London: Dent, 1967), p.12. From here on page references in text.

<sup>43</sup> Bronfen, op. cit, p.15-16.

such relevance, in fact, that it begins to sound like a description of Miriam's own use of her Babington garden memories:

A memory theater of sensual pleasures, the [picturesque] garden was an exterior that put the spectator in 'touch' with inner space. As one moved through the space of the garden, a constant double movement connected external to internal topographies. The garden was thus an outside turned into an inside; but it was also the projection of an inner world onto the outer geography. In a sensuous mobilization, the exterior of the landscape was transformed into an interior map – the landscape within us.<sup>44</sup>

The picturesque garden therefore involves a dual, simultaneous exploration, in which external space and internal space unfold from moment to moment. That such gardens offered a sequence of ordered views, a form of spatial narrative, is the origin of Bruno's claim that they may be considered a forerunner of the cinema as a source of entertainment. In attempting a spatialised and cinematographic narrative in *Pilgrimage*, Richardson hits upon the garden as space of contemplation, simultaneity, and the exploration of internal topographies. Miriam's Babington garden pulls the recollection of concrete space into simultaneity with the present experience of space as outlined in the forward flow of the text, and echoes the proto-cinematic spatial narrative of the picturesque garden. For Bruno, this action of bringing internal and external topographies into contiguity is an action of touch, a haptic experience.

Watts' analysis of Richardson's 'The Garden' identifies elements within the story that support this connection between the garden space and haptic experience, which can be seen to be more fully realised in *Pilgrimage*. Describing the progress of "The Garden"'s young protagonist, Watts states: 'As she ventures down the gravel path, the child attempts to measure herself in and through the world of sensations that surrounds her. Richardson uses synaesthesia [ ... ] to represent the child's dissolving of the

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<sup>44</sup> Bruno, op. cit, p.203.

boundaries between her own experience and the garden, between subject and object'.<sup>45</sup> Such a collapse of the subject / object divide as a result of non-visual sense experience recalls the work of film theorist Laura U. Marks, whose manifesto of haptic criticism offered touch as a means of 'humble' approach, bringing observer and observed into contiguity.<sup>46</sup> For Richardson, the use of the haptic as a means of negotiating the self and one's relationship with others, or with the world more broadly conceived, is crucial. Watts suggests that 'The Garden' describes a founding psychological moment of parental abandonment, causing the child to reflect on her sense of self. That touch should come into play at this moment is no coincidence. The use of the garden to interrupt the chronological flow of Miriam's consciousness and, therefore, of Richardson's text – the creation of an 'ur-memory' – is one source for claims that Richardson's writing is cinematographic, in Frank's understanding of the term. With Richardson herself so wary of the notion of the 'stream of consciousness',<sup>47</sup> with all its implied linearity, it seems that a 'garden of consciousness', experienced in a haptic manner, offers an apposite alternative model for the author's own depiction of the workings of the mind.

## Touching Public Space – London

The public, hurried space of London, although crucial to Miriam's development as an artist, is of a very different order to the contemplative space of her recollected garden. However, it is

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<sup>45</sup> Watt, op. cit, p.21.

<sup>46</sup> Laura U. Marks, 'Haptic Visuality: Touching with the Eyes', 25 January 2008 <[www.framework.fi](http://www.framework.fi)>. p.3. See also Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Richardson's own 'Foreword' to the first collected edition of the novel sequence, published in 1938, explicitly addresses this issue. During the writing of the twelve novels collected in this edition, she records: 'Phrases began to appear, formulae devised to meet the exigencies of literary criticism. 'The Stream of Consciousness' lyrically led the way, to be gladly welcomed by all who could persuade themselves of the possibility of comparing consciousness to a stream' (I 11).

another space in which haptic forms of perception can be seen to be mobilised. Bryher's review of *Dawn's Left Hand* quoted above observes that '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'.<sup>48</sup> Here Bryher makes reference to the thoughtlike swiftness of film, and suggests that, as in film, London appears to 'revolve before the eyes', that is to take on a visible three dimensionality as a result of the reading process. Might it be possible to suggest that this three dimensional depiction in fact becomes tangible for the reader? That, like the synaesthetic experiences of the child of 'The Garden', the reader too enjoys the collapse of the boundary between subject and object, between reader and text, and is able to 'touch' Miriam's London, that is engage with it haptically? Miriam's present space is foregrounded in the London passages, as memory is jettisoned in the interests of creating a visceral experience for the reader that occurs as Miriam's own experience occurs. Travel around London is central to the perception of its spatial reality, highlighted by the adjectival neologism in the description of North London as 'noisy and trammy' (I 322). Miriam's walks around London are opportunities for both heedlessness as to her surroundings, and for reflections upon abstract emotions:

She wandered about between Wimpole Street and St Pancras, holding in imagination wordless converse with a stranger whose whole experience had melted and vanished like her own, into the flow of light down the streets; into the unending joy of the way the angles of buildings cut themselves out against the sky, glorious if she paused to survey them [ ... ] a maze of shapes, flowing, tilting into each other, in endless patterns, sharp against the light; sharing her joy in the changing same song of the London traffic; the bliss of post offices and railway stations, cabs going on and on towards unknown space; omnibuses rumbling securely from point to point, always within the magic circle of London (III 85-6).

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<sup>48</sup> Bryher, op. cit., p.210.

Her purposeless ‘wandering’ finds a ‘joy’ in the angles and juxtapositions of buildings which may remain only dimly registered, but, if contemplated, become ‘glorious’. The ‘maze of shapes’ and ‘tilting’, ‘endless patterns’ recall the kaleidoscope of her youth, whose potential for the endless generation of patterns brought her to tears. When staying with the Brooms in the novel *Interim*, Miriam declares an emotional fascination with proto-cinematic devices: ‘“Do you *remember* looking at the kaleidoscope? I used to cry about it sometimes at night; thinking of the patterns I had not seen. [ ... ] Oh, and do you remember those things – did you have a little paper *theatre*?”’ [ ... ] She rushed on to the ‘stereoscope’ (II 298-9). The ‘changing same song’ of London indicates its flow of movement, the reliability of its pattern of ceaseless change. Post offices, railway stations and the ‘point to point’ travel of omnibuses give London its sense of an ordered network of spaces, although the cabs head off into ‘unknown’, unexplored, space. London, then, has a circular or, more properly, circulatory magic. The mention of the kaleidoscope works to evoke the fragmented, angular shiftings of visual experience in the city, but also, of course, recalls attention to the cinematographic, and thence haptic, aspect of Richardson’s writing project. Travel and the cinematic mode of perception are linked in a later episode when Miriam takes a tram ride to the coast: ‘Through the sliding door she escaped into the welcome of reflected light, into an inner world that changed the aspect of everything about her. When the tram moved off, the scenes framed by the windows grew beautiful in movement. The framing and the movement created them, gave them a life that was not the life of wild nature only’ (IV 265). The framed scenes that, in motion, transform the natural world, bringing to it a new form of life through the mechanised means of its presentation to the eye, recall the cinema.

An earlier bus journey within London itself is also set up as a cinematic experience, and again the kaleidoscope is mentioned: ‘In the dimly lit little interior, moving along through the backward flowing mist-screened street lights, she dropped away from the circling worlds of sound, and sat thoughtless, gazing inward along the bright kaleidoscopic vistas that came unfailing and unchanged whenever she was moving, alone and still, against the moving tide

of London' (III 114). The 'dimly lit' interior, the reference to a screen and Miriam's gazing, set up the cinematic relationship between spectacle and spectator. The 'thoughtless[ness]' of the cinematic experience is debated by Richardson in her column "This Spoon-Fed Generation?". The 'moving tide' of London provides a moving picture. That Miriam is described as 'moving, alone and still' seems at first to be a paradoxical statement, although of course her position on an omnibus explains this phraseology: while she is physically still, her movement through the landscape is technologically, mechanically enabled. Such an apparently contradictory situation, of being at once still and moving, is one which Richardson explicitly claims to be cinematic when she states in her column 'Narcissus' that: 'In this single, simple factor rests the whole power of the film: [ ... ] In life, we contemplate a landscape from one point, or walking through it, break it into bits. The film, by setting the landscape in motion and keeping us still, allows it to walk through us'.<sup>49</sup> Travel, then, is a cinematic experience, best conveyed to the reader by means of a cinematographic text. That such a text might 'walk through' its reader, creating kinaesthetic resonances akin to those experienced by the cinema audience, is implied by Richardson's oeuvre. Miriam's circuitous perambulations bring out the kaleidoscopic, cinematic experience of the city. For the reader of *Pilgrimage*, Richardson recreates the action of the kaleidoscope upon the senses, and in her fragmented description, recreates the sensory bombardment of contemporary London. Just as the audience of modernist cinema is assailed by visual impressions which bring about a kinaesthetic response of the body, which in effect trick the body into believing itself in movement, so in reading of Miriam's London wanderings, Richardson's audience may also have their kinaesthetic sense engaged. If the kinaesthetic sense of the human body can be triggered by cinema, it can surely be triggered by a cinematic, haptic text.

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<sup>49</sup> Dorothy Richardson, 'Narcissus', *Close Up*, 8, 4 (1931): 203.

## Touching Domestic Space – Miriam’s Room

Within the context of the noisy, trammy city of London, the privacy and quiet of the domestic room is essential as a space in which Miriam can write. Yet, according to Bronfen, it also works at a ‘figurative level as a threshold between the conscious and unconscious, between the products of experience and those of the imagination’.<sup>50</sup> While London as a city is a space of experience, of the groundwork of Miriam’s *kunstlerroman*, the private rooms she occupies within that city enable the exercising of her imagination, and are thus essential in the creation of her writing. Of her room in Mrs. Bailey’s boarding house, for example, she notes: ‘The room was full of clear strength. There must always be a clear cold room to return to. There was no other way of keeping the inward peace. Outside one need do nothing but what was expected of one, asking nothing for oneself but freedom to return, to the centre’ (II 321). The cinematic aspect to bus or tram travel in the city foregrounds the moving picture, and yet even domestic space is occasionally described in such a way that it comes to sound cinematic. Miriam’s room in *Deadlock* provides four walls that, even as they shelter her, also operate as screens onto which imagined, mobile spaces can be projected: ‘The walls were traveller’s walls. That had been their first fascination [ ... ] now [ ... ]. They saw her years of travel contract to a few easily afforded moments, lit, though she had not known it, by light instreaming from the past and flowing now visibly ahead across the farther years’ (III 87). This domestic moving picture display is, it turns out, the only travel experience that counts, a claim made later when Miriam says to Hypo: ‘Of course there is actually no such thing as travel. So they say. There is nothing but a *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*, meaning *de tout ce que je suis*, even in a *tour du monde*’ (IV 167). Miriam allows her past experiences of travel to form a cinematic projection on the walls of her room. Light ‘instreaming from the past’ is modified by the apparatus of her consciousness and projected forth, with Miriam’s mind as film projector, onto the movie screen of her walls, inscribed with imagination and memory.

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<sup>50</sup> Bronfen, op. cit., p. 82.

## Conclusion – The Haptic Reader

The spatial and sensory inventiveness of Richardson's narrative transforms the chronology of Miriam's *kunsterroman* into an achronological, spatialised, cinematographic and haptic text. Miriam's Babington garden performs a proto-cinematic function which, when understood alongside her story 'The Garden', seems to invite in the protagonists of each text a synaesthetic engagement which uses the tactile to contemplate self / world relationships. London's spaces are experienced as cinematic spectacle through the mechanised mediation of tram and bus rides, and through Miriam's perambulatory activities; they may even bring about a kinaesthetic response in the reader. The domestic spaces that Miriam inhabits within London are also, surprisingly, subject to travel and recollection, and transform Miriam herself into a form of cinematic apparatus. Through the presentation of Miriam's story, Richardson uncovers the haptic element within the cinematic, which Benjamin so presciently identified as crucial to modernist apprehension. Richardson is therefore considerably more than a cinematographic writer in Frank's terms. In her intention to make use of the haptic, Richardson can be seen to be answering Benjamin's call for a shift in the mode of perception in the modernist period. At her most radical, Richardson moves beyond mere *depiction* of haptic experience, in order to appeal to the haptic sense of her own readership.

Richardson's fictional depictions of reading provide a haptic model that is reflected in the approach of the reader to the text of *Pilgrimage* itself. When Miriam reads Ibsen's *Brand* in the ABC restaurant, she remains engrossed in the text, even when those running the restaurant are keen for their remaining customers to leave: 'The electric lights flashed out all over the A.B.C. at once. Miriam remained bent low over her book' (II 383). The captivating quality of the book is its ability to offer the reader an experience, a connection with their sensibility, rather than a mere representation: 'You are *in* Norway when you read. That is why people read books by geniuses and look far-away when they talk

about them' (II 383). For the reader of *Pilgrimage*, the reading experience is not merely cinematographic, formally reflecting the spatial nature and thoughtlike swiftness of film, but haptic; their tangible, emotional and kinaesthetic engagement places them *in* Miriam's world. Therefore, while Miriam finds a hint of the reader's haptic experience in the work of Ibsen, it must be observed that the haptic capacities of the written text are truly brought to fruition in the experimental work of Richardson herself.