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John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* and the Cinematic Sensibility

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Abstract

John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* has long been recognized for its cinematic qualities, yet criticism has tended to treat montage chiefly as a formal analogue to film editing. Our article reconsiders the novel's cinematic sensibility by approaching montage not as a stylistic borrowing from the screen but as an organizing principle through which urban space, temporality, perception, social conflict, and narrative voice are articulated in relation to one another. Situating the novel within the broader frameworks of literature, cinema, and the visual arts that shaped Anglo-American modernism, we argue that Dos Passos reconstitutes New York as a spatialized, kinetic textual field with fractured rhythms which register the sensory and ideological aspects of metropolitan life.

Through close readings of selected episodes, the article examines the novel's recourse to rapid cutting, close-ups, panoramic views, abrupt transitions, documentary fragments, advertising copy, newspaper headlines, song lyrics, and shifting focalization. It gives particular attention to the ways in which these devices dismantle linear narrative progression, substituting for it a discontinuous structure grounded in juxtaposition, accumulation, and simultaneity, all of which are instantiated in the article through the use of textual evidence from the novel. The discussion further

situates Dos Passos's technique in relation to D. W. Griffith's discontinuous editing and the compositional logic of synthetic Cubism, while distinguishing these antecedents from the Soviet montage practices that Dos Passos could not yet have encountered while composing *Manhattan Transfer*. The novel's cinematic form thus appears less as the derivative imitation of a single medium than as part of a wider modernist reconfiguration of the increasingly emerging concept of visuality.

The article also brings cinematic form into dialogue with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia" and Ellen Esrock's recently developed account of visual imagination and reader response. Montage, it contends, operates acoustically and ideologically as well as visually, setting in collision the speech registers, social positions, private thoughts, public noises, and commercial idioms of the modern metropolis. The resulting layering yields a collective urban portrait that no single consciousness can fully organize. At the same time, the novel's recurrent oscillations between poverty and affluence, anonymity and visibility, movement and stasis position the reader as an active participant, compelled to assemble meaning from dispersed fragments.

By conceiving cinematicity as a structural, perceptual, and social principle rather than an inventory of film-like techniques, the article extends existing accounts of Dos Passos's formal experimentation. It proposes that the distinctive achievement of *Manhattan Transfer* lies in its fusion of montage, sensory description, heteroglossia, and visual juxtaposition into a narrative form capable of registering the velocity, dissonance, and social stratification of early twentieth-century New York. In doing so, the analysis draws together questions usually addressed in isolation: cinematic technique, urban representation, sensory perception, polyphony, and the social critique of modern American life. This integrated approach illuminates how formal fragmentation becomes inseparable from the novel's representation of class disparity, alienation, mobility, and collective experience. Consequently, *Manhattan Transfer* emerges as a pivotal experiment in American modernism, one that transforms the metropolis into a moving textual image while anticipating the more expansive documentary strategies Dos Passos would develop in the *U.S.A.* trilogy.

Keywords: cinematic narrative, montage, editing, heteroglossia, American literature, modernism, cross-pollination

In *The Culture of Time and Space*, Stephen Kern aptly observes that the technological innovations in film, radio, and military industries at the onset of the twentieth century engendered a "cult of speed," driven by an urge to restructure, remap, and reorient the reader's perception of time and space in a modernist sense (2003, p. 110). The transformation Kern describes in his book extends far beyond technological innovation; it reaches into the heart of artistic imagination and reshapes how modernist writers and artists understood and represented the world around them (2003). Modernism was an emphatically international, predominantly cosmopolitan movement, with innovations in one country swiftly spreading to another. Aesthetic movements such as Futurism, Dadaism, Cubism, and Vorticism, which rose to prominence at the dawn of the new century, partially shaped by a rising fascination with optical contrivances in the Victorian era, were marked by major technological transformations. "The optical is no longer a metaphor, but a reality: a device, apparatus, or gadget whose lens-crafted appearance on the scene of vision enhances and alters 'visuality,' a recently coined term for 'how we moderns see seeing'" (Moore, 1997, p. 367). Modernist literature in the Anglo-American context – particularly in the works of James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and T. S. Eliot, among others – recognized the popular effects of contemporary cinema as a prime mover behind the emergence of optical tropes and cinematically structured narratives in their works, but the poetry of Walt Whitman, Virginia Woolf, Stephen Crane, and Gertrude Stein had already begun to shed a new light on realism, representation, and memory, borrowing from the visual and mechanical logic of photography in both form and content.

The aim of the present article is to demonstrate how John Dos Passos dismantles the conventions of linear narrative temporality in *Manhattan Transfer*, selecting instead a spatialized, visually-charged orchestration of scenes which emulate the kinetic grammar of early cinema. Through his fragmented, montage-driven aesthetic and the screen-inspired narrative design, he does not merely represent the modern metropolis; rather, he reenacts its disjointed rhythms, its visual noise, and its emotional dissonance, enabling the reader to inhabit, as it were, the fractured interiority of modern urban life. David Seed claims that in addition to making "sustained attempts to incorporate cinematic elements in […] *Manhattan Transfer* and the *U.S.A.* trilogy, he also saw film as a unique force of cultural change in the modern era (2009, p. 129).

It is not surprising, then, that Anglo-American modernism – nourished by cross-fertilization across the arts, such as music vis-à-vis painting, painting vis-à-vis literature, etc. – abandoned the linear exposition of thought in favor of filmic co-

llages composed of fragmented imagery and layered allusions. The cross-pollination between literature and cinematography became one of the most significant "inventions" of the era, predicating the emergence of highly stylized forms and fractured compositions. American avant-garde modernism, in particular, bore visible traces of this influence. Ezra Pound, for instance, crafted *The Cantos* with a cinematic sensibility, incorporating techniques drawn from the still-inchoate motion-picture industry – such as flashbacks, dissolves, jump cuts, and montage. In his book, *James Joyce and Cinemacity*, Keith Williams accentuates that "André Bazin equated Joyce with the future of cinema, by arguing that [Joyce] achieved 'ultracinematographic' things on the page which film had still to catch up with in the 1960s. [Bazin] deemed Joyce 'ahead of the game' because he seemed to emulate or even outdo what screen techniques achieved both during his lifetime and long after he died in 1941" (2020, p. 2).[1] It would be challenging to disagree with Williams, alluding to Jonathan Crary, in that

> the inception of visual modernity did not stem from experimentation with non-representational form in Post-Impressionist art from the 1880s as is often assumed, but rather from experimental optical devices developed from the early nineteenth century and their wider impact on popular consciousness. This meant that seeing was no longer regarded as neutral perception, but as a subjective and mobile activity, dependent on the body, on perspective, attention and even artificial manipulation (2020, p. 2).

"Dos Passos was concerned with new ways of seeing, new practices of consumption, and the general role of the media in society" (Seed, 2009, p. 129). *Manhattan Transfer* reinvents the city of New York and its denizens during the Roaring Twenties through the usage of montage as a leading cinematic technique, documenting the fragmented urban metropolis. It will be demonstrated that, though chiefly used as a cinematic technique, montage (alongside its several subcategories, such as conceptual, accelerated, and Hollywood montage) is not confined to the description of "assemblage through editing" (Beaver, 2006, p, 158) and becomes a storehouse of

[1] In his comprehensive essay on the cinematic mode of writing, Marco Bellardi writes that cinematization in narratives encompasses several representative works, "such as Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), Elio Vittorini's *Uomini e no* (1945), Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La jalousie* (1957), or James G. Ballard's *The 60 Minute Zoom* (2006 [1976]), where cinematisation is most prominent. However, cinematised narration can also be substantially limited to imitation of montage, as in Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) and Antonio Tabucchi's *Piazza d'Italia* (1975), or appear locally in the narrative, as in some passages of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997)" (2018, p. 25).

interweaving personal histories of the characters that occupy the novel's human landscape in a similar manner to Joyce's main characters rambling in the city of Dublin in *Ulysses*.

Manhattan Transfer is an amalgamation of diverse influences, chief among them the American filmmaker D.W. Griffith – whose work Dos Passos greatly admired – and the Russian pioneers of cinematic montage, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein. All three directors relied heavily on montage as a central narrative technique, using it to structure meaning through visual juxtaposition and rhythmic sequencing. As defined by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, montage is "the editing technique of assembling separate pieces of thematically related film and putting them together into a sequence" ("Montage"). This method, in turn, allows for the construction of meaning through the cumulative layering of discrete images, fragments, and events. How, then, does Dos Passos distinguish himself from other modernist writers experimenting with narrative form? He is known to have made one of the most ambitious attempts in modern American literature – Faulkner being yet another towering presence – to craft a *panoramic* fiction through a distinctive kaleidoscopic technique. His objective was to depict, with unprecedented depth and variety, the complexities of American national life in all its fragmentation and diversity. Like Joyce, Dos Passos is known to have rejected conventional plot structures in favor of montage-like juxtapositions, and techniques which encompass, *inter alia*, cinematic cuts, shifting viewpoints, and documentary-style inserts. Akin to Joyce, each author constructs their own cities – Dublin and New York – as textual spaces, giving rise to a symphony of voices and interlocking episodes of major, minor, and oftentimes faceless characters.

Let us take, for instance, the early scene in *Manhattan Transfer* where a nurse carries a newborn into a hospital ward: the walls are greenish, the air reeks of alcohol and iodoform, and the baby squirms in cotton wool "like a knot of earthworms" (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 15). In the same breath, the reader is offered the noise of a gyre of gulls, the rot of cabbage heads, and the faint sour wailing of other infants lined up along the wall. It a fleeting, almost brutal moment, yet it is in no way isolated. The next scene zooms out to a businessman rushing to work, a drunkard stumbling into the street, or a milkman clattering down frozen stairs. Each fragment alone is sharp and ephemeral; together, they accumulate into something holistic before the reader's eyes.

In doing this, Dos Passos seems to follow the spirit, if not the form, of the avant-garde urban films of his time – especially Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's *Manhatta* (1921), with its reverent, fragmented take on New York. He even seems to prefigure the great "city symphony" films of the 1920s, those kinetic portraits of ur-

ban life – *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, *Man with a Movie Camera* – where structure is built through rhythm, juxtaposition, momentum. The city doesn't speak; it pulses.[1]

The modernism of *Manhattan Transfer*, however, is related significantly both to an earlier form of montage, that of D.W. Griffith, and to the second stage of cubism, the synthetic cubism developed by Picasso and Braque during 1912 to 1914. Griffith, in two great movies, *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*, responded to the challenge presented by his desire to deal with extremely large historical themes – that is, the impact of the Civil War upon the nation in the first, the history of human intolerance in the second – by creating the technique of montage. He would encompass these large-scale subjects by telling a series of stories to reveal their full dimensions; also, he would present these stories in interwoven fragments to imply their interconnectedness and therefore their relationship to a common theme. Each of the films thus conveyed its meaning not through a continuous linear plot but in what is known as discontinuous montage. The modernism of *Manhattan Transfer* draws significantly on D.W. Griffith's earlier forms of montage and other cinematic techniques as well as the synthetic cubism best represented by Picasso and Braque. In *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*, Griffith used montage to interweave fragmented narratives around large historical themes, favoring discontinuous structure over linear plot to convey interconnected meaning – a strategy echoed in Dos Passos's literary form (Pizer, 1979, p. 57).

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[1] On a side note, it is worthy of cinematic the controversial nature of *Manhattan Transfer* in terms of whence its techniques germinate. David Pizer claims that the novel relies on the "use of radical cutting or editing technique resembl[ing] the film technique of montage" (1979:57). While critics like Gretchen Foster often link Dos Passos's montage technique in *Manhattan Transfer* to the influence of Sergei Eisenstein, this connection is chronologically untenable (1986, p. 196). Dos Passos completed the novel in May 1925, before Eisenstein's films were screened outside the USSR. It was only after the international success of *Battleship Potemkin* in 1926 that these films became accessible, and Dos Passos did not encounter them until his 1928 visit to Russia. Though he later discussed montage directly with Eisenstein while beginning *The 42nd Parallel*, his use of montage in *Manhattan Transfer* developed independently. What is clearly suggests that its roots lie not in Soviet cinema, but in American modernism itself, particularly as it emerges in *U.S.A.* The modernism of *Manhattan Transfer* draws significantly on earlier forms of montage, particularly D.W. Griffith's cinematic techniques and the synthetic cubism of Picasso and Braque. In *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*, Griffith used montage to interweave fragmented narratives around large historical themes, favoring discontinuous structure over linear plot to convey interconnected meaning (Pizer, p, 57). Dos Passos had a preference for this technique as a hallmark of his literary style.

If one were to attempt a conventional summary of the novel's plot, it would quickly become apparent that *Manhattan Transfer* is a complex network of intersecting narratives and episodic digressions, portraying the lives and milieus of New York City's inhabitants from the early 1900s through the First World War. The novel's fragmented panorama centers on four emblematic figures: Ellen Thatcher, the ambitious actress craving for fame at all costs; George Baldwin, the morally ambiguous lawyer who becomes involved a case of corruption; Bud Korpenning, the drifting day-laborer haunted by guilt, anonymity, and the fact that he can neither find employment nor the "center of things" (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 34) upon his arrival in New York City; and Jimmy Herf, the restless intellectual and Dos Passos's thinly veiled autobiographical alter ego, whose wandering presence and aesthetic sensibility render him an something of an urban *flâneur*. The author's stylistic extravagance, the hollow and faceless mosaics dotting primarily the first section of the novel, and the abrupt chronological shifts – even within a single paragraph – raise the question of how Dos Passos handles time and place in the novel. The prose of *Manhattan Transfer* is punctuated by atmospheric, prose-poetic fragments – epigraphic and often arcane epithets that introduce each chapter, snippets of contemporary song lyrics ("I am so tired of vi-olets / Take them all away" [Dos Passos, 2000, p. 108]), newspaper headlines ("ANOTHER ACCIDENT ON ELEVENTH AVENUE TRACKS" [Dos Passos, 2000, p. 54]), and the continuous hum of advertising slogans and shop signs that animate the city's sundry loci. Nevertheless, these textual elements do more than set tone or serve as a backdrop to New York City. In our opinion, they create a palimpsest of urban noise, emotion, and commerce, which is all the more necessary for Dos Passos, who believed that "American individuals are processed by the economic machine of the city, like the new arrivals of New York described in the opening passage of the novel: 'men and women press through the manuresmelling wooden tunnel of the ferry-house, crushed and justling like apples fed down a chute into a press.'" (McInerney, 1986, pp. 7-8). In their accumulation, these are the elements which give Dos Passos's New York a dense, macrorealistic texture and evoke the almost documentary precision with which Joyce had painted Dublin.

Dos Passos's novel is often placed into the broad category of being "cinematic" (Pizer, 1979, p. 57), though the term itself has been hotly debated among critics.[1]

[1] See Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (1978), for a structuralist comparison of narrative in literature and film; David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), for a critique of metaphorical uses of "cinematic" in literary analysis; and Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse* (2007), for an account of cinema's influence on modernist writing and perception.

Marco Bellardi offers one of the more precise definitions, describing cinematic fiction as "a cross-category of fictional narrative texts in which the medium of film is implicitly imitated to varying degrees" (2018, p. 24). Apart from its cinematic qualities, most scholars agree that *Manhattan Transfer* is an experimental novel, which realistically documents, or rather, registers, as though it were a camera, the lives of characters from different social strata, including the rich and the pauper. While montage shapes the visual syntax of the novel, Bakhtin's theory helps us understand its acoustic and ideological layering.

From Ellen Thatcher's pursuit of a livelihood to George Baldwin's frustration and scandalous affair as a young lawyer, and Jimmy Herf's own *Bildungsroman*, we are of the mind that the narrative reconstructs a collective portrait of American life during the ordeals and upheavals surrounding the World War I. Dos Passos's use of cinematic devices offers a collage of the city's vibrant atmosphere through fragmented, yet often interlocking storylines, stream of consciousness and a life-like documentation of city dwellers. Dos Passos's cinematic narrative assembles a social mosaic of intersecting lives, shaped by transitional modernist techniques and informed by a cinematic gaze that lays bare the materialism associated with the American Dream, which exerts a constitutive force on the cultural psyche of the era.

The novel was undoubtedly the first in Dos Passos's oeuvre which consciously set out to turn characterization, plot, and setting into a montage document about New York City life. In his analysis of the textual form in the novel, Marc Brosseau asserts that "[i]f one borrows the cinematographic terminology, one could say that Dos Passos alternates close-ups and depth of field, and uses freeze-frames and sideways tracking, panoramic views and kinetic descriptions. These rather objective or camera-eye techniques are somewhat 'compensated' by a very rich range of descriptive styles: various senses (sight, hearing and smell) are used" (1995:98). It is enough to recall Gus McNiel, a milkman, who is hit by a train car, "sleep still gleaming in his eyes" (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 46), as he steers quietly through the purple, cold streets with his wagon, collecting milk bottles while

> the gaslamps tremble a while down the purplecold streets and then go out under the lurid dawn. Gus McNiel, the sleep still gumming his eyes, walks beside his wagon swinging a wire basket of milkbottles, stopping at doors, collecting the empties, climbing chilly stairs, remembering grades A and B and pints of cream and buttermilk, while the sky behind cornices, tanks, roofpeaks, chimneys becomes rosy and yellow. Hoarfrost glistens on doorsteps and curbs. The horse with dangling head lurches jerkily from door to door. There begin

to be dark footprints on the frosty pavement. A heavy brewers' dray rumbles down the street (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 46).

The narrator – recording, in a seemingly metallic and objective documentary fashion, as it were – zooms in on the scene to offer the reader a vignette, painted with minute precision: hoarfrost shimmering on doorsteps, the city caught in the fragile stillness of early morning appeal to all the senses. This passage vividly engages the sensory triad of sight, sound, and smell, a technique Dos Passos also employs in the novel's opening scene, where a newborn baby squirms in a basket amid the acrid smell of alcohol, the faint cries of other infants, and the lingering staleness of cabbage and decay.[1]

While reading the scene cited above, the reader follows Gus slowly and attentively as he walks through the city. At first, Gus is rendered synecdochally: only his movements – his footprints, the clink of milk bottles, the wagon's creak – are captured by the narrative camera. He appears as a faceless, alienated figure, emblematic of the modernist urban subject. Only gradually does the full person emerge, as the narrative lens zooms in and out, assembling fragments into a cohesive, if momentary, portrait. The use of a succession of verbs in the present tense renders the sequence of events vibrant, as if seen through the lens of a camera. Furthermore, the presence of concrete images contributes to the vivacity of the simple act of walking. Dos Passos dramatizes the mundane routine (like milk delivery) to suggest that even abstract ideals – labor, fatigue, survival – can be embodied in ordinary acts. This cinematic outlook is reminiscent of Dickens's *The Christmas Tales*, wherein laborers at the very bottom of the social stratum stomp the frozen pavement to keep warm. Both scenes offer a tactile portrait of the earthbound and often hopeless life of the working class in the cold of dawn.

Jay McInerney notes that *Manhattan Transfer* registers a fervent denunciation of a society that subsumes and crushes the individual. This theme, evident here and later in the *U.S.A.* trilogy, is conveyed through "brief glimpses of those who would seem to operate the machine – politicians and capitalists for whom news of the Great War is significant only insofar as it affects the Stock Market and the elections" (1986:9). Ironically, it is Gus McNiel who rises to become a powerful and cynical

[1] The nurse, holding the basket at arm's length as if it were a bedpan, opened the door to a big dry hot room with greenish distempered walls where in the air tinctured with smells of alcohol and iodoform hung writhing a faint sourish squalling from other baskets along the wall. As she set her basket down she glanced into it with pursed-up lips. The newborn baby squirmed in the cottonwool feebly like a knot of earthworms (2000, p.15).

political boss, while Joe Harland, who once controlled half of Wall Street, descends into destitution as a Bowery bum. Harland reflects bitterly in the "Streamroller" episode: "I dunno… I used to set in Union Square most of the time, then I set in Madison Square. I been up in Hoboken an Joisey and Flatbush an now I'm a Bowery bum" (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 116).

The technical boldness for which Dos Passos has been widely recognized reaches its zenith in his adoption of the cinematic principle of montage. As mentioned earlier, montage becomes not merely a stylistic device but a structural and social and ideological strategy. Michael Spindler observes that "[f]or the importance of montage lies in its ability to bring unity to phenomena, people and events previously considered separate" (1981, p. 391). Dos Passos's striking use of cinematic technique –especially its rapid succession of visual fragments and physical details – which transforms an ordinary moment of movement into a dynamic sequence typical of montage is worthy of note:

> Door slammed in his nose. His sallow sagging face tightened up all of a sudden. He ran lightly on tiptoe up the stairs to the top landing then up the little ladder to a trapdoor. The bolt ground as he slid it back. He caught in his breath. ... Chimneys stood up in alert ranks all about him […] His foot grazed a flowerpot as he landed. Everything dark. (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 129)

In this extract, the reader follows the act of running along with what Jimmy perceives. In doing so, his movement is cinematically juxtaposed with the world around him. The chimneys as a reaction "stood in alert." The activity is presented in close-up, lending the scene a cinematic immediacy that replaces narrative stasis with dynamic visual intensity. Thus, montage, as used by Dos Passos, not only dramatizes ordinary action by making it as appealing, but it is also used to provide a panoramic view of mundane events through a distinctly cinematic lens. Therefore, it can be safely stated that Dos Passos's experimentation with the montage technique transforms the novel into a kinetic text rather than a conventional one – that is, a novel following a linear plot structure within a coherent setting and timeframe – emulating the accelerated tempo of the era he seeks to register and ultimately reinvent. The Camera Eye, which becomes a supplemental autobiographical device in *U.S.A.* trilogy to write impressionistically of the very feel of time and place, lingers on these sensory moments to eventually render a series of quick visual fragments from doors slamming, bolts grinding, and the flowerpots. The text imbues the mundane with sensory details where Jimmy's otherwise unnoticed gestures become noticed.

To better comprehend the cinematic complexity of *Manhattan Transfer*, it seems practical to turn to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin writes that language is "heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present" (1981, p. 35). Put simply, language is never singular. It is always layered with conflicting voices, shaped by time, class, and context. Novels, in this view, are not ruled by a single voice but are composed of the dialogue between many (these can be official and unofficial, personal and public, past and present, etc.).

Bakhtin's idea is central to Dos Passos's vision of New York. Since *Manhattan Transfer* does not offer a unified perspective, it only presents a mosaic of urban experience, made up of fleeting encounters, internal monologues, and fragments overheard by its characters. Immigrants, radicals, socialites, and drifters move through the city speaking in their own registers. For example, Ellen's stylized register appears to carry the sign of refined, controlled diction with hardly any colloquialisms, while Congo's rhythmic, idiomatic language that teeters on caricature allows the reader to read and – through phonetic transcription even "hear" – his speech as a reflection of racialized and marginalized attitude. With some pun intended, it is worth noting that while Bakhtin's heteroglossia is a theory that can help explain the clashing of registers, Congo also makes it evident – though likely to be unversed in literary theory – that "[e]verybody ave their teoriye" (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 205). As the voices at the inn dissolve into one another, the reader comes to the conclusion much that the narrative built on dissonance and collision, which can be best rendered through montage and other cinematic means.

A shining example in support of the above conjecture appears in the "Went to the Animal' Fair" episode. Set in a roadside inn, the passage becomes a kind of urban symphony as different voices – drivers, waitresses, travelers, drunkards – drift in and out. Conversations begin mid-sentence and end abruptly. The children's rhyme that gives the scene its title plays like a chorus in the background. The outcome is but a layered acoustic performance: public speech, private thought, background noise, and cultural cliché, all coexisting with no single voice dominating the conversations. *Manhattan Transfer* refuses to restore order on this chorus of voices. It embraces noise, a certain level of cacophony, and contradiction. Dos Passos transforms the city into a text, and the text into a reel of film. Voices flash by. Scenes dissolve. And it is up to the reader, like a film editor, to make meaning from the fragments left behind.

The portrait of an indigent boy counting "the nickels in his hand" (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 48) is juxtaposed with a lavish description of "a goblet for Rhine wine hob-

nobbed with a champagne glass" (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 48). The narrator zooms out from the boy to the sumptuous display: "On eight glossy white plates eight canapés of caviar" (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 48). The reader is positioned not as a passive observer but rather as an eyewitness. Rather than explicitly dismantling the myth of a classless American society, Dos Passos renders the reader's gaze a form of testimony to these injustices and social disparities. In her insightful article, entitled "Visual Imagination and Reader Response," Ellen Esrock argues that readers construct vivid mental images while reading, becoming active participants and co-creators of meaning. Her reasoning is based on the claim that "the reader's visual images, like the meanings and sounds of words to which we accord semiotic status, can also participate in textual semiosis" (1988, p. 30). It critiques the tendency of literary critics, who often overlook the significance of visual images in the reading experience:

> [C]ritics simply do not find anything interesting to say about the reader's imagery. Like a will-o'-the-wisp, it comes and goes. To reader response critics, as well as to formalists, what has semiotic status are patterns of meanings and sounds- not the various sensory modalities in which we mentally represent them (1988, p. 30).

Thus, as Esrock suggests, the reader becomes an active participant who visually inhabits the world of the text rather than merely observing it from a distance. This dynamic is particularly evident in the stark contrast between the boy's empty pockets and the alternating images of a Five and Ten store, a luxurious living room, a fancy club, and a lunchwagon (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 328). Faced with such juxtaposition, the narrative lens adopts a filmic rhythm, animating the scene with the fluid motion of cinema. Rather than delivering a conventional critique of social hierarchy through exposition, Dos Passos uses montage to expose injustice as a visually immediate and aesthetically charged sensory experience.

To further understand this interplay between form and perception, it is useful to examine how spatiality in *Manhattan Transfer* is forged by cinematic techniques and impressionistic effects. The mosaic nature of spatiality in *Manhattan Transfer* is pluralized and articulated through visual effects. Dos Passos's use of close-ups, panoramic views, and kinetic descriptions simulate the movement of a camera, further enhanced by a vivid and varied descriptive style. It can be easily perceived that multiple sensory modalities are engaged, seasons shift, and urban spaces unfold with an impressionistic quality. The geographical milieu that Dos Passos paints is as follows:

> Outside the lemoncolored dawn was drenching the empty streets, dripping from the cornices, from the rails of fire escapes, from the rims of ashcans, shattering the blocks of shad – ow between buildings. The street lights were out. At a corner they looked up Broadway that was narrow and scorched as if a fire had gutted it. (Dos Passos, 2000, p. 50)

Like in a Cubist painting, Dos Passos lays stress on dispersed objects that the reader must actively assemble into a coherent whole. He emphasizes certain details while obscuring others, allowing the surface to be fragmented into multiple visual layers. There is a continual oscillation between light and darkness. In the passage, narrative action is suspended; instead, the emphasis falls on perception, that is, on a different way of looking. The reader is drawn into the task of reconstituting what is seen. Objects are bathed in dawn light, while shadows settle over the scene with an eerie, atmospheric stillness. One cannot but agree with Lisa Nanney, who considers *Manhattan Transfer* to be a work that succeeded in "creat[ing] a simultaneous portrait of the United States in the first three decades of the twentieth century, from war to boom to crash. Little wonder that the potential of such Cubist, cinematic narrative structure, functioning as it does like montage, should be recognized by filmmakers in a hyper-visual age nearly a century later" (2019, p. 2).

The intellectual and visual challenges posed by Cubist compositions and collages – with their juxtapositional dynamics and interplay of mediums – and the evocation of speed and motion characteristic of Futurist works across various forms, both contribute significantly to the novel's cinematic structure. Although cinematic narratives have been a staple in literature with novels incorporating flashbacks, collage and closeups, the cinema's pivotal role as an aesthetic device continued to reshape novelistic conventions in the twentieth century.

In closing, it must be accentuated that "[t]he formal strategies Dos Passos […] mastered in *Manhattan Transfer* and the novels of *U.S.A.*, derive from film, the art whose dynamics perhaps more than any other form drew on machine-age technologies and influenced all the aesthetic expressions of modernism" (Nanney, 2019, p. 45). In *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos does more than document the American city in its Roaring Twenties tumult, but he also reimagines it through a lens shaped by montage, dissonance, and "cult of speed" so quintessential of the era. In doing so, he not only captures the fragmented psyche of a nation in flux but also confers a distinctly American flavor upon the modernist novel. We agree with scholars who ascertain that due to its stylistic and structural bravado, this is the novel that serves as a launchpad for Dos Passos's later and more expansive literary endeavors, most notably

the *U.S.A.* trilogy. As Gretchen Foster aptly observes, the novel functions as Dos Passos's "experimental vehicle whose overpowered engine consumes itself as it shoots forward" (1986, p. 192). Indeed, Dos Passos's vision – kaleidoscopic, kinetic, panoramic, and infused with the language and techniques of the cinema – inscribes him indelibly in the modernist Anglo-American literary imagination as a scintillating *homo scribendi*, who brought the modern metropolis to life as a breathing text.

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