

Tsivian's brilliant semiotic study, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (trans. Alan Bodger, 1994), cited in her Preface as a "companion" to *The Magic Mirror* (xiv), made Youngblood opt for a less ambitious treatment of the pre-revolutionary era than she gave to the post-revolutionary era in *Movies for the Masses*, and dictated her emphasis upon production and producers rather than products and consumers. At its own level, in any case, *The Magic Mirror* succeeds well enough. It draws on interpretations of the Western *fin-de-siecle* (for instance, Bram Dijkstra's *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood* [1996]) to make some sharp points about social anxieties in early twentieth-century Russia. And it offers an engrossing portrait of a group of under-rated, but talented and hard-working film enthusiasts, whose work, as Youngblood rightly argues, was fundamental to the development of the Soviet cinema, most particularly the "contemporary melodrama and historical costume drama" of the 1920s (145). Though historians of Russia are now more ready to accept arguments about long-term continuities than they were, the 1917 divide is still seen as a Rubicon, and Youngblood's attempt to cross it was an act of commendable courage.

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Colin MacCabe, *The Eloquence of the Vulgar: Language, Cinema and the Politics of Culture* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999).

The Eloquence of the Vulgar is a wide-ranging collection of essays and speeches that Colin MacCabe has written over the last fifteen years, on the history of the English language, the development of British cultural studies, the evolution of English television, the role of the British Film Institute, the nature of English universities, the importance of media education, and, above all else, the complex interrelationships of these various fields. MacCabe has a strong historical sense, and most essays, although clearly about literature, communication, or education, are presented as parts of larger cultural histories. He also has a clear allegiance to the left, writing that "anyone who struggles to understand the relationship between cultural and economic forms in the belief that a better understanding will lead to real possibilities of social emancipation" (153) remains deeply indebted to Marxism.

Each piece is interesting in its own right, since MacCabe is not only an articulate and intelligent human being who knows a great deal about the culture and education industries, in both of which he has worked, but is also a passionate activist who wants to change what they do. "Let there be no mistake about the radical proposition I am advancing here," he writes. "My argument is that there can be no sense to a teaching of literature which is not a branch of

media studies.” (159) Anyone who has ever been a member of an English faculty will recognize the radical nature of this proposition, the driving force behind many of the essays in *The Eloquence of the Vulgar*. MacCabe has impressive credentials: he has been professor of literature at Cambridge and Strathclyde, head of production and then head of research for the British Film Institute, and is now on the literature faculties at Pittsburgh and at Exeter. He has written a significant amount of literary and cultural criticism of very high quality, designed new academic programs, and produced for movies and television.

It is as a single work, however, that this book is most provocative. Although only a few of the essays and speeches are explicitly autobiographical, MacCabe provides enough information about the specific context for each chapter that in a very real sense MacCabe himself emerges as the subject of the book. *The Eloquence of the Vulgar* is a kind of latter-day *Education of Henry Adams*¹ with MacCabe as the intellectual making his way somewhat awkwardly into a world of power and politics where he tries to change the nature of universities, film institutes, and degree programs with only limited success. Like Adams, it is his failures, as well as his successes, which MacCabe invites us to think about, as well as the people whose paths he crosses along the way (Jean-Luc Godard, Martin Scorsese, Fredric Jameson, Gayatri Spivak among them). And like Adams, it is in the confrontation between old and new that MacCabe finds himself somewhat uncomfortably (and permanently) situated. But while Adams could never find a way to reconcile old and new at the end of the nineteenth century, accepting finally virgin and dynamo as polar opposites, and then retiring in despair, MacCabe works tirelessly to avoid Adams' fate at the end of the twentieth, attempting to reconcile old and new as best he can. It is an important struggle, and *The Eloquence of the Vulgar* an important book.

Anyone who wishes to understand the various fights over culture which have periodically erupted in education, politics, and the popular press in recent decades should start here, with MacCabe's lifelong struggle to connect what everyone else wants to separate: traditional forms of literature and new forms of film and television, traditional forms of literary criticism and new forms of cultural criticism, even differences between film study and film production, and in society at large, between blacks and whites, and between British and North American academic life. Unlike the intellectually conservative Adams who could not connect old and new, the intellectually radical MacCabe can, and does, insist on the importance of making the connections. MacCabe is Henry Adams as we have not met him before.

While Adams wrote his story as a realistic narrative, imposing order and meaning on the moments of his intellectual life he chose to present, MacCabe only gives us fragments to make sense of as best we may. A “history” has been replaced by an archive, a distinction that is familiar enough to MacCabe and

his regular readers. In an essay on “Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses,” which is not part of this collection,² MacCabe contrasts the conventions of realism, which tell the reader or viewer how to understand a story, with a Brechtian alternative which does not, but sets us free to make our own way. MacCabe clearly prefers the latter, and *The Eloquence of the Vulgar* is *The Education of Henry Adams* reconstituted along such Brechtian lines – we get to see all the machinery creaking behind the scenes in MacCabe’s various prefaces and introductions which detail what he was trying to accomplish, why it did or did not work, how he felt, and then what he tried next. But just as in Brecht’s theatre, we are not exactly without direction about how to respond. In MacCabe’s introduction to his speech “On The Eloquence of the Vulgar,” for example, the chapter which gives the book its title, he tells us that its purpose was “to place the development of film and television studies within a very long history of the democratisation of communication. Raymond Williams is not mentioned by name within the lecture but *The Long Revolution* is the book which informs the whole thrust of the argument.” (147) It is in moments like this that MacCabe tells us quite clearly how to read and understand (and review) the book. I will not miss the opportunity.

If Adams is MacCabe’s unconscious model then, Williams is certainly his conscious inspiration. What Williams argues in *The Long Revolution*³ and then in such related works as *Communications*⁴ is a set of first principles that appears to have animated MacCabe’s life project: that we are living through a revolutionary period in history precipitated by developments in communications systems which will be fought out in complex battles within art and ideas and which will last a very long time; that the communications revolution offers important opportunities for human liberation, providing that people have the skills to understand new cultural forms, and access to use them; and that it is impossible to understand new media without placing them in the context of what has come before. (The latter point is made by Williams in the posthumously published *The Politics of Modernism*⁵). For all of his adult life (at least), Colin MacCabe has not only been an active partisan in the long revolution, but he has worked hard to put Williams’ principles to the test, in practice.

When Raymond Williams died in 1988, Stuart Hall wrote a piece about him in the *New Statesman* with the title “Only Connect.”⁶ Throughout his life, Williams worked hard to connect everything, and insisted, at every appropriate opportunity, that nothing could be understood in isolation. Of all of Williams’ followers and former students, no one has carried the principle of “Only Connect” more passionately and effectively than Colin MacCabe. *The Eloquence of the Vulgar* is in the great tradition of *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*.

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¹ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: an Autobiography* (Boston 1918).

² "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," in Tony Bennett, Susan Boyd-Bowman, Colin Mercer, and Janet Wollacott, eds., *Popular Television and Film* (London 1981), 216-235.

³ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London 1961).

⁴ Raymond Williams, *Communications* (Baltimore 1962).

⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, Edited and Introduced by Tony Pickney, (London and New York 1989), 159.

⁶ Stuart Hall, "Only Connect: The Life of Raymond Williams" in *New Statesman*, (5 February, 1988), 20-21.

Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*. Translated by Quintin Hoare and with an Introduction by Inka Mülder-Bach. (London/New York: Verso, 1998).

How we think about twentieth century "modernity" still continues to be influenced by the writings of Weimar cultural theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. One obvious reason is that the problem of the future was more sharply posed in the Germany of the 1920s than almost anywhere else in Western Europe. Berlin was the vanguard metropolis of the early twentieth-century where "modernity" was pushed to new extremes. In the streets, squares, movie theaters, department stores and other public spaces of the German capital, observers detected the emerging outlines of a new "mass society" and "mass culture."

Siegfried Kracauer's contribution to the Weimar project of understanding this modernity was essential. Yet, in the English-speaking world, the full-range of Kracauer's work is less well known than that of Benjamin. Until quite recently, Kracauer has been seen primarily as a film theorist, author of the classic *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Along with the recent translation of *The Mass Ornament*, the short book under review here shows us a more versatile and complex Kracauer who is no less interested in the rationalization of clerical labour in Berlin's large banking or insurance companies than in the composition of movie audiences.

Kracauer saw capitalist rationalization as the motor of modernity. Unlike his Marxist contemporaries, however, Kracauer refused to advance any overarching theory. In his view, history was essentially a "destructive process, a process of disintegration" (11). The fragmentary nature of modernity demanded a fragmented analysis which extended even to the specific form in which Kracauer presented his arguments – a series of relatively short articles published in the *feuilleton* section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on diverse practices and spaces of everyday life, from travel and dance to hotel lobbies.