

One of the defining moments of early cinema likely never happened. The story goes that on the eve of the twentieth century, an audience in a Parisian theater jumped at the sight of an oncoming train in the Lumière brothers' short film *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (*L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*, 1896). Despite the event's probable fabrication, that the legend endures is an important marker of how new media technologies, in this case film, often trouble the distinction between fact and fiction. The popularity of this legend speaks to an anxiety that technology would dupe audiences into believing things that were not true because they saw it in the realistic style of film and photography. By the late 1930s, when my dissertation is set, this anxiety had reached critical mass. With the supposed dominance of film and photography in shaping public perception by 1930, literature has received comparatively little attention in this area of media studies. Writers, concerned about the rise of authoritarianism around the globe, wondered what role their own work might play in documenting the crisis.

For the writers in my dissertation like Richard Wright and Virginia Woolf their return to writing was not based on the search for "new" forms of writing (e.g. the avant-garde) rather a reconsideration of how to interact with established genres of expression, particularly mass media like newspapers, advertisements, and photography. On the eve of the Second World War, Wright and Woolf found themselves collecting clippings from newspapers that they then incorporated into their works such as *Native Son* and *Three Guineas*. My dissertation reads Wright and Woolf as media theorists in their own right. Their deep engagement with these sources allowed them to question the primacy of supposedly documentary visual works, particularly those that aided the rise of authoritarian regimes, at the same time that the Frankfurt School was developing media theory that continues to shape cultural studies. By looking not just at how these writers wrote about media, but also at how they themselves used it, I argue that their works allow us to see how intersections between writing and photography reshaped the meaning of documentation in the final years of the interwar period.

Their work remains especially relevant in our own era, a time when skepticism over the effects of digital technologies on judgments of fact has allowed for a resurgence of anxiety about the linkage between new media technologies and creeping authoritarianism.