

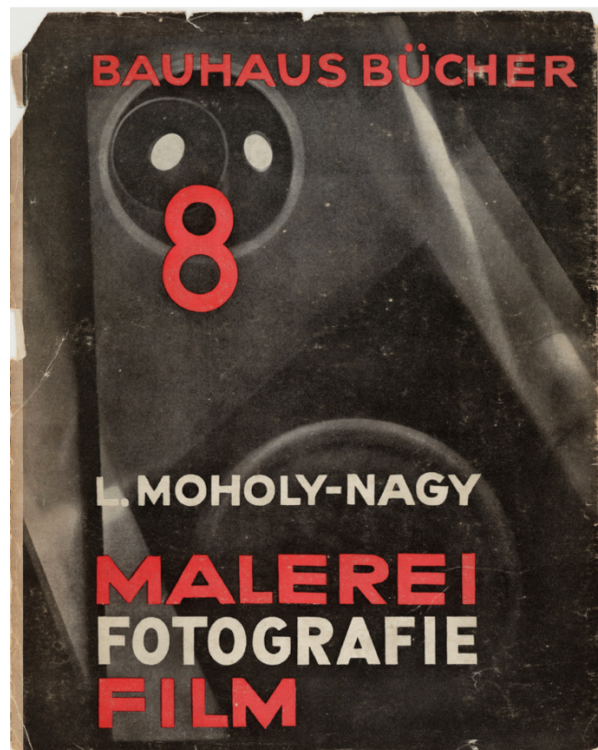
CONSTELLATIONS AND CONCEPTS

BAUHAUS

LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY

By 1921–22, before joining the Bauhaus, Moholy-Nagy had begun experimenting with the idea of creating a film that would present “the dynamics of a big city through purely visual means.” After joining the Bauhaus, he published his 15-page typographic sketch under the title “DYNAMIK DER GROSS-STADT – SKIZZE ZU EINEM FILM,” which combines images and words in a constructivist, quasi-cinematic montage. This sketch was included in his 1925 book, *Malerei, Fotografie, Film*.

– While proofreading the second edition in 1927, Moholy-Nagy learned of Ruttmann’s film and added a note to his original introduction from 1925 (see facsimile, p. 123 below). He observed that Ruttmann’s film “seeks to realize the same aspirations as those proposed in this chapter. . . Ruttmann’s ‘Symphony of the Metropolis’ [sic] shows the rhythm of the movement of a city and dispenses with ‘normal action’.” [TK]



L. MOHOLY-NAGY:

DYNAMIC OF THE METROPOLIS

SKETCH FOR A FILM

ALSO TYPOPHOTO

The manuscript sketch *Dynamic of the Metropolis* was written in the year 1921–22. I hoped to carry it out with my friend Carl Koch, who gave me many ideas for this work. So far, unfortunately, we have not managed to do so; his Film Institute had no money for it. The larger companies like UFA were at that time unwilling to risk enterprises which appeared bizarre; other film-people could 'find no **action** in it despite the good idea' and so declined to film it.

Some years have passed since then and everyone today has some idea of what is meant by the proposition – revolutionary in its effect in the early days – of the **FILMIC**, that is, of the film which proceeds from the potentialities of the camera and the dynamics of motion. Such films have been shown in 1924 in Vienna by Fernand **Léger** at the **International Festival of Theatre and Music** and in Paris – as an entr'acte in the **Swedish Ballet** – by Francis **Picabia**. Some American comedy films contain similar filmic moments and we may say that by now all good film-directors are concerned to establish the optical effect proper to the film **alone** and that the films of today are constructed to a much greater extent upon tempo of movement and the contrast of light and shade and the various optical views than on theatrical action. This type of film is not concerned with the actor's star-performance, nor indeed with the actor's performance at all.

We are still, however, at the very beginning. Theoretical deliberations, a few experiments by painters and writers which have been based upon their intuitions, chance good fortune during studio work: that is all. What we need, however, is an experimental film centre that will work systematically, with the most intensive promotion by public authorities. Yesterday a few painters were still experimenting on their own. This work was received with suspicion, for the technique of film-production, the whole paraphernalia no longer admits of private effort. The 'best' ideas are useless if they cannot be transposed into practice and thus form the basis of further development. The setting up of a central **film experimental centre** to execute scripts which contain new ideas, even under private, capitalist auspices, will therefore soon be an obvious and recognised necessity.

The intention of the film '*Dynamic of the Metropolis*' is not to teach, nor to moralise, nor to tell a story; its effect is meant to be visual, **purely** visual. The elements of the visual have not in this film an absolute logical connection with one another; their photographic, visual relationships, nevertheless, make them knit together into a vital association of events in space and time and bring the viewer actively into the dynamic of the city.

No work (of art) can be explained by the sequence of its elements. The totality of the sequence, the sure interaction of the smallest parts upon one another and upon the whole are the imponderables of the effect. Thus I can explain only some of the elements of this film, so that at least people will not stumble over cinematically obvious happenings.

Aim of the film: to take advantage of the camera, to give it its own optical action, optical arrangement of tempo – instead of literary, theatrical action: dynamic of the optical. Much movement, some heightened to the point of brutality.

Individual parts which do not 'logically' belong together are combined either optically, e.g., by interpenetration or by placing the individual images in horizontal or vertical strips (so as to make them similar to one another), by a diaphragm (e.g., by shutting off one image with an iris-diaphragm and bringing on the next from a similar iris-diaphragm) or by making otherwise different objects move in unison, or by associative connections.

As I was reading the corrections for the second edition, I heard reports of two new films which seek to realise the same aspirations as those proposed in this chapter and the one on Simultaneous Cinema (p. 41). Ruttmann's film 'Symphony of the Metropolis' shows the rhythm of the movement of a town and dispenses with normal 'action'. – In his film 'Napoleon' Abel Gance uses three film-strips running simultaneously side by side.



**L. MOHOLY-NAGY:
DYNAMIK DER GROSS-STADT**

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Recht der Verfilmung und Über-
setzung, behalten Autor und
Verlag sich vor.

**SKIZZE ZU EINEM
FILMMANUSKRIPT**

Geschrieben
im Jahre 1921/22



Entstehen einer Me-
tallkonstruktion

ErstTricktischaufnahme von sich be-
wegenden Punkten, Linien, welche
in ihrer Gesamtheit in einen Zeppe-
linbau (Naturaufnahme) übergehen.

Kran bei Hausbau
in Bewegung
Aufnahmen:
von unten
von oben



Ziegelaufzug
Wieder Kran: in Kreisbe-
wegung



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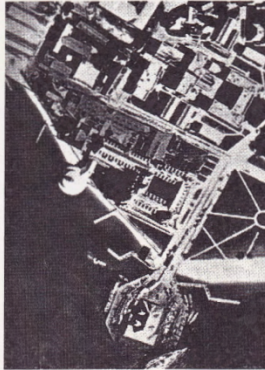


First page of Moholy-Nagy's sketch for a film manuscript in Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei – Fotografie, – Film* (Bauhaus-Buch No. 8, 1925), reprinted by Florian Kupferberg Verlag, 1967, p.120

Low aerial photograph
over a square with

8

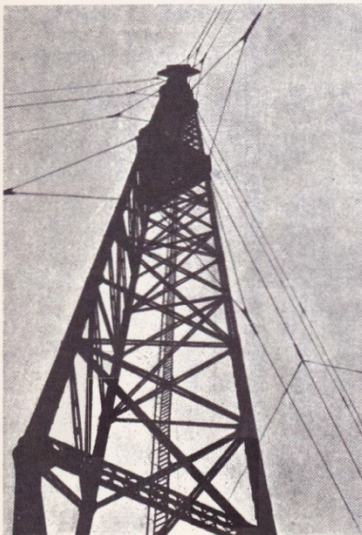
streets opening into it.



TEMPO-o-

The vehicles : electric trams, cars, lorries, bicycles, cabs, bus, cyklonette, motor-cycles travel in quick time from the central point outwards, then all at once they change direction ; they meet at the centre. The centre opens, they ALL sink deep, deep, deep –

a wireless mast



(The camera is swiftly tilted over; there is a sense of plunging downwards.)



Under the tramways
the sewers being
extended.
Light reflected in the
water.

Under-
ground
railway.
Cables.
Canals.

TEMPO

TEMPO - o - o

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF NEW OBJECTIVITY



Albrecht Renger-Patzsch, *Die Welt ist schön* (1928)

ALBRECHT RENGGER-PATZSCH

Aims

First published as "Ziele." In: *Das deutsche Lichtbild I* (1927), n.p.

Photography has not yet come of age. As in the past, many talented photographers are using photography as a medium to achieve the same artistic goals as the fine arts. When photography was in its infancy, these efforts were crucial to developing its artistic style.

Photography has its own techniques and methods. Using these techniques to achieve effects characteristic of painting can bring photographers into conflict with the truthfulness and clarity of their materials and techniques. At best, only superficial similarities to fine art can be achieved.

Like a work of visual art, a photograph can have artistic qualities, but the secret of a good photograph lies in its realism. Photography is a reliable tool for rendering our impressions of nature, plants, animals, architecture, sculptures, and engineering creations. Yet, we still don't fully appreciate our ability to capture the essence of material things. Photography can depict the texture of wood, stone, and metal with a level of perfection that painting cannot achieve. As photographers, we can express concepts such as height and depth with great precision. When it comes to analyzing and rendering the fastest motion, photography is the undisputed master.

Only photography can capture the rigid, linear structures of modern technology; lofty gridworks of cranes and bridges; and the dynamism of machines operating at one thousand horsepower.

Those attached to the "painterly" style consider mechanical reproduction a defect, but it is precisely this quality that makes photography superior to all other means of expression. The absolutely accurate rendering of form and subtle gradation of tones from bright highlights to dark shadows give a photograph technical expertise and the magic of experience.

Therefore, let us leave art to the artists and let us try to use the medium of photography to create photographs that can endure because of their photographic qualities – without borrowing from art.

AESTHETICS OF THE EVERYDAY



Renger-Patzsch, Flat Irons for Shoe Manufacture, Fagus Factory (1926)



Ruttman, Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt (1927)

MACHINE AESTHETICS



Albert Renger-Patzsch, Blast Furnace (1927)



Walther Ruttmann, Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt (1927)

MONOCHROMATIC PICTORIALISM

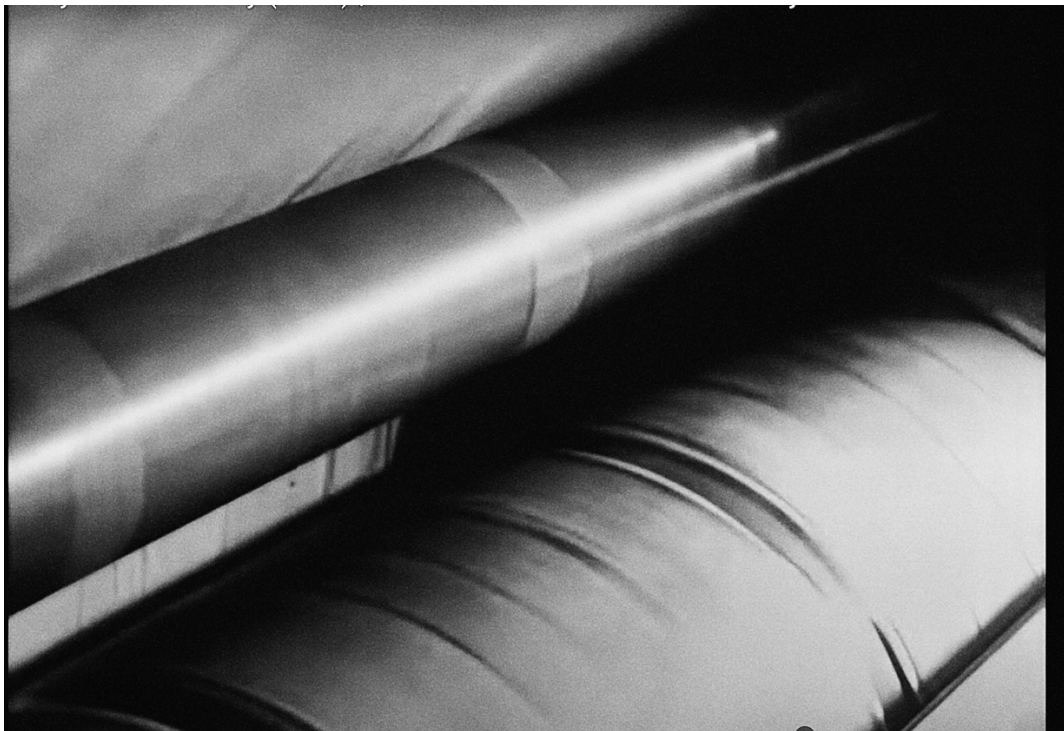


Walther Ruttmann, *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927)

FOCUS ON SHAPES



MOVEMENT IN CIRCLES



Screenshots of Newspaper printing press in *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt*

THINGS IN CLOSE-UPS



Screenshots from *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt*



SHOP WINDOWS



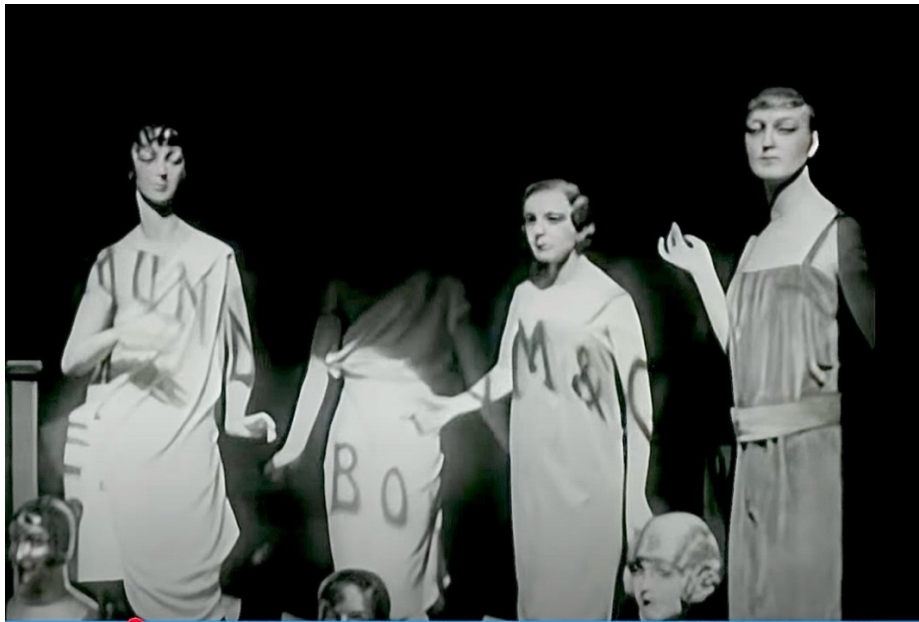
Eugene Atget, Shop Window: Tailor Dummies, c. 1910



Screenshot from *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt*



Eugene Atget, Store, Avenue des Gobelins, c. 1925



Screenshot from *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt*

EXTREME ANGLES



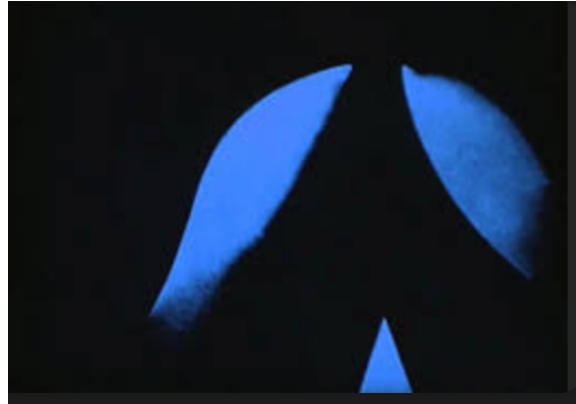
FROM ABSTRACTION TO REPRESENTATION



Screenshots from Ruttmann, *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt*

RUTTMANN'S EARLY ABSTRACT FILMS

Lichtspiel Opus I (1921) 12 min.



Ruttman's first publicly screened abstract film was shown in Berlin on April 21, 1921. It presents organic shapes appearing, disappearing, dissolving and morphing in a rhythm synchronized with a score by Max Bunting.

Herbert Ihering, Lichtspiel op. 1 (in: Ihering, Von Reinhardt bis Brecht, Berlin 1961, p. 414)

The experiment undertaken by Walther Ruttmann as a painter and Max Butting as a musician is one of the most interesting, I have ever seen in film. It meant nothing less than making light and color sound, translating music into visible movement.

Colored triangles fought colored circles, which swelled and shrank. Beams of light vibrated, suns circled. There was only one law that drove them against each other and apart, that made the forms expand and disappear: **rhythm**.

A play of movement of rare purity. Basically, it was the archetype of film (which only developed later): showing forms in rhythmic movement, independent of material constraints, independent of the burden of matter. **Visible music, audible light.**

This film was not photographed. It was painted. And was transmitted directly. It was an experiment that remained a special case (seemingly unrelated to developments). And yet, perhaps of decisive importance for the development of a new genre: the "Lichtspiel" (play of lights), which wants to be nothing other than "Lichtspiel."

Opus II (1921) 3.30 min.

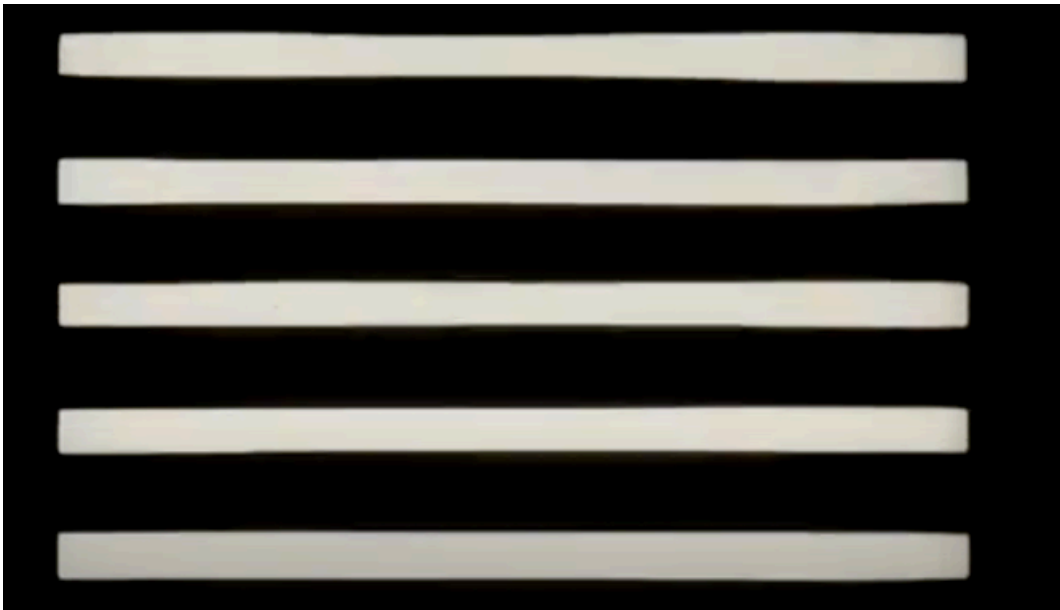
Opus III (1924) 4 min.

A score commissioned from Hanns Eisler for Ruttmann's Opus 3, "Prelude in the Form of a Passacaglia," was performed live at the Baden-Baden Music Festival on July 16, 1927.

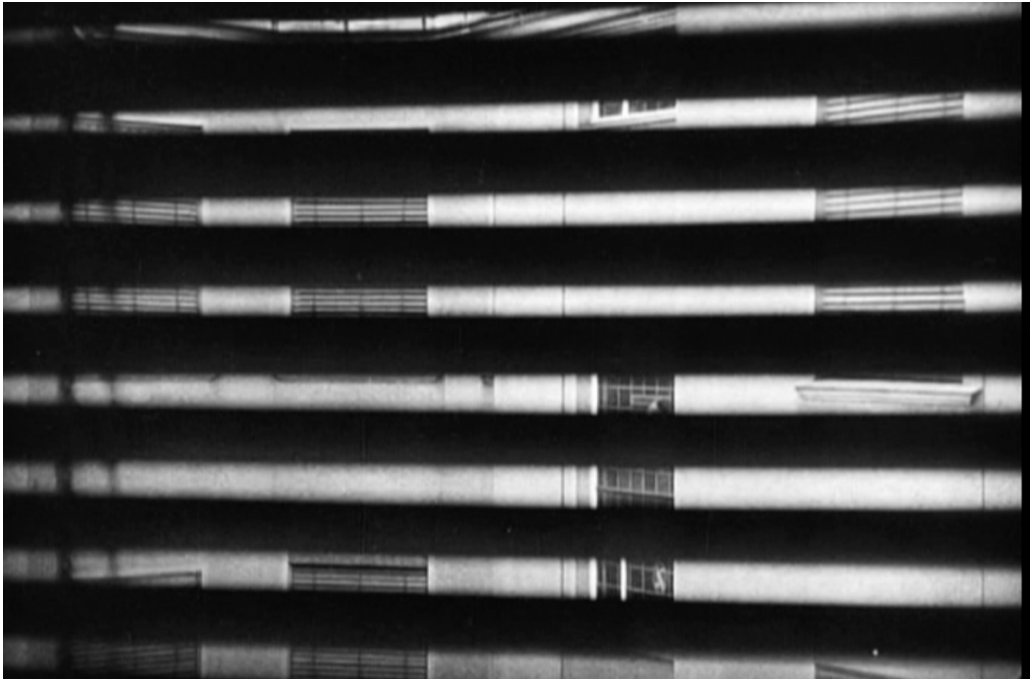


Opus IV (1925) 5 min.

Sequence in Opus IV:



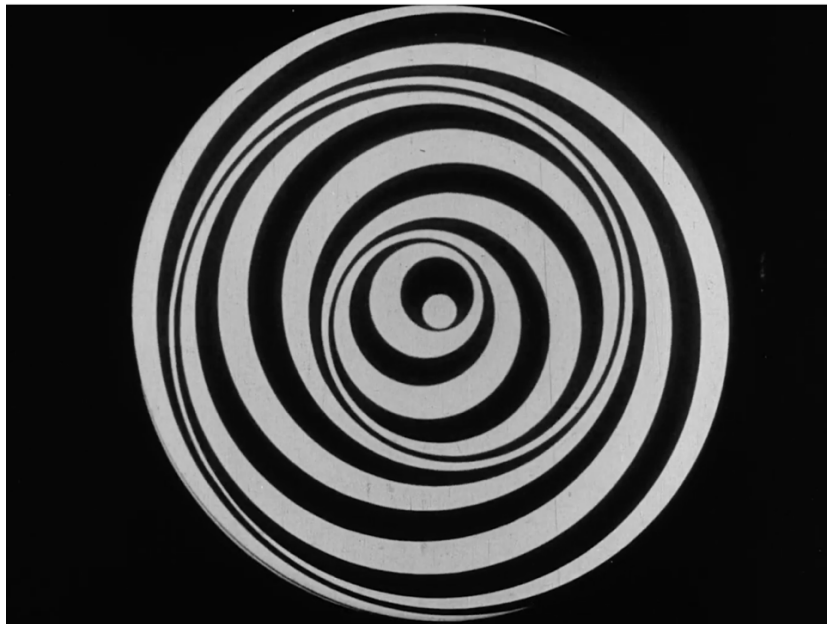
Sequence in *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt*:



RUTTMANN AND DUCHAMP



Walther Ruttmann, Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt (1927)



Marcel Duchamp, [Anémic Cinéma](#) (1926)

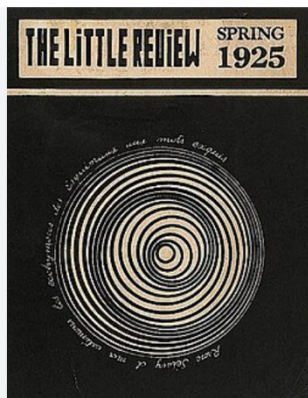


Marcel Duchamp's 1925 "Rotary Demisphere (Precision Optics)":

"The device's papier-mâché half-sphere is housed under a plexiglass dome fitted to a disk covered in dark velvet, and the entirety is mounted on a motorized stand. When the machine is set in motion, the dome appears to pulsate hypnotically, projecting and receding in illusory space."

(Quoted from a wall text at the 2026 Duchamp retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.)

There is no evidence that Ruttmann's recurrent motif of moving spirals borrowed from Marcel Duchamp's experiments with rotating optical machines or from his six-minute abstract film Anémic Cinéma (1926). Nevertheless, the similarities between Duchamp's rotating spirals and those of Ruttmann's 1927 Berlin film are striking. Ruttmann was familiar with the French avant-garde: his abstract films were screened alongside Fernand Léger's Ballet mécanique and René Clair's Entr'acte in the famous



1925 Berlin matinee called "Der Absolute Film." Duchamp's abstract film was also featured in The Little Review.

Unlike Duchamp, Ruttmann employs the optical illusion of a spiral's ceaseless movement not to demonstrate the hypnotic properties of film, but to create a vertiginous effect that intensifies the viewer's experience of the modern city's dizzying pace. An early sequence transforms close-ups of typewriter keys into a frenzied, self-rotating spiral, suggesting

the growing abstraction of mechanized life and its absorption of the individual. In the film's staged suicide scene, rapidly rotating spirals are intercut to evoke an uncontrollable, inescapable downward vortex. While Ruttmann's spirals resemble Duchamp's formally, they serve a fundamentally different function. [TK]

POETICS OF URBAN MODERNITY



GEORG SIMMEL

The Metropolis and Mental Life (1903),

transl. by Kurt Wolff, in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York, The Free Press, 1950), 409-10.

[...] The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli. Man is a differentiating creature. His mind is stimulated by the difference between a momentary impression and the one which preceded it. Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts-all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates.

With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life. The metropolis exacts from man as a discriminating creature a different amount of consciousness than does rural life. Here the rhythm of life and sensory mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, and more evenly. Precisely in this connection the sophisticated character of metropolitan psychic life becomes understandable - as over against small town life which rests more upon deeply felt and emotional relationships. These latter are rooted in the more unconscious layers of the psyche and grow most readily in the steady rhythm of uninterrupted habituations. The intellect, however, has its locus in the transparent, conscious, higher layers of the psyche; it is the most adaptable of our inner forces. In order to accommodate to change and to the contrast of phenomena, the intellect does not require any shocks and inner upheavals; it is only through such upheavals that the more conservative mind could accommodate to the metropolitan rhythm of events. Thus the metropolitan type of man - which, of course, exists in a thousand individual variants - develops an organ protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart.

In this an increased awareness assumes the psychic prerogative. Metropolitan life, thus, underlies a heightened awareness and a predominance of intelligence in metropolitan man. The reaction to metropolitan phenomena is shifted to that organ, which is least sensitive and quite remote from the depth of the personality. Intellectuality is thus seen to preserve subjective life against the overwhelming power of metropolitan life, and intellectuality branches out in many directions and is integrated with numerous discrete phenomena [...]

The technique of metropolitan life is unimaginable without the most punctual integration of all activities and mutual relations into a stable and impersonal time schedule. Here again the general conclusions of this entire task of reflection become obvious, namely, that from each point on the surface of existence - however closely attached to the surface alone - one may drop a sounding into the depth of the psyche so that all the most banal externalities of life finally are connected with the ultimate decisions concerning the meaning and style of life.

Punctuality, calculability, exactness are forced upon life by the complexity and extension of metropolitan existence and are not only most intimately connected with its money economy and intellectualistic character. These traits must also color the contents of life and favor the exclusion of those irrational, instinctive, sovereign traits and impulses which aim at determining the mode of life from within, instead of receiving the general and precisely schematized form of life from without. [...]





Screenshot from Karl Grune, *Die Straße*

SIEGFRIED KRACAUER

A Film

First published as „Ein Film,“ in *Frankfurter Zeitung* (February 4, 1924)

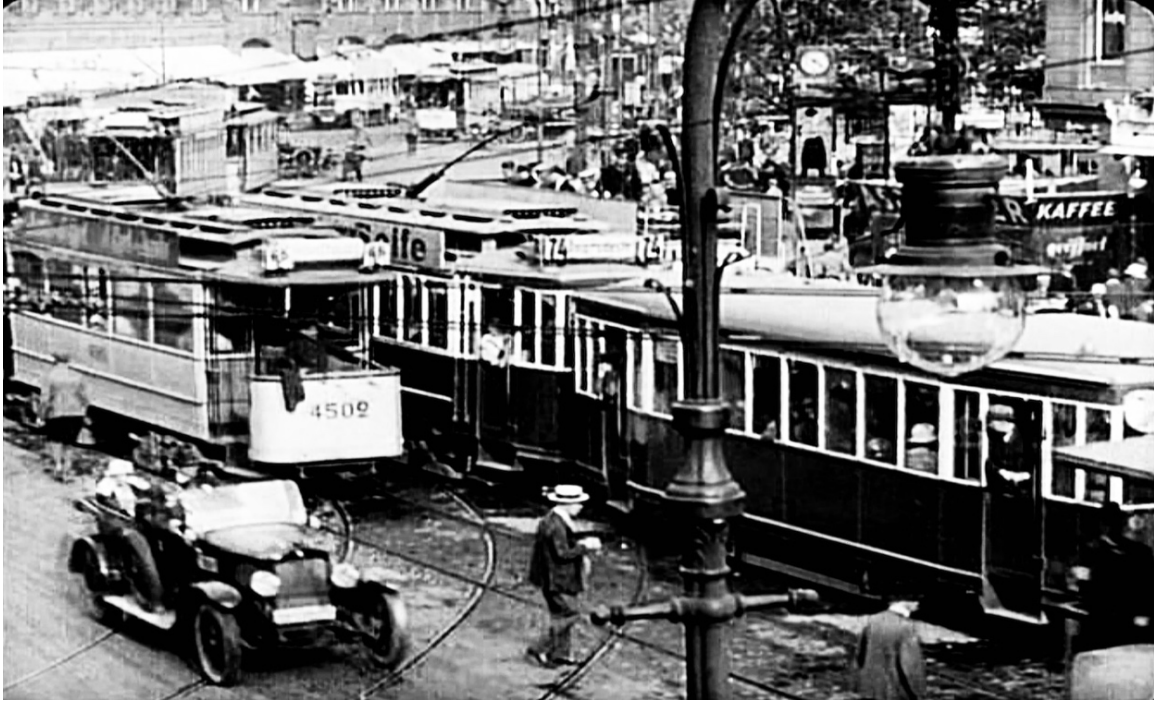
[Although this text was written in 1924 as a review of Grune's Die Straße, it reflects on the affinity between metropolitan street life and the constitutive features of the medium of film. TK]

The film *The Street*, which will now be shown in Frankfurt as well, is one of the few works of modern filmmaking in which an object takes shape that only film can shape in this way, and in which possibilities are realized that are possibilities only for film. The production process of the film already suggests the object to which it is designated. The film adds shot onto shot, and from these, reeling one after another, it mechanically assembles the world—a silent world in which no word passes from

person to person, but rather the sole language is the inchoate speech of optical impressions. The more the object represented can be rendered in the succession of

mere images, the collection of simultaneous impressions, the more it corresponds to film's technique of association. Indeed, what would be more closely related to it than a life that exhausts itself purely in external occurrences? A life bereft of substance, empty like a tin can, which knows—instead of the inner relationality—only selective events that assemble kaleidoscopically in ever-new series of images? Only the surface is turned toward it, and in the activity of existenceless larvae, the chaos of the atom mixture, it finds itself whole again.

The *metropolitan street* is the characteristic setting of such illusory life. People cross it as chance would have it, brush against each other, and withdraw without greeting. No encounter of souls takes place, no meaningful, lasting connection clenches and binds, nothing tragic happens between them, which would presuppose a concrete relationship and real decisions grounded therein—only figures bump into each other, events transpire, and situation piles blindly upon situation; all of this without continuity and order, a spectral, unreal togetherness of unreal people, which is unable to fill the time flowing emptily by. The individual placed into the disintegrated world who has any consciousness of himself is plainly lonesome therein. Only for moments can his soul assert itself and, in feeling its peculiarity, reveal the illusory quality of the bustle around it. This impact of the demoralized soul on the emptied world was imagined exemplarily by Edgar Allan Poe, perhaps the first to do so, in his tale "*The Man of the Crowd*." [...]



ALFRED DÖBLIN

Ulysses by Joyce

First published in *Das deutsche Buch*, 3/4 (1928), 84–85

. . . Cinema has invaded the realm of literature. Newspapers have grown bigger and are now the most important and most widely distributed written product—the daily bread of the people.

Today, people's everyday experience includes street scenes changing by the second, the signboards, and automobile traffic.

The heroic—indeed, the importance of the isolated individual—has sharply declined, overshadowed by the state, the party, and the economic system. While some of this was evident in earlier periods, it has become more pronounced in modern times. Some of this was already present before.

Now, a man is no greater than the wave that carries him. Today's picture includes the disconnectedness of his actions and of existence itself, its fleeting quality, the restlessness.

The fabrications of storytelling and its constructions seem naive here. This is the crux of the so-called crisis of the contemporary novel. The mentality of authors has not caught up with the times.



BERLIN IN THE "ROARING TWENTIES"

Cabaret, Dance, Movies



MAXIMILIAN SLADEK

Our Show

First published as "Unsere Schau," in Erik Charell, *An Alle* (Program Notes, 1924).

Life in the big city is a multiple interweaving of surfaces. But everyone wants an art in which one sees life reflected. This is how the cinema has become the expression of our time. What could be the point of opposing it? Nevertheless. for the big-city

dweller the true "mirror and abbreviated chronicle of the age" has always been the revue, that colorful, whirring, easy-going, incredibly mobile, suggestive replica of existence aswirl in a storm. In Paris, London, and New York, where the revue was born, this has long been recognized. Genuine theater holds itself a bit aloof in these cities, with the great show being offered by the one that pulls everything together into an incredible rhythm—dramatic art, variete, music, fashion show—and defines the center of social life and social encounters. In the climate of advancing internationalization before the war, Berlin was also tending in this direction, but its isolation in the last decade has blocked further development. Now the revue has entered upon its triumphal march here as well, a triumph that can only be the greater since contemporary theater is in no position to capture the stirred-up life of the present. Ought one speak of symptoms of decay and recite the decline of the West? Cassandra did not change the fate of Troy, and the living demand their due.

That the revue, however, offers great developmental possibilities within its enlarged scope, and therefore need not be a merely mindless sensation, is not denied even by its opponents. And if the Großes Schauspielhaus is now opening its doors to our show, it has not sacrificed its lofty expectations. The advantage of this space—which like no other demands and encourages the grand movements and rhythm of the masses—allows for a complete exploitation of the full potential of gripping visual attractions. Beyond this, we hope in this show to have captured something of the more intimate pulse of our red-hot times.



S

KATHARINA RATHAUS

Charleston: Every Age Has the Dance It Deserves

First published as "Charleston. Jede Zeit hat den Tanz, den sie verdient," *Uhu* 3 (1926), 120-121.

The waltz is dead-and all attempts to resuscitate it are failing and destined to fail. For the times have changed and with them, like a natural necessity, so must the dances. Today, when a new car rolls out of Ford's factory every minute, when "Valencia" and the latest hits are played simultaneously in major cities and the smallest provincial nests, when radio makes it possible for us and the deepest forest dwellers to check out simultaneously the applause earned by the closing Charleston in the Savoy Hotel in London, in Berlin's pace-setting Dance Palace, or in Paris-today the movement and rhythm of dance is different than it was in the cozy times of the blessed Strauss. They are creatures of the new mobility of life, of its whipped-up and racing tempo! They

are full of the new spirit, and the new should not be judged, good or bad, too quickly! The notion of the "good old times" is marked by a fear of the new, and skepticism over the new dances usually goes along with an inability to dance them. And as the "new" is always the slogan of the young, so does the new generation fasten its excited grip on the new dances. It senses that the empty bowls of the old Europe will offer no new nourishment for the blood, that the burned-out temperament of the European centers of culture can convey to the body no unsuspected, electrifying rhythm. The mechanization and democratization of life force upon its members new and other movements. Instead of dancing dances in a strolling gait with the spirit of a bygone era, the younger generation takes its inspiration from the original motions of primitive peoples, from an unaffected return to the rhythmic, musical experiences of naïve souls. If such borrowed steps, perhaps movement fragments of savage peoples, end up melted together with the remnants of Western culture, tempered in the ovens of modern civilization, if they find their final form in the molds of a talented dancer's sense of style, to be cooled finally into social dances at parties and balls by the conventions of our democratic-bourgeois milieu—who would wonder then that hearts and legs fly, race to them, dance in exultation!

For dance speaks to the blood and to the beat of the heart, not to reason! The associations of international dance teachers persist in their yearly efforts, in vain, "to invent" new dances. All "invented" dances are still-born children. They live a few fleeting days and hours. All the dance teachers in the world are incapable of forcing their artificial products on the dancing crowds, which instinctively defend themselves against the rape of their movement by affectation. On the contrary, the new, original dance; Terpsichore's modern face, made-up, powdered, and painted according to the current dictate of fashion; bobbed hair in the latest cut; crepe de Chine streamers just to the knee—none of this needs advertising. This dance gets its own recruits, makes its own way, discharges itself (with occasional farcical misunderstandings) amid the thunder of a jazz band like a storm! It cleanses tradition of the dust of decades, inflames blasé dance fanatics anew, shows all those excited by dance the rhythm of their life, their feelings and thoughts.

It answers to the name Charleston.



Scene from Chaplin's *Gold Rush*, which was released in Berlin in 1925



Ufa - Palast am Zoo, 1926, seating 2,135 spectators

SIEGFRIED KRACAUER

Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Movie Palaces

(First published as „Kult der Zerstreuung,“ in *Frankfurter Zeitung* March 4, 1926).

The large movie palaces in Berlin are palaces of distraction; to call them merely "cinemas" would be disrespectful. Such cinemas still survive only in Old Berlin and in the outer districts, where they cater to a smaller public; their numbers are declining.

More than by these smaller cinemas—or even by the spoken theaters—the face of Berlin is shaped by those optical fairy palaces. The Ufa palaces—above all the one at the Zoo—the Capitol built by Poelzig, the Marmorhaus, and whatever else they may be called, achieve sold-out houses day after day. That development is continuing in the direction they have charted is demonstrated by the construction of the new Gloria-Palast.

A carefully cultivated splendor of the surface (*gepflegter Prunk der Oberfläche*) is the hallmark of these mass theaters. Like hotel lobbies, they are places of worship dedicated to pleasure; their glitter is intended to edify. [...]

The performances themselves are also marked by a well-executed grandeur. The time has passed when one simply screened one film after another, accompanied by appropriate music. At least the major theaters have adopted the American principle of the self-contained performance, into which the film is integrated as one part of a larger whole.

Just as magazines expand in scope and variety, so too do the presentations expand into a structured abundance of attractions. Out of the cinema there has emerged a glittering, revue-like creation: the total work of art of effects (*das Gesamtkunstwerk der Effekte*).

It unleashes itself upon all the senses by every available means. Spotlights pour their beams into the auditorium, across festive draperies or trickle down through cascades of colored glass. The orchestra asserts itself as an independent force; its performances are supported by the accompaniments of the lighting effects. Every sensation receives its acoustic expression, its color value within the spectrum.

An optical and acoustic kaleidoscope, to which corporeal stage performance is added: pantomime, ballet. Finally, the white screen descends, and the events on the three-dimensional stage imperceptibly pass over into two-dimensional illusions.

Performances of this kind are today, alongside the genuine revues, the principal attraction in Berlin. In them distraction attains its own culture. They are dedicated to the masses. [...]

The four million inhabitants of Berlin cannot be overlooked. The sheer necessity of their circulation alone transforms life in the street into the inescapable street of life itself, calling forth spectacles and settings that penetrate even into the four walls of the home. The more people experience themselves as a mass, the more the mass acquires formative powers in the realm of the mind and culture—powers whose cultivation and financing become worthwhile.

The mass is no longer left to itself. Rather, it asserts itself in spite of its abandonment; it no longer tolerates scraps being tossed to it, but demands to be served at a properly laid table. Alongside it, there is little room left for the so-called educated classes (*Bildungsschichten*). They must either join in the meal or withdraw into a snobbish isolation. In any case, their provincial separateness has come to an end.

Through their absorption into the mass there emerges the homogeneous metropolitan public, which thinks and feels alike—from the bank director to the shop assistant, from the diva to the stenographer. Lamenting this turn toward mass taste is belated. For much of the cultural heritage that the masses refuse to embrace has become little more than a historical possession, because the economic and social reality to which it once belonged has itself been transformed.

People reproach Berliners for being addicted to distraction; the accusation is petty-bourgeois. Certainly, the craving for distraction is greater here than in the provinces, but greater and more tangible, too, is the strain endured by the working masses—a strain that is largely formal, filling the day without giving it fulfillment.

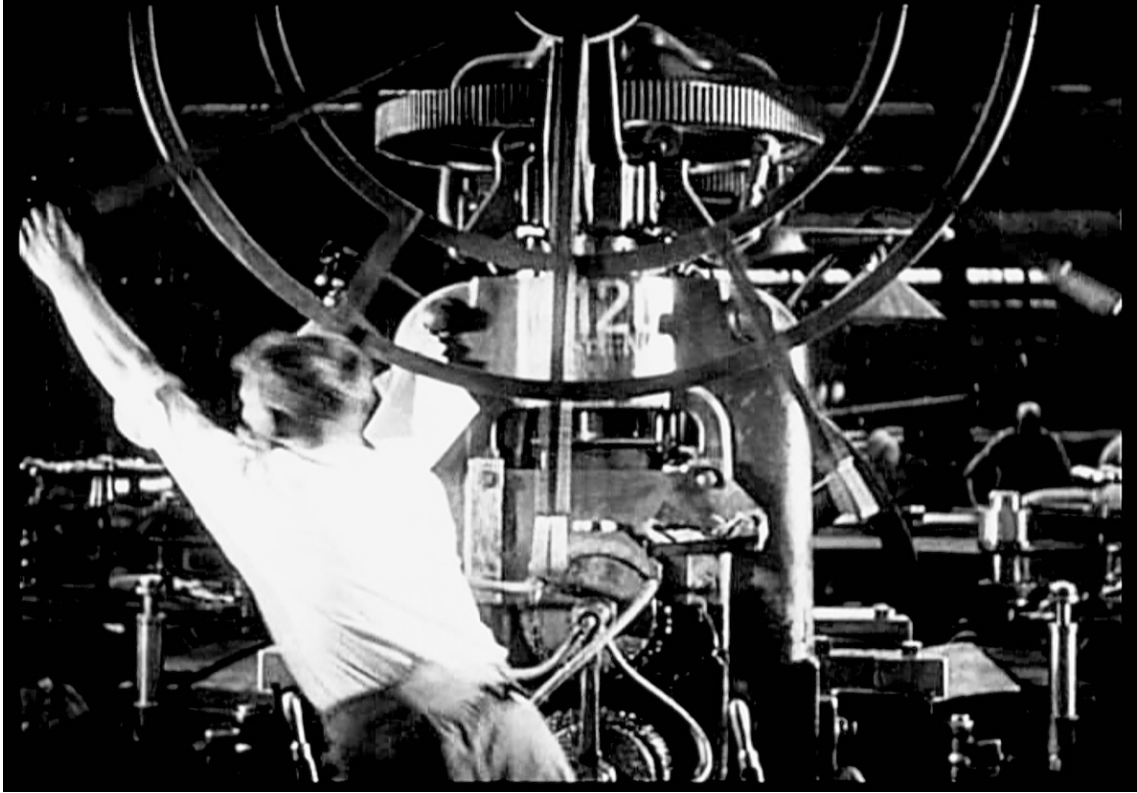
What has been missed must somehow be made good; yet it can only be sought within the same sphere of surfaces in which, under compulsion, one has missed it. The form of leisure necessarily corresponds to the form of work.

A sound instinct ensures that this need is satisfied. The elaborate arrangements of the movie palaces serve a single purpose: to keep the audience fastened to the periphery so that it does not sink into the abyss. Sensory stimuli follow one another so densely that not even the slightest reflection can force its way between them.

Like corks floating on water, the sweep of the spotlights and the musical accompaniment keep people afloat. The desire for distraction demands—and finds in response—the unfolding of pure outwardness.

Hence, especially in Berlin, the irresistible tendency to stage all performances as revues; hence, as a parallel phenomenon, the proliferation of illustrations in the daily press and periodicals. [...]

MODERNITY IN CRISIS



"THE STORM IS HERE"

Watch this [CLIP](#) from *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt*,
beginning at 45:00 and ending at 50:00

Jakob van Hoddis, World's End (1911)

The citizen's hat flies from his pointed head.
In all the air, it echoes like a scream.
Roofers plunge down and break apart,
And on the coasts – one reads – the flood is rising.

The storm is here, the wild seas leap
Onto land to crush the heavy dikes.
Most people have a cold.
The trains are falling off the bridges.

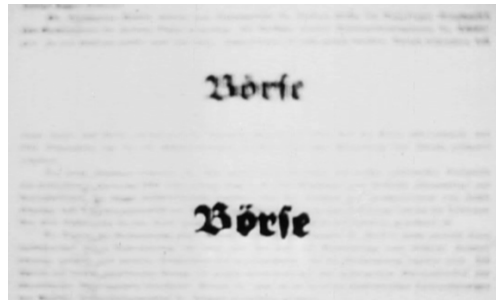
Weltende

Dem Bürger fliegt vom spitzen Kopf der Hut,
In allen Lüften hallt es wie Geschrei,
Dachdecker stürzen ab und gehn entzwei
Und an den Küsten – liest man – steigt die Flut.

Der Sturm ist da, die wilden Meere hupfen
An Land, um dicke Dämme zu zerdrücken.
Die meisten Menschen haben einen Schnupfen.
Die Eisenbahnen fallen von den Brücken.

Jakob van Hoddis





Crisis — Murder — Stock market — Marriage — Money









The suicide scene cuts to a fashion show in *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt*



"THE OTHER BERLIN IS LURKING"

JOSEPH GOEBBELS

Around the Gedächtniskirche

First published as "Rund um die Gedächtniskirche," *Der Angriff* (January 23, 1928).

[NOTE: Goebbels, who was Nazi Party Gauleiter of Berlin after 1926 and Minister of Propaganda after 1933, uses anti-Semitic language here to denounce Berlin's modernity and to speak on behalf of the "other Berlin," i.e., all those who felt left behind. Goebbels mostly wrote for his own propaganda paper Der Angriff, which was at permanent war with Berlin's modern culture. TK]

This is Berlin West:

Thousands and thousands of signs beam a flood of light into the gray evening, so that the Kurfürstendamm is almost as bright as day. Streetcars jangle, buses rattle past honking, filled with people, people. Long lines of taxis and elegant limousines crowd

the mirror-smooth asphalt. Red, yellow, and green stoplights tell traffic to stop and go, and in the midst of it all crossing signals direct the dark crowds on the curbs as they attempt the dangerous trip from one side to the other. Squeals and commotion assault the ears, and anyone not used to it risks losing his senses. Bright red signs announce the latest films: *Killed by Love*, *The Girl from Tauentzien*, *Just One Night*. Whiffs of heavy perfume drift past. Coquettes with the artificial colors of modern women's faces smile; so-called men slink around, monocles flashing; false and real gems sparkle. One hears every language on earth: here a silent yellow Indian stands next to a talkative Saxon, an Englishman elbows his cursing way through the mob, and over all the roar a frozen newspaper seller shouts the latest headlines.

In the middle of the city's noise, the Gedächtniskirche sends its slender spire into the gray evening. It does not belong in the midst of such raucous life. It is an anachronism standing between the cafes and cabarets, letting the droning automobiles roll past its stone body, ignoring the rottenness, and ringing the hour.

Many passers-by have perhaps never looked up at its spire. The snob in his fur coat saunters past; the woman of the world – a lesbian from tip to toe, monocle in place, cigarette in hand – clicks along the sidewalk in high heels and disappears into one of the thousands of smoky dens whose lights shine invitingly in the evening glow.

This is Berlin W – the stone heart of the city. Here in the niches and corners of cafes, in cabarets and bars, in Soviet theaters and parlors, the intellectuals of the asphalt democracy gather. Here is where the politics of sixty million hardworking Germans is made. Here one gives and receives the latest tips on the stock exchange and the theater. Here one manipulates politics, pictures, medical treatments, stocks, love, theater, the government, and public assistance. The Gedächtniskirche is never alone. It moves smoothly from day to night and night to day without a moment of stillness.

The eternal repetition of rottenness and decay, the absence of genius and true creativity, the hollowness and despair – all coated with the fool's gold of an age that has sunk into the most contradictory pseudoculture: that is the mischief surrounding the Memorial Church. One might wish that the elite of our people were found day and night along Tauentzien Street, headed toward God. It is only the Israelite.

The German people are foreign and out of place here. One almost stands out for speaking the national language. Pan-Europe, the Internationale, jazz, France, and Piscator: that is the theme.

"*Die Freundin*, old issues, only ten pfennig!" shouts a clever peddler. None of the passers-by thinks he is in the wrong place. He is not in the wrong place. He knows where he is.

Berlin W is the boil on this great city of work and industry. What is produced in the north is squandered here in the west. Four million people earn their living in this stony expanse, and a hundred thousand drones squander their labor in sin, depravity, and filth.

The Kurfürstendamm howls when someone steps on the toes of one of these bloodsuckers; humanity is in danger. The one person they hate to see is an honest working man. Smiling, they carry a whole people to its grave.

That is not the true Berlin. It is elsewhere, waiting and hoping and fighting – beginning to recognize the Judas that has sold our people for thirty pieces of silver.

The other Berlin is lurking, ready to spring into action. Day and night, thousands are working toward the day that is coming. That day will demolish the places of corruption around the Gedächtniskirche, it will transform them and give them over to an awakened people.

The day of judgment: it will be the day of freedom!



We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.

Michel Foucault, Of Other Spaces

Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be seen today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time with others.

Ernst Bloch, Heritage of Our Time