MODERNIST URBAN CULTURE AND CINEMATIC PERCEPTION:

CONTINGENCY, SUPERFICIALITY, AND FRAGMENTATION

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the ways in which urban experience and cinematic experience converge and shape each other during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I do not intend simply to assess how the city is represented in the cinema, but also to examine the ways in which urbanization changed the perception of urbanites and required a new medium to represent their lives in the city. My focus in this dissertation concentrates on three characteristics of the city that define urbanity at the turn of the century: contingency, superficiality, and fragmentation. Each chapter examines one of these three characteristics and consists of two parts. In the first part, I examine the aesthetic responses of various arts to urbanity. Informed by discussion of the cinema, urban space, and modernism in the first part, the second part performs close textual analysis of a particular film or a literary text, through which I aim to examine the affinity between urbanity and the cinema.

First, I examine contingency in urban space in interdisciplinary contexts to understand how the notion of chance shaped the perception of modernist artists. Main texts include Le Corbusier's *The City of Tomorrow* and his vision of a systematic and orderly city; Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* with its film adaptation *Sabotage*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, to discuss the literary and cinematic representation of unpredictable urban environments; and August Sander's city photographs capturing urban contingency in *People of the*

Twentieth Century. Based on the first part, the second part discusses the city symphony film, specifically Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, to examine how the film manages accidental incidents in the city.

The next chapter explores the superficiality of the city and the responses of art movements that experimented with the concept of surface, starting with Christopher Isherwood's camera-eye, which he employed to represent the lives of urbanites in "Sally Bowles"; Adolf Loos's architectural theory, which favors effectiveness and simplicity over luxurious ornamentation; and Art Deco and Machine Art, which prioritize aesthetics over functionality. After I explore diverse aesthetic responses, I turn to Joe May's *Asphalt* to gain insight into the affinity between the city and the cinema in terms of superficiality.

Last, I discuss the fragmentation of city life and argue that the cinema is the medium most in tune with fragmented perception and non-contiguous urban life. To understand the directionlessness of urban geography and culture and their opposition to completeness and wholeness, I mainly examine Georges-Eugène Hausmann's totalitarian urban planning; several key modernist avant-garde painters who attempted to represent the fragmentary and ephemeral city; Etienne-Jules Marey, Dziga Vertov, and Fernand Léger's cinematic fragmentation. Focusing on John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, the second part explores the ways in which the modernist literary text employed cinematic aesthetics to describe the fragmentation of the city.

DEDICATION

To my husband and family for their support and love.

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INTRODUCTION

> The cinema has become so much a habit of thought and word and deed as to make it impossible to visualise modern consciousness without it. It is so much part and parcel of development, so linked up consciously and subconsciously with growing up, with learning, with this, that and the other thing, that one no more thinks of there being no cinemas than one thinks of there being no museums or art galleries.
> — Kenneth Macpherson. "As Is." *Close Up*.

I.1 The Cinema and the City

This dissertation is motivated by a fascination with modern urban visual

culture and its cinematic representation.[1] As the often-used term "the cinematic

city" indicates, the city and the cinema are intricately related to each other in

modernist discourse; the cinema frequently recorded the everyday life of the city,

and the city was becoming cinematic. Urban realities imitate fictional cities

represented in film, and urbanites desire what actors onscreen desire. The nexus

between the city and the cinema in modernism has been articulated by a number

of scholars, but Walter Benjamin's acknowledgment is perhaps one of the most

influential:

> Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our
>
> railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly

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[1] Films are usually cited by their most familiar U.S. titles, followed by original

around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. […] This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object. It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis. (*The Work of Art* 37).

Film represents the city by "explod[ing]" everyday life and lets us explore urban space through its "debris." Through the cinema, what has been unnoticed is noticed and what has been concealed is unconcealed, and it is also through the cinema that one can observe urban space and urban perception. As Benjamin writes, film "not only reveals familiar aspects of movements, but discloses quite unknown aspects within them" (37).

What I want to "reveal" or "disclose" through the cinema is condensed into three characteristics. Due to the technical features of the cinema, it records the here-and-now of the city (contingency), attends to the city's appearances or exterior (superficiality), and breaks up the urban landscape into discontinuous shots (fragmentation). Each cinematic characteristic is associated with urbanity

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titles in parenthesis.

and the aesthetic movement of modernism. Contingency, superficiality, and fragmentation are also significant concepts because these ideas were contested by some modernist intellectuals and artists at the turn of the century, often framed within the binarisms of determinacy against uncertainty, depth against surface, and unity against discontinuity.

The dissertation explores modern urban visual culture from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century and its association with the cinema. I focus on contingency, superficiality, and fragmentation, which together define modern urbanity. Each emphasizes the novel experiential and perceptual aspects of the city. By observing the relationship between urban consciousness and cinematic consciousness, the dissertation sheds new light on modernist urban culture, and I argue that the cinematic mode of understanding offers an innovative way to reconsider the city.

I.2 The Country and the City

Urbanization was one of the most significant changes in the West at the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth. The city has existed for a thousand years, but tracing the history of the city is not the aim here; however, when focusing on modernity and modernism, it is crucial to examine significant modernist critics who explored the ways in which the urban environment has influenced modern consciousness. Modern urban studies tend to define the city against the country and characterize city life in terms of stimulation. In "The

Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), George Simmel argues that life in the city is fundamentally different from that of the country. "With each crossing of the street," Simmel writes, "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" (*Sociology* 410). While "the rhythm of rural life and sensory mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, and evenly," the metropolis engenders incessant, excessive stimulation (*Sociology* 410). The psychological conditions of the metropolis exhaust people and make them gradually less responsive and dull, and eventually they adopt a blasé, impersonal, and cold outlook, a consequence of continuous sensory stimulation. To defend oneself from sensory overload, the modern man responds rationally rather than emotionally, retreats into intellectualism, and alienates himself from others. This is the structure of modern social relations.

For Siegfried Kracauer, sensation is also the salient feature of the modern city and a pleasant distraction for people whose city life is monotonous and tedious. Distraction is more than an outlet to escape from humdrum reality; it is a mode of life and is embodied in urban popular culture such as the Tiller Girls—a dance troupe, founded by John Tiller around 1890 and famous for their synchronized dance—and movie palaces, which Kracauer examines in *The Mass Ornament* (1927). The massive and identical performance of the Tiller Girls, the product of "American distraction factories," transforms the individuality of each

girl into "extravagant spectacle" (*Mass* 75, 76). Movie palaces, or "optical fairylands," stimulate and divert the spectators' attention to decoration, and leave no room for contemplation (*Mass* 323). This culture or cult of distraction might feed people with sensational entertainment, but Kracauer conceives it as significant urban culture "that exposes disintegration instead of masking it" (*Mass* 328).

Conceiving sensation as a major feature of the modern city, Walter Benjamin also characterizes the city as a place where the modern subjects are easily distracted and unable to concentrate. Benjamin's perspective on the city, as Marshall Berman points out, is ambivalent. On the one hand, he is drawn "irresistibly toward the city's bright lights, beautiful women, fashion, luxury, its play of dazzling surfaces and radiant scenes"; on the other hand, he is very critical about urban culture in that "this whole glittering world is decadent, hollow, vicious, spiritually empty, oppressive to the proletariat, condemned by history" (*All* 146). Examining Charles Baudelaire's modernity, Benjamin writes that moving through urban space involves the experience of shock: "At dangerous intersections," Benjamin writes, "nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery" (*Writer* 191). In his examination of film, Benjamin sees shock as a more productive and creative force. Since "perception conditioned by shock was established as a formal principle" of film, through film, urbanites can satisfy their new urge for stimulation and also train their consciousness to be prepared for stimulation

(*Writer* 191).

Modernist scholarship in the later twentieth century was concerned with how the discourse of the city is produced. As Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* (1973) describes the typical images of the country and the city, the country has been conceived, on the one hand, as a place "of peace, innocence, and simple virtue," and on the other hand, "as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation" (1). The image of the city has been constructed as a place of "of learning, communication, light" and at the same time "as a place of noise, worldliness, and ambition" (1). Acknowledging these long-held images of the country and the city, Williams asks where these two images originate and traces them back to critical literary works that reproduce the two stark images of the country and the city. Williams argues that our social experience cannot be pinned down as either that of the country or the city, because real life lies in between and often involves new kinds of experience.

Defining modernism as "an art of cities," Malcolm Bradbury examines the modernist city to which writers and intellectuals were attracted and which at the same time they abhorred ("Cities" 96). In similar vein as Williams, Bradbury and McFarlane note that "the pull and push of the city, its attraction and repulsion, have provided themes and attitudes that run deep in literature, where the city has become metaphor rather than place" (97). Writers and intellectuals endeavored to escape from the city's disorder and corruption to the pastoral country, but they were still drawn to the city, which "appropriated most of the

functions and communications of society, most of its population, and the furthest extremities of its technological, commercial, industrial and intellectual experience"; the city, at the turn of the century, was a "cultural museum" (*Modernism* 97).[2]

Another notable thread in urban studies in the later twentieth century concerns the everydayness of the city. This approach is distinguished from that of previous urban studies, which were "informed by some version of the semiotic perspective in which meanings were investigated through the unpacking of the processes whereby spaces, typically instrumental spaces such as the shopping mall, were produced" (Borden 258). However, this approach is deterministic because it assumes that the meaning of space is defined by the producers. In *The Production of Space* (1974), Henri Lefebvre argues that "([s]ocial) space is a (social) product"; space is not just made up of buildings or roads, but is also produced by social practices and experiences of people (72). For Lefebvre, space is neither entirely metaphysical nor physical. It is rather the complex combination of the "perceived—conceived—lived triad" (40). In other words, space is produced by the interrelationships between "spatial practice" (the daily life of people), "representations of space" (conceptualized space such as maps or

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² For more discussion of the city and modernism in the late twentieth century and after, see Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (1983), James Donald's *Imagining the Modern City* (1999), David Harvey's Paris, Capital of Modernity (2003), Richard Dennis's *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930.* (2008), and Leo Charney's *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift* (1998). Although the main concern of *Empty Moments* is not directly related to the city, part of the book examines the characteristic of modernity in

models), and "representational spaces" (lived space of signs or symbols) (39).

According to Lefebvre, the triad "loses all force if it is treated as an abstract

'model'" (40). The space cannot be neatly reduced to theories.[3]

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), focusing on the

consumers of space, examines the spaces shaped by everyday life of city walkers.

For de Certeau, walking is a "qualitative" act and exhibits "the (voracious)

property that the geographical system has of being able to transform action into

legibility" (97). Defining walking as a speech act or enunciation, de Certeau

empowers the activity of individuals who often have been objectified as passive

consumers or users in urban theories or planning. Walkers use "tactics" that

"trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined

nor captured by the systems" (xviii), and through these "tactics," they transform

or manipulate space constructed by "political, economic, and scientific

rationality" (xix).[4]

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association with urban consciousness.

[3] Although not a critical or theoretical work, Mass-Observation is worth noting in the context of everyday life of the city. It is a collection of meticulous records of daily life by a number of people living in Britain between 1937 and the mid-1960s. (The work resumed in 1981.) Although it has been received as a minor social movement in modernist studies compared to avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, Mass-Observation is an integral part of modernism. Mass-Observation was created in 1937 by anthropologist Tom Harrisson, poet Charles Madge, and filmmaker Humphrey Jennings. They recruited observers to record personal diaries of everyday life and sometimes distributed survey questionnaires to observers.

[4] For more discussion of everydayness in modernism, see Bryony Randall's *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (2007.), Barry Sandywell's "The Myth of Everyday Life: Toward a Heterology of the Ordinary" (2004), Rita Felski's "The Invention of Everyday Life" (1999/2000), Ben Highmore's "Awkward Moments:

In addition, significant modernist discourse of the city has emerged in the field of urban planning. Urban planners and architects of the early twentieth century shared the idea of the city as a disorderly place with other modernist intellectuals, as I briefly examined above. One of the most notable planners was Le Corbusier who proposed a dramatic plan in *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning* (1929). By building identical high-rises, dividing districts into commercial, business, and residential zones, and straightening the road for fast transportation, Le Corbusier attempted to transform the city into a living machine that functions systematically in a predetermined way. While Le Corbusier's plan focuses on renovating the city, Ebenezer Howard's is to move the population to the countryside—the Garden City. According to *Tomorrow, a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898), the Garden City is in a concentric form, surrounded by a green belt, and has six boulevards traversing the city. Designed to be self-sufficient and controlled by public authorities to limit the maximum population up to approximately three thousand, the Garden City combined the notion of the city (town) and the country. "Town-Country" offers, according to the illustration of "The Three Magnets" in *Tomorrow*, only the positive qualities of the city and the country: "beauty of nature, social opportunity, fields and parks of easy access, high wages, low rates, low prices, pure air and water, good drainage, no smoke, no slums, and freedom" (n.p.). Urban historian Lewis

Avant-Gardism and the Dialectics of Everyday Life" (2000), Juan A. Suarez's *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (2007), and Lisa Olson's *Modernism and the Ordinary* (2009).

Mumford celebrated the city for its culture. Approaching the city from a humanistic perspective, Mumford conceived it as more than a size or population. In "What Is a City?" (1937) Mumford presents the principal propositions of the city that it "fosters art" and stages "man's more purposive activities" (29). However, due to severe urbanization, including overpopulation and heavy traffic, the city stopped cultivating urban culture and promoting social facilities. He suggests stopping expansion and limiting "size, density, and area" for "effective social intercourse" (30).

However, what Le Corbusier, Howard, and Mumford suggested were all examples of "orthodox city planning," as Jane Jacobs criticized in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) (3). Many urban planners and architects in the early twentieth century were mostly concerned with "how cities ought to work and what ought to be good for people and businesses in them," so when city life contradicts their ideal city, they "shrug reality aside" (8). Jacobs points out that idealizing nature or country life, or "grass fetishes" in her words, is dangerous because it instills "false reassurance that parks are real estate stabilizers or community anchors" (92). Also, our "sentimentalizing nature" ignores that "our cities, just by virtue of being, are a legitimate part of nature too, and involved with it in much deeper and more inescapable ways than grass trimming, sunbathing, and contemplative uplift" (445).[5]

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[5] In addition to Le Corbusier, Ebenezer Howard, and Lewis Mumford, for urban planners who suggested the ideal city or community from the late nineteenth to the

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the population of the city increased

radically, and it has still been increasing ever since.[6] It wouldn't be too much to

say that the city is the engine propelling our lives. The modern city has been

actively discussed in recent decades in modernist studies, and the increasingly

central role of the city in modernism scholarship in the twenty-first century

indicates that the city is a key to understanding modernism. Many contemporary

critical and theoretical works influenced my development of the idea on urban

aesthetics, particularly interdisciplinary studies. *Tracing Modernity:*

Manifestations of the Modern in Architecture and the City (2004), edited by

Christian Hermansen and Mari Hvattum, collects writings about modern culture,

particularly concerning modernity, architecture, and the city. The anthology

explores modernity not only through Baudelaire, Benjamin, and Kracauer, but

also Le Corbusier, Bruno Taut, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. William

Chapman Sharpe's 2008 book, *New York Nocturne: The City After Dark in*

Literature, Painting, and Photography, 1850–1950, demonstrates the aesthetics

early twentieth century, see Frederick Law Olmsted's "Public Parks and the
Enlargement of Towns" (1870), Baron von Haussmann's reconstruction of Paris in
1850s-1860s, Camillo Sitte's *City Planning According to Artistic Principles* (1889) and
The Art of Building Cities (1889), Edwin Unwin's *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding!:*
How the Garden City Type of Development May Benefit Both Owner and Occupier
(1912), Patrick Geddes's *Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning*
Movement and to the Study of Civics (1915), Tony Garnier's urban planning Cité
Industrielle (1917), Bruno Taut's *The Crown City* (1919), Clarence Arthur Perry's *The*
Neighborhood Unit, a Scheme of Arrangement for the Family-life Community (1929),
Catherine Bauer's *Modern Housing* (1934), and Frank Lloyd Wright's "Broadacre City.
A New Community Plan" in *Architectural Record* (1935).

[6] For more information, see Daniel Hoornweg and Kevin Pope's "Population
Predictions for the World's Largest Cities in the 21st century" (2016)

of New York at night and examines representations of the gaslit and electrified city in modernist artworks in media such as photography, painting, and literary works. David Pinder's *Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in Twentieth-Century Urbanism* (2005) examines urbanism in the context of utopia, particularly focusing on Le Corbusier and Ebenezer Howard in earlier chapters and giving a critical view of authoritarian urban planning. *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (2006) by Rebecca Zurier explores New York's public culture and everyday life through the works of the Ashcan School. The series of paintings examined in the book shows diverse faces of New York from poverty, danger, and loneliness to thrill and joy. Most of all, the book concerns not only the subject matter of the paintings but also the painters' techniques, through which Zurier reads changing cultural practices of looking. Chistoph Lindner, in *Imagining New York City: Literature, Urbanism, and the Visual Arts, 1890-1940* (2015), drawing on numerous examples from literature, photography, architecture, cinema, and urban planning, explores the city's transformation in two parts--skylines and sidewalks. Connecting the spatial and cultural aspects of New York, Lindner asks how the material structure of the city constructed urban culture and inspired artists and residents.[7]

My project developed in relation to these modernist discourses. The

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[7] For more general discussion of the city from a sociological perspective, see *Community and Society* (1887) by Ferdinand Tönnies, Louis Wirth's "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (1938), Claude S. Fischer's *The Urban Experience* (1976), Harvey Molotch and John R. Logan's *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (1987), Sharon

modern city I explore is a space of sensation, distraction, and shock, and I

rethink the idea of the city as uncontrolled, inhuman, and unhygienic, which is

constructed against the idea of the country or nature. Acknowledging the

previous discourses of the modern city in its psychological, aesthetic, and

sociological aspects, the dissertation will inquire what makes a city a city and the

ways in which urbanity enriches city life and inspires modernist artists. Also, the

dissertation is inspired by and is hoping to contribute to recent interdisciplinary

studies of the modern city. The three concepts I proposed as the prominent

features of the city have been conceived as undesirable factors because they

destroy the integrity of life. I question this long-held assumption and argue that

people not only adjusted themselves to what have been believed to be the

detrimental conditions, but also that they savored the risky, shallow, and chaotic

nature of city life. Through literary texts and visual arts including painting,

design, photography, and, most of all, film, I examine how urban culture thrived

on contingency, superficiality, and fragmentation.

I.3 Method and Range

The cities I am concerned with are primarily New York, London, Paris,

and Berlin, the largest modern cities in late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries, where the respective cultural climates stimulated artists. Instead of

limiting my texts to one city or one nation, the texts I examine here are from

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Zukin's *The Cultures of Cities* (1995), and *The City Cultures Reader* (2nd ed. 2004), an

multiple countries. As John Stuart Mill's often cited phrase says, "capital is becoming more and more cosmopolitan; there is so much greater similarity of manners and institutions than formerly, and so much less alienation of feeling, among the more civilized countries, that both population and capital now move from one of those countries to another on much less temptation than heretofore " (348). Around the turn of the century, cities were networked, and labor and commodities were transacted across national borders. On the cosmopolitan aspect of modernism, Pericles Lewis writes that "the avant-garde and modernism were fundamentally cosmopolitan movements, in the root sense of that word, movements of citizens of the world and of world cities" (97).

The film industry in particular played a major role in the worldwide circulation of urban culture. Unlike language-specific literary texts and unreproducible paintings, film spread out rapidly across countries. The Lumière brothers sent their representatives who could operate the Cinematographe abroad to project their films in many countries. As Thompson and Bordwell write, the Lumières first avoided selling their Cinematographe and sent their operators abroad to project films in rented theaters. When the Lumière brothers began to sell their Cinematographe in 1897, the cinema emerged as an international medium and "made the cinema an international phenomenon" (*Film History* 23). Following the Lumière brothers, other film producers such as Georges Méliès and Charles Pathé extended their businesses worldwide and

anthology edited by Malcolm Biles, Tim Hall, and Iain Borden.

accelerated film distribution. American cinema, Weimar cinema, and the cinema of Soviet Union, whose films I often explore in the dissertation, were screened internationally and influenced modernist artists around the world. Virginia Woolf references the German horror film *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* in "The Movies and Reality"; John Dos Passos had interactions with Soviet filmmakers that had a huge impact on his literary world; H. D., Kenneth Macpherson, and Bryher published the monthly magazine *Close Up* devoted to film from 1927 to 1933, which included reporting on international films and articles contributed by artists from many countries; European filmmakers such as Ernst Lubitsch and F. W. Murnau emigrated to Hollywood and continued to make films. As Laura Marcus points out, "the promise of cinema was internationalism" ("Literature" 335).

To understand urban culture, especially visual culture, this dissertation employs a multimedia approach. Since urban culture in modernism is associated with and embodied in diverse art forms and partakes of different disciplines, my study of the subject requires an interdisciplinary approach. Although my main texts are film and fiction, I have drawn upon a wide range of visual sources, including painting, photography, architecture, and design. In addition, theories of urban planning are especially important in exploring the urban landscape and the economic and social functions of the city, which have direct impacts on modern life.

I.4 The Chapters

The three chapters examine urban visual culture and the cinematic representation of urban perception. Each chapter concerns one specific theme and consists of two parts. The first part explores a range of aesthetic responses of modernist artists, and the second part, based on the responses examined in the first part, closely analyzes a single text through which I argue for the affinity between urban consciousness and cinematic consciousness and suggest a cinematic way of exploring the city. The first part of each chapter aims to observe the city at the turn of the century and to investigate the cultural topography from the texts I select. I explore a number of cases across disciplines to avoid reifying a single case and to emphasize the diversity and complexity of urban culture. The first part begins with urban planning to introduce a utopian, idealistic view of the city, then moves to explore visual arts inspired by urbanity, and ends with film capturing the city at street level and reflecting urban perception. Although I attempt to include various responses from modernist artists, my survey cannot be definitive and has to be selective of cases that are historically important in modernist discourse. While the first part remains impressionistic, the second part focuses on one text and develops a critical understanding of the theme.

The first full chapter, "Modern Urban Contingency and Cinematic Representation," centers on the pervasive indeterminacy of the city at thhas been e turn of the century. I examine the ways in which the cinema embodies the modernists' anxiety over unpredictability and address how modern contingency

differs from that in previous times. Unforeseeable accidents have occurred long before the twentieth century, but modernization significantly changed the notion of contingency. The moderns endeavored to explain the cause of accidents rationally, which led them to depend on probability or chance, not on transcendental power, as previous generations had. Contingency was a source of chaos, but at the same time, it liberated the moderns from a teleological system.

The idea of contingency in modernity has been a central theme in modernist scholarship. Charles Baudelaire in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863) defined modernity as two contradictory forces: the contingent and the eternal. Also conceiving contingency as a critical feature of modernity, T. J. Clark in *Farewell to an Idea* (1999) notes that the moderns accepted the notions of risk, change, and unpredictability and liberated themselves from supernatural power or fate. Ben Singer explores the modern city defined by chance and traces the ways in which the mass media sensationally reproduces contingencies in the city. Contingency has been continuously discussed in relation to the cinema. Siegfried Kracauer in *Theory of Film* (1960) notes the ability of film to capture unstaged moments and its affinity for contingent events in the city. Mary Ann Doane's *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (2002) examines contingency as manifested in the cinema. In contrast to determinism and rationalization, contingency is a mark of disorder and randomness, a threatening factor in narrative film.[8]

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[8] For more discussion of contingency in modernism or modernity, see Peter V. Zima's "Contingency and Construction:From Mimesis to Postmodernism" (1997),

Part One of this chapter explores the concept of contingency and provides a wide spectrum of modernists' responses. Le Corbusier, who abhorred disorder and chaos, imagined the city free of the contingent and projected his ideal in his plan. August Sander, on the other hand, found an aesthetic moment in urban contingency and captured it in his city photographs, made possible by the camera's ability to fix unstaged moments. Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and its film adaptation *Sabotage,* directed by Alfred Hitchcock, are intriguing texts to juxtapose because the literary text describes an unforeseeable future in the modernized city, and the film visualizes the pervasive fear of contingency in the city. By juxtaposing the two texts, I demonstrate the cinematic translation of the literary text and underscore the medium specificity of film.

Part Two explores city symphony films and their association with urban contingency. Dozens of city symphony films represent the ways in which the notion of probability plays into film, but I choose Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* as an exemplar in that the film displays chance events upon which the city is structured and also illustrates the ways in which film manages or eases modern anxiety and insecurity.

The next chapter, "Superficiality and Urban Surface Culture," discusses

Michael Makropoulos's "Crisis and Contingency: Two Categories of the Discourse of Classical Modernity" (2012), and Pierre Saint-Amand's "Contingency and the Enlightenment" (1997). Risk is also often discussed in relation to contingency. See James Leo Cahill's "How It Feels to Be Run Over: Early Film Accidents" (2008), Judith Green's *Risk and Misfortune: A Social Construction of Accidents* (1997), Karin Zachmann's "Risk in Historical Perspective: Concepts, Contexts, and Conjunctions" (2014), and Greg Siegel's *Forensic Media: Reconstructing Accidents in Accelerated Modernity* (2014).

superficial urban culture and argues that both the city and the cinema share the feature of superficiality, a significant phenomenon at the turn of the century. The modern city has been criticized for its lack of depth and its obsession with appearances. For example, the night city lit by electricity fascinated people, but at the same time it was denounced for its shallowness and commercialism. Although depth and surface have long been two opposing values that can be traced back to Plato, superficiality during urbanization in the early twentieth century was particularly phenomenal because the landscape of the city transformed surface into spectacle. The urban spectacle was shallow, as some modernist critics decried; however, surface was an aesthetic domain for modernist artists to realize their ideas of the capitalized and commercialized city.

The concept of superficiality in modernity has been discussed particularly in association with the city due to the spectacle of the urban landscape. Conceiving the surface as an important site of the modern city, Kracauer in *The Mass Ornament,* examines the superficiality of parts of popular culture such as the Tiller Girls and movie palaces. The surface splendor of the city undermines individuality and promotes its externality, not the internal meanings hidden behind its face. Surface is a salient feature of the city for critics in the later twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. In *Weimar Surfaces* (2001), Janet Ward, exploring the surface culture of Weimar Germany in the 1920s, illustrates the city's obsession with surface and argues that the city surface is where function is aestheticized. Surface culture has been an important issue in film

studies. Ann Friedberg in *The Virtual Window* (2006) discusses the experience

of watching a film and the architectural characteristic of the screen in relation to

the pedestrian walking down the street and the display window, in that both

kinds of spectatorship lack depth and interiority. Guy Debord's *The Society of*

the Spectacle (1967) critically views spectacle that aims at nothing but itself and

becomes the condition that dominates the city. In *The Condition of*

Postmodernity (1990) David Harvey compares postmodernist and modernist

ways of conceiving surface and claims that postmodernism refuses the

surface-depth model, while modernism depends on this structure of surface and

depth.[9]

Part One discusses the notion of superficiality and surface culture and

explores the broad spectrum of modernist artists' responses. I begin with

Christopher Isherwood's "Sally Bowles," where the narrator begins the story by

claiming, "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not

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[9] For more discussion of superficiality and decoration, see   Nikolaus Pevsner's
Pioneers of Modern Design, From William Morris to Walter Gropius (1936), Alan
Wilde's "Surfacings: Reflections on the Epistemology of Late Modernism" (1980), Paul
Virilio's "The Overexposed City" in *Lost Dimension* (1984), Alastair Duncan's *American
Art Deco* (1986), Richard Shusterman's *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and
Culture* (2002), *The Function of Ornament* (2006), edited by Farshid Moussavi and
Michael Kubo. Also, for the discussion of superficiality in relation with the cinema, see
Bela Balazs's "Visible Man, or the Culture of film" (1924), Martin Rubin's
Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle (1993), Maggie
Valentine's *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie
Theatre, Starring S. Charles Lee* (1994), Anne Friedberg's *Window Shopping: Cinema
and the Postmodern* (1994), and Rudolf Arnheim's *Film as Art* (1957)—particularly the
sections of "The Projection of Solids upon a Plane Surface," "Reduction of Depth,"
"Absence of the Nonvisual World of the Senses," "Artistic Use of Projections upon a
Plane Surface," and "Artistic Utilization of Reduced Depth."

thinking" (*The Berlin Stories* 207). The novella deals with the superficial urban culture "superficially" in the same way that a camera records only what it can "see." The first part then proceeds to discuss important examples of surface culture from Piet Mondrian's abstract painting of grids to Adolf Loos's architecture and design with "efficiently undecorated" surfaces. Art Deco, which had a huge influence on fashion, the cinema, and art in general, is also an important instance of surface culture. Through diverse urban cultural events and modernist artworks, I argue that surface culture was more than fanfaronade or flamboyance. In fact, it was a mode of living in which urbanites willingly participated. Based on these examples, the first part ends with a discussion of the aesthetic appeal of the city surface and film's ability to project that surface on the screen.

Attending to textual specifics of the film, the second part discusses Joe May's 1929 *Asphalt* and argues that urban visual culture and the cinema share the feature of superficiality. It is an exemplary film because it addresses the dichotomy of depth and surface, authenticity and pretentiousness, and significance and triviality at multiple levels. The film poses as a melodrama, which conveys the moral message that a woman indulging in luxuries is punished. However, mocking the notion of depth, the film relishes shallowness, not only in its story, but also through its filmic form.

The last chapter, "The Fragmented City and Cinematic Inquiry," offers a critical view on fragmentation and on modernist artists' understanding of a

fragmented urban condition. Fragmentation in general signifies a break of totality and unity and an epistemological doubt about wholeness. It is a process of disintegration accompanied by scientific discoveries and technological development such as Einstein's revolutionary concept of time and space and innovations in the field of communication and transportation. Also, city life was dramatically transformed; one could not walk the city streets without being distracted by noise, billboards, window displays, flashing lights, traffic, and crowds. Despite the overload of sensory stimulation, fragmentation was a condition to which people adjusted, and they even immersed themselves in eye-catching distractions. Fragmentation is deleterious only when seen through the lens of wholeness.

Fragmentation is one of the conspicuous features in studies of modernist aesthetics. Marshall Berman in *All that Is Solid Melts into Air* (1982) explores modernity and modernism in terms of fragmentation. Berman notes that fragmentation is a consequence of dramatic changes such as the development of science and mass communication, industrialization, and urban growth at the turn of the century, all of which put us into "a maelstrom of perceptual disintegration and renewal, of struggle, and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish" (15). Fragmentation has been discussed particularly in relation to the forms of modernist artwork. It has been conceived as a dominant style that defines literary and visual works. In *The Dialectics of Seeing* (1989) Susan Buck-Morss reads Benjamin's *Arcade Project*, written in journalistic style, as a

textual embodiment of modern urban fragmentation. Benjamin's massive fragmentary notes and quotes reflect shattered urban experiences that cannot be reconstructed in a coherent manner. Andreas Huyssen's 2015 book *Miniature Metropolis* sees fragmentary experiences of the city as a dominant modernist characteristic and traces textual evidences in metropolitan feuilleton texts. Jonathan Crary's *Suspensions of Perception* (1999) and his other writings discuss the fragmentary vision in modernist paintings. Because the observer is distracted, it is not possible for him to be attentive or hold a stable position. T. J. Clark in *The Painting of Modern Life* (1985) also discusses Impressionist paintings and their lack of intelligible form, their images collapsing into fragments.[10]

Part One traces aesthetic and scientific changes during modernization, which disillusioned the moderns regarding stable and continuous spatio-temporality. Of course, there was resistance to the fragmented city. Georges-Eugène Haussmann, in favor of unity and totality, dreamed of an imperial city and renovated an unruly and fragmentary Paris. However, the literary style of fragmentation, syncopation and improvisation of jazz, and

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[10] For further discussion of fragmentation, see Arnold Hauser's *The Social History of Art: Naturalism, Impressionism, the Film Age* (vol.4, 1951), Susan McCabes's *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (2005)—particularly the chapters of Introduction and "Delight in Dislocation: Stein, Chaplin, and Man Ray," and Bart Keunen's "Living with Fragments: World Making in Modernist City Literature" in Ástráður Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska's *Modernism* (2007). Arnold Weinstein's "Fragment and Form in the City of Modernism" in Kevin R. McNamara's *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature* (2014), and Robert Harbison's *Ruins and Fragments: Tales of Loss and Rediscovery* (2015).

modernist avant-garde painters' new style embodying the fractured city dismantled the previous aesthetic values rooted in the harmonious and coherent. The development of photography and film also affected the culture of fragmentation. Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotography and Dziga Vertov's films show a desire to capture the fragments of movement and life. Above all, Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* shows the medium specificity of the cinema that inherently represents things in fragments, which makes film a promising art form to visually realize the fissures and flux of the metropolis. *Ballet Mécanique* reveals the cinematic representation of urban perception by fracturing objects and bodies, not only eliciting nervousness but also creating rhythmic pleasure from disassembled fragments.

Part Two aims to extend cinematic aesthetics to the modernist literary text by exploring the montage technique in John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*. Urban fragmentation is not just a condition of the city that concerns the literary text thematically, but it also defines the text at the formal level—how the text should be written. The narrative style of *Manhattan Transfer* refuses to offer a master narrative but assembles small fragmentary stories of the city in the same way montage disassembles and reassembles shots. Also, the literary montage fragments the reading experience, just as one experiences the chaotic city. Dos Passos values fragments and details instead of unity or completeness, and he employs fragmentation as a mode of representing and understanding modern urban space.

The city has been denounced for its unforeseeable risks, lack of substance and sincerity, and schizophrenic environmental factors. Rapid industrialization and urbanization made the city high-risk, shallow, and neurotic, and, at the same time, many modernist artists sought ways to aesthetically treat contingency, superficiality, and fragmentation. Instead of defining the city against the country, we can dismantle this divide and examine the city at experiential and perceptual levels if we see through the lens of the cinema. The cinema, due to its kinship with the perceptual experience of the city, shows an unconventional and progressive mode of seeing the city that is inaccessible through other art forms. Discussing the interdependent relationship between the city and the cinema, I show how the three urban phenomena constitute an essential urban sensorium engendered by modernity. Not only do I argue that these three key themes are prevalent and significant symptoms of modern urbanity, but also contend that they suggest a liberating way of comprehending modern urban culture.

CHAPTER II

MODERN URBAN CONTINGENCY AND CINEMATIC

REPRESENTATION

> "as beautiful... as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table"
> — André Breton. Communicating Vessels.[11]

II.1 Part 1 The Modernist Ambivalence to Urban Contingency

II.1.1 Filming the City in the City: Cinema and Contingency in *The Black Hand*

I begin with Wallace McCutcheon's 1906 short film *The Black Hand* (American Mutoscope & Biograph Company) because it sets the stage for this chapter to consider contingency in the film and the city. *The Black Hand* is a crime drama based on a "true story of a recent occurrence in the Italian quarter of New York," as the intertitle reads. In the first scene, two gang members write a blackmail letter, demanding 1000 dollars or they will kidnap Maria, a daughter of a butcher. The second scene depicts Mr. Angelo, Maria's father and a hard-working butcher, reading the blackmail note in his butcher shop. In the third scene, shot in the actual location of Seventh Avenue in New York, the gang

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[11] André Breton took the phrase from the novel *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Comte de Lautréamont.

kidnaps Maria on the street. The next scene shows the gang's shabby headquarters, where Maria is confined. The rest of the storyline involves a clever scheme created by New York detectives, in which the gang members are arrested and Maria is rescued.

What is most noteworthy about this ten-minute film is the third scene (the gang kidnapping Maria), a one-and-a-half-minute-long shot in an authentic exterior of Seventh Avenue. The camera is filming the actual street in New York City, which becomes the stage for the criminal action—kidnapping (see fig. II-1). The spectators are uncertain what they are supposed to see, since the scene is full of visuals of a typical city street. In the middle of the frame, a man with a package is standing and staring at the camera (the upper left of fig. II-1). It seems that he is an actor in this film, but soon a horse carriage passes in front of the camera and blocks the entire frame for a while (the upper right of fig. II-1). After the carriage moves outside of the frame, there is a boy looking straight at the camera beside the man with the package (the bottom left of fig. II-1). As soon as the boy and the man walk away, another man holding a girl's hand enters the frame, and the spectators may highly suspect that the two are a kidnapper and his victim only until they walk away and disappear (the bottom right of fig. II-1). People are still walking toward the camera and passing across the frame, and the spectators are unable to figure out what they should focus on since no central event is taking place. Among the crowd in the film, a man is looking for something on the street, and a girl passing by helps him find it. While the two

are looking down the street, a horse-drawn carriage is approaching the two, and

the man forces the girl into the carriage. The other man standing beside and

watching this kidnapping raises his hand for attention (maybe he cries out for

help), and police officers run toward the carriage but fail to catch the kidnappers.

Fig. II-1. Four consecutive shots of *The Black Hand*. A man with a package
(upper left), a horse carriage blocking the frame (upper right), a boy staring at
the camera (bottom left), and a man holding a girl's hand (bottom right).

Within this kidnapping scene, only Maria, the gang member, and the

gang's carriage are what the filmmaker intended to capture. All the rest are

unexpected and unpredictable events that the filmmaker is unable to remove

from the scene. Unlike the locations of the headquarters and the butcher shop,

which are artificially made sets and under the control of the filmmaker, the New

York street is crowded with visual details that have nothing to do with the

fictional crime scene. In this scene, everyone on the street is a potential

kidnapper and victim, and the city itself is a crime scene. This kidnapping scene

of *The Black Hand*, filmed on the streets of New York, exemplifies the

relationship between the city, the film, and contingency. The scene reveals the

camera's ability to record the city replete with chances as well as its inability to

remove unwanted information. This aspect of the film can be seen as an

aesthetic of the film that plays on the relationship between contingency and the

city.

In this chapter, I am concerned with the representation of the modern city

that reveals contingency during the early twentieth century. My hope is to find

ways to appreciate some of the modernist representations of urban space that

are suspended between the city designed by means of urban planning, narrative,

or propaganda and the city marked by chance, indeterminacy, or disorder. In

particular, the chapter examines the ways in which cinematic representations of

the city avoid reductive binarisms and offer a middle ground or an alternative

cartography of the city. Ultimately, I argue that film offered a welcoming way of

thinking about modernist urban contingency.

In the first part of this chapter, I juxtapose a variety of examples drawn

from modernist texts to understand a wide spectrum of modernist responses to the new experience produced by modern urban life. First, I examine an extreme case of Le Corbusier, whose urban planning attempts to remove any forms of urban contingency. The discussion of city planning and design extends the understanding of the material conditions and physical features of the city, through which we can discover the principles and ideals that shape city life. The city-models are valuable examples to contextualize the city represented in film and useful to compare a theoretically constructed city with urban planning and daily city life portrayed in film.   Then I move to Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* with its film adaptation *Sabotage,* directed by Alfred Hitchcock. *The Secret Agent* (1907) shows the concerns that provoke Le Corbusier: unexpected events in the city might affect or harm the lives of people. And *Sabotage* (1936) cinematically visualizes modernism's anxiety about the unexpected. Unlike Le Corbusier and Conrad, August Sander found aesthetic moments that urban contingency offers. Sander's city photographs considers the city as a "character" in modernity, which elicits a different response from Sander than does his portraiture projects. His city photographs allow us to focus on the relationship between the city and the camera and to examine the camera as a medium well-suited to represent urban contingency.

Building on from the first part, the second part of this chapter explores city symphony films and their relation to the city. Among city symphony films, I closely examine Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (*Berlin:*

Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt 1927) to examine the ways in which the city is represented cinematically, and ultimately I argue that film is a privileged medium for modernist ambivalence about contingency. Although *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (hereafter *Berlin Symphony*) films the specific location of Berlin, the film shows the general aspects of a metropolis that other major cities share. Also it is a quintessential example of the city symphony film genre, the name of which drives from *Berlin Symphony*. Most importantly, in the context of modernism, contingency in *Berlin Symphony* defies narratives of causality. The anti-narrative aspects of contingency in the film refuse any kind of sequential logic. Instead of cause/effect logic, the film adopts the temporal framework of twenty-four hours to capture the events. Using temporal topographies, the film shows events in the city that happen by chance, not as a result of a dramatic narrative.

Throughout these two parts, I try to answer several questions. In the highly urbanized and crowded city, what is the modernist perspective on uncertainty? Can it be controlled? To what extent can we design the city as we design machines? How does film respond to and play a role in shaping the modern perceptions of accidents? How do modernist artists negotiate between indeterminacy and determinacy? I will ultimately examine the ways in which cinema expresses a range of desires and anxieties for urbanites in the early twentieth century.

II.1.2 Contingency and Modernity

The discussion of contingency in modernist discourse has taken place in the dialectic between order and disorder, predictability and randomness, or totality and fragmentation.[12] In his essay "The Painter of Modern Life," Charles Baudelaire theorizes the aesthetics of modernity. Throughout the essay, he stresses that modernity is composed of the eternal and the contingent, and that the (true) artist is looking for both qualities. "By modernity," he writes, "I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (13). For Baudelaire, the contingent signifies the presentness of the here and now, in contrast to long-lasting traditional values. What is important in Baudelaire's modernity is that he links the contingent to the eternal in a dialectical way. If the artist neglects the contingent, he will "tumble into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty," and if he only studies the old masters of eternal beauty, he will fail to "understand the special nature of present-day beauty" (13). Modernity does not mean either contingency or eternity, but exists in the tension between the two: the eternal, which is an "invariable element, whose quantity it is excessively difficult to determine" and

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[12] To plainly explain contingency, Andreas Schedler's definition is useful. According to Schedler, contingency invokes three concepts: indeterminancy, conditionality, and uncertainty. The indeterminate aspect of contingency is that "things could be different," so everything is possible (72). The claim of indeterminancy excludes necessary, universal, and inviolable attributes. It opens to change and contestation. Second, the claim of contingency resting on conditionality means that "it depends" (72). The relationship between x and y is casual, and there are variable intervening factors. Third, contingency concerning the notion of uncertainty invokes that which "we cannot know," so we are not in control of consequences and we are unable to predict everything.

the contingent, "a relative, circumstantial element"—they are both inseparable, essential elements needed for the artist to establish an artistic work.

Contingency, of course, is not exclusively the product of modernity. Unexpected happenings, from minor accidents to natural disasters, have always existed; however, the significance of accidents in the discourse of modernity is drastically different from the pre-modern era. A primitive man encountered unpredictable events, but they were conceived as a result of a determinate cause; they happened for a reason. Examining the ways in which the perception of the accidental was transformed, Judith Green writes that "[t]he primitive had no conception of chance or coincidence, because all events were invested with meaning" (41-42). Drawing from Levy-Bruhl's anthropological study of the Azande, Green explains that a misfortune was not a contingent or random event, but a meaningful occurrence, which should be explained in terms of causality; the primitive asked "why me, and why now?, a question not perhaps amenable to rational explanation" (43).[13] While wizardry or divinity offered a way to accept a misfortune for the primitive, the accident in the early twentieth century emerged from rationality and probablism, which enabled a modern man to disassociate accidents from transcendental or supernatural power and a predetermined cause. Rational thinking defines accidents as "events whose causation is coincidental and thus could not be predicted" (Green 57). In other words, accidents in the

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The referent of uncertainty acknowledges that the future is unpredictable.

[13] In case of the Azande, witchcraft was the ultimate (not an immediate) cause of

early twentieth century occur by chance. Greg Siegel also notes that the discourse of modernity in the early twentieth century perceives accidents as "things 'just happen,' [which] is precisely an achievement of reason and scientific enlightenment" (10). Although, as Siegel points out, the modern rational mind "serves as a standard of intellectual sophistication and an expression of cultural superiority" over the primitive, "[e]pistemological modernity makes accidents possible as such" (10). Rationality and statistical thinking secularized the accident.

In addition to rationality and statistical thinking, unprecedented urban growth and increased population density in the metropolis intensified the accident. As Siegel writes, "human bodies were exposed to unprecedented threats and dangers, while human sense organs were bombarded by unfamiliar shocks: and uncanny disturbances, all resulting from the processes and products of industrialization, mechanization, and electrification" (12). Accidents prevailed both in the pre-modern and modern era, but urbanization and industrialization made the city more chaotic and increased the degree and the number of accidents. As Ben Singer exemplifies in his study of the representation of modernity in popular culture, the electric trolley was a more frightening mode of transportation than horse-drawn carts. Advertisements and illustrations in trade magazines and newspapers in the early twentieth century particularly convey "an anxiety about the perilousness of life in the modern city and also symbolized the

a misfortune.

kinds of nervous shocks and jolts to which the individual was subjected in the new environment" (69). It is true that the sensational press tended to intensify "the violence, suddenness, randomness [...] of accidental death in the metropolis" (71). However, this kind of representation also reflects how urbanites felt in the new metropolitan environment: "in modernity the individual faced a more hectic, intense, and unpredictable array of audiovisual and social stimuli than ever before, and the consequences reverberated throughout the mind and body" (113).

Although modern rational thinking accepts the idea of chance, it also endeavors to predict the probability of accidents. The modern mind liberated itself from supernatural (or superstitious) power, but at the same time it also attempted to rationalize contingent events. As Zygmunt Bauman notes, "order and chaos are modern twins" (4), and people struggle for an orderly world in which "one knows how to go on [...] how to calculate the probability of an event and how to increase or decrease that probability," and where "one can rely on past successes as guides for future ones" (2).Industrialization and urbanization in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century brought disorder throughout the metropolis. Contingent events, which cannot be logically explained, disrupted the lives of people living in an era of technological progress and intellectual enlightenment. The idea that things can *just* happen without apparent cause made modern men vulnerable, and their desire to predict what will happen could not tolerate the idea of chance. In fact, many attempts were

made to overcome such contingency. Not only did modern technologies such as forensic media try to tame the accident, but also explanatory modern science, psychoanalysis for example, treats mental disorder through systematic study of seemingly random symptoms.[14]

T. J. Clark tries to understand the ways in which modernism (aesthetic works or cultural practices) responds to modernity, which is conditioned by capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization. Clark characterizes modernity as contingency in that the modern world lost a certain frame or set of transcendental beliefs upon which people could depend. Clark's discussion of contingency gives insight into the ways in which modernist art works contested chaos and order, and chance and necessity. He explicitly argues that modernity is, indeed, contingency. It "has turned from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future—of goods, pleasures, freedoms, forms of control over nature, or infinities of information" (7). Since ancestral authority is lost, "meaning agreed-on and instituted forms of value and understanding, implicit orders, stories, and images" also lose their validity (7). Clark explains the loss as "the disenchantment of the world" and "secularization" because supernatural, inhuman power no longer explains accidents but was replaced by "a calculus of large-scale statistical chances," which is largely

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[14] For a study of forensic media's participation in the account of accidentality, see Greg Siegel's *Forensic Media: Reconstructing Accidents in Accelerated Modernity* (2014). Siegel examines "the ways and contexts in which graphic, electronic, and digital media have been adapted and deployed to informationalize, anatomize, and narrativize

indebted to capitalism because "[m]arkets offer hugely increased opportunities for informed calculation and speculation on futures" (7). Contingency, according to Clark, is born from modernist reasoning, which acknowledges "the acceptance of risk, the omnipresence of change, the malleability of time and space" (10).

Although Clark states that modernity is the signal of the discontinuity between the past and the present, he does not identify modern life as "an absolute, quantitative increase in uncontrolled and unpredictable events" (11). Focusing more on how the contingent is constructed and mediated, he writes that contingency is "an issue of representation, not empirical life-chances. And using the word is not meant to imply that modern societies lack plausible (captivating) orders of representation, or myths of themselves" (11). It is true that modernity is cut off from the past, the present is in flux, and life lacks certainty. Modernists' struggle to represent an ever-changing world may even seem futile. As Clark suggests, modernist artists were skeptical about their ability to represent reality, but at the same time they still were looking for meaningful ways to explain a world increasingly perceived as senseless. What Clark is claiming is that "for modernism, risk and predictability were felt to be endlessly irresolvable aspects of experience (and of artmaking), endlessly at war. Modernism could not put contingency down" (11). By extension, what this chapter is trying to do is to examine the representation of contingency in modernist works and to examine how they cope with insecurity, particularly in

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accidents of accelerated mobility" (7).

the city. However, my view on modernism is not as same as Clark's in that modernism was not always resistant to modernity as he presumed. As Johanna Drucker remarks, "[m]uch of modern art overtly reaffirmed commercialism, engaged popular and mass media cultures, became part of corporatization, and assisted in the global reach of colonizing systems of capital, of the info-entertainment industries that use the techniques of fashion, seduction, and consumption as their effective instruments. Modern art was a culture industry, not outside of or apart from the culture of modernity" (n.p.). Taking the intricate relationship between modern art and modernity into consideration, in the following, I examine the ways in which modernity shaped urban contingency and modernist aesthetic responses to it.

II.1.3 The Utopian City and Zero-Contingency: Le Corbusier's Urban Planning

In order to understand a wide spectrum of modernist responses to urban contingency, let's first look at an extreme case of Le Corbusier (the *nom de plume* of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret), a leading twentieth-century French architect and one of the pioneers of International Style architecture. During his first visit to New York City in November 1935, Le Corbusier went to the top of 30 Rockefeller Center (the heart of the Rockefeller Center Complex) and looked down at the "man-made miracle," but "was not particularly impressed" according to H. I. Brock in *New York Times* (10). Looking at the Empire State

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Building, the tallest building in the world at the time, he then said: "They [the skyscrapers including the Empire State Building] are too small [...] I am not interested in that sort of thing—both sets of lines are all right as expressing the idea of horizontal and vertical circulation respectively. But what counts is the actual existence in the building of the two kinds of circulation and their efficient coordination. That is the combination which creates adequate machines for business for swarms of people—human bee-hives—if it is joined of course, with free circulation among the buildings" (qtd. in Brock 10). For him, the skyscrapers are not efficiently built to facilitate people moving around. As Brock rephrases Le Corbusier's remarks, "they complicate instead of simplify the problem of circulation for the whole city, taking up surface space needed for that circulation and sucking in and dumping out too many people for narrow arteries of traffic to carry without painful congestion" (23). "Complication" and "congestion" are the two urban elements that contradict Le Corbusier's principles.

From the top of 30 Rockefeller Center, Le Corbusier saw people, in Brock's words, "like a swarm of ants hindered from going directly anywhere following the runways of narrow streets that turned sharply at right angles and pushed the living contents of one packed artery into or across another packed artery, with the streams of pedestrians and the streams of motorists all tangled up at every crossing" (23). From a bird's-eye view at the top of the skyscraper, the overpopulated crowd of the city is undirected, so unpredictable. After looking

down at the city from the parapet, he went down and joined the swarming crowd to move from downtown to uptown. Unsurprisingly, he was caught in a traffic jam, which once again "confirmed in his idea that New York needed all her surface footage for getting about, and could well afford to send business as high upstairs as might be needful to provide separate levels for motors and foot passengers" (23). This idea—constructing separate levels for vehicles and for passengers respectively—is addressed in his analysis and scheme for the future city in *The City of To-morrow and Its Planning* (1929), which has become a touchstone for studies of urban planning.

In *The City of To-morrow and Its Planning,* Le Corbusier identified the ideal city with the machine. He remarks that "science has given us the machine. The machine gives us unlimited power. And we in our turn can perform miracles by its means" (148). According to Le Corbusier, the city should be a systematic mechanism that can sustain itself, and the elements in it will be governed by its own central system. To eliminate all traffic congestion in New York City, he argues, geometrical urban planning should be implemented because "geometry leads them [people] to mathematical forms" that are free of chaos and confusion (2). It is no wonder that he picks Piazza San Marco in Venice as a perfect geometrical embodiment: "the uniformity of the innumerable windows in this vast wall [...] lends the wall a grandeur that is boundless but can be easily appreciated; the result is a type-form of a clear and simple nature" (69). His early urban planning project, "a City of Three Million Inhabitants," exhibited at

the Salon d'Automne in 1922, is an exemplary model of a geometric, centralized city with identical buildings and perpendicular axes (see fig. II-2).
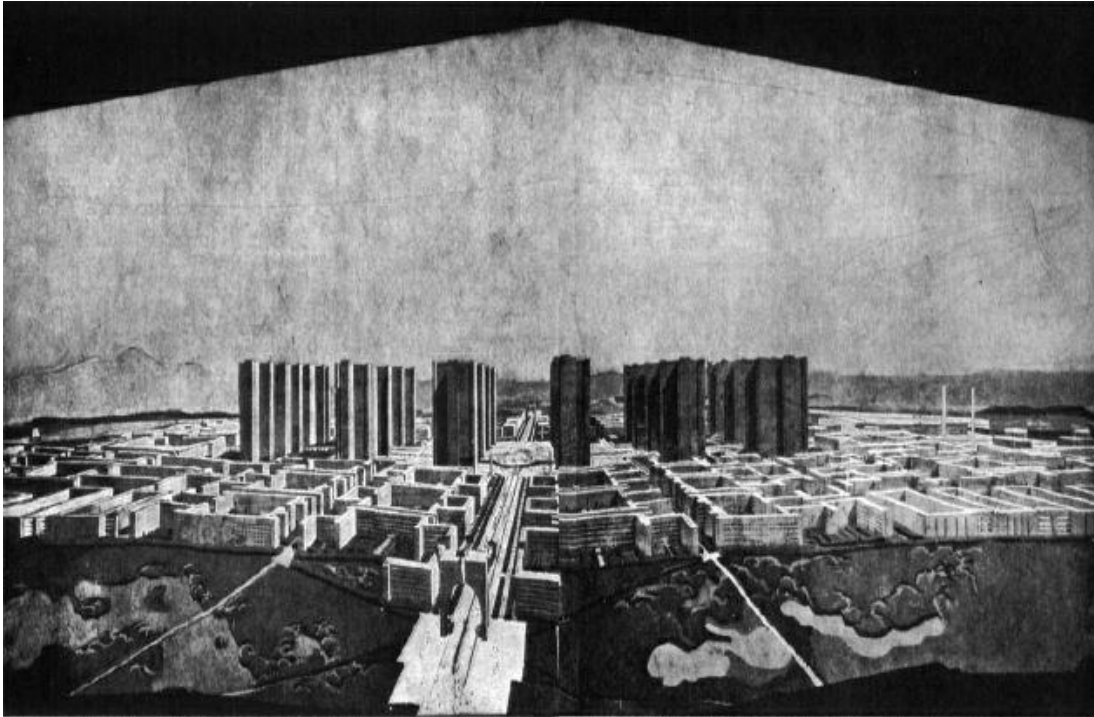
Fig. II-2. Le Corbusier's plan for a "City of Three Million Inhabitants." Reprinted from *The City of To-morrow and Its Planning*. (Copyright 2018, Fondation Le Corbusier)

Le Corbusier's grand plan for the contemporary city is mainly born from the recognition of traffic problems due to inefficiently designed streets, which hinder "modern" man from reaching his destination. "To-day traffic," he diagnoses, "is not classified—it is like dynamite flung at hazard into the street, killing pedestrians" (164). Traffic should be divided according to its function to de-congest the center of the city; he proposes to locate heavy good traffic at the below-ground (basement) level, lighter good traffic at the ground-floor level, and

fast traffic also at the ground level crossing north and south and east and west. This is also necessary to maximize speed: "the more rapid this intercommunication can be made, the more will business be expedited" (191). Likewise, for maximum speed, streets should be straight rather than curvy. Le Corbusier compares the winding road to "the pack-donkey way" and the straight way to "the man's way" (11). His ideal city man is a man who "walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going; he has made up his mind to reach some particular place and he goes straight to it" (11). On the contrary, "the pack-donkey meanders along, meditates a little in his scatter-brained and distracted fashion, he zigzags in order to avoid the larger stones, or to ease the climb, or to gain a little shade; he takes the line of least resistance" (11). Le Corbusier's scheme for urban planning is to decrease unforeseeable events for the goal-oriented man. His theory of modern urban planning is based on the idea of the modern man who "[struggles] against chance, against disorder, against a policy of drift and the idleness which brings death" (95). The rational man pursues his goal and achieves it in a most efficient way, but "the city of to-day is dying because it is not constructed geometrically," so it hampers the modern man from achieving his goal (220). In order for urban planning to facilitate this struggle of the modern man, "the centers of our great cities must be pulled down and rebuilt" (98). In other words, a new city needs to be constructed on a clear site, not on the "accidental lay-out of the ground" (220).

Although Le Corbusier's grandiose urban planning has not been realized, his watertight formula was influential. A genuine engagement with urban planning in the early twentieth century remains beyond the scope of this chapter, but discussing several notable urban planning models that influenced and were influenced by Le Corbusier provides a historical context and a clearer view of urbanism and contingency in the early twentieth century. Modern architecture and urban planning during that period aimed to solve the problems that the industrial city generated: the radical increase of the population caused a lack of employment and decent housing; and the shortage of water and power supplies, and uncontrolled industrialization put urban dwellers in squalid and unhygienic living conditions. Baron von Haussmann, whose renovation of Paris dates from the 1850s to the 1920s, influenced Le Corbusier in terms of his key concept of circulation. Haussmann planned "to render the capitalist instrument of the city more efficient by liberating its circulation; to celebrate the monuments and glory of empires past and present by linking focal points with vistas; to let in light, air and greenery for the bourgeoisie, but push the poor elsewhere; to turn the boulevard into a social stage, but also a vector of military control" (Curtis 34). Conceiving Paris as "a great consumer's market, a vast workshop, an arena of ambitions," he renovated the city by installing water and sewer systems and created Avenue de l'Opéra to clear the slums and reduce traffic congestion (Curtis 34).

Another model for the industrial city was to build a new city instead of

renovating the old one. Ebenezer Howard's the Garden City project was an alternative model to deal with overcrowding in London. In his pamphlet *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898), Howard diagnosed that what "draw[s] the people into the cities, those causes may all be summed up as attractions," and, by presenting "greater attractions than our cities now possess," he could "re-distribut[e] the population in a spontaneous and healthy manner" (6). Influenced by John Ruskin's country-like urban vision, Howard suggested good landscape, local architecture, clean air, quiet streets, and beautiful parks to attract people away from the overpopulated city. As the clockwork-like diagram shows, Howard tried to realize the utopian city ("slumless, smokeless cities") by decentralizing the city and integrating it with the country (6. see fig. II-3). The central city (which can contain 58,000 people in 12,000 acres) is connected by avenue, railroad, and canal to six agglomeration cities (32,000 people in 9,000 acres). The cities are in a circular form and grow in a radial manner. Streets are also formed in a series of concentric rings. Garden City is self-sustaining in that it can deal with the growth of the city by building the central city surrounded by agglomeration cities, connected by railroads and canals.
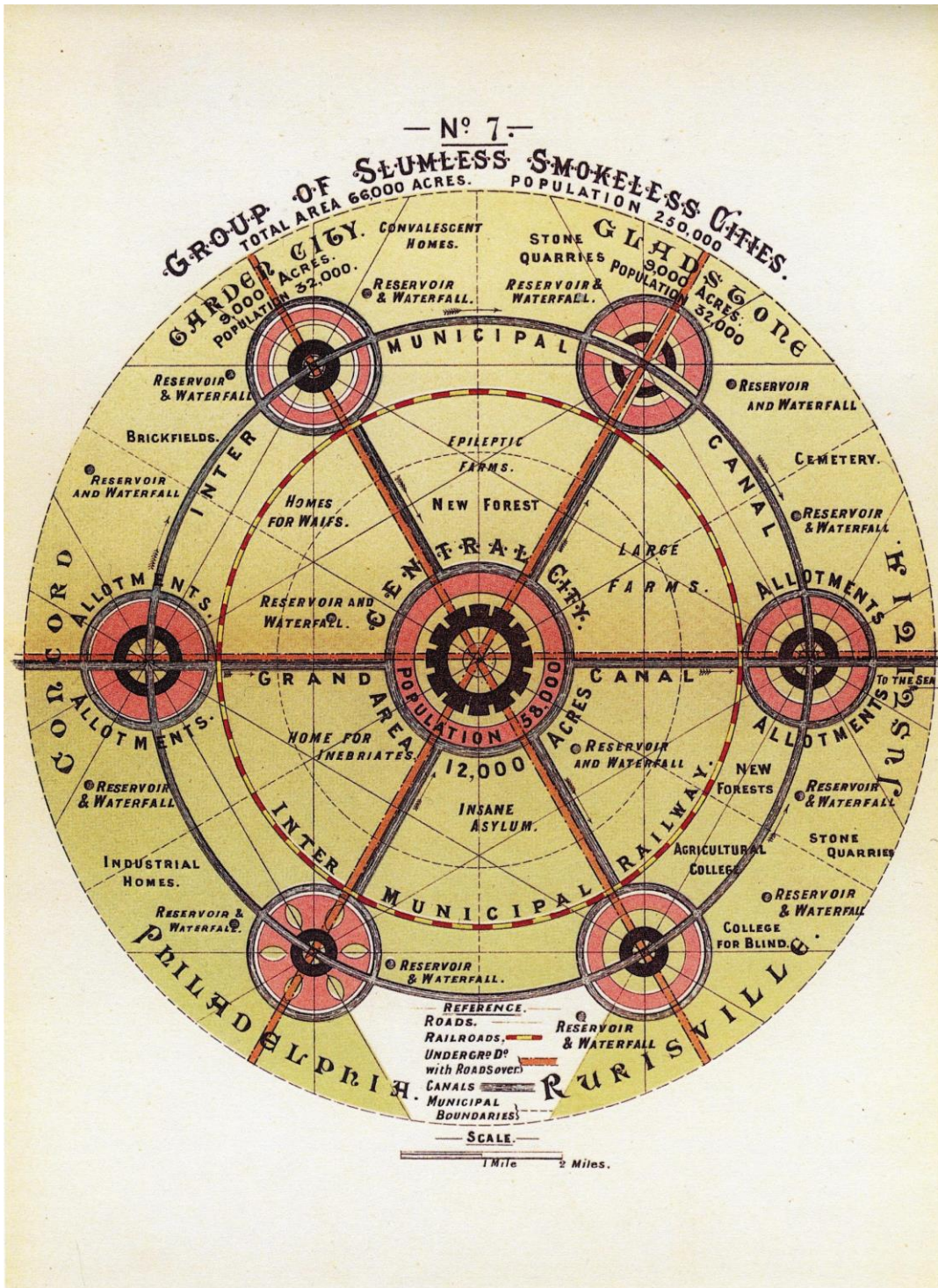
Fig. II-3. Ebenezer Howard's diagram of Garden city, reprinted from *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*.

Tony Garnier inherited Garden City ideals incorporating nature, regionalism, and egalitarian socialism and proposed Cité Industrielle in 1917 to deal with the outgrowth of industrialization. Dividing the city into several zones—residential, industrial, transport, and recreational—and surrounded by a lake, a valley, and a river, the space of Cité Industrielle is defined by its function. As Garnier's drawing shows, the residential area is composed of numerous identical rectangular blocks with flat roofs running from the east to the west for the sake of clear and simple geometrical urban planning. Garnier's ideal of Cité Industrielle is closely related to Utopian concepts, as Dora Wiebenson suggests, in that he "believed in the basic goodness of man," so there was no need for the institutions of court, police, jail, or church (17). Instead, he built public facilities for social emancipation, where class struggle would no longer exist. Garnier assumed that the well-designed city not only solves congestion, but also even eases class conflict.

Later architects after the 1950s, such as Robert Venturi and Rem Koolhaas, to name just two, presented ideas opposed to utopian, rational, or universal models of urban planning. As his famous maxim, "less is a bore," suggests in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), Venturi promotes "hybrid rather than pure, compromising rather than clean, distorted rather than straightforward, ambiguous rather than articulated" (22). He remarks that "simplified or superficially complex forms will not work. Instead, the variety inherent in the ambiguity of visual perception must once more be

acknowledged [...] the growing complexities of our functional problems must be acknowledged" (27). Congestion of the city, for Koolhaas, is not a defect but the culture on which the city is grounded. "Manhattanism," he says in *Delirious New York* (1978), "is the one urbanistic ideology that has fed, from its conception, on the splendors and miseries of the metropolitan condition—hyper-density—without once losing faith in it as the basis for a desirable modern culture" (10). Thus each block cannot and should not be identically designed for the geometrical structure because "each house will represent a different lifestyle and different ideology" (123).

It is no exaggeration to say that Le Corbusier takes the position of the autocrat in planning the city. In Le Corbusier's world, men cannot linger, stray, or wander around the city. Distraction is the mark of irrationality, which should be eliminated. His ideal modern man knows where he is heading and is capable of getting to his destination as quickly as possible, and accidents or any contingent events that deter his progress should be removed. Le Corbusier describes and even identifies the panorama of the ideal city with the machine in that every element is properly arranged and functional. Comparing the "Baudelaire-inspired surrealist rag-picker" with "the autocratic Le Corbusian flâneur," Deborah Parsons, from the feminist point of view, criticizes the "masculinist geographer assuming a comprehensive position based on a masculinist focus" (10-11). "Le Corbusier's modernity," Parsons criticizes, "is based in the enlightenment principles of the past in which the utopian city

becomes analogous with the rational mind and the disordered city with the sickness and degenerative process of the body" (12). His city ultimately "[prevents] human movement over the city map and human contact with the street surface; thus threatening human autonomy" (13).

II.1.4 The Bomb and the Camera: The Precarious Machine in *The Secret Agent*

Threatened by the disorder and chaos of the city, Le Corbusier and many other contemporary urban planners employed systematic and scientific theories of urban planning and endeavored to rebuild a city that is free of contingency. In the chaotic city of the early twentieth century, the contingent was something one can neither predict nor prevent. However, urban planners' vision of the city does not fully take the ordinary practices of the street into consideration. They take a god's-eye view and look down at the city only to imagine a totalizing picture of the city. According to Michel de Certeau, lifting one's point of view to the "voyeur-god" from the crowd on the street is similar to Icarus's flying, which "transfigures him into a voyeur" and ignores "endless labyrinths far below" (92). de Certeau criticized this "solar Eye, looking down like a god," which is driven by the "exaltation of a scopic and gnostic" desire (92). The ideal and futuristic city imagined by urban planners is the "panorama-city, [which] is a "theoretical" (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices" (93). In contrast to the

"geometrical or geographical space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions" of the city, de Certeau argues that we need to discuss the experiences of "the ordinary practitioners of the city [...] whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban text" (93). In this vein, Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* shows not only the city pictured by the mind of a theoretician but also the city experienced by urban dwellers, so urban contingency can be examined on multiple levels. Moreover, the novel was adapted by film, which leads us to think about the relationship between the city and the cinema.

    The Secret Agent is replete with references to uncertainty. The climate of uncertainty in the city is a common theme among modernist texts centered on urban space during the early twentieth century. Decadence and dangers loom over the city where the innocent are jeopardized. *The Secret Agent* questions science and technology, the quintessential products of modern men's desire for mastery and their will to perfection. By employing a bombing as a major plot engine, *The Secret Agent* invites us to consider the ways in which contingency affects the city and conditions the lives of its people. In this section, I focus on a micro-moment when the Professor, one of the novel's anarchists, defensively explains his philosophy of bombing. At the beginning of the novel, readers meet Mr. Vladimir, the First Secretary of the foreign Embassy, who tells Mr. Verloc, the double-agent and pornography shop owner, to bomb the Greenwich observatory in order to attack science, which people believe unquestioningly. To maximize the effect of the bombing, Mr. Vladimir insists, it must be "so absurd

as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable; in fact, mad" (27).

What Mr. Vladimir proposes here is that the bombing should be not only

unexpected but also senseless. By "senseless," he means that it lacks purpose,

and that any common sense or logic cannot explain why it happened. It should

"go beyond the intention of vengeance or terrorism. It must be purely

destructive" (26). He targets the Royal Observatory, the symbol of pure

mathematics, "the source of their material prosperity," and "the sacrosanct

fetish" of the period (26). Ironically, to attack the Royal Observatory, the

embodiment of science, the bomb must be the product of science that is under

the control of a bomber. Mr. Vladimir's philosophy of bombing is further

described by the Professor, the engineer of the bomb and a self-obsessed

scientist.

Carrying a bomb strapped to his body, the Professor feels powerful when

he walks down the street "with his head carried rigidly erect, in a crowd whose

every individual almost overtopped his stunted stature" (64). For the Professor,

the city is a damned place due to "an immense multitude" of the crowd, and he is

frightened by "the mass of mankind mighty in its numbers" (65). As he perceives

it, the crowd "swarmed numerous like locusts, industrious like ants, thoughtless

like a natural force, pushing on blind and orderly and absorbed, impervious to

sentiment, to logic, to terror too perhaps" (65). What the Professor fears here is

uncontrollable masses, distracting noises, unexpected accidents, and an

unforeseeable future. While he is walking in the street among the crowd, the

Professor thinks of "the refuge of his room with its padlocked cupboard, lost in a wilderness of poor houses, the hermitage of the perfect anarchist" (66). In contrast to the street full of an uncontrollable, ignorant, but powerful crowd, his room sealed from outside influence mirrors his fear of the disorder of the city. In this catastrophic and disastrous city, what consoles him while among the dreadful crowd is the bomb he carries in his jacket. He is "keeping his hand in the left pocket of his trousers, grasping lightly the india-rubber ball [a bomb trigger], the supreme guarantee of his sinister freedom" (65). To eliminate the uncontrollable and the threatening, he invents the bomb, the technology that "you can carry in your pocket to blow yourself and everything within sixty yards of you to pieces" (53).

We might consider his desire to make a bomb, the way a bomb works, and its failure as an allegory of filming the city. Comrade Ossipon, a former medical student and an anarchist who writes radical pamphlets, raises the possibility of contingent conditions in the city when he suggests that the bomber might be unexpectedly stopped by a group of anonymous people "jumping upon you from behind in the street" and you "with your arms pinned to your sides you could do nothing" (53). The Professor, denying any possible accidents, answers with certainty:

> "Yes; I could. I am seldom out in the streets after dark," said the little man [the Professor] impassively, "and never very late. I walk always with my right hand closed round the india-rubber ball

which I have in my trouser pocket. The pressing of this ball

actuates a detonator inside the flask I carry in my pocket. It's the

principle of the pneumatic instantaneous shutter for a camera

lens." (53)

That he describes pressing the ball of the bomb as pressing "the pneumatic

instantaneous shutter for a camera lens" is a curious yet telling coincidence (53).

The Professor designs his bomb to explode, even when interrupted by

unexpected incidents. Always playing with the india-rubber ball that can

"actuate a detonator," he secures his ability to take action at any moment.[15] This

principle—enabling oneself to operate the machine despite any chances—is very

similar to shooting a photograph with the pneumatic shutter for the camera. The

device was popular among photographers because of "the possibility of making

exposure in the studio," E. M. Estabrooke writes, "unknown to the subject,

placed a very decided advantage in the hands of the operator, who, standing at

any point, could watch the expression of the subject and seize the right moment

to secure the impression desired" like a photographer in F. W. Murnau's *Sunrise*,

who, using a pneumatic instantaneous shutter, takes a photograph of a married

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[15] Jeremy Lakoff proposes the detonator as the prosthesis that "serves to ameliorate that extension out into the world; but it still cannot completely master a temporal spectrum" (31). Focusing on the Professor and his preoccupation with time and technology, Lakoff suggests that the instantaneous detonator will "[close] the gap between the Professor's will and his explosive action and thereby [overcome] the potential indecisiveness or accident that delay can cause" (32). That is, the instantaneous detonator will not allow contingency to interrupt the explosion. As Lakoff argues, the perfect instantaneous detonator is "a prosthesis that affects a transfer so rapid that it amounts to an authentic mastery of contingency" (32).

couple kissing, without letting them know that they are taken. The photograph is taken at the very moment that the photographer wants. (126). The two technologies, the ball of the bomb and the pneumatic shutter of the camera, are similar in that they both operate at a precise moment, even with interruptions. The operator, moreover, can work without touching the bomb itself. The bomber does not need to take the bomb out to plant and trigger since it can be hidden in his vest so that he can secretly carry it anywhere with him and still explode it as long as he has an india-rubber ball in his hand, which is made to regulate a period of time at the will of the bomber. Likewise, the pneumatic shutter guarantees the mobility of the photographer. "Here we have an instrument which permits him to be at any part of the studio he pleases," and to take a picture of the subject unknowingly (Estabrooke 126).

Although both technologies allowed mobility of the operators and control over the machine as well, they cannot eliminate or be free from contingent incidents. The Professor's bomb, seemingly under his complete control, does not instantaneously respond to his direction. "A full twenty seconds must elapse from the moment I press the ball till the explosion takes place" (53). The duration of twenty seconds is the time that the Professor is unable to control the bomb. He cannot stop the bomb or modify the time of the explosion. Once he presses the ball, the bomb is out of his control for twenty seconds. This inability happens to the camera with the pneumatic shutter too because the speed of the shutter and the exposure are not perfectly controlled by the photographer. Also,

although the shutter can be held from 1 to 20 seconds, "in many instances after the sittings had been made it was found, on attempting to develop the plate, that no exposure had taken place" (Estabrooke 127). Even though the photographer catches the right moment to push the pneumatic shutter, the camera might not respond to his will, and no one can tell why the exposure has not taken place. The inability to shoot at the exact moment is aligned with the failure of the bomb, a perfect "combination of time and shock" (61). What the Professor can only guess at best is that the bomber "ran the time too close, or simply let the thing fall" (61). In fact, "Stevie had stumbled within five minutes of being left to himself" and the bomb exploded prematurely (182). In the end, one cannot "expect a detonator to be absolutely fool-proof" (61). Technical difficulties show that it is impossible to "invent a detonator that would adjust itself to all conditions of action, and even to unexpected changes of conditions. A variable and yet perfectly precise mechanism" (54).[16]

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[16] Anxiety regarding the mastery over and failure of the machine was not exclusively confined to a few modernist artists. As Rube Goldberg's cartoons of inventions show, technology is the locus of modern men's control and also of their fear of losing it. To take control over a machine, his protagonist devises a machine that has to go through multiple steps, leading from one action to another. As Goldberg's *Picture Snapping Machine* illustrates, to take a picture of himself, his invention undergoes seven steps, and each step continues to the next step (see fig. II-4). A man sits on a pneumatic cushion; the sitting forces air in the cushion through a tube; the air starts an ice boat; the ice boat causes a lighted cigar butt to move close to a balloon; the balloon explodes; a dictator hears a loud explosion, and he, thinking that he is shot, falls over on a bulb; falling over the bulb snaps a picture. This sequence of actions, which is carefully contrived by the inventor, proves his ability to manipulate the invention. In fact, a longer sequence better shows his mastery; no matter how far he is from the camera, he can operate it as he wants. (Paradoxically, an inventor contrives a machine that creates minimum results with maximum effort.) However, as many actions or stages are

Picture Snapping Machine by Rube Goldberg

AS YOU SIT ON PNEUMATIC CUSHION (A), YOU FORCE
AIR THROUGH TUBE (B) WHICH STARTS ICE·BOAT (C),
CAUSING LIGHTED CIGAR BUTT (D) TO EXPLODE
BALLOON (E) — DICTATOR (F), HEARING LOUD
REPORT, THINKS HE'S BEEN SHOT AND FALLS
OVER BACKWARD ON BULB (G), SNAPPING PICTURE!
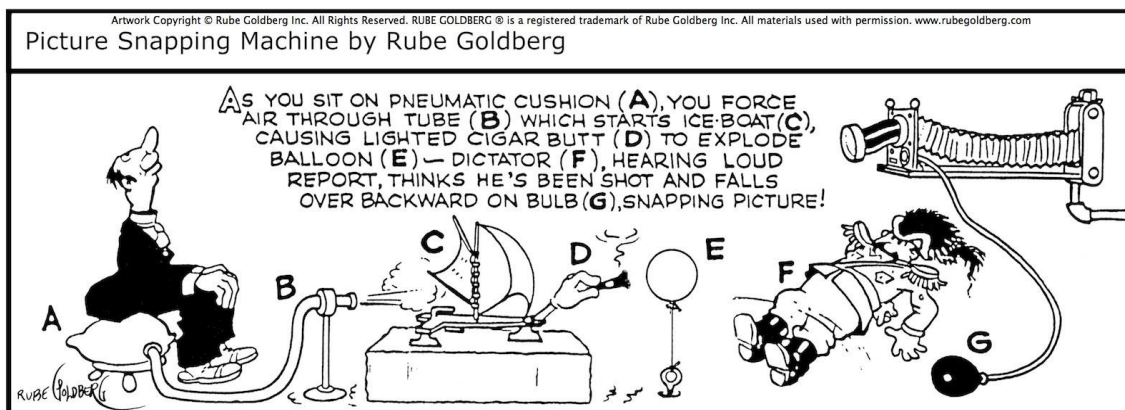
Fig. II-4. Rube Goldberg's *Picture Snapping Machine*. (Copyright 2018, Rube Goldberg Inc.)

The professor's philosophy of bombing the city undoubtedly allows us to consider the ways in which urban contingency was perceived. In particular, the Professor's comparison of the perfect detonator to the pneumatic photographic shutter implies that the camera may not respond to the photographer, and that photographs may not show what we have wished to see. Conrad further shows this precarious relationship through Stevie, an unwilling bomber in the city. The scene of Stevie carrying a bomb in the city attends to the nexus of technology, contingency, and the city, and, through the film adaptation of *The Secret Agent*, we can further examine the cinematic representation of the contingencies of the city.

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involved, there is a high risk of malfunctioning because more stages entail more contingencies. For the longer version of operating a camera, see Goldberg's "Simple Way to Take Your Own Picture," which takes nineteen steps to photograph oneself.

II.1.5 The Unpredictable City and the Cinema in *Sabotage*

Stevie, Mr. Verloc's brother-in-law, is docile but sometimes impetuous. Described as one who is mentally disabled and who needs to be looked after, his inability to pay sustained attention to any one thing reflects the inherent condition of city dwellers and the nature of modernity.[17] Easily distracted (or attracted) by the spectacle of the city, he evokes the flâneur, whose "joy of watching prevails over all" (Benjamin. *Writer* 98). Conrad describes Stevie's wandering in relation to the attractions of the city:

> But as errand-boy he [Stevie] did not turn out a great success. He forgot his messages; he was easily diverted from the straight path of duty by the attractions of stray cats and dogs, which he followed down narrow alleys into unsavoury courts; by the comedies of the streets, which he contemplated open-mouthed, to the detriment of his employer's interests; or by the dramas of fallen horses, whose pathos and violence induced him sometimes to shriek piercingly in a crowd, which disliked to be disturbed by sounds of distress in its quiet enjoyment of the national spectacle. (7)

Stevie is susceptible to his surroundings; he loves to follow "stray cats and dogs," absentmindedly falls for "the comedies of the streets," and feels compassion for

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[17] For a discussion of distraction as a characteristic of modernism, see Jonathan Crary's *Suspensions of Perception*. Crary traces "how ideas about perception and attention were transformed in the late nineteenth century alongside the emergence of new technological forms of spectacle, display, projection, attraction, and recording" (2).

"the drama of fallen horses." Stevie as flâneur enjoys observing the

phantasmagoria of the city, but he is not a good messenger; he is not what Le

Corbusier calls a modern man.[18] He is unable to resist the spectacle and focus on

his goal; he is "easily diverted from the straight path of duty."

Considering his insufficient attention and the contingent events lurking in

the city, his mission to carry the bomb (which is not a "fool-proof" device) and to

drop it at the Royal Observatory is demanding. Aware of "the depth of Stevie's

fanaticism," Mr. Verloc trained Stevie, "walking away from the walls of the

Observatory as he had been instructed to do, taking the way shown to him

several times previously, and rejoining his brother-in-law" (182). According to

Mr. Verloc's calculation, "fifteen minutes ought to have been enough for the

veriest fool to deposit the engine and walk away. And the Professor had

guaranteed more than fifteen minutes" (182). What he was concerned about was

not the malfunction of the bomb or Stevie's distraction. Technology (the bomb)

is not even in question, and Mr. Verloc attentively disciplined Stevie by "strolling

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[18] Joseph Valente argues that Stevie's "idiocy and its collaterals, like imbecility, prove to be ubiquitous in Conrad's urban universe. No one is immune to this disorder" (23). Although he does not interpret Stevie's autism as a general symptom from which urbanites suffer, from what Valente suggests, it is not too far-fetched to think that Stevie's mental condition can be symbolically interpreted as the distraction of urban dwellers, caused by the sensorial bombardment of the city. Valente also explains, Conrad does not categorize Stevie as "the sort of primitive, appetitive, unreflective depravity"; instead, Conrad "[creates] a socially conscious idiot that could be plausibly affiliated with an ethically framed, politically motivated provocation" (24). Stevie's disability should not be seen as "an intellectual apparatus diminished to the point of chronic incomprehension—the traditional fate of the simpleton—but in a phenomenological circuitry (sensory, perceptual, affective, cognitive) overload to the point of derangement, a state of hyperesthesia or systematic overstimulation that

the streets of London" together and instructing him to say nothing and remain silent even if he is arrested by the police (182). Despite Mr. Verloc's careful arrangement, "Stevie had stumbled within five minutes of being left to himself" (182). Conrad describes the scene through the constable's speculation that Stevie "[s]tumbled against the root of a tree and fell, and that thing he was carrying must have gone off right under his chest" (71).

Conrad ascribes this disaster to an unexpected event, and Alfred Hitchcock dramatizes Stevie's "stumbling" in *Sabotage*, the film adaptation of *The Secret Agent*. In the film adaptation Stevie, as in the novel, is presented as lacking attention (tasting the food secretly before the meal, breaking a plate by accident and hiding it, and distracted in public spaces like a restaurant and the street market). The adaptation goes further than the novel in illustrating Stevie's "stumbling," and it is no coincidence that Hitchcock notices the contingent condition of the city and its effect on Stevie walking on the street with the bomb. Moreover, that Mr. Verloc's pornography store in *The Secret Agent* is changed to a movie theater in *Sabotage* is an interesting alteration in that Hitchcock associates the cinema with entertainment and murder. Just like a pornography store, cinema is a locus of sensational amusement. If the onscreen murder is an extreme form of entertainment, through the cinema Hitchcock pursues suspenseful moments and thrilling experiences created by uncertainty. Although the narrative of *Sabotage* slightly deviates from the original novel, the film can

spasmodically distorts the information to be processed by intensifying it" (25).

function as a critical text to parallel the novel if we examine the ways in which

the film imagines the city and its contingency.[19]

From the first, Hitchcock's film shows a willful man who tries to regulate

the city and a city that is uncontrollable and unpredictable.[20] The first scene

shows a light bulb, and then there is a close shot of a dictionary page indicating

the word "sabotage: wilful [sic] destruction of buildings or machinery with the

object of alarming a group of persons or inspiring public uneasiness." A long

shot of a lighted street in London follows. Then the shot goes back to the light

bulb flickering and going out. Three men are examining the powerhouse and

exclaiming "sabotage" although Mr. Verloc's act of sabotage only lasts for the

first five minutes of the film. He attempts sabotage by cutting off electricity, and

London goes dark, but his attack fails to plunge the city into chaos. On the

contrary, people find it quite amusing to stroll in the dark with a candle, and the

newspapers report the blackout as a small fuss. After failing to put the city in

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[19] There are several differences between *The Secret Agent* and *Sabotage*. To list main differences, Mr. Verloc is a terrorist both in the novel and film. In the novel, however, he is the owner of the pornography store, while, in the film, he is the owner of a cinema. Also, in the novel, Mrs. Verloc is romantically involved with and betrayed by Ossipon, one of the terrorists. In the film, Mrs. Verloc develops a romantic relationship with the detective, who chases after terrorists. In the end, the detective tries to protect Mrs Verloc and covers her crime.

[20] For a discussion of Conrad's portrayal of London as a disconnected and random place in relation to Cubism, see Roger Webster's "The Aesthetics Of Walking: Literary And Filmic Representations Of London in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*." Webster notes that "the overall impression of the novel's cityscape is of a world of fragmented" forms (92). Specifically, Webster observes Stevie's experience of the city as "expressing the unknowability of the city and its workings as represented in his geometric forms" (95).

chaos, Mr. Verloc's contact plans a more serious attack and orders him to set off the bomb in Piccadilly. Mr. Verloc receives the bomb in a package with a film canister to cover up the bomb, which has been set to explode at 1:45 pm on the day of the bombing. Since the detective keeps him under surveillance, Mr. Verloc specifically instructs Stevie to deliver the bomb by 1:30 pm to Piccadilly Circus to give him just enough time to place the bomb and walk away from it. Not knowing he is carrying a bomb, Stevie enters the city street.

The street scene repeatedly shows a number of unexpected events in the city and the danger it can bring to people through Stevie's advance and deviation. The first scene the audience sees as soon as Stevie steps into the street is set in the street markets, full of noise and the crowd. He is attracted to one of the vendors who promotes toothpaste and a bottle of hair oil, and the vendor pulls Stevie from spectators to demonstrate the products. Unwillingly placed in a chair and circled by spectators, he becomes a spectacle to be watched and "groomed to stardom," as the salesman says. The spectators are amusedly watching him, not knowing that they are a few steps away from the bomb and the film canister, which is even mistaken for a toffee box by the salesman. When he is released by the salesman, Stevie plunges into the crowd and becomes a spectator again. Distracted by a toyshop nearby for a moment, he soon recalls his assignment and keeps to his journey. The audience too is reminded of the bomb by the dissolve shot of the note: "Don't forget the birds will sing at 1:45." While proceeding to Piccadilly Circus, the bomb site, he is obstructed by the Lord Mayor's Show Day

Parade. Although Stevie is trying to break away from the crowd and cross the street, the policeman pulls him back and pushes him into the crowd at the side of the road. Noticing that it is one o'clock, Stevie tries to push his way through the crowd one more time. But, as the parade starts, he temporarily forgets his delivery and enjoys the parade. His dangerous distraction is indicated by ominous non-diegetic sound, combined with the superimposed shot of the ticking clock gears of the bomb, Stevie's absentminded smile, and the clock pointing to 1:05 (see fig. II-5). After staying among the crowd until the marching is over, he makes his way through the crowd to take the bus. The entire city street scene repeats Stevie's rushing to deliver the package, his distraction by the city's spectacle, and his recalling of his assignment and resuming his task.

Fig. II-5. Three consecutive shots of *Sabotage*.

After the street scene, the film moves to the bus scene, another crowded public space, and cinematically presents the unpredictability of the city. On the bus, the shots describing Stevie's attention and distraction rotate fast to increase tension. As soon as Stevie takes a seat on the bus, he is distracted (and amused at

the same time) by the puppy the woman next to him is holding. He looks out of the bus to check the time, presented through an inserted shot of a clock from his point of view. The clock shot is followed by a shot of the London street, clogged by traffic, and a close up of the bomb package next to him.[21] Rotating the shots of Stevie with the puppy, the clock outside, the bomb, and the traffic jam of the street, the film suggests Mr. Verloc's plan is interrupted by urban congestion. The bomb courier is exposed to the city's contingencies, which were not in Mr. Verloc's calculation. In *The Secret Agent*, the Professor's suicide vest bomb explodes twenty seconds after pushing the ball. The duration of twenty seconds indicates when the bomber loses his control over the machine and the machine responds to its surroundings, rather than to the engineer of the bomb. What Hitchcock does in *Sabotage* is to cinematically present the twenty seconds of uncertainty and actually visualize the terror caused by the contingency of the city.

The suspenseful sequence of Stevie's delivery of the bomb in the city reveals that urban space is at the juncture of distraction, chaos, and danger, and that the city resists being mapped. It is noteworthy that Hitchcock stated that he wanted to film the story of a city for twenty-four hours during his interview with

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[21] For a shot-by-shot analysis of the bus scene, see Mark Osteen's "It Doesn't Pay to Antagonize the Public: *Sabotage* and Hitchcock's Audience," pages 262-263. According to Osteen, Hitchcock uses thirty eight shots for the bus scene which lasts about two minutes, and the editing is executed to build up suspense. He writes that "for the first minute and a half, the standard length for each shot is just under three seconds; as the explosive moment approaches, the cutting speeds up almost imperceptibly before returning to the earlier tempo near the end." (262).

François Truffaut. Truffaut tells Hitchcock that Hitchcock's approach to the film

is "anti-literary and purely cinematic" in that he sees "the film as a receptacle to

be filled" (320-321). Hitchcock readily responds to Truffaut's comments,

describing how he wishes to fill the film with the city:

> [...] I'd like to do twenty-four hours in the life of a city, and I can
> see the whole picture from beginning to end. It's full of incidents,
> full of backgrounds, a complete cyclic movement. It starts out at
> five A.M., at daybreak, with a fly crawling on the nose of a tramp
> lying in a doorway. Then, the early stirrings of life in the city. I'd
> like to try to do an anthology on food, showing its arrival in the city,
> its distribution, the selling, buying by people, the cooking, the
> various ways in which it's consumed. What happens to it in various
> hotels; how it's fixed up and absorbed. And gradually, the end of
> the film would show the sewers, and the garbage being dumped out
> into the ocean. So there's a cycle, beginning with the gleaming
> fresh vegetables and ending with the mess that's poured into the
> sewers. [...] You could take it through the whole city, look at
> everything, film everything, and show all of that. (320)

The city Hitchcock imagines is like a living organism and has its own life. It is

"full of incidents" and "full of backgrounds," where there is no one dominant

image that defines the city. Picturing the food circulating within the city,

Hitchcock maps a city in which multiple routes are possible for the food to be

distributed and sold. Also, the image of the city is not clean as with Le Corbusier's blueprint city; it is crowded with diverse people and as messy as thrown-away food in the sewer. Hitchcock is aware of the randomness of the city and what Stevie, carrying a bomb, has gone through in the streets is his cinematic way to represent it.

What I want to suggest here is that urban space cannot be reduced to a neatly blueprinted scheme, and that the camera is able to capture unpredictable things or events. In the following, I will focus on the camera's record-ability and the ways in which the camera responds to the city. Although modern technology is constantly developed to follow and embody a man's will, it does not always fulfill one's desire, and the camera is no exception. Manmade machines, whether a bomb or a camera, teeter between control and chance. The camera is not a simple instrument that answers to a cameraman. Rather, some filmmakers, whom I will soon examine, take this limit as the unlimited possibility of a camera that can film the uncontrollable and unforeseeable. On the one hand, it is a defect because a cameraman cannot exactly capture what one wants. On the other hand, it is a possibility because one can catch even unwanted moments. To put it differently, contingencies can be photographed. The interplay between the camera, the cameraman, and the city is possible because of the contingency embedded in the city that is not controlled by a filmmaker.

II.1.6 The Camera and the City: August Sander's Urban Aesthetics

When writing about the affinities between photography and film,

Kracauer stresses that the camera's ability to "reproduce, indiscriminately, all kinds of visible data, gravitates toward unstaged reality" (*Theory of Film* 60). Unlike other forms of art, the camera is able to reproduce accidental incidents that are irrelevant to filmmakers' intentions. That the camera can record "actual physical existence," not determined or controlled by human effort, makes it an apt medium to represent the city (60). "The affinity of film for haphazard contingencies," Kracauer writes, "is most strikingly demonstrated by its unwavering susceptibility to the street," and the street is where "the accidental prevails over the providential, and happenings in the nature of unexpected incidents are all but the rule" (62). Mary Ann Doane also argues that "the technological assurance of indexicality [of photography and film] is the guarantee of a privileged relation to chance and the contingent, whose lure would be the escape from the grasp of rationalization and its system" (10). What the camera records certainly indicates the "thing" at a specific moment, and the "thisness" of the film represents the contingent, which is not arranged by the filmmaker.

To discuss a camera both as a gadget that operates according to our need and as a machine that plays itself regardless of our will, I turn to August Sander's city photographs because they offer us valuable examples to explore the relationship between the city and the camera. Sander, as a photographer, was aware of the camera's immediacy and automatism and understood that he is "always restricted by his medium, and so a photograph is not possible without

the camera" (*Seeing* 30). This remark might sound too obvious, but it tells us that he conceives of the camera as an automatic medium that at least in some parts, works itself, and that a photograph may not faithfully reflect a photographer's intention. The photograph is the negotiated product between the photographer and the camera. Also, considering the unexpected not as danger or risk but as fortuitous coincidence, Sander shows a different response to urban contingency from that of Le Corbusier, Conrad, and Hitchcock. Before I advance my discussion to city symphony films, it is crucial to examine the affinities between the camera and the city and also the ways in which a camera captures urban contingency.[22]

In 1922, August Sander published *Face of Our Time*, a collection of photographs of the German people, which evolved into his larger project *People of the 20th Century*. "In order to summon a cross-section of our time and of the German people," Sander documented over 40,000 photographs between 1892-1954, and this grand project is divided into seven groups: The Farmer, The Skilled Tradesman, The Woman, Classes and Professions, The Artists, The City, and The Last People (*Seeing* 14). What is notable is that he includes the city as one of the characters of the twentieth-century German people. I specifically choose to look into Sander's works because his recognition of the city as an

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[22] The improvements that reduced exposure times during the nineteenth century made the camera possible to capture urban contingency. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce's camera needed eight hours of exposure in 1827, but, in 1871, Richard Maddox invented the gelatin dry plate, which allowed exposure times of fractions of a second.

essential character of the twentieth century allows us not only to read the face of modernity, but also to understand the idiosyncratic relationship between the city and the camera. By comparing The City section with the other sections, we can see the contingent nature of the city that cannot be removed by the photographer, but only recorded by the camera.

Unlike portrait photographs, where he could reduce visual noises, Sander takes advantage of the camera's privileged relation to contingency in his city photographs. [23]The sixth group, The City, consists of eleven portfolios, and the first portfolio, The Street and Street Life, depicts ordinary urban life and people on the city streets.[24] The first portfolio of this group in particular features mobility and contingency, which the cameraman has to capture accidentally, unprepared. For example, the photograph of President Paul von Hindenburg and Mayor Konrad Adenaeur is shot on a celebratory occasion after the Allied troop's partial evacuation. ("President von Hindenburg and Mayor Konrad

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[23] Compared to his city photographs, Sander's authorship clearly works in portrait photographs in terms of the composition, light, and framing; he carefully places his subjects in the frame and chooses a background that can accentuate the personality of the photographed. One example of his elaborate photographing technique is his portrait of Ingeborg von Rath, a sculptress and Sander's acquaintance. The photograph is chosen from twelve different shots of von Rath. Also in his well-known pastry cook photograph, taken in a bakery, Sander obscures the background and isolates the subject; he clears out all the visual noise to focus on the cook and the cookery he is holding. In portrait photographs, there aren't many unexpected elements, since Sander can exert his control over the subject and the scene to photograph the best shot.

[24] The eleven portfolios in The City part are 1) The Street and Street Life, 2) Traveling People—Fair and Circus, 3) Traveling People— Gypsies and Transients, 4) Festivities, 5) City Youth, 6)Servants, 7) Types and Figures of the City, 8) People Who Came to My Door, 9) The Prosecuted, 10) Political Prisoners, and 11) Foreign Workers.

Adenauer 1926"). Since he had to capture them as their car passed by him, Sander might have had just enough time to point and shoot the two important figures, the President and the Mayor, leaving the driver out of focus. Likewise, the city requires Sander to respond immediately when he attempts to catch moving objects such as the steam locomotive passing across the city street ("The Feuriger Elias Locomotive in Cologne") and the train on electric elevated railways ("Suspension Railway, Elberfeld, 1901-1906"). Unlike his portrait photographs (whether in the studio or the outside), in which he has much room to manipulate the scene, Sander needs to rely on the camera's immediate recording ability to capture an unexpected event.

The contingency of the city emerges not only from the photographic subjects' immediacy but also from their unpredictable mobility. While the subjects of portraits are conscious of being photographed, the people Sander met in the city—showmen, magicians, street musicians, chauffeurs, organ grinders, police officers, street photographers, or even the demonstrating crowd—are not there to be photographed. His encounter relies on pure chance, and his struggle to cope with contingency is represented in most of the photographs in "The Street and Street Life" portfolio. In *Showman with Performing Bear in Cologne, 1923*, the main subjects are the showman with a drum and his chained bear, but they are not the sole subjects, as in the portrait photographs (see fig. II-6). Unable to eliminate visual noise such as the spectators who gathered for the show or nonchalant passersby, Sander had to include them in the photograph

with the main characters—or maybe he gladly shot all of them for the vibrant atmosphere of the street show. What matters is that it is not Sander who creates this accidental and unpredictable moment, but the city, and only the camera can catch the noise regardless of the intention of the photographer. By closely examining the photograph, we can see Sander's attempt to cope with this contingency that is out of his control. Taking a photograph of the showman, I believe that Sander was quite sure he and his bear would be at the center of the photograph (he might have asked him to hold his little drum as the showman in the photograph poses), but he could not decide how many spectators should be in the frame and how close or distant they should be from the camera. He could not arrange their placement or poses as he did in the portrait photographs, and his hesitation is embodied in the girl peeping at the photographer at the very right end of the frame. Without putting the main subjects at too great a distance, Sander managed to include just half of the girl who is looking at him. Or, it is also possible that she might have jumped in at the last moment when he pressed the shutter, so only half of her is included in the photograph. She is the pure contingency that Sander was not expecting. If he was not in a city crowded with people, Sander could focus only on the showman and the bear, as he did in *Showman with Performing Bear in the Westerwald, 1929* (see fig. II-7).

Fig. II-6. August Sander's *Showman with Performing Bear in Cologne, 1923.* Reprinted from *People of the 20th Century* (Copyright 2018, Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur - August Sander Archiv, Cologne; ARS, New York)

Fig. II-7. August Sander's *Showman with Performing Bear in the Westerwald, 1929*. Reprinted from *People of the 20th Century* (Copyright 2018, Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur - August Sander Archiv, Cologne; ARS, New York)

II.2 Part 2 The Lure of Contingency

II.2.1 The City Symphony Film and Urban Space

Walter Ruttmann's Berlin Symphony of a Great City tries neither to reduce the contingency of the city nor to stigmatize it as an irrational force that threatens urban dwellers. *Berlin Symphony* represents the city as lacking stability, as in other modernist works, but it does not condemn or describe the city as disastrous. Acknowledging contingency as the essence of the city and the camera's ability to register it, Ruttmann in *Berlin Symphony* fully embraces contingency as an array of possibilities embedded in the city, as August Sander does in his city photographs. Just as Sander made a visual archive of the German people, Ruttmann archived instantaneous moments and categorized them by means of a motion picture instead of a collective portrait. This section examines the ways in which Ruttmann deals with the indeterminate to make the city more habitable. I develop this argument by way of two interrelated explorations. First, I examine the ways in which the city symphony film experiments with urban contingency. Focusing on *Berlin Symphony*, the second element of this section is concerned with the temporality and spatiality of the film. My discussion forces us to confront the modernist convention that interprets the city in terms of fragmentation, shock, and rupture. While acknowledging the modernist convention that interprets the city in terms of fragmentation, shock, and rupture, I suggest that, instead of confining our attention to these tropes, we should also

examine the ways in which the film represents those urban characteristics and constructs a more desirable city.

City symphony films break out from the previous city film tradition that is based on narrative. I would like to dwell for a moment on the city film to examine how the city has been represented by the filmic method, and to better understand the unique ways in which the city symphony genre uses film as a perceptual apparatus. The city film during the 1910s is "the pictorial colportage," as Helmut Weihsmann puts it, "spiced with sensation and often mingling newsreel facts with fiction in a super-naturalistic way" (9). For example, Louis Feuillade's *Fantômas* (1913) is a crime film serial consisting of five episodes, in which the city becomes the crime scene of Fantômas, a master criminal.[25] The serial mainly follows Fantômas's criminal activities, his arrest, and narrow escapes. Although the city is the stage where the criminal spreads fear, the place remains in the background as a flat, theatrical space rather than a cinematic space in which the camera draws the spectator's attention to the spectacle of the city. Also, most of its scenes are filmed in artificially made studios rather than in authentic locations.

In the street film genre of the 1920s, the city is the major motif and plays a significant role. It is a more notable encounter of the film and the city than the

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[25] In 1913, the first three episodes were released sequentially: *Fantômas I: In the Shadow of the Guillotine, Fantômas II: Juve vs. Fantômas,* and *Fantômas III: The Murderous Corpse*. In the next year the last two episodes primiered: *Fantômas IV: Fantômas vs. Fantômas* and *Fantômas V: The False Magistrate*.

films from the 1910s, which mirror the dark and immoral side of the city and are concerned with stories about poor urban conditions. Anti-heroes such as prostitutes, thieves, cripples, old people, or beggars are the protagonists of shabby city life, where the spectacle of the city is nothing but vain fantasy. Karl Grune's *The Street* (*Die Straße*, 1923) and G. W. Pabst's *The Joyless Street* (*Die Freudlose Gasse*, 1925) are examples of the street film among many other, as Siegfried Kracauer notes.[26] Grune's *The Street* in particular established the tradition of the street film by depicting a city where irresistible attractions almost cause people to hallucinate and, at the same time, tragic events and danger lurk around every corner of the street. In the first scene of *The Street*, the middle-class male's fantasy of the city is projected on the wall of his cozy place: neon lights, rushing automobiles, and a seductive woman. He runs out from his boring place where his wife is setting the dinner table for him and drives himself to the street. Not long after he steps into the street and enjoys a glaring shop window, he is conned by a group of swindlers and soon is trapped in murder. Unlike previous films, it is essential that the film represent the city as spectacular, so that not only the protagonist but also the spectator is attracted by the city.

Another sub-genre of the city film is the chamber film (*Kammerspielfilm*). Though this genre deals with the hardships faced by urban dwellers, the city

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[26] For Kracauer's discussion of the street film, see Chapter 13, "The Prostitute and the Adolescent," in *From Caligari to Hitler*.

street is not the main set. Most scenes are filmed in a chamber-like minimal set, and the genre is more interested in the psychology of characters. F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (*Der Letzte Mann*, 1924) depicts a man who has been demoted from prestigious hotel doorman to washroom attendant due to his age. *The Last Laugh* was filmed entirely in the UFA studio, and the main sets are the hotel lobby, the washroom, and the doorman's apartment. The splendid urban scape is reduced to the fancy facade of the hotel, and no other city scenes are seen in the film.

The city symphony is in the city film tradition, since it represents metropolitan life. However, the city symphony drastically differs from other city films in that the city symphony expressed the physical reality of the city, not the studio, and the style of the genre is experiential, resisting the confinement of narrative structure and deliberately avoiding causality. Accidents are still a prevalent and uncontrollable factor that puts people in danger, but the filmmakers of the city symphony film appreciate contingency as a critical element of the city. City symphony filmmakers vary their particular attitude towards modern life, their cinematographic styles, and their ideas of cinema, but they all find film to be an apt medium for representing the city. Most of all, the genre thematically foregrounds the materiality of the city and the medium of the film. Alberto Cavalcanti's *Nothing but Time* (*Rien que les heures,* 1926) begins with intertitles claiming that this film is not a typical city film that depicts the "fashionable and elegant" side of the city but the "humble and downtrodden"

part, and declares that "this film does not need a story, it is no more than a series of impressions on [sic] time passing." Cavalcanti also emphasizes the superiority of the filmic representation: "only the successions of images can bring it to life" while "painters try to depict the life" (intertitle).

Joris Ivens's early short films also reflect his interest in the materiality of the city—its exterior surface. Although Ivens gradually took an interest in social issues and filmed social themes after his successful two short films *The Bridge* (*De Brug,* 1928) and *Rain* (*Regen,* 1929), his first initiation was what he calls a "cine poem," an impressionistic sketch of the city. *Rain* in particular evokes the poetic beauty of the city before, during, and after the rain. Unlike other city symphony films, *Rain* was solely interested in "the effect," not the message. He notes: "I organised a system of rain watchers, friends who would telephone me from certain sections of town when the rain effects I wanted appeared. I never moved without my camera—it was with me in the office, laboratory, street, train … To achieve the effect of the beginning of the shower as you now see in the film, I had to photograph at least ten beginnings and out of these ten make the one film beginning" (qtd. in Weihsmannn 24). Ivens filmed the diverse images of the rainy city of Amsterdam, which evoke a sentimental mood: a river diffusing the light, people opening their umbrellas, water flowing into gutters, wet roads reflecting cars, asphalt covered with umbrellas, and rain dropping from eaves. *Rain* is less interested in criticizing miserable city life than in appealing to the spectator's emotions.

Another notable thing is that the production of this genre did not proceed traditionally. The production of *People on Sunday* (*Menschen am Sonntag*, a collaboration of Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, Kurt Siodmak, Billy Wilder, and Fred Zinnemann, 1930) did not employ professional actors and actresses, but instead hired ordinary people who were sometimes cast on the spot.[27] The film follows young people in the city who meet accidentally and plan impulsively to go to a picnic outside Berlin on Sunday. The stories in the film are not elaborately developed. Rather, the events happen by chance and they "could happen differently," as Lutz Koepnick writes (240). At the very beginning, the film introduces us to the protagonists, but it soon "frustrates our desire to locate the man or the woman we have just seen anywhere onscreen" (237). The camera seems to follow them, but it soon loses track of them as they stroll through the street. *People on Sunday*, Koepnick remarks, "privileges atmospheric detail over narrative causality, chance and play over goal-oriented action" (239).

The production of the city symphony film is notably susceptible to urban contingency, but also keenly aware of the filmic method. Declaring that *Man with a Movie Camera* (*Человек с киноаппаратом,* 1929) is without a story and actors, Dziga Vertov identifies his eye with the camera lens and theorizes the

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[27] It is another issue to clarify who gets the most credit for making the film. *People on Sunday* was not conventionally filmed. Some actors were cast on the street, and no formal script was ready when the directors were filming. Also, as Wilder says, there was "no studio, no money." For the production process, see Lutz Koepnick's "The Bearable Lightness of Being: *People on Sunday.*" Also see Noah Isenberg's "*People on Sunday*: Young People Like Us" and Wilder and Siodmak's interview, "Making *People on Sunday*: Billy Wilder and Robert Siodmak" in the Criterion Collection DVD

term "the kino-eye." Vertov acknowledges that machines are capable of things that human beings are not, and he imagines a human being embodying the camera by overlapping an eye with the lense of a camera in the film. What the kino-eye does in the film is to record the cities of the modern Soviet Union (Kharkiv, Kiev, Moscow and Odessa). In Jean Vigo's *À propos de Nice* (1930), the camera is very mobile and shoots the same object from several different angles to make the spectator conscious of the filmic method. Distinguishing the social documentary from the pure documentary, Vigo does not charge his film with heavy camera techniques and aims to "renounce the over-artistic subtlety of pure cinema and the super-view of a super-navel gazed at from this angle, then another angle, always another angle, a super-angle; technique for technique's sake" (qtd. in Temple 31). He believes that the camera is not intended to show fancy techniques but to "reveal the motivation hidden behind a gesture," and he makes the humble remark that "À propos de Nice" is "a modest sketch of such a cinema" (33). His desire to "reveal" is implied in what he called the "documented point of view," a combination of his subjective point of view with an objective documentary style (17). The city in "A Propos de Nice," in this sense, emerges from the dynamic interplay between social issues (mainly, class issues of the rich and the poor) and the splendid city preparing itself for a festival.

Among city symphony films, *Berlin Symphony* will be examined here because Ruttmann is keenly aware of the chaos that accidental events can cause,

supplementary booklet.

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and, at the same time, he embraces the fortuitousness that energizes the city. Ruttmann, who was a painter and a filmmaker (mostly abstract and animated films), turned to the documentary genre, which can best express the contingency of the city. He is registering a kind of chance that does not amount to violent shock or danger, and the camera is integral to representing city life. What he ultimately constructs is a habitable city where random and unexpected incidents neither constrain nor threaten the life of urban dwellers.

Berlin Symphony consists of five parts depicting a course of a day in Berlin from dawn to night. Although summarizing the entire film might be too long, it is useful for the following discussion to describe what happens in each.[28] Act I starts with a train coming in to the Berlin station. As the train arrives at the station, the spectator encounters the quiet and still city at 5 am: streets are empty of people; windows of buildings and apartments are closed; stores are not opened yet; and factory machines are motionless. As one or two people finally show up on the street, the city gets ready to start: urbanites open windows; stores unlock doors; gates open for trams and trains to operate; commuters rush to the station; workers arrive at their workplaces; and finally factory machines start moving.

In Act II, around 8 am, the camera mostly observes people on the street

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[28] I intend to give a dry summary of the film in order to deliver the film's non-narrative mode. For a more detailed and pictorial description of the film, see Sabine Hake's vivid illustration in "Urban Spectacle in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City.*" pp. 131-134.

such as smokers, horse-riders, janitors, bootblacks, and commuters. As time goes by, the city gets busier. Office workers make phone calls; telephone operators, inserting phone plugs into jacks, connect people; and typists finger their keys. At the end of Act II, the intensity of the city is expressed through an abstract swirling image, screaming monkeys, and fighting dogs.

Act III shows diverse yet ordinary activities in the city: workers operate forklifts and excavators at construction sites; station staff loads and unloads bags; vendors sell their products to passers-by; fighting breaks out on the street; a bride steps into the church for her wedding; traffic police officers whistle to regulate vehicles; a man fervently gives a street speech; a band is marching down the street; and a plane takes off. As if to show everything that is happening in the city, Act III presents a number of people from a bellboy to a beggar and a variety of transportation modes such as a tram, horse carriage, car, bus, and train. The third act closes with overlapping shots of newspapers to show the overwhelming information flowing throughout the city.

Act IV starts at noon when the city takes a break for lunch. Factory machines temporarily stop and workers leave for a break. Horses, babies, monkeys, lions, and cats enjoy their lunch. Restaurants are busy with customers. An elephant, a dog, and a man take a nap. Some take photographs, play in the park, take a walk, or chat with each other. After this short break, the city resumes its work. A machine starts printing newspapers; and they are packed, loaded in trucks, and sold to pedestrians. What is noteworthy in the fourth act is

the suicide of a woman on the bridge. When the city accelerates the speed of work after the break, Ruttmann inserts the roller-coaster ride shots, in which a car on the track rises and falls suddenly at great speed. The roller-coaster scene is juxtaposed with the scene of a woman committing suicide. Her suicide is not explained, but is simply there in the film. After this climactic scene, the camera captures workers leaving their workplaces and enjoying leisure time in the afternoon: playing sports games, dining and dancing in the club, watching fashion shows, and taking walks in the park.

The last act goes on to show the nightlife in the city, illuminated by street lamps and electric signs. The camera catches car lights reflected on the wet asphalt; fancy display windows attracting shoppers; moviegoers buying tickets; female dancers at the backstage preparing for their show; and circus animals and trainers performing at the theater. People enjoy playing or watching games such as hockey, cycling, figure skating, skiing, and boxing. The film goes on to show scenes of people drinking at a bar, couples flirting on the street, and gamblers betting in the casino. Finally, as if to celebrate the city night, Act V ends with fireworks.

II.2.2 Filming Indeterminacy

As the summary indicates, Ruttmann's *Berlin Symphony* is a collection of numerous city scenes. It is a collection because the way Ruttmann maps the city is not dependent on narrative—that is, shots are not linked by causality. At the beginning of the third act, for example, the spectator first encounters a sequence

of a train passing through a tunnel, workers on the construction site, trams on the street, and street vendors. This sequence of shots does not accumulate to create a narrative; one shot does not necessarily or logically lead to the next one. Rather, these shots can be rearranged without harming the entire work, and some shots can be even removed. In the middle of the third act, a station sequence consists of approximately 20 shots of people loading and unloading their baggage. Would it severely distort the film if one of these shots were to be removed from the sequence? In fact, any shots of the film can be switched slightly or a shot can be taken away quite safely because the logic that binds the shots is contingency, which also explains the random events in the city. Coincidence, as Kracauer illustrates, implies the unpredictable (and thus unavoidable) events lurking in the city. Each shot is connected very loosely without necessity, and the editing does not follow narrative logic. This indeterminacy is a major reason for the difficulty of analyzing *Berlin Symphony* in terms of a sequence, a group of shots accumulated to dramatize a story or develop characters.

Urban contingency is presented as danger and, at the same time, as lure in *Berlin Symphony* and particularly in the suicide scene in the fourth act. Suicides may not occur frequently, but they constitute a kind of danger that can surely happen in the city. Ruttmann juxtaposes the suicide scene with the shots of a roller coaster and the abstract image of swirl to accentuate the chaotic feel of the city (see fig. II-8). Without any account of the cause or context of the suicide,

the death is thrown at the spectator as a shock. Instead of placing the suicide in a narrative for the spectator to accept with fewer disturbances, Ruttmann deliberately presents it as an accident with no explanation. Unlike the film's mostly unstaged shots, the death in Act IV is performed. Ruttmann captures, or stages, the death and presents it to the unprepared spectator to witness. This can be, as several critics observed, read as a critique of the city in which overpopulation or extreme individualization generates dehumanization. The juxtaposition of this suicide and the fashion show scene might also be a social comment on commodified women in the city or on commercialized city life. However, considering that the woman who throws herself from the bridge makes only a onetime appearance to the spectator and the death is presented as a random incident, disconnected from the surrounding scenes, the death implies the lure of contingency more than social criticism. The entire film is rather disinterested in the suicide, and the death is not used as a social issue to educate the spectator. It shocks the spectator, nothing more.

Fig. II-8. Three adjoining shots of Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*. From the left, a woman committing a suicide, a roller coaster, and a swirl.

This type of meaningless death is fascinating and, at the same time, disturbing because of its uncertainty. A shock is a sensational experience, as Doane writes, "due to the lure of contingency, the promise of its indexicality and hence its access to the present. But such a lure of contingency and such a promise carry with them the threat of meaninglessness" (*Emergence* 107). A narrative that creates meaning is thus a controlling mechanism of such a random incident that gives a feeling of security to the spectator. By narrativizing the death, the spectator can logically make sense of the incident. In other words, a narrative provides him/her with a certain causality—that everything happens for a reason, and this is why "[t]he direct presentation of death to the spectator as pure event, as shock, was displaced in mainstream cinema by its narrativization": a certain causality or "narrative proved to be a more effective and surer means of assimilating the unassimilable by conferring on death a meaning" (164).[29]

Berlin Symphony does not fulfill the spectator's desire to master

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[29] In this context, Doane's reading of two deaths in "Electrocuting an Elephant" (1903) and "Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of Auburn Prison" (1901) is illuminating. "Electrocuting an Elephant" is a seventy-second long footage, produced by Edison Film company. In the footage, the elephant Topsy is electrocuted at the Coney Island amusement park for killing three spectators. "Execution of Czolgosz" is a three-minute long film, produced by Edwin S Porter. Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist, was also electrocuted for assassinating President William McKinley. Although the opening shots of Auburn Prison are authentic, taken on the day Czolgosz was executed, the execution shot is not authentic but staged because Edison could not get permission to film the execution. Through these two films, Doane examines the ways in which "[e]arly actualities exploit the cinema's apparent predilection for the contingent, its capacity to record whatever happens to be there at the moments" (163). For more discussion, see Chapter 4 "Dead Time, or the Concept of the Event" in *The Emergence of Cinematic*

insecurity by regularizing its episodes in narrative form. But yet, the film does not abandon the spectator's hope of being rescued from chaotic urban space. Ruttmann neither discards randomness for a safe city nor lets the city sink into chaos. Using the filmic medium, Ruttmann represents, rather than narrativizes, the daily life of the city, in which contingency multiplies the possibility of life chances without falling into anarchy. Using the form of a single day and adopting cross-cut editing, *Berlin Symphony* depicts diverse urban activities and categorizes them without strictly regularizing them by listing and grouping numerous and diverse activities on film, a time-based medium. In the following, I explore Ruttmann's cinematic strategies to deal with the contingent without reducing it to a teleological trajectory, while still presenting indeterminacy of the city.

II.2.3 Everydayness and the Diurnal: A Syntagmatic Reading of *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*

    Berlin Symphony records actual Berliners engaging in repetitive daily activities. Although urban chaos in *Berlin Symphony* is generated by its mere randomness, and the spectator is likely shocked by this chaos, the repetition of everyday activities gives people a sense of security because, as Henri Lefebvre notes, the everyday is "a common sense referent and a point of reference" ("Everyday" 9). What makes the everyday "a common denominator activities,

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Time.

locus and milieu of human functions" is its repetitiveness. Rita Felski also emphasizes the indispensable materiality of the everyday and writes that it is "the essential, taken-for-granted continuum of mundane activities that frames our forays into more esoteric or exotic worlds. It is the ultimate, non-negotiable reality, the unavoidable basis for all other forms of human endeavour" (15).[30] She further argues that "within the maelstrom of contemporary life, everyday rituals may help to safeguard a sense of personal autonomy and dignity, or to preserve the distinctive qualities of a threatened way of life" ("Invention" 21). The key aspect of the everyday is the repetitiveness with which people engage in activities such as waking up, working, eating, shopping, or going to the movies what everyone, regardless of age, gender, and class, does. Ruttmann even juxtaposes daily activities of people with those of animals such as dogs fighting and people arguing on the street; a lion eating meat and people eating at a restaurant; and an elephant sleeping and a man taking a nap on the bench.

In addition to daily activities, I want to draw attention to the temporality of a day, a twenty-four-hour period. That is, not only is everyday work essential, but the duration of a day is also significant in *Berlin Symphony*. By filming city life in a single day from dawn to night, *Berlin Symphony* builds a safe temporal structure for the spectator to become oriented to the city's chaotic moments. A day is a useful unit and an essential measure for people to conceptualize time. As

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[30] Although Felski and Lefevre both theorize the importance of everydayness, Felski does not share the same view with Lefevre, criticizing Lefevre's tendency to

Bryony Randall notes, it is "particularly important in that its shorter cycle enables a more direct experience of its repetitive structure; it is more manageable to compare days with each other than months, or years" (22).[31]

Although the concept of a day in the life of the city is not new, modernists are particularly interested in the presence of a day. Stephen Kern notes that "in contrast to the realists' fluid movement of stories from past to present to future, modernists often focus on the present" (*Modernist* 101). Laura Marcus also stresses the connection of "diurnal time and the city with modernist aesthetics" (*Dreams* 95). She suggests that "modernist dailiness" is significant not only in Ruttmann's *Berlin Symphony* but also in other city symphonies such as Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta* (1921), Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, and Cavalcanti's *Nothing but time*. These city symphony films reduce the narrative, and "greater spans of time and culture are condensed within the diurnal round" (89).

The temporality of a day is what the spectators use to orient themselves because without the temporal structure of a day, all activities might appear random. The mode of the city is sensational; the tempo is fast, and the events are subject to contingency. However, *Berlin Symphony* does not disable the spectators from positioning themselves in time or threaten them with

prioritize the value of change and neweness over repetition.

[31] Illustrating a day of the city is not unusual in modernist works. Some well-known examples are James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), both taking place over the course of a single day. Laura Marcus

anachronism. By framing city life over the course of a day, Ruttmann provides

the spectators with a useful temporal frame so they can expect what can happen

next in the city.[32] For example, the first act of *Berlin Symphony* describes the

city around 5 a.m., and the scenes contain nothing unexpected at dawn in the

city: trains arriving in the Berlin station, empty streets at dawn, trams

occasionally running on tracks, and several people showing up on the street.

Although there are no necessary connections or causality between these scenes,

the randomness of these activities does not disorient the spectators. In the

second act, with the clock indicating 8 a.m., the business of the city starts, so the

city becomes livelier (or more chaotic) than in Act I. Public transportation is

packed with people heading to work, and office workers, typists, or operators are

promptly coping with their tasks. Ruttmann often uses fast cutting to represent

the pace of the city and its sensational mode. In spite of the stimulation and

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discusses the importance of the one-day novel especially in modernist fiction. See
Marcus's "The Legacies of Modernism" particularly pp 85-88.

[32] Paul Ricouer's discussion of the dating system provides a much-needed
theoretical scaffolding here. In his discussion of the calendar, Ricouer underscores the
importance of days. The calendar transforms infinite moments of chronicled time into a
systematic scheme by creating patterns. "The very notion of dating," Ricoeur writes,
"make[s] an anonymous instant coincide with a quasi present […] confers us a position
in time to all possible events in relation to their distance from the axial moment; to this
objective position in cosmological time" (214). An anonymous moment can be marked
as noteworthy because its system locates us in the grid of days (or in the list of days in
the earlier version of the calendar). From Ricoeur's discussion, we can say that the
calendar assists us to orient ourselves to a specific time and to remember an event in
relation to other events. It saves us from infinity and meaninglessness and, as Ricoeur
remarks, calendar time "humanizes cosmic time" (214). *Berlin Symphony* is analogous
to Ricoeur's concept of the calendar because the film interweaves seemingly
coincidental events into a systematic pattern. In other words, in order for events to be
significant, *Berlin Symphony* marks them in the system of a day. For further discussion
of Ricoeur's "calendar time" and the "phenomenon of dating," see Chapter 10

dizziness the film generates, all the activities in Act II are what the spectators can anticipate around 8 a.m. in the metropolis. Likewise, in Acts IV and V, although no clock informs the audience of the exact time, the spectators can reasonably guess the time due to the continuous and linear progress of a day that the film creates. Throughout the film, Ruttman creates a temporal pattern, without which all these events would be anonymous and senseless.

A temporal structure of a day, connecting each act of the film in a chronological order, is analogous to syntagmatic relations as Ferdinand de Saussure theorizes the structure of a sentence. His theory of language establishes a framework for reading *Berlin Symphony*. Reading the structure of the film in terms of Saussure's language theory is not a new attempt, since Rick Altman has already suggested a method of analyzing film genre in terms of syntagmaticism and semanticism. Although he does not have in mind the city symphony or *Berlin Symphony* in particular when he argues for using semantics and syntax to study genre theory and genre history, his method is useful for understanding the structure of *Berlin Symphony*.[33] According to Saussure, in syntagmatic relations,

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"Initiatives" in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II* (214).

[33] For more dicussions of genre analysis, see Altman's "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre." To briefly explain the semantic and syntactic approach, the semantic approach "stresses the genre's building blocks, while the syntactic view privileges the structure into which they are arranged" (10). Altman's concern was to define genre films: "how do we know to which genre they belong?" (6). So his "blocks" indicate qualities that can bind films in a specific genre. As he exemplifies the Western film by drawing on many critics' definitions, blocks in the Western consist of generic features ("films in the American West from 1840 to 1900), atmosphere ("earth, dust, water, and leather"), stock characters ("the tough/soft cowboy, the lonely sheriff, the faithful or treacherous Indians, and the strong but tender woman") , and technical

"words acquire relations based on the linear nature of language because they are chained together" (123). Since "the elements are arranged in sequence on the chain of speaking" and bounded by "inside discourse," the listener can predict what comes next. Saussure explains this series of interdependent and syntagmatic relations as "syntagmatic solidarities" (127). The organization of units "depends on what surrounds them in the spoken chain or on their successive parts" (127). Because elements acquire their meaning "only through their reciprocal action," the entire sentence can have value "only through its parts, and the parts have value by virtue of their place in the whole" (128). For example, the shots of people walking on the street and getting on the bus in Acts I and IV have different meanings (one is on their way to the office; the other is their way back home), depending on their temporal places, which are determined by syntagmatic relations. As with Saussure's syntagmatic relations, each act in *Berlin Symphony* can acquire its significance (a temporal significance in particular) in relation to each other and as parts of a whole.

II.2.4 Randomness and Multiplicity: Paradigmatic Reading of *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*

While a syntagmatic relationship offers us a method to see *Berlin Symphony* in terms of a sequence of ordering, a paradigmatic relationship leads

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elements ("use of fast tracking and crane shots"). The syntactical view concerns the relationship among these blocks such as how the characters struggle with what conflicting values. In addition to the semantic and syntactic approaches, Altman later

us to discover an infinite number of possibilities of elements that can be substituted.[34] Saussure states that a syntagmatic relation is "in presentia" and "is based on two or more terms that occur in an effective series," but an associative relation "unites the terms in absentia in a potential mnemonic series" (123). A paradigmatic relationship, which Saussure called an associate relationship, groups elements in terms of the possibility of substitution. It is closer to mental relationships that create an infinite number of associations as long as they share some commonalities, as Saussure gives the example of "pain-ful, delight-ful, and fright-ful." In the paradigmatic approach, events in each act in *Berlin Symphony* happen contingently, not chronologically. In other words, unlike a syntagmatic relationship that binds each act in chronological order, associations of elements in a paradigmatic axis are not limited.

In syntagmatic relationships, the combination of elements is limited by time; the film should proceed forward from morning until dark. While the syntagmatical reading of the film provides a solid temporal structure for understanding the film (an ordinary but chaotic day in the city in chronological order), a paradigmatic reading does not give us a temporal tool. In fact, what the paradigmatic approach concerns in *Berlin Symphony* is spatiality, not

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adds the pragmatic approach in *Film/Genre* to embrace "multiple conflicting audiences" and "the discursive nature of genres" (208).

[34] The paradigmatic analysis of *Berlin Symphony* here is indebted to Robert C. Allen's structural analysis of the soap opera. Although not dealing with a city symphony film, Allen's discussion of "intraepisodic redundancy [that] cannot be explained as a syntagmatic device" in the soap opera provides a clue (70). For his paradigmatic analysis, see Chapter four, "A Reader-Oriented Poetics of the Soap Opera," in *Speaking*

temporality. The complexity of the networked space of the city can be understood in terms of Saussure's paradigmatic relations ("associative relations" in his exact words), for it is "a purely arbitrary act" (127). It is arbitrary because "we are unable to predict the number of words that the memory will suggest or the order in which they will appear" (126). What Saussure suggests in the "infinite order and indefinite number" of paradigmatic relations corresponds to the contingency of the city in that *Berlin Symphony* visualizes a complex and intersecting space.

To visualize this dispersed and at the same time connected urban space, *Berlin Symphony* paradigmatically deploys cinematic space. In the film, the most frequent motif is that of the train, bringing people to and moving them outside of Berlin. The film starts with the train coming into the Berlin Station at immense speed, and the scenery viewed from the train passes and changes quickly, as if miles of distance are collapsed into a single moving image. Due to the speed of the train, a single shot covers several miles from the train, and railroads and telegraph lines look almost like abstract lines. Because transportation technologies such as railroads, streetcars, and trams increased mobility, and electric communication devices—telephone, telegraph, and radio—bring people at great distances closer together, different spaces can coexist. Relatively decreased distances due to modern transportation between Berlin and other major cities are symbolically represented in the film as the

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of Soap Operas.

juxtaposition of such station name signs as Mannheim, Karlsruhe, Zurich, Ludwigshafen, Luzern, Milano, and Berlin. Simultaneity is an essential feature of the modern urban spatiality that creates the networked space. As Wesley Beal in his *Networks of Modernism* argues, urbanization forced people "to reconceive the boundaries and shapes of community, the interrelationships of center and periphery, and the meanings of pluralism and regionalism" (8). This network, for the moderns, was "a versatile model for their radical reformulation of social space" (5).

It is true that processing multiple shots of the networked space is a shocking experience for the spectator. Benjamin remarks that shocks are embodied in montage because the spectator is unable to contemplate them as he does when he is appreciating a painting. Doane also notes that "the very rapidity of the changing images in film is potentially traumatic for the spectator" (15). She further adds that not only montage technique but also indexicality causes shock because of "its ability to register or represent contingency" (15). Both montage and indexicality produce shock in *Berlin Symphony*, but I want to suggest that the shock in *Berlin Symphony* is less traumatic or threatening than pleasing because the shots are connected by analogy, not by contrast or conflict. Most of the sequences in *Berlin Symphony* are composed of several shots that share a similar action or motif. For example, Act III begins with a sequence of construction sites. The shots of the first sequence show a train passing through the tunnel and arriving at a site, the skeleton frame building yet to be

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constructed, workers shoveling, a crane lifting sand, an excavator digging a hole, and dozens of workers pulling the cable, all of which indicate ongoing construction. The second sequence of Act III is also composed of several shots of transportation such as streetcars, double-deck buses, and cars. Although each individual shot is autonomous, a sequence of shots can be grouped together under the same motif, and the spectator views the sequence of shots as less shocking because one shot follows another that has some commonality.

For this reason, several critics have viewed the ways in which *Berlin Symphony* links its shots in terms of similarity. Hake defines montage as a technique that "produces contrast, conflict, or opposition through the juxtaposition of two images," while collage produces "perceptual totality" by "integrating differences or creating new connections" for the effect of "synthesis" (129). It is hard to draw the line between the two techniques, and Hake infers that the film makes use of both techniques, calling Ruttmann's approach an "associate montage" (130). Hake explains that the film links the shots by "formal or thematic similarity," but that the sequence of shots "[resists] critical interpretation," as collage does. Relying on a cross-sectional epistemology, Michael Cowan remarks that *Berlin Symphony* is a *Querschnittfilm* which "[promises] to manage the proliferation of moving images to which it contributed by gesturing toward a lawlike regularity" (76). In his extensive discussion of cross-sectional studies in social sciences, Cowan focuses on the term *Querschnitt* (cross-section) which "[designates] the exploration of the

relations between simultaneous phenomena rather than the cause-and-effect links between contiguous events" (2). Cowan notes that *Berlin Symphony*'s cross-sectional editing "draws numerous graphic and thematic parallels between the actions of different classes as they work, eat, sleep, or relax, as well as those of people and machines or people and animals" (77). As Cowan demonstrates, *Berlin Symphony* connects analogous shots and draws attention to the affinities that they share, but he also remarks that Ruttmann's analogous montage is not as same as Sergei Eisenstein's intellectual montage because Ruttmann's montage does not concern "conflict, collision, or dialectical sublation" (77). Attending to "patterns of shot articulation and spatial constructions," Matthew Bernstein explains the mode of shot relations with Christian Metz's "bracket syntagma," a type of image tracking (6). Metz defines bracket syntagma as "a series of very brief scenes representing occurrences that the film gives as typical samples of a same order of reality, without in any way chronologically locating them in relation to each other in order to emphasize their presumed kinship within a category of facts that the film-maker wants to describe in visual terms" (126). *Berlin Symphony* as a whole chronologically pictures a day of the city from morning to night, but a sequence of shots in the film are collected and located closely by "their presumed kinship." Whether the editing is called associate montage, *Querschnittfilm*, or bracket syntagma, all these analyses of *Berlin Symphony* remind us that the logic that binds a sequence of shots is similarity.

The repeated shots of a similar motif bear randomness, but they also

temporarily give the spectator a sense of security. Although the pace of the moving images is fast, the spectator can expect what one is likely to encounter next in the paradigmatic segment. Of course, it is true that whether shots are interrelated by similarity or by difference, the changing images themselves on the screen can be a shocking experience. Nevertheless, the shock in *Berlin Symphony* seems more enjoyable than threatening. However, similarity in *Berlin Symphony* does not mean that Ruttmann removes the hyperstimulus condition of the city. The film mirrors fragmentary urban life, and contingency still persists throughout the entire film, but it neither makes the city only a dangerous place nor threatens the spectator. Contingency does not refer only to the threat but to the pleasure as well. Because of its indeterminacy, the contingent offers the spectator free play. *Berlin Symphony* presents the ways in which the urbanite can live with the contingent, or use it to enrich life in the city. The uncertainty that the city generates evokes the pleasure of possibility.

SUPERFICIALITY AND URBAN SURFACE CULTURE

> All sense of perspective and of realistic depth is washed away by a
> nocturnal sea of electric advertising.
> — Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*.

> It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The
> true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.
> — Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

III.1 Part 1 The Lure of the Surface

III.1.1 Visualizing the City: Sheeler and Strand's *Manhatta*

I would like to begin with a nine-minute film *Manhatta* (1921), directed
by Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler. The film portrays a day in New York City,
and is composed of scenes of Manhattan that Sheeler and Strand filmed along
with intertitles lifted from Walt Whitman's poems about the city such as
"Mannahatta," "A Broadway Pageant," and "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." It is not
certain whether the filmmakers adopted Whitman's poems that can best
illustrate the shots of the city, or if they used film to visualize the lines of
Whitman's poems. Whichever is the case, the juxtaposed scenes and intertitles
explain each other. For example, the intertitle "When million footed Manhattan
unpent, descends to its pavements," is followed by a sequence of scenes of

commuters arriving at the Staten Island ferry or of New Yorkers walking down the street. Drawing attention to the city views, both Whitman's lines and Strand and Sheeler's shots aesthetically represent the modern city, which has been transformed by urbanization and industrialization.

However, due to the differences in medium, there is a tension between the image and the text in *Manhatta*. The poem suggests Whitmanesque romanticism, depicting the city as urban pastoral with is "high growth of iron, slender, strong, light, splendidly uprising towards clear skies." The following images of the city, however, are not so romanticized. The shots are footage of real places and people, which are randomly selected (see fig.III-1). The film neither idealizes the city as utopia nor contrives a dramatic story. What the film is interested in is just seeing various spots of Manhattan from different points of view. While the intertitles describe the city as "proud" and "passionate" and conceptualize the city as a utopia in the spectator's mind, the images plainly show its exteriority—geometrical and abstract elements of the city created by high-rises—because the camera only takes a photo of material things, not ideas or concepts. Strand and Sheeler combined two media: poetry, which can form an idea of the modern city, and motion picture, which reproduces the outside, or surface, of the city. Focusing on the towering geometry of lower Manhattan and its environs, Strand and Sheeler "have tried to register directly the living forms in front of them and to reduce through the most rigid selection, volumes, lines and masses, to their intensest terms of expressiveness" (Horak 272). That they

wanted to "register" visual images and "reduce" them into "volumes, lines and masses" reflects that the film, unlike words, can reproduce the physical aspects of a city.
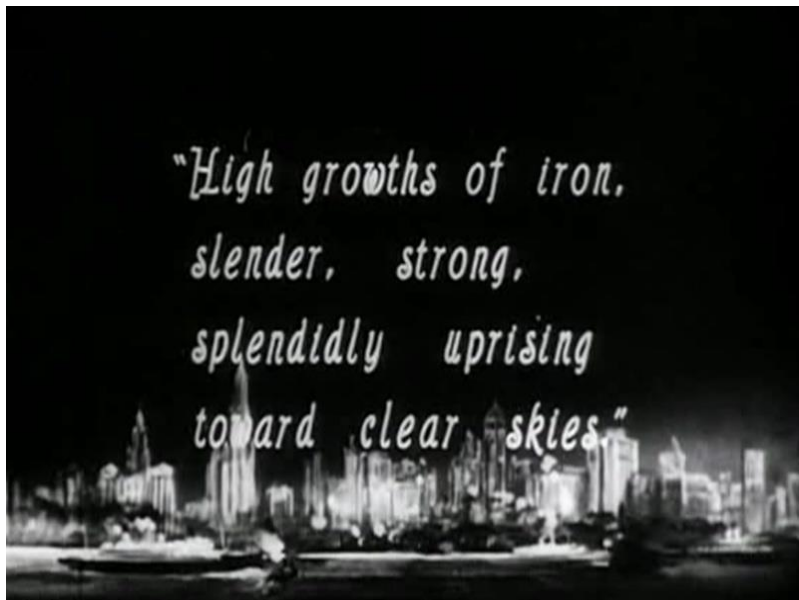
Fig. III-1. Two consecutive shots of *Manhatta*.

Considering that the two photographers were interested in the composition of geometric patterns that the city creates, it can be said that Strand and Sheeler "privileg[e] abstract and formal compositional elements over the image's iconic signifying functions" (Horak 275). In other words, through a camera, the filmmakers capture the "surface" of the city and its dynamism in a sequence of images, which might lack meaning or narrative but are still aesthetically appealing. As Juan Antonio Suárez notes, "[...] *Manhatta* deflated dramatic and representational pretensions and highlighted the movement, surfaces, lines, and textures of the urban spectacle. In doing so, Strand and Sheeler drew on the urban panoramas [...]" (64). And what this chapter is concerned with is the relationship between the splendid face of the city and the filmic image on the flat screen.

With increasing urbanization, the term "surface" took on a new significance during the early twentieth century, demanding "a variety of physiognomic readings," as Thomas Y. Levin notes in his introduction to Siegfried Kracauer's *The Mass Ornament* (20). Levin argues that "[t]he surface-level expressions, however, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things" (16). As Kracauer reminds us, the surface is not just a shallow domain or a flimsy cover that can be overlooked; it reflects a distracted and fragmented modern culture and is a text that requires critical reading. Furthermore, it is a condition

that people create and in which they willingly dwell. Thus, the surface can be examined as a way of reading contemporary urban culture.

This chapter discusses the affinity between the urban experience and the cinematic experience and ultimately argues that both the city and the film share the feature of superficiality, which shaped the lives of people at the turn of the century. The cinema, due to its medium specificity, mirrors and even welcomes the shallowness of urban culture. In order to examine the surface in terms of cultural phenomena during the early twentieth century, the chapter offers some thoughts not only on the surface culture of the city but also on various artistic movements that experimented with its shallowness. I juxtapose various examples by visiting a number of crucial scenes and episodes to illustrate the surface culture and also to elaborate on the superficiality of the city and the cinema's engagement in it.

Due to its semiotic instability, the signification of the term "surface" is extensive, and the chapter traces its wide use across diverse fields ranging from architecture, decoration, and literature to film and photography. "Surface" signifies the exterior of material things or persons, which eyes can immediately see. In this chapter, mainly related to twentieth-century urban visual culture, the term "surface" refers to display windows, facades of the buildings, or urban landscapes, all of which engage visual perception. In contrast to "surface," "depth" indicates concepts, ideologies, or structures, belonging to the realm of the invisible and immaterial, which appeal intellectually, not visually. In modern

urban visual culture, "depth" is often understood to act as authenticity or morality, something we need to pursue but which has become inconspicuous (if not been obliterated) by consumerist, superficial visual culture. It is often thought that surface or appearance is a superficial cover that conceals a true reality. (From a Marxist view, commercialism obscures the labor that produces products; from a psychoanalytic view, the real desire or unconscious is repressed under the conscious.) However, I argue that urban surface is not just a location of entertainment and indulgence, devoid of truth, but is an aesthetic and also authentic domain where modernist artists response to the realities of capitalization and industrialization. Truth lies *on* the surface. I mean truth not as universal and unchanging value but as the reality of lived experience. Surface culture is true enough in that the visual in the form of photography, film, design, and architecture has changed the landscape of modern thought, and the visual is a means of communication and a mode of life.

To understand twentieth-century urban visual culture in general, the first part of the chapter examines various fields of art from literature and film to architecture and design that influenced the surface culture of the city. It begins with the discussion of the neglected "superficial" strand within literary modernist discourse, suggesting how it is different from but also connected to other modernist strands. Then I discuss debates about the importance of surface in modern design and architecture that influenced the surface of the city. Several significant art movements and theories provide examples for us to think about

diverse ways in which modernist artists engage with surface: Adolf Loos favors

clean and ornament-less surface, while Art Deco prefers an exuberantly

decorated one, and Machine Art aestheticizes the surface of machine-made

objects. Through these artistic practices, I hope to reconstruct the signification of

the surface in the early twentieth century. Modernist architecture and design lay

a foundation for examining the changed cityscapes—the actual physical

appearance of the city, which contemporaries encountered every day. Discussing

the cityscape and urban life will lead me to examine the feature of superficiality

that the city and the cinema share and to argue that the cinema was uniquely

favorable to the urban surface culture and an apt medium for representing the

exterior of the metropolis.

In the second part of the chapter, Joe May's *Asphalt* (1929) will be

discussed closely to examine the affinity of the city and the cinema and the ways

in which they influence each other. Although the film falls into the Weimar street

film genre, *Asphalt* was influenced by Hollywood cinema and was screened in

major cities not only in America and England but also in Europe.[35] The city

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[35] *Asphalt* occupies a critical position within the rivalry between Hollywood
cinema and Weimar cinema in the late 1920s. In 1925, due to the sudden onset of
financial trouble, the principal film studio in Germany Ufa productions had to ask for
help from Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which resulted in founding the
Parufamet Distribution Company. It was urgent for Ufa to make highly profitable films
that could draw large audiences from Germany and America, and, as Ian Roberts
analyzes, German directors responded by "embrac[ing] the Hollywood narrative style of
causal narrative links" (90-91). Produced in this historical context, *Asphalt* aims to
embrace both Hollywood and Weimar styles and audiences. Also the film was produced
after producer Erich Pommer had returned to Germany from Hollywood where he
acquired its style and technical innovations.

depicted in *Asphalt* reflects the urban modernity not only of Berlin but also of other major cities of the 1920s. Most of all, compared to other melodrama films where the city has only symbolic significance, *Asphalt* emphasizes the material reality of the city, which plays a significant (almost subversive) role in the film. Furthermore, through the production of *Asphalt,* we can see the film's effort to realize the surface of the city, which mirrors the construction of the superficial city and reveals the relationship between the city and the film.

III.1.2 The Surface and the Literary Modernist: Isherwood's "Sally Bowles" and the Camera-eye

Looking down at New York City from his hotel room on the ninth floor, H. G. Wells wrote in 1906, "New York is lavish of light" (41). While he enjoys the sundown in New York as "glorious" natural scenery, he comments that the artificial "innumerable little lights of the house cliffs and the street tier above tier" after the sundown are "lavish" (41). It is interesting that he is comparing the built environment and the natural environment by making "cliff" his metaphor. For Wells, the city or "the house" has its natural beauty, and any artificiality may not be needed. New York, Wells writes, is "full of the sense of spending from an inexhaustible supply. For a time one is drawn irresistibly into the universal belief in that inexhaustible supply" (41). In the early twentieth century, the changing faces of the city produced a shallow material culture that was often criticized for its superficiality and lack of metaphysical depth by contemporaries. This surface

culture, also called "asphalt culture," according to Wolfgang Natter, is typical of the city, where "genuine culture and social values" have disappeared and "direct contact with soil and the ethical life" is lost (214). As Natter notes, commodification and the materiality of urban life during the early twentieth century were seen as "rootless" and "soulless" (214). The lavish light and the extravagant display window, lighting up the city, were often conceived as a paper-thin illusion that the industrialized modern world built. It has become a cliche to note the abundant supply of the city, but it was unprecedented and, to some, threatening at the turn of the century. While the excessive use of artificial light is not a pleasant scene for Wells, some urbanites are willingly distracted and turn to this light to console themselves in their emptiness. Although Kracauer sees this seeking solace as a form of banishment ("One is banished from one's own emptiness into the alien advertisement"), walking down the street of excessive lights was a pleasurable experience for the contemporary man (*The Mass Ornament* 332).

The tension between surface and depth is not virgin territory among modernist artists or thinkers, and it certainly did not first emerge in the early twentieth century. It has been a subject of discussion since the time of the Greek philosophers, as Plato's allegory of the cave exemplifies in his *Republic*. In a dialogue between Glaucon and Socrates, Plato describes a cave where a chained prisoner can only see what is reflected on the wall. When a prisoner is dragged outside of the cave and forced to see what is "real," not the shadow, "he would be

able to look upon itself and see its true nature, not by reflections in water or phantasms of it in an alien setting, but in and by itself in its own place" (127). Plato's allegory of the cave reveals the Platonic perception of surface (shadow, illusion) and depth (real, origin), in which there is a real world where the greater truth lies behind an inauthentic surface. The term "surface," the exterior of objects, signifies the visible area that people can easily see. It is the cover that directly appeals to the eyes and does not necessarily involve intellectual faculties. Due to its association with falsehood, "surface" inevitably invokes the dichotomy of visible, shallow, superficial, peripheral, and inauthentic as opposed to invisible, deep, essential, core, and authentic.

Some notable literary modernists such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and T. S. Eliot endeavor to depart from realistic representations of modern life and to innovate new forms to represent the incoherent and fragmented consciousness that is affected by modernity. Reading Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Erich Auerbach argues that the modernist representation of reality reflects what is below the surface rather than visible things or events. Since the modernist novel is somewhat less interested in exterior states than interior states, the narrator no longer informs readers about objective facts but reflects "the consciousness of the dramatis personae," and readers can access the interiors of the characters rather than "an objective reality" (Auerbach 534). It is true that readers could gain access to the consciousness of characters long before modernist experimentation. Before the modernist novel, however, the

inwardness of characters was given "more frequently as a monologue, and of course in most instances with an introductory phrase," and it did not undermine objective reality (535). However, according to Auerbach, in the case of the modernist novel, "the exterior events have actually lost their hegemony, they serve to release and interpret inner events, whereas before her [Woolf's] time (and still today in many instances) inner movements preponderantly function to prepare and motivate significant exterior happenings" (538). The invisible sphere became more important to explore than the visible sphere.[36]

For Woolf, any attempt to construct reality in the novel by illustrating the physical world seems futile. In her essay "Modern Fiction," she argues that what modern fiction should focus on is a person's thoughts and feelings. Drawing a line between the modernist novelists and so-called "materialists" or Edwardians, Woolf criticizes the latter for "spend[ing] much time in making things shipshape and substantial" and "making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring" (159). Constrained to give a plot, Edwardians endeavor to

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[36] In *The Difficulties of Modernism*, Leonard Diepeveen suggests an interesting use of "surface" and "depth" in understanding literary modernist works. Following the concept of "difficulty" during the early twentieth century, he contends that "the spatial metaphors for understanding worked with three dimensions and represented works of art as having a surface and a depth," and it is commonly said that "[t]he difficult text is 'dense,' in that in reading it, one needs to go 'beneath the surface'" (63). While the depth and the difficulty of the work are considered worth examining, "its surface is consequently of lesser value than the depth of work" (63). Although the concept of surface and depth was not always fixed, "[f]or conservative modern readers, the surface was usually a given, something that one needed to get past; what lay underneath that surface was what art was about. In this conceptualizing, one's understanding can be understood as a surface understanding (i.e., insignificant, incomplete) or, at the other extreme, a deep understanding (i.e., complete, profound)" (63). For more discussion,

"[provide] the solidarity, the likeness of life, of the story" and pay too much attention to material surroundings, which are *only* the surface of life (160). Woolf contests the idea of rendering "an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable" because "the mind receives a myriad impressions," which are impalpable (160). In short, the moderns should take their interest, in Woolf's phrase, "in the dark places of psychology," not in a palpable outside reality (162).[37]

However, the presence of the "superficial" strand within modernist literature coexisted with Woolf's and other modernist writers' aesthetics. Particularly, among the early twentieth-century literary texts that take the urban milieu as their main subject, Christopher Isherwood's "Sally Bowles" (1937) conveys the decadent urban culture of the time "superficially." I will discuss his short story "Sally Bowles" in *Goodbye to Berlin* and Isherwood's concept of the "camera-eye" to examine the notion of surface and the superficial in modernist literature and to discuss the affinity between the city and film. *Goodbye to Berlin*,

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see Chapter Two, "Articulating Anxiety: A Theory of Difficulty."

[37] Emerging at the turn of the century, psychoanalysis, also referred to as "depth psychology," is a field that analyzes what lies beneath one's consciousness. Psychoanalysis employs the conception of surface and depth and considers that seeking the inwardness of a patient is essential to cure (or, at least, to understand) their mental disorders. According to Sigmund Freud, a consciousness is what a dreamer remembers ("manifest dream content") and is only a distorted part of a dreamer's unconscious ("latent dream thought"). Psychoanalysis interprets the dreamer's consciousness, which is readily accessible and clear, to reach the hidden unconscious. For Freud, "the dream as a whole is a distorted substitute for something else, something unconscious, and that the task of interpreting a dream is to discover this unconscious material" (139). The idea that there is a sphere where one's desire is concealed or repressed underneath depends on a perception that favors depth over surface.

a collection of six short stories, depicts the life of urbanites in pre-Nazi Berlin

from 1930 to 1933. "Sally Bowles," the second short story, is about the

eponymous protagonist singing at a cabaret and pursuing pleasure in the restless

city. Isherwood intends to write the life of urbanites in the same way in which

the camera films them, and from the beginning of the novel the narrator

proclaims his intention to write as a camera records. Isherwood's consciousness

of this "camera-gaze" or "camera-eye" sheds light on the similarities between the

urban experience and the cinematic experience. Whether or not the writer

achieved his purpose is important, but my focus is on understanding why

Isherwood decided to write cinematically. Moreover, that the story has been

adapted and performed in many visual media—plays, musicals, and

films—suggests that the text invites us to read the story visually.[38]

Isherwood accomplishes the visual task in the literary text by employing a

camera-eye. At the beginning of *Goodbye to Berlin*, the narrator claims that "I

am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.

Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the

kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully

printed, fixed" (*The Berlin Stories* 207). The statement "I am a camera" and

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[38] The endless revival of "Sally Bowles" in theatrical performances suggests that the text visually engages readers: a play by John van Druten entitled *I am a Camera* in 1951, the film adaptation *I am a Camera*, directed by Henry Cornelius in 1955, a musical *Cabaret* in 1966, and a 1972 film version of *Cabaret* directed by Bob Fosse. And perhaps "Sally Bowles" is more to be seen than to be read. Considering that Sally desires to be looked at and willingly delights her spectators, it is no wonder that the character was performed on the stage for a long time.

Isherwood's cameralike writing—his willingness to record anything he sees with "its shutter open"—have been discussed by many scholars. Heather Marcovitch accounts for "I am a camera" as an anxious expression of a narrator who refuses to be actively involved in a society where Nazism is rising and morality is diminished. Marcovitch notes that, by establishing the persona as a camera, the narrator claims to be "the distanced observer, neutral in perspective, whose presence does not affect in the least the actions of the characters whom he encounters" (324). However, according to Marcovitch, *Goodbye to Berlin* gradually shows that it is impossible to remain detached, and the narrator "is compelled to negotiate his sense of himself as an outsider in Germany, his immersion in the decadent milieu of Berlin, and his growing moral outrage against Nazism, particularly its anti-Communism and anti-Semitism" (341). In a similar vein, David P. Thomas argues that the narrator claims to be detached but that his detachment is "a defensive mask, the pseudo-impersonality of a young man, 'alone, far from home,' attempting to protect a vulnerable personality against the terrors of isolation" (48). Alan Wilde, examining Isherwood's writing in linguistic and psychological terms, also contends that the narrator's non-commitment is "a kind of defensive maneuver that turns testingly upon itself, asserting a brave, unsentimental austerity while fearfully undercutting what it cares most to assert" (480).

Anthony Shuttleworth also focuses on Isherwood's passive camera-eye. However, Shuttleworth writes that what matters is not whether Isherwood

succeeded in being "passive, recording, not thinking"; his focus is not to evaluate Isherwood's attempt to pose a camera-like gaze, but to understand why he took such a view. According to Shuttleworth, the seemingly objective approach is destined to fail, and we need to ask what the effect of this failure is. By seeking to be "passive," Isherwood "mimics the cultural role that cameras can fulfill"—presenting objective truth—and, at the same time, because he fails to be objective, "[h]is truth-telling status is compromised, and we begin the novel with the disconcerting idea that the 'truth' that would undermine cultural appearances is, in its own particular way, a mythology that can offer its own deceptions" (157). Thus Isherwood's approach mirrors the danger of being free of interpretation and "alerts his readers to the problems and limits inherent in that very project itself" (160).

Considering the emerging question of the artist's role during the 1930s when Nazism was rising, reading Isherwood's camera-eye or his camera-like writing as a metaphor for being objective and authentic is a legitimate argument. However, besides reading Isherwood's camera-like writing politically or psychologically, a cinematic reading is also a way to understand his text, if we look into the specific medium of film and given the fact that Isherwood was devoted to the cinema, and it was a crucial part of urban culture. As "a born film fan," Isherwood recalls in his autobiography, he had an "indiscriminate appetite for anything and everything shown on a screen," and his experience of watching films leads us to understand why Isherwood needs a camera-eye to portray the

life of the city (*Lions* 85). Van Druten also acknowledges that Isherwood's camera-eye does not necessarily mean objectivity. The Isherwood character in Van Druten's play criticizes factual and objective writing as "sheer journalism" and tries to find a way to describe Berlin life through "a typical beachcomber of the big city. He comes to Berlin for the week-end, stays on, runs out of money, starts giving English lessons. Now he sits in a rented room waiting for something to happen" (9-10). The Isherwood character is searching for a persona who casually writes his daily life in Berlin as if a camera effortlessly records city life. Whether being objective or not is not his concern; rather, he distances himself from being *just* objective.

In his lectures on writing for film, Isherwood claims that the language of the film is the image. Across several lectures, he compares writing plays and screenplays to emphasize that "[t]he film is primarily for image and for movement" (*Isherwood* 101). On the stage, words are needed to deliver ideas or emotions. Facial expressions and gestures or any other visual effects alone are not enough to contain ideas or motifs. The play, Isherwood notes, "is primarily for speech, for utterance, and for the presentation of character" (*Isherwood* 101). Onscreen, however, the camera captures images and movements, and an excess of words might bore spectators or make the film "ludicrous" (*Isherwood* 107). For Isherwood, it is inefficient to convey meanings with words when images are more appealing and effective in the cinema. He pinpoints later in his lecture: "[t]his is one of the things that you have to learn when you write for the film —

you have to try your best to somehow oppose the words and the image"
(*Isherwood* 107). Using the term "oppose," he demonstrates that the image
should neither be accessory to the words nor simply illustrate what the words say.
The fact that film is essentially a visual art and the camera lens only sees the
"surface" made it an apt medium for Isherwood in writing about Berlin.
Particularly in "Sally Bowles," the episodes resist revealing Sally's state of mind
and describe what the narrator can see or the camera can film. As he mentions,
Isherwood was "endlessly interested in the outward appearance of people" and,
as a novelist who wants to "watch [the] scene taking place visibly before [him], it
is simplest to project it on an imaginary screen" (*Lions* 85, 86). His novelistic
interest in the surface of things and the visual language of the cinema led him to
adopt the camera-eye and to write about Berlin life as if throwing images on the
screen, images which will later "be developed, carefully printed, fixed" to convey
the visual impressions of the city to his readers.

Isherwood adopted the camera-eye not only because it produces images,
but also because it frees him from the burden of contriving a plot. When the
narrator says that he himself is like "a camera" that is "quite passive" and "not
thinking," it means that he mainly illustrates what he sees without tying it to a
story, particularly in the case of "Sally Bowles." In the story, events happen
randomly and do not fit into a narrative that requires causality, but the camera
can contain these contingent events due to its "passive" recordability. Likewise,
the fact that the camera passively records enables the narrator to assume the

camera-eye in order to write senseless happenings superficially without thinking deeply. Instead of devising a story to tell readers about Sally and her life in the city, Isherwood rather "shows" Sally and depicts the visual culture of the city, and the camera-eye liberates him from making a narrative. For Isherwood, a plot is not the best way to represent city life or Sally's life because a conventional plot requires a writer to explain characters' motives or the meaning of events to justify what happens in terms of coherence. However, to represent the visual culture of the city, showing the "scene [as if] taking place visibly before him" is more suitable than contriving a plot (*Lions* 86).

In "Sally Bowles," Isherwood critically intimates that narrative, melodrama in this case, is ill-suited to depict the sensational city life because it cannot fully present Sally's life in the metropolis in 1920s when city life was predominantly visual. Melodrama was, and still is, a popular narrative form among other genres to deliver a story centered on a female protagonist living in a city and her concerns about success, economic potential and stability, marriage, family, and, above all. love. The genre tends to privilege the woman who sacrifices herself for love and chooses the domestic sphere or motherhood. City life is often described as fancy and superficial, lacking moral principles. When Sally and the narrator go to see the film about "a girl who sacrificed her stage career for the sake of a Great Love, Home, and Children," they "laughed so much that we had to leave before the end" (*The Berlin Stories* 248). For Sally and the narrator, it is hilarious that they had to laugh at the film about the girl caught

between stardom and the pleasures of the city and patriarchal domestic morality, which is a dramatic and stereotypical way of depicting the life of a woman in the city. Sally, when actually falling into a similar situation (pregnant and unmarried), comes up with a fake story that "makes everything so much simpler" (*The Berlin Stories* 258). To save herself from being "the poor girl who gets abandoned by her lover," she tells one of the nurses that "we [Sally and the narrator] were most terribly in love but fearfully hard up, so that we couldn't afford to marry, and how we dreamed of the time when we'd both be rich and famous and then we'd have a family of ten, just to make up for this one [Sally's unborn baby]" (*The Berlin Stories* 258-259). Since this repeated pattern of women's fall and redemption hardly illustrates Sally's urban experiences, instead of weaving Sally's life into a melodramatic plot, Isherwood conveys her life through a sequence of episodic and photographic scenes with the camera-eye, including the narrator's first encounter with Sally, her performance at The Lady Windermere, several affairs—not romance—with men who might help her succeed as an actress, and many adventurous days with the narrator.[39] Loosely connected, these episodes neither carry any real romantic plot nor add up to a denouement.

That "Sally Bowles" is "plotless, pointless and leading no where" is what Van Druten noticed when he transformed the novel into the play, and he did not

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[39] It is interesting to note that Lady Windermere is the patron saint of the superficial in Oscar Wilde's comedy *Lady Windermere's Fan, A Play About a Good*

think it was a "fault," as others did (5). Rather, Van Druten was dubious about having a plot, so instead of a plot, he places priority on "characters and mood" in the play. According to Van Druten, "[t]he mood of the play—the establishment for the audience of what it felt like to be living in Berlin in 1930, and the kind of life and people that one met there, then--is its most important quality. That is what the director must aim for" (5). Both Isherwood and Van Druten acknowledged that the mood of the metropolis in the 1930s required that it be written as filmed by a camera. This might be why Isherwood first failed to "transform [his] material into one huge tightly constructed melodramatic novel, in the manner of Balzac" as he notes in the preface (*The Berlin Stories* xiii). He wanted to "devis[e] a plot-structure which would plausibly contain the mob of characters," but "what I actually produced was an absurd jumble of subplots and coincidences which defeated me whenever I tried to straighten it out on paper" (*The Berlin Stories* xiii-xiv). For Isherwood, the camera-eye is the embodiment of his voracious desire to see the face of the city and indulge in urban life, and it offered a way to picture the plotless city in a superficial manner.

III.1.3 Surface Decoration in Modernist Architecture and Design

Surface and depth were contested subjects in the visual arts as they were in literature. In modernist painting, for example, surface and depth were essential criteria that distinguish it from pre-modernist painting. Unlike the

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Woman.

plastic arts, which require the modeling of a medium, that takes

three-dimensional space—height, width and depth—painting is two-dimensional

with no depth or volume. It is an aesthetic practice that uses a flat canvas on

which artists apply different types of painting media. According to Clement

Greenberg, painting bases its aesthetics on the canvas, and the

two-dimensionality of the surface is the singular feature that defines painting.

Greenberg observes that what makes modernist painting different from previous

kinds of paintings lies in modernist artists' keen awareness of the specificity of

their medium. This superficiality is "the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself"

and this uniqueness defines an art form (5). In the case of modernist painting,

the nature of painting lies in the flatness or the surface. However, pre-modernist,

realist painting gives the illusion of three-dimensional space as if it has depth,

and pre-modernist painters consider the flat surface of painting as a "negative

factor that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly" (6). For

Greenberg, depth-like space is not an exclusive factor of painting, so this can be

seen as "dissembl[ing] the medium" (6). "Flatness alone was unique and

exclusive" to modernism, and this is why modernist painting pursued

abstractness instead of representational entities (6).

In this vein, Rosalind Krauss notes that Dutch modernist painter Piet

Mondrian's grids (and the grid in modern art) "function to declare the modernity

of modern art" (50). (see fig. III-2) Because of the rectangular planes and the

intersecting lines, critics have sometimes compared these paintings to the grid of

the modern city. What makes modern art modern is its "[f]lattned, geometricized, ordered" space, which is "antinatural, antimimetic, antireal" (50). Instead of using perspective to show depth, Mondrian marks the surface of painting with few lines. This does not mean that modernist painting rejected any kinds of representation or pursued a complete flatness. But while pre-modernist painting "created an illusion of space into which one could imagine oneself walking, the illusion created by a Modernist is one into which one can only look, can travel through only with the eye" (8). Because modernist painting orients itself to the surface, the viewer is encouraged to see more of the painting itself and its surface than what is represented on the surface. While the viewer "tends to see what is in an Old Master [pre-modernist painting] before seeing it as a picture, one sees a Modernist painting as a picture first" (6).[40]

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[40] Later critics opposed canonical critical theorists such as Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, and Rosalind Krauss, who "share the belief that what defined the avant-garde was the struggle to uncover the essential qualities of art" (Karmel 11). According to Karmel, "[t]he simplicity and clarity of the reductivist model gave it tremendous authority. Furthermore, it privileged abstract art: abstraction was what was left after you eliminated everything else" (11). However, Karmel finds this criticism reductive, and "it turned out this privileged position was actually a prison cell" (11). Karmel proposes "a non-reductive history of abstraction," which "survey[s] the different formal languages used by abstract artists without trying to fit them into the 'Procrustean' bed of a necessary evolution" (13). A non-reductive model also "acknowledge[s] the porous border between abstraction and figuration" and "looks seriously at the subject matters of abstract art" (13). For more discussion of the current thought on abstract art, see David Carrier's "Abstract Painting and its Discontents" in *The Aesthete in the City*.
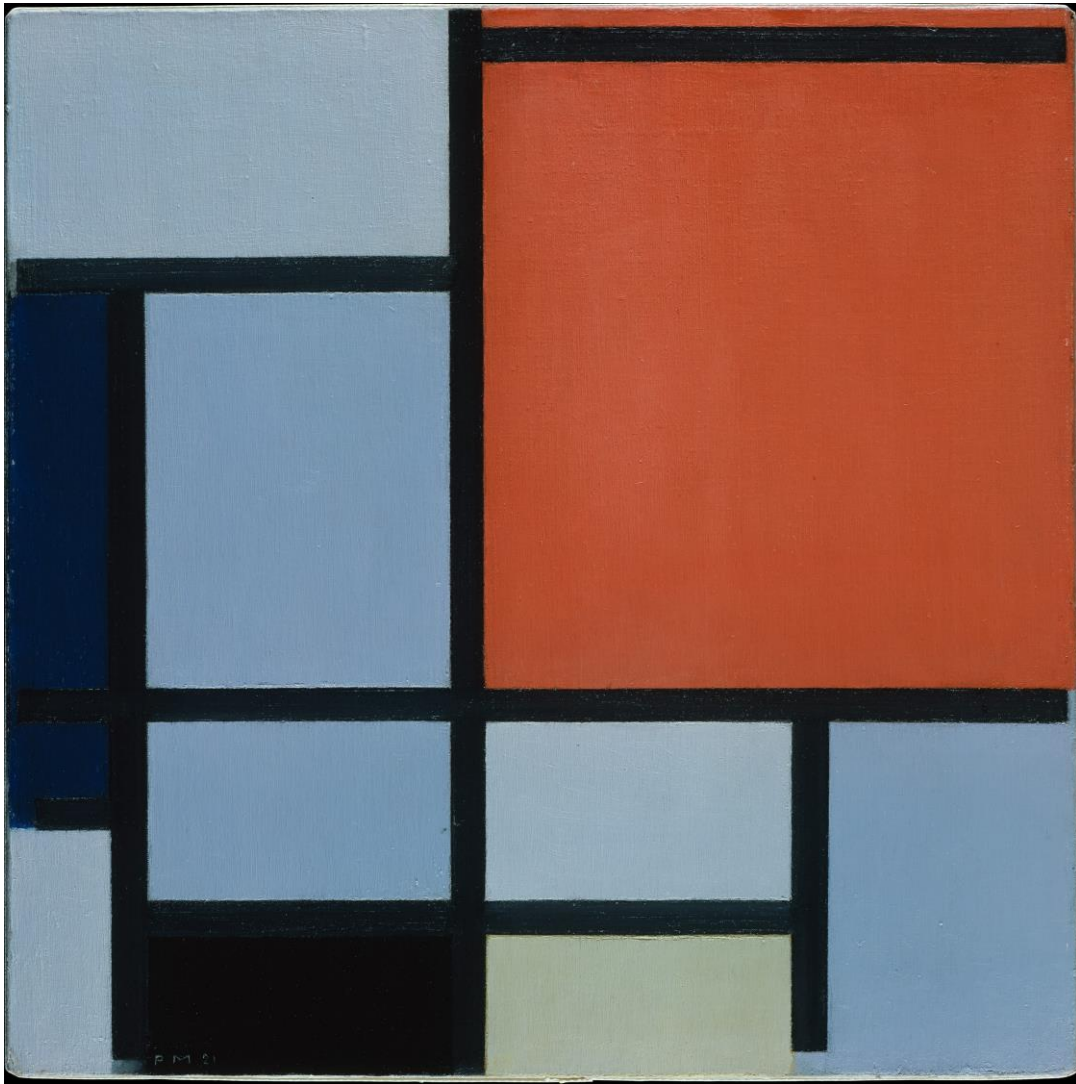
Fig. III-2. Piet Mondrian's *Composition* (1921).

The conception of surface was also visible and controversial in modern design and architecture because such visual arts are directly associated with ornamentation or surface decoration. Debates about the importance of surface in modern design and architecture are worth exploring to establish modernity's "surface culture," which was dominant in visual forms. Among other kinds of

visual arts, design and architecture offer stunning examples of the material reality of the city in which modern city-dwellers were living. First, I turn to modernist architect Adolf Loos, who criticized ornamentation due to its functional uselessness and who preferred clean surfaces for efficiency's sake. To explore a different spectrum of the modern surface, I will examine artistic attempts to create different beautiful surfaces (although they are not necessarily functional), focusing on the Art Deco movement and Machine Art, which originated in the 1920s and were influential in modernist design. Practitioners of Art Deco, unlike Loos, appreciated ornamentation, and Machine Art found industrial products aesthetic. Ultimately, despite their different views on "good" surface, they valued surface and conceived it as the realm of modern art.

Adolf Loos (1870-1933), an influential architect in European modern architecture, criticized the superfluous surface, writing significant essays that renounce flamboyant decoration and promote simple and functional architecture. Loos argues that ornamentation is "added labour," "superfluous," and "the sadism of the eighteenth century" (*Ornament* 186). In his essay "Crime and Ornament," Loos notes that decoration that does not contribute to function is deteriorative and that people who are fond of ornaments are "behind in cultural evolution" (22). "Since ornament is no longer a natural product of our [modern men's] culture," Loos writes, "it is a phenomenon either of backwardness or degeneration, [and] the work of the ornamentor is no longer adequately remunerated" (22). As opposed to the twentieth-century ideal

modern man, Loos calls the ornamentalist a straggler who wastes labour, and is hung up on temporal and ephemeral fashion that is "greeted joyfully and shortly afterwards repudiated" (22). For Loos, "modern" surface has no extra inessential ornamentation. Just as Le Corbusier contrasts the practical and rational modern man with the inefficient and tardy one, Loos also defines the modern as efficiency and privileges the modern man over the straggler.[41] Both architects characterize being modern as rational and productive and disapprove those who do not fit into their definition of being modern.

Designed in 1899, the Cafe Museum can be considered as an exemplary model of Loos's modern architecture. It is distinguished from other contemporary architecture in Vienna in that it does not follow the prevalent fin-de-siècle Vienna Secession style, which was inspired by William Morris and the English Arts and Crafts movement. Disapproving of the Vienna Secession style because of its rich ornamentation on the surface of the building, Loos kept the facade of the Cafe Museum clean from unnecessary ornamentation and "transformed the base of a traditional Viennese corner house in historic style from a heavy natural stone imitation in the kind of Italian renaissance palazzo into a smooth, plain plaster finish, and he built in large, rectangular, transparent window panes with mahogany frames" (Bock 43). Many contemporary architects "harshly criticized and dubbed the site 'Cafe Anarchism' for its overly dry nature"

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[41] For discussion of Le Corbusier's pre-modern man, see Chapter One of this dissertation.

(Coppa 39). Loos, on the other hand, denounces Vienna as a "Potemkin city,"

because its excessively-ornamented buildings merely pretend to be grandiose

Renaissance and Baroque palaces made out of stone while the buildings and

ornaments are actually nothing more than "nailed-on poured cement"

("Potemkin City" 96).

Although Loos stresses effectiveness and practicality, this does not mean

that he abandons aesthetic quality. As Patrizia C. McBride notes, Loos "had

nothing against the idea of pleasing the senses that is customarily associated

with the use of decorative elements" (749). What he opposed was, McBride

writes, "the tendency to decouple the functional from the pleasing by adding

decoration that had no other purpose than to be attractive" (749). For example,

the first impression of the exterior of the Kärntner Bar designed by Loos in 1907,

also known as the American Bar, is far from being plain or undecorated (see fig.

III-3). The facade of the bar looks rather fancy due to a signboard "American

Bar," written in mosaic black glass, and right below the signboard, the glass

mosaic of the American flag is projected and supported by four marble pilasters.

Because of the pattern and the texture of the marble and the distinctive color of

the glowing glass mosaic of the American flag, the facade of the bar appears to be

very splendid and decorative. However, instead of adding extra ornaments to the

facade of the bar, he takes advantage of the material: scintillating glass and

magnificent, grandiose marble.[42] He does full justice to the material he uses

without overusing it or adding extra ornaments. Loos adorned the surface of American Bar by eliminating ornamentation.

Fig. III-3. The facade of Kärntner Bar, also known as American Bar, designed by Adolf Loos.

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42 For more details of the outside and inside of the bar, see Ralf Bock's *Adolf Loos: Works and Projects* and Roberto Schezen's *Adolf Loos: Architecture 1903-1932.*

Loos's idea of ornamented surface in architecture transfers to other cultural fields, particularly fashion, another major field of urban visual culture.[43] Loos argues that as much as unnecessary ornamentation of architecture should be avoided, uncomfortable decoration in clothing that is intended only to attract others should also be removed. For Loos, as a true modern building is "unobtrusive," modern dress, with minimum ornamentation, "draws little attention" ("Architecture" 81). According to Loos, clothing is not a means to express one's taste or subjectivity; it is rather "a mask," a form of surface that frees us from ornamentation and unnecessary labor. Loos even describes decorating oneself as primitive and anti-modern. In modern fashion, beauty relies not on embellishing oneself but on simplifying and eliminating. Although Loos's approach was minimalist, it was focused on surfaces and on making the superficial crucial.

However, during the early twentieth century, urban space overwhelmingly ornamented its surface, and modernist artists relished this surface and its superficiality in various ways. One of the distinctive events that showed artistic interest in the ornamented surface was the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, held in Paris in 1925 (the 1925 Paris Exposition hereafter). It was a major venue in which France could claim its influence on the

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[43] Loos's view of frivolous ornaments in fashion is gendered. He correlates ornamentation to femininity and disclaims overly decorated clothing. He comments on women's excessive ornamentation that "[t]his waste of good material can be justified only by womanly caprice and ambition, for ornament in the service of woman will live

decorative arts. Many designers from various countries participated, and over

sixteen million people visited.[44] However, as Daniel Moore points out, a few

modernist voices criticized Art Deco because "[w]ith ostentatious use of surface

material, high production costs and derivative aesthetic value, such objects and

designs were emptied of the philosophical impulse behind the 1925 Paris show"

(416). Though the products were affordable only for some affluent clients, the

public in general was pleased by seeing them while not necessarily possessing

them, and the 1925 Paris Exposition was intended to popularize the decorative

arts, not to sell them. Arthur Chandler notes that Charles Plumet, a chief

architect of the 1925 Paris Exposition, "was charged with conjuring up a splendid

but temporary fairyland," which captivated the visitors with grand pavilions,

twelve uniquely structured entrances, and of course the decorative artworks

themselves (3).[45] The 1925 Paris Exposition declared that almost any surface

could be decorated and aesthetically appreciated. A twelve-volume documentary

record of the Exhibition, *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs et industriels*

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forever" (*Ornament* 187). In his argument, superficiality, ornamentation, and femininity
are interrelated.

[44] Notable absentees were America and Germany. According to Alastair Duncan,
Germany received an invitation too late, and "American designers could not meet the
entry requirements, stating that '[w]orks admitted to the Exposition must show new
inspiration and real originality'" (20). Although the United States did not participate in
the Exposition, it was a hot issue among artists and critics, and Art Deco was a booming
trend from architecture to furniture, and even cars.

[45] Not all exhibited works at the Exposition can be called Art Deco. According to
Chandler, "Le Corbusier's spare, aggressively antidecorative Pavilion de l'Esprit
Nouveau angered the exhibition's organizers. They hid it behind a 20-foot-high fence"
(3). His pavilion in fact was against Art Deco and embodied "[a] machine for living and

modernes au XXème siècle, includes entries from decorative and industrial arts, architecture, architectural ornamentation and sculpture, furniture, hardware, accessories, textiles, paper products, book designs, toys, scientific and musical instruments to vehicles, fashion, stage design, photography, film, the environment, streets, and gardens. Through its exhaustive inclusion of diverse kinds of fields, the 1925 Paris Exposition showed that any kind of surface could be an equally legitimate space for decoration.

What is noteworthy at the 1925 Paris Exposition is that unlike artworks such as painting or sculpture, practical objects from furniture to vehicles were also displayed and appreciated for their beauty. In the case of the mass-produced everyday objects, whether they were useful was not a concern of visitors, who were impressed not by their usefulness but by their features of physical beauty such as form, color, volume, and texture. At the exposition, how well the commodities please the consumers was as crucial as how well they serve their purpose. In other words, appearance was not a secondary element of products, but a primary criteria that met the consumers' needs. As Jared Goss notes, "potentially utilitarian designs—bowls, plates, vases, even furniture—were in and of themselves purely ornamental, not intended for practical use but rather conceived for their decorative value alone, exploiting the singular beauty of form or material" (n.p.). Unlike Loos's idea of modern surface, which prioritizes functionality and simplicity over ornamentation, ornamented surface outweighs

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not a three-dimensional backdrop for interior decorators" (Chandler 7).

functional surface at the 1925 Paris Exposition. Furthermore, its emphasis on ornamentation at the surface level signifies the importance of aestheticism, which "made no heavy intellectual or moral demands on the visitor" (Chandler 3). It is precisely this superficiality that the 1925 Paris Exhibition promoted.

The International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts later became known as Art Deco, which influenced diverse fields of art, including cinema. The importance of the surface was not limited to the decorative arts but affected the cinema as well. In this context, the revival of the exuberant and grandiose Baroque style in the film industry during the 1920s and the 1930s is noteworthy. The enthusiasm that fueled Art Deco also brought the seventeenth-century's rich Baroque design back to film sets and costumes. As Angela Ndalianis points out, Hollywood epics such as *Intolerance, Queen Kelly* and *The Scarlet Empress* reproduced the grand Baroque style. Hans Dreier, an art director for *The Scarlet Empress* (Dir. Josef von Sternberg, 1934), a regal drama of Catherine the Great, created opulent baroque style sets with excessive details of decoration such as lavish costumes and accessories, gargoyles, lace curtains, and elegant chandeliers. Besides Hollywood epics, the choreography in many Hollywood musical films from the 1920s and the 1930s also echoes Art Deco design and the Baroque style, "in which singers and dancers became part of a grander, baroque design of light and movement on a massive scale" (Calloway 103).[46] The performance imitates geometric patterns made by a platoon of

dancers, who are conceived as elements of a mass rather than as individuals. For example, filmmaker and choreographer Busby Berkeley, with the help of mobile stages and Art Deco sets, directed numerous musical numbers that can be considered as an advanced version of the Tiller Girls, a female dance troupe. "By a Waterfall" in *Footlight Parade* (Dir. Lloyd Bacon, 1933) is an extravaganza water ballet sequence, choreographed by Berkeley (see fig. III-4). One hundred chorus girls swim in an 80-by-40-foot pool, lined with glass walls and floor so that the camera can capture the human architecture from every angle.[47] Female bodies are mechanical components for grand patterns: jumping into the swimming pool at the same time, making a star-shaped figure seen from an overhead shot, sitting on the rotating fountain identically and making a V-shape with their legs all at once. The formations that the chorines make "bear the stamp of an Art Deco aesthetic," as Lucy Fisher notes (138).

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[46] For discussion of Neo-Baroque culture in the twentieth century, see Stephen Calloway's *Baroque Baroque: The Culture of Excess*. Calloway examines the visually excessive, theatrical tendency of the early twentieth century.

[47] Another crucial element that makes the performance spectacular and at the same time superficial is the camera. The spectacle, a visually impressive event or performance, is fundamentally superficial and a camera is able to capture this surface. Unlike the theatrical stage, which can be viewed only from the spectator's seat, Berkeley's performances are presented from almost every possible angle. It was not only dancers who performed, but the camera as well, dancing with them. As Martin Rubin notes, "Berkeley created numbers for the camera, chiefly through the use of elaborate crane shots, striking camera angles, and various editing tricks" (2). "In terms of effects," Rubin remarks, "the numbers create configurations that are feasible only with a movie camera, or in a special effects lab, and that would be either impossible or incomprehensible on a theatrical stage" (39).

Fig. III-4. A shot from the water ballet sequence "By a Waterfall" in *Footlight Parade.*

Examining the Tiller Girls as a case study of urban surface culture in *The Mass Ornament*, Kracauer criticizes the shallowness of the mass ornament, which is a pleasure for urbanites. Kracauer accounts that members of the Tiller Girls are not distinguished as individuals but are instead close to "indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics" (76). Their identical movements deprive the dancers of personality and use them as replaceable components for the formations in which they take part. Unlike the communal group, which bears "a magic force" and "meaning," the members of

the Tiller Girls are a mass that is "reduced into a pure assemblage of lines" (76). Kracauer criticizes its shallow and superficial performances because the mass ornament alienates the dancers, who can "never grasp the stage setting in its totality" (77). This kind of dance troupe, Kracauer continues, "resembles aerial photographs of landscapes and cities in that it does not emerge out of the interior of the given conditions, but rather appears above them" (77). Interestingly, Kracauer identifies the Tiller Girls with the city landscape because of their superficiality, both of which have only form but bear no meaning. As Kracauer criticizes, the performance without a significance seems hollow, but it is pleasurable for the spectator because of its very superficiality, which resists being meaningful and appeals only to the eye. Those musical films containing mass ornaments are less interested in a tightly scripted scenario than in including several spectacular musical numbers, which are loosely connected to a main story and are almost autonomous pieces by themselves. As Martin Rubin argues, Berkeley's musical films can be located in the "Tradition of Spectacle" which creates "feelings of abundance, variety, and wonder. It offers a fundamentally different approach to entertainment from those more modern forms that are oriented predominantly toward unity, continuity, and integration" (4).

Defining modern society as "fundamentally spectaclist," Guy Debord examines the spectacular society, claiming that "the spectacle aims at nothing other than itself" (10). The spectacle does not have an ulterior motive, but "its

means are simultaneously its ends" in the same way that the performance of

Berkeley's choreography does not allude to something else. It is a purely

spectacular scene to be looked at. Although, based on a Marx's view, he criticizes

the spectacular society as the "degradation of being into having" and "having

into appearing," Debord highlights the superficiality of the spectacle which

"covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory" (10).

According to Debord, the capitalist-driven society commodified social life and

deprived people of authentic human relations. For Debord, "[f]ragmented views

of reality regroup themselves into a new unity as a *separate pseudo-world* that

can only be looked at" (7). Society is "materially invaded by the contemplation of

the spectacle" (8). However, is spectacle to be distrusted? Spectacle is something

exciting to see and related to exteriority, directness, extravagance, and pleasure.

In modern urban space, where one's experience and perception are

predominantly visual, spectacle is a means to express. For example, spectacular

sets or scenes such as in Berkeley's musical numbers might not be narratively

informative—distracting the flow of the narrative to show incredible scenes—but

they fulfill the spectators' desire for excitement and thrill and, most of all,

represent a culture of distraction. Particularly in late nineteenth and early

twentieth century, the images recapture the life of the city, not the stories

because urban consumer spaces were saturated with a collection of   images

such as advertising posters and display windows and those images are the

everyday manifestation of the modern city.

Another prominent embodiment of modernity's surface culture is the architecture of the movie palace prevalent in the 1920s and the 1930s, which was influenced by Art Deco. The movie palace was luxuriously built with heavy ornamentation. Screening films, of course, was part of the function of the movie palace, but it moved away from its function, and the architecture itself actively attracted moviegoers' eyes and made them buy tickets. People not only chose a film to watch, they also chose a theater to go to. The movie palace offered a fairy-tale experience of attending an event instead of just going to the movies. It is no exaggeration when Anne Friedberg notes movie exhibitor Marcus Loew's comments that "we sell tickets to theaters, not to movies" (qtd. in Friedberg. *Virtual* 167). Maggie Valentine discusses S. Charles Lee's movie palaces; Lee, one of the prestigious movie theater architects, "frequently referred to the 'psychology of entertainment' to describe the physical attributes and amenities that seduced customers and made them feel a part of the theatrical experience" (9). "The theatrical experience" begins even before the screening when the extravagant facade of the movie palace captures the eye of the passerby and draws him/her inside. As Friedberg writes, it was the era of "theaters of attractions" after "the cinema of attractions" was losing its charm, and this fetishization of the surface is "pure exhibitionism, architectural hyperboles designed for the spectacle of pure visibility" (*Virtual* 167).

While Art Deco embellishes its surface by adding, which usually has no functional role, some objects decorate themselves by removing ornamentation

and making them streamlined, simple, and useful. Ornamentation, which Loos considered as excessive and useless, can be useful and aesthetic. This suggests a different version of "superficiality," which is not always decorative. In contrast to movie palace architecture, the Viennese architect Frederick Kiesler created a simple auditorium for the spectators because decoration frustrates the operation of absorption on the part of the spectators. As Laura M. McGuire notes, for Kiesler, heavily ornamented movie palace designs "encouraged patrons to feel as if they had entered a sumptuous world" but it distracted the spectators from film itself (52). Kiesler, rejecting ornamental interior of the cinema, pursued "a consistent monochrome color scheme that complemented the medium of film and a quiet minimalist decor of planar geometries that would not distract the viewer from the presentation" (68). In 1929 in New York, Kiesler designed the Film Guild Cinema, an art-house film theater of the little cinema movement, to engage the spectators with a film itself, not with the movie theater.[48] As Ann Morey notes, "the ideal little cinema experience was one of pure, even private, engagement with a primarily visual medium" and "the theater's exterior signaled the artistic purity of the new medium" (242). For Kiesler, surface of the movie theater is an influential site, and it should not divert the spectators' attention from a film to the theater, but, instead guide them to concentrate on a film.

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[48] The little cinema movement promoted artistic and experiential films, produced outside Hollywood. It was "a socially significant manifestation of public revolt against mainstream filmmaking" (Morey 236). Renovating the conventional architectural forms of film theaters was one of the projects of the movement. For more

The Machine Art exhibition in 1934 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, another example of modern superficiality, showed that industrial materials can be visually pleasing, so they are not only to be used, but also to be seen. "The beauty of machine art," Alfred H. Barr, Jr. notes in the exhibition catalogue, "is in part the abstract beauty of straight lines and circles made into actual tangible surfaces and solids by means of tools, lathes and rulers and squares" (n.p.). The beauty of machines lies more in their geometrical shapes than in their functions. Thus, the machine as "a propeller, a governor, a rotary saw, a ball bearing are more beautiful as [art] objects when they are still or, better, moving very slowly" (n.p.). Then, what role does function play in designing machines? Barr writes that "[f]or in a great many useful objects function does not dictate form, it merely indicates form in a general way. The role of the artist in machine art is to choose from a variety of possible forms, each of which may be functionally adequate, that one form which is aesthetically most satisfactory. He does not embellish or elaborate, but refines, simplifies and perfects" (n.p.). Sven Wingquist's Self-Aligning Ball Bearing, for example, was made to renovate the previous inefficient ball bearing, which was not smooth enough to reduce friction (see fig III-5). Wingquist's upgraded ball bearing was distributed throughout Europe and America, and was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art. However, the ball bearing was displayed less for its revolutionary efficiency than for its circular, symmetrical shape and its smooth, hard, and shiny chrome-plated steel

dicussion of the little cinema movement, see Ann Morey's "Early Art Cinema in the

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texture. The Machine Art exhibition and the 1925 Paris Exposition both attached cultural significance to the site of the surface, which was considered to be more essential than function and meaning.[49]

Fig. III-5. Sven Wingquist's self-aligning ball bearing. (Copyright 2018, The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY)

U.S. Symon Gould and the Little Cinema Movement of the 1920s."

[49] Another notable group is the Design and Industries Association, founded in 1915 in Britain. Under the principle of "Nothing Need Be Ugly," the group believed that the industrial production could guide and improve public taste.

However, emphasizing aesthetic quality at the surface level is not exclusive to Art Deco or Machine Art. John Ruskin and William Morris, who inspired and led the Arts and Crafts movement from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, before Art Deco was in fashion, claimed that ornamentation is an intrinsic quality in design and architecture. Ruskin considers ornamentation as "the principal part of architecture. That is to say, the highest nobility of a building does not consist in its being well built, but in its being nobly sculptured or painted" (*Lectures* 105). Throughout his lectures, Ruskin emphasizes that good design can change and determine the lives of people, and remarks that ornaments might not be useful, but without them, there is no "entertaining" element (*Lectures* 6).

Ruskin's idea of ornamentation, however, differs from the twentieth century's ornamentation, which is influenced by industrialization. He believed that decoration is a form of work through which the working class can express artistry; this is why Ruskin championed Gothic style because it grants artisans freedom. Also, as "a social utopian," he was "dedicated to improving the lot of the working class through artistic education," in the decorative arts in particular (Dorra 82). William Morris, the main influence on the Arts and Crafts Movement, also stressed that "men will then assuredly be happy in their work [craftsmanship], and their happiness will assuredly bring forth decorative, noble, popular art" (93). Ornamentation is valuable work because it is done by the

hands of artisans, not machines. Morris criticized "how precarious and decayed

the social foundations of art had become during the centuries since the

Renaissance, and especially during the years since the Industrial Revolution," as

Nikolaus Pevsner notes (21-22). For Morris, ornamentation cannot be simply

reduced to luxurious goods or mass produced products because "[i]n Morris's

mind, it is not possible to dissociate art from morality, politics and religion"

(Pevsner 23). Therefore the mechanistic production is by no means a work of art,

according to Ruskin and Morrison. Considering workers' handcraft as

professional and noble work, Ruskin and Morris value manual workers' labor,

but Art Deco and Machine Art prioritize the final product and the consumer.

While pre/anti-industrial ornamentation focuses on the process of producing

ornamentation and the producers themselves, Art Deco and Machine Art instead

highly regard final products and consumers. Of course, from the Marxist point of

view, one cannot deny that industrialization alienated workers from the product

of their labor and raised commodity fetishism. However, ornamentation in the

twentieth century freed decoration from moral obligation, letting it be purely

superficial. It also placed consumers or spectators in a critical position; how the

ornamentation is appreciated by consumers is as significant as how it is

produced by workers.[50]

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[50] Consumers do not have much autonomy in the Marxist dynamics of capitalism. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno claim that the culture industry cultivates the taste and the needs of consumers by entertaining them, and "[c]apitalist production hems them in so tightly, in body and soul, that they unresistingly succumb

III.1.4 The Aesthetic Appeal of the Cityscape

The changes in modernist surface in architecture and design also transformed the topography of the city and shed new light on the urban surface. First of all, the change of look seems most conspicuous from the street level during urbanization and industrialization. Wood and stone surfaces were replaced by glass, steel, and cement, and glass, above all, significantly changed the face and culture of the city. On the city streets, the boundary between internal and external was becoming elusive due to the increasing use of glass. Because of its transparency and glamour, glass attracted consumers and promoted consumerism. From the outside, urbanites could see commodities inside the store. The display window allowed shoppers to see the interior from the outside and to desire commodities without buying or even touching them. As Monika Wagner notes, glass "encloses space [but is] nonetheless space-opening" (60). The streets of the city open up a new spatial conception that "superficializes" things. As Jean Baudrillard writes years later, "glass is the basis

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to whatever is proffered to them. (106)" In Karl Marx's theory, consumers are not a determinate factor within the production process. Capitalists exploit labor to maximize their profit, and consumers (who are also workers) do not take part in deciding how the products will be made and designed. Benjamin revalues the role of consumers (the masses) and commodities (reproducible art works which are also mass-produced commodities) in the age of the mechanical reproduction. Due to technological reproducibility, the work of art lost its aura and authenticity that can only exists in the original work—a painting remains unique while films and photographies can reproduce multiple copies of their own. The absence of aura in reproduced works, however, can be advantageous on the side of the mass or consumers because the absence of a singular authority, the cult value, or the mystification allows the mass their own aesthetic interpretation and an oppotunity to question their own conditions.

of a transparency without transition; we see, but cannot touch" (42). In other words, people can desire what they see, but do not have to possess what they see.

The changed look of the city was also apparent from a bird's eye view. By the early twentieth century, the soaring skyscrapers that changed the skyline of the city offered a newly wide, sweeping view, and such a panoramic view was a favored scene for photographers. Alfred Stieglitz frequently photographed the skyscrapers of Manhattan from his apartment and gallery (see fig. III-6). Berenice Abbott's *New York at Night* (c. 1935), for example, is an iconic photograph of the night city (see fig. III-7). Looking down on the city from the Empire State Building, Abbott filled the photograph with buildings and lights as if trying to capture as much as she can see through her camera lens. For Abbott, the abstraction created by the lights and buildings of the night city is the artistic subject of her photograph.[51] Not only artists but also many urban dwellers were able to enjoy this panoramic view of the city. The Eiffel Tower, for example, was itself a major attraction (especially when lighted at night), drawing visitors to see this giant landmark although the structure initially faced many objections to its "ugliness." It also served as an observation tower, mobilizing people to come to the top and offering a panorama of Paris under their feet. "[T]he gaze was mobilized to a new vantage," to borrow Friedberg's phrase, and the cinema also

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[51] The popularity not only of city photographs but also of postcards of the city view indicates that the cityscape was a source of sheer fascination for people to look at and linger on. People bought city postcards, a portable-size representation of the city, to send them as well as to keep them.

took this new vantage point just to dazzle the spectator (*The Window* 83). Early

silent short films of the city more frankly show their preference in the bird's-eye

view. Wallace McCutcheon's *Panorama from Times Building, New York* (1905),

for example, presenting the city from the top of the Times Building, tilts and

pans the camera to give both a vertical and horizontal view of the city from

elevated places. Throughout the film, the cameraman films the cityscape, taking

advantage of its height. The higher the cameraman goes, the wider view the

spectator gets. Skyscrapers not only changed the skyline of the city but offered

the wider view of the city to urbanites. Cityscape, the city as a scenic surface, was

truly possible due to high-rises.

Fig. III-6. Alfred Stieglitz's photographs of the skyscrapers in Manhattan. From the left, *From My Window at An American Place, North* (1931); *From My Window at the Shelton, North* (1931); *From the Back Window – 291* (1915)

Fig. III-7. Berenice Abbott's *New York at Night*. (Copyright 2018, Berenice Abbott/Commerce Graphics)

The ever-changing surface of the city had been invisible at night in part

due to electricity. The city landscape at night offered a new vista. Electricity

created urban venues such as theme parks and expositions, which were major attractions at the time.   Those entertaining places were frequently visited during the day, but night was when people visited to see dazzling attractions. Additionally, the electric lights illuminated the streets. The theater district of Broadway, nicknamed The Great White Way, was illuminated by electric lights, and people walked down the street not only to see plays but also to see the illuminated advertisement signs and be drenched in the pool of lights. Electric signs, visual stimuli mostly for commercial display, embellished the surface of the city and aggressively drew the eyes of the potential buyers. The spectacle, composed of electric signs, was "a billboard-studded dreamscape where art and life, power, technology, and commerce, blended into a profit-oriented performance," as William Chapman Sharpe writes (34). Moreover, unlike gaslit lamps, electric lights were conveniently lit and unaffected by weather. As David E. Nye notes, "[f]or the first time in history, light was separated from fire. It needed no oxygen. It was not affected by the wind. It could be turned on in many places simultaneously at the turn of a switch" (176). "At the turn of a switch," the city changed its face.

Neon lights in particular altered the face of the city dramatically, although this technology boomed mostly during the 1920s and the 1930s. The cost of making neon signs was low, and it was malleable enough to make any shape of letters and signs. Among its advantages, diversity of colors was a major reason to use neon signs in advertising. Neon signs accentuated not only street

advertisements, but skyscrapers and movie palaces as well. However, because of colorfulness and malleability, neon signs received negative responses from their contemporaries. The fact that they were boosting unrestrained commercialism and chaotic popular culture disturbed a few critics at the time. Indeed, the hollow tubes of the neon sign seemed superficial and shabby, devoid of any substantial meaning. Christoph Ribbat notes that "[n]eon advertising, blown by mouth and shaped by hand, exists in order to attract the attention of the masses. Its writing is intended to be seen and read, its invitation to buy to be acted upon. It is this very simplicity that strikes critics of mass culture as typical of modern commerce" (20). The neon light came "in the Jazz Age of the interwar years as part of what seemed like this era's lack of lasting substance" (36). It might lack "lasting substance," but, due to its low price and glamour, it turned the city into a space where every store regardless of its size had an opportunity to promote their business with various colors and forms. The visual diversity of neon signs gave birth to a "new, possibly liberating, urban culture" and the neon city was "a kind of collective dream available to urban dwellers of all social strata since it combined commercialization and cultural emancipation" (Ribbat 27). The glow and flicker of neon lights attracted not only urbanites but also modernist artists from writers to visual artists. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti writes about using neon signs to renovate the theater in "The Variety Theater" (1913). In his unrealized typo-photo (image-text) film script, "Dynamic of the Metropolis" (1921-2), László Moholy-Nagy attempts to show rhythmically flickering signs

and letters to give an electric spectacle impression of the city.

The flashing lights of electric signs and the displayed commodities under the illuminating lights promote the products and attract potential buyers by alluring them, not by informing them. In other words, it is not persuasion but enchantment. As Nye notes, "[s]ince the object was not to educate but only to excite the passerby, designers tried to make electric signs curious, mesmerizing, and funny" (184). The passerby does not read the meaning of the sign, but absentmindedly stares at the conglomeration of signs as abstract figures of diverse colors and shapes. "[T]he effectiveness of their signs as messages," Nye writes, "was exceedingly short-lived" (196). Or it is not the text or meaning but spectacle that the abundant lighting and excessive decoration created. That is, what the sign says matters less than how it looks. When walking down the street, urbanites do not necessarily recognize each sign, but they are nonetheless overwhelmed by the abundant flickering signs. Nye notes that in this superfluity of lights "no sign was ever seen alone; each was a part of an overwhelming impression produced by the constellation of city lights. [...] Collectively these signifiers lost their individual meanings and became a tourist site, flattening the city into ethereal abstraction" (196). The "flattened" city left only the surface for urbanites to glance over.

This kind of fascination with the luminous surface of the city generates a superficial relationship between the city and its people. They need not ponder over or see beyond the spectacle (if there is something beyond), but instead

browse the streets casually. This is the attitude of the flâneur who "goes on botanizing on the asphalt," as Benjamin characterizes "the leisurely quality" of the flâneur (68). The flâneur, Catherine Nesci writes, "browsed the streets, scanned and read the crowds; he became a recording device of progressively more complex and wider fields of vision" (72). These carefree acts of browsing and scanning the surface of the city are also described as "urban skimming" by Shirley Jordan in her analysis of a mode of city photographs "whose images express a brief, superficial relationship to the city" (149).

III.1.5 The Surface of the Film

To represent the surface of the city, however, artists conceive the film as an adequate medium because of its ability to transform three-dimensional reality into two-dimensional moving images. Mechanically, the cinema is "the immaterial operation of light itself," as Gerald Mast accounts. The projected images on the screen "are produced by light's bouncing off the beaded surface of a screen, a refraction that is not, however, perceived as the images themselves" (268). Despite the refracted image on the flat surface, the spectators are under the illusion that they are seeing three-dimensional images. Film theorists also point out the screen as a crucial architectural element and superficiality as one of the overarching qualities of film. Like the superficial city that (willingly) loses its depth and adorns its surface, the cinema also bases its aesthetics on the surface of the screen.

Rudolf Arnheim offers a technical approach to the flatness of the cinema, comparing the cinema to the other visual arts such as theater and photography. Among the characteristics that make film art, Arnheim points out that the "reduction of depth" is an essential quality (11). While the theater holds "an actual space (the stage) and an actual passage of time," a photograph "lying on the table in front of us" signifies a certain fixed space and a particular moment in time. It is "a pictured space; and that is so much of an abstraction that the picture surface in no way gives us the illusion of actual space" (25). Film, according to Arnheim, is the product of a confluence between the theater and photography. The space in the film that is presented on the screen is not real space, as in the theater, but a flat surface, like a photograph. Despite its flatness, however, "a certain illusion of depth holds the spectator" (26). The surface of the film gives an illusion not only of depth, but also of motion. What the spectator actually sees on the screen is an accumulation of still images, which gives an illusion of motion. As Arnheim points out, our eyes mistake "immobile images shown in sequence" for "motion" (162). The screen is thus the vehicle of an illusion, luring the spectator into its fantasy.

Anne Friedberg, exploring the architectural properties of the screen, calls this illusion "virtual," arguing that "the film screen is a surface, a picture plane caught in a cone of light, dark and empty until projected images are caught on its veneer" (*Virtual* 166). The empty screen is "an architectonic element, opening the materiality of built space to virtual apertures in an 'architecture of

spectatorship" (*Virtual* 150). Friedberg further explains the ways in which watching movies and window-shopping that emerged from the urban visual culture are closely connected: "Window-shopping implies a mode of consumer contemplation; a speculative regard to the mise-en-scène of the display window without the commitment to enter the store or to make a purchase. Cinema spectatorship relies on an equally distanced contemplation: a tableau, framed and inaccessible, not behind glass, but on the screen" (W*indow* 68). Window-shopping and the cinema, both visual in nature, invite a spectator into a certain architecture where one can indulge in watching without touching what is reflected on the flat wide panel.

In his writing on silent films, "Thoughts on an Aesthetic for the Cinema" (1913), György Lukács offers a philosophical perspective on the cinema and remarks that moving images have idiosyncrasies that words cannot imitate. Unlike the performance at the theater, which requires actors on the stage in front of the audience, showing a film to the spectator does not need a stage or actors to perform. Characters in the film or on the screen are "not people, but the movements and actions of people. […] In a word, they are fantasies" or projected images, not live performers. However, according to Lukács, this does not mean that they are not real or "the opposite of living life; it is only a new aspect of it—a life without existence in the present" (3). According to Lukács, the cinema is "a life without a soul, pure surface," because "only the presence [of performers] gives things destiny and weight" (3). Since the cinema is a set of projected

images on the screen that do not require "soul" or "presence" of actors, as the stage of the theater does, it rather earns "the total unhindered movement of the characters; the background, nature, interiors, plants and animals being completely alive, and with a life which is definitely not restricted to the content and confines of ordinary life" (3). Unlike the stage of the theater where things must be physically presented, almost anything can be projected on the screen as long as the camera is able to record.[52]

For Lukács, the cinema is an art of the surface, which means that it "presents mere action, but not its motive or meaning; its characters have movement merely, but no souls" (3). The cinematic language does not convey "words," "meanings," or "destiny" but rather "actions," "gestures," or "events," so the cinema can liberate itself from "cohesive continuity," which adheres to "memory, duty and loyalty to oneself and to the idea of one's own selfhood" (3). In other words, "[m]an has lost his *soul*, but in exchange has gained his *body*" (3). Also, that the cinematic language is more apt to create movement than meaning enables the spectators to simply indulge in what is projected on the screen instead of inducing them to seek meaning or motives behind the movement. Thus, the cinematic language allows the spectator to enjoy a sequence of moving images that are not narratively meaningful. "[A]n

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[52] Although he later mentioned the limitations of visual media and the cinema's implication with capitalism, Lukács initially appreciated the aesthetic quality of the medium. Also, considering that he championed nineteenth century realist fiction because it confronts an objective reality, the mimetic aspect of film might appear

imaginative and poetically striking effect" of the cinema, as Lukács remarks, is that it "made the automobile poetic" (3). The speed of a racing car, or even just an automobile itself, is something to be appreciated to the spectator. The projected images can be aesthetically valuable, regardless of their narrativity or lack thereof, so "everyday activities in streets and markets also gain a powerful humour and a poetry of primitive vigour" through the cinema (3). This reminds us why early silent films simply enjoyed recorded the city and spectators were amused to watch un-narrated scenes of urban sites.

Woolf also contends that the language of the cinema is inherently different from words. However, instead of conveying meaning by way of storytelling, the cinema makes abstract forms onscreen that offer a visual experience that provokes the spectator. In "The Movies and Reality," she distinguishes the cinema and literature as two different languages, arguing that it is "disastrous" to translate the novel into film, or a certain meaning or emotion into an image (88).[53] Taking Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* as an example, Woolf explains that it is futile to translate a literary text into a visual medium: "A kiss is love. A broken cup is jealousy. A grin is happiness. Death is a hearse. None of these things has the least connexion with the novel that Tolstoy wrote, and it is only when we give up trying to connect the pictures with the book that we guess from some accidental scene—like the gardener mowing the lawn—what the

promising to him.

[53] "The Movies and Reality" was originally published as "The Cinema" in *New*

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cinema might do if left to its own devices" (88-89). What Woolf is saying here is that, unlike literature, the cinema has "its picture-making power," which is more effective than a simple statement. The cinematic language, as Woolf notes, is "the secret language which we feel and see, but never speak" and which "can be rendered visible without the help of words" (89).

III.2 Part 2 The Cinematic Representation of the Superficial City

III.2.1 *Asphalt* and the City of Melodrama

The surface culture of the city was intense in the early twentieth century and modernist artists found in film a novel medium to represent and experiment with the superficial quality of the city. City symphony films, an umbrella term for European and American avant-garde films in the 1920s and 1930s whose primary subject matter is the city, recorded modern urban visual culture.[54] By combining diverse scenes of cities in the service of visual spectacle, rather than narrative, filmmakers engage spectators in textual interpretation of the city. Walter Ruttman's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927), a representative example of the city symphony film, consists of five acts depicting a single day in the lives of Berliners without a clear conventional narrative. As Sabine Hake notes, "[b]y organizing documentary footage with the help of avant-garde

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Republic in 1926.

[54] For more explanation, see Chapter One of this dissertation.

techniques and by choreographing images according to the laws of visual spectacle, Ruttmann captured the city's vibrant atmosphere" (127). Cecilia Mouat also writes that he "aimed to explore formal and aesthetic principals using the dynamic city as the main protagonist" (21). His interest in the movements of two-dimensional geometric figures and their representation on the screen were prefigured in his earlier short films. A series of *Lichtspiel* (1921-1925) using animated forms such as lines, circles, triangles or amorphous figures, have no representational images (see fig. III-8). The city is the site in which modernity is embodied, and the film aesthetically portrays modern Berlin as a-collage-in-motion. Considering that *Asphalt* was filmed during this time when the film was eager to capture the city and that it falls into the taxonomic category of the street film, the city scenes, particularly those at the beginning of the film, should not be neglected.

Fig. III-8. Shots of Walter Ruttmann's *Lichtspiel Opus 1*.
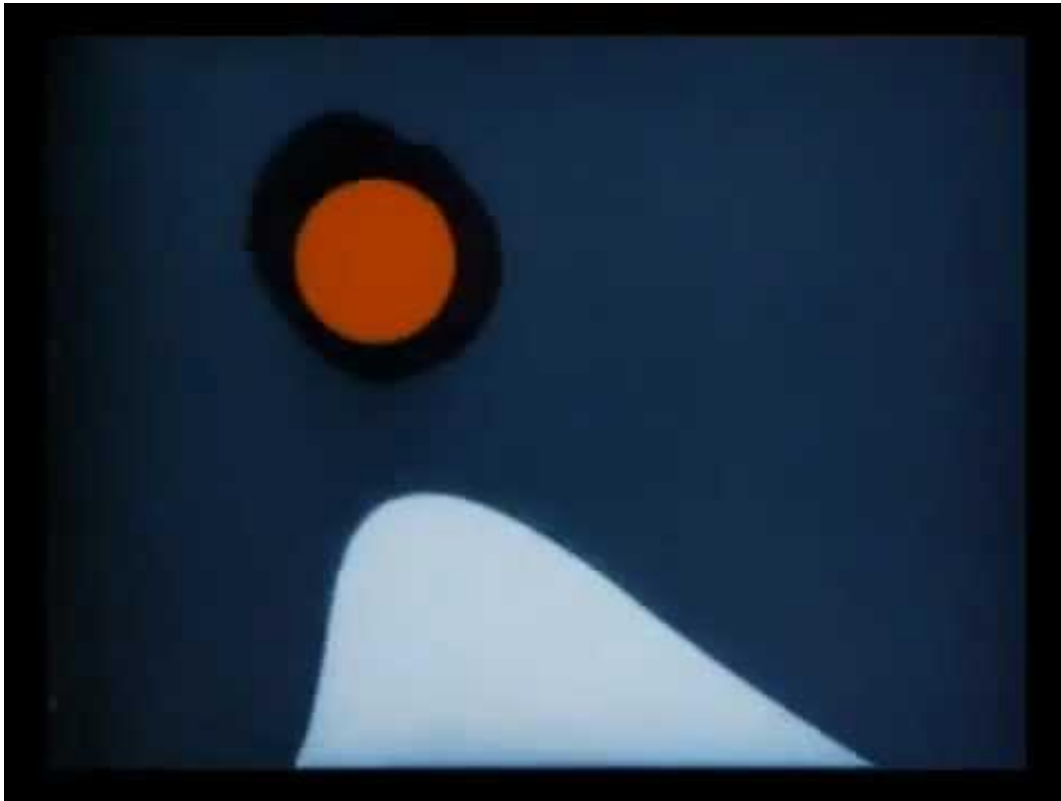
Fig. III-8. Continued

Asphalt is a tragic love story between an upright policeman and a

seductress and thief, who in the end sacrifices herself to save him. Asphalt seems

to teach a moral lesson—surface appearances are no more than illusion, and

morality and virtue below the surface, though invisible, are more precious than

the visible—but the film also draws the spectator's attention to the surface of the

city and superficial things, and suggests that surface value matters. This

melodrama does not simply reward virtue and punish vice. Just to be clear, in

Asphalt, I consider "surface" as consisting in the visual culture of the

city—visible things, often criticized as superficial, including the facades of

buildings, display windows, fancy commodities, luxury goods, ornamentation, fashionable clothes, or women's make-up. "Depth," in contrast, signifies virtue, morality, rationality, or meaning, which are invisible but often perceived as essential. The title of the film, *Asphalt*, a dark viscous substance for paving and covering the surface of the city, truly a surface material, directs spectators' attention to the materiality of the city and the streets, which is an essential part of the urban visual culture. To understand the film within its historical and cultural dynamic, one needs to consider the ways in which a urban visual culture is embodied in *Asphalt*. In this section, I foreground the city and the heroine's urban experiences and answer several questions: what prevents contemporary reviewers from noticing the city in *Asphalt*? What is unique about the filmic (re)presentation of the city in *Asphalt*? What role does the city play in the film? If urban surface can inflect the melodramatic narrative, what kind of alternate reading can it offer?

  Asphalt drew the attention of U. S. media even before it was released in 1930 partly due to Hollywood's increasing interest in Ufa productions, a major German film production company. *Exhibitors Daily Review*, in its exclusive Ufa section, informs the reader about *Asphalt*, mentioning not only director Joe May and well-known producer Eric Pommer but also art directors Robert Helth and Walter Röhrig, cinematographer Gunther Rittau, and even the filming location in Neubabelsburg. However, when it was released in the U. S., the film met with mixed reviews. On the acting, reviewers, on the one hand, tend to evaluate the

expressive acting as exaggerated. On the other hand, some reviewers,

considering the film in the context of the last silent films, praise the acting or at

least see it as natural.[55] What is noteworthy is the criticism of the narrative. The

reviews quite unanimously say that the narrative does not proceed smoothly;

they complain that the film has unnecessary scenes or sub-plots. They tend to

see the narrative as "disjointed" because the street paving scenes and Berlin city

scenes at the beginning of the film have no close connection with the

melodramatic narrative or the love story between the two protagonists. For

example, in the *New York Times*, Mordaunt Hall points out that, at the

beginning of the film, the scenes of street paving and wet asphalt streets are "the

preliminary scenes" before the introductory episodes, and they are not relevant

to the film, making the film "disjointed and slow-paced" (6 May 1930). In his

other review in the *New York Times*, he also comments that "the initial scenes"

that are related to asphalt roadways only appear at the beginning of the film and

"no further thought is given" (11 May 1930).

What is interesting among the reviews, besides the discussion of acting

and the narrative, is their tendency to categorize the film as a melodrama and

their criticism of the title *Asphalt* as confusing. *The Sun,* in its regular movie

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55 In *Los Angeles Times*, Rolf E. Vanloo understands the film in the silent film
context, where "words are not needed to explain a story," whereas Elena Boland
evaluates Gustav Fröhlich as too "immobile and phlegmatic." Robert Hage from *Moving
Picture Show* also acknowledges and appreciates that the film is one of last silent
pictures so he welcomes the film "in the rapid procession of talkers" and he expresses
his "regret that the pantomimic art is passing out with the advent of dialogue." Due to
his understanding of *Asphalt* as a silent film, Hage evaluates the acting as "simple and

column, "At the Movies This Week," says the film is "a moderately entertaining

melodrama." Boland in the *Los Angeles Times* also titles the review of *Asphalt* as

"Melodrama from U.F.A screened" (26 July 1930). Moreover, *Asphalt* adopts

melodrama as the mode for its expressive, sentimental, and sensational

expression, as the theme for the distinctive confrontation between good and evil.

The heroine is condemned for not affirming middle-class values, and the film

attempts to cultivate docile women and promote the ideals of true womanhood.[56]

    But although it flirts with the melodrama, *Asphalt* does not comfortably

fit into it, and one of the reasons for this can be found in its title, as many

contemporary reviewers pointed out. For reviewers, the title, *Asphalt*, does not

match with the melodrama or a love story because many melodrama films tend

to adopt titles from heroines' names such as *Stella Dallas* or have titles that

derived from heroines' characteristics such as *Baby Face*, *Blonde Venus*, or *The*

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natural."

    [56] To understand the moral message in *Asphalt* within the complex deployment
of the melodrama, it is helpful to look briefly at John G. Cawelti's study of social
melodrama in literature. In the late eighteenth century, melodrama is "dependent on a
sense of what is proper, acceptable, and plausible means for insuring the triumph of
virtue in spite of the terrible strength of vice" (34). In the early nineteenth century, the
conventional moral vision of the late eighteenth century associated with social values
produced the plot about "the marriage of the virtuous heroine to the right man—or, in
the tragic version of melodrama, the degradation and death of the fallen heroine" (34).
These stereotypical characters increase in significance as they pass through literary
works, and the characters gradually embody "middle-class values of love, domesticity,
social respectability, masculine dominance, and feminine purity" (35). However, due to
social changes at the end of the nineteenth century, the two dominant values—feminine
purity and respectable middle-class domesticity—were challenged; melodrama reflected
the fin de siècle unrest in characters who acknowledge the tension between tradition
and social change, which modifies their sense of morality, and engenders adaptation to
change. Nevertheless, as Cawelti points out, however considerable the transformation
undergone by social melodrama, it still upheld romantic love and the monogamous,

Red Headed Woman. In Britain, the film was even released not as *Asphalt* but as *Temptation*, a title more suitable and understandable for a melodrama. However, the title "*Asphalt*" directly points to the materiality of the city, which was often confusing to reviewers. Elena Roland sarcastically remarks that the film is not about "the rise and fall of cement" as the title suggests (26 July 1930). Mordaunt Hall also points out that "the film is not concerned with street paving, as one might presume from the title" (6 May 1930), and sees the title as "somewhat misleading" (11 May 1930). Hage, too, questions why the film is called *Asphalt*. It is not surprising that they criticize the title because *Asphalt* is not an appealing title for a melodramatic love story.

The narrative, as reviewers note, is a dramatic love affair set in Berlin and taking place between a thief and a police officer: Else Kramer (Betty Amann), while flirting with the proprietor of a jewelry store, steals a diamond and subsequently is caught by Albert Holk (Gustav Fröhlich), a police officer. Albert, who is infatuated with her and falls victim to her, lets her go free. Although distressed by his dereliction of duty, he visits Else again the next day and, after a few quarrels, asks her to marry him, but she sees herself and him as a thief and a police officer. When they are struggling with the issue, Else's lover, a bank robber who is known only as the Consul (Hans Adalbert Schlettow), pays a surprise visit to her apartment. Finding Else and Albert together, the Consul gets into a fight with Albert and Albert accidentally kills him during the fight. Albert

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heterosexual normative family.

turns himself into the police, but is released after Else testifies what has happened and confesses her crime. The film ends with Else walking down a dark corridor. From the synopsis, it seems that the moral lesson is delivered through the heroine, and the city is the convenient backdrop of a misfortune narrative.

The city in *Asphalt*, however, is not simply a symbolic place that signifies the danger of superficial and material urban culture. Of course, portrayed as a frantic and corrupted place, the flamboyant city in *Asphalt* is a place where women are seduced and corrupted, a place that threatens the values of domesticity, and tests the morality of the heroine. Although serving as a generic space signaling the glamour and disorder of modernity, the city surface disrupts the melodramatic representation of the heroine that emphasizes virtue over appearance. Although the film seems to follow the melodramatic typology and represent Else as a typical melodramatic heroine, what distinguishes Else lies in her relation to the city. The city in *Asphalt* is a rich text for exploring a different mode of urban space which privileges superficiality over morality, surface over depth.[57] Not subsumed into the narrative to serve as a background, it has its

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[57] Though the city is one of the crucial factors that propels the melodrama, not all melodrama films are rich in city scenes; they are paradoxically stingy in presenting the surface of the city despite its significance. For example, Bryan Foy's *Lights of New York* (1928), following the city/country opposition, contrasts urban Broadway and rural Main Street. However, despite the significance of the urban space in the film, the city is presented only through intertitles. The spectators acknowledge that the couple Kitty and Eddie are in Central Park not by virtue of the scenery but because of the intertitle "Central Park." Similarly, the night club on Broadway is more fully described by the intertitle "the Night Hawk--a night club where anything can happen and usually does," than by the fancy facade of the night club. In Josef von Sternberg's melodrama *Blonde Venus* (1932), New York City, where Helen debuts in a cabaret, succeeds as a singer, and

own voice and sometimes is the protagonist in the film. In the following section, I argue that by foregrounding the materiality of the city, *Asphalt* shows the city that liberates the heroine, and a heroine who happily falls and commits wrongs with pleasure.

III.2.2 The Superficial City

Berlin in the 1920s offers us a moment when popular culture and mass consumption promoted surface values, and the city is a site where external appearances dominate in-depth contents. As Janet Ward writes, "only in Weimar Germany did modernity's cult of surface extend uniformly into all visual fields and come to dominate cultural and business production" (10). Ward gives examples of urban spectacle events around the 1920s such as the founding of Osram lighting company, the arrival of the American dancer Josephine Baker in Berlin and the spread of the Charleston dance, the opening of the movie palace Ufa-Palast-am-Zoo, Eugen Schüfftan's trick effect using mirrors and miniature buildings (the technique used in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*), the display window competition "Then and Now" where major department stores participated, and the founding of the first German national window dressers' guild (now the European Visual Marketing Merchandising Association).

Visual culture and modernity in *Asphalt* can be understood in the context of New Objectivity, which focuses on the surface instead of piercing into the

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has a love affair with a millionaire, is rarely presented. Despite its importance, urban

depth inside the surface. For New Objectivists, the surface of the city is where they find the aesthetics of modern urban life, so it is the material that they should depict. It is one of the most prominent movements that arose in Germany throughout the 1920s, only to be eclipsed with the rise of the Nazis in 1933. Although it is hard to generalize about this stylistic tendency of New Objectivity and its attitude toward urban visual culture, the movement actively responded to and was involved in urban culture instead of throwing contempt on the mass-produced and commodified popular culture. In Richard McCormick's succinct definition, New Objectivity is a "materialistic affirmation of the external surfaces of modernity" (8). In the case of *Asphalt*, the delight in recreating the city within the studio could be addressed through attention to surfaces.

Asphalt, most of which was studio-made in Neubabelsberg, accentuates the materiality or the surface of the city. The filmmakers tried their utmost to recreate Berlin's material surface in the studio, and the reconstructed surface referred to recognizable originals, where they built streets, neon signs and display windows, all of which were entirely studio-made. The film was a high-budget production for Ufa, and a great deal of capital was invested in set design. Gunther Rittau, a cinematographer for Fritz Lang's *Metropolis,* was hired; Erich Kettlehut, also an art director on *Metropolis* and *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*, was in charge of production design. The set in *Asphalt* was so visually detailed that the city in the film appears almost identical to Berlin in the late

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geographical features are not always fully presented in melodrama films.

1920s. In fact, the construction in the studio actually copied existing buildings in Berlin, and some displayed wares were from an actual street of local shops. As Ward notes, real brands were advertised in electric signs, display windows were similar to those of Alexandre III Bridge at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Ars Decoratifs in Paris, and a movie palace facade imitated Erich Mendelsohn's Universum. Moreover, real asphalt was laid on the 760-foot-long set, and 2000 lamps in the studio consumed the daily electricity of a medium-sized city. To create a comprehensive view of this artificial city, ten cameras, hung on a moving crane, circled the studio and filmed the architectural facades. A crane allowed horizontal and vertical tracking and also both bird's-eye and eye-level views, high-technology in the late 1920s that later became common. For Kettlehut, it was essential to maximize the cameras' movements to deliver the visual geography of the city. The set design in *Asphalt* is not just a background to the narrative but captures the modernity of urban visual culture.

Not completely included in the narrative, the excess city scenes in *Asphalt*, whether shot in the studio or on location, are scattered throughout the film. For example, the very first scene of the film is the street paving: workers, only recognizable by their hands and legs, are paving hot asphalt (see fig. III-9). Setting the tone for the cinematic city that the spectators are about to encounter in physical form, the sequence of the surfacing of the city roads invites the spectators to attend to the city and its materiality and indeed to focus on surfaces as such. The following scene, composed of actual sites in Berlin, is not seen from

the perspective of the protagonist. Neither Albert nor Else are driving through Berlin streets. They do not yet appear on the screen; it takes almost ten minutes to present a meaningful event, Else's theft. Rather, the camera has a spatial relationship with Berlin that is beyond narrative requirements.

Fig. III-9. A shot of paving hot asphalt at the beginning of *Asphalt*.

As the camera is moving down the street as if it is a flâneur, the city becomes a protagonist which claims its existence and is not consumed by the narrative or the characters. The footage of Berlin streets cannot be synopsized because it does more than offer information about the venue of the narrative. While the camera is watching the facade of Berlin—buildings, advertisements,

crowds, cars, street cars, and display windows—the scenes of the studio-made city are intercut with Berlin scenes. The film deliberately does not distinguish actual Berlin from the studio city since the latter almost reproduces Berlin. To engage urbanites with filmic space, the verisimilitude is essential, as Ward points out, because pedestrians' spatial experience was "phenomenological and still on the (newly asphalt-covered) street" (16). The camera characterizes the experience of moving through the city and the city is only fully realized through the movement of a camera/flâneur who is not a known/named character. Thus, to recreate the city in the film, the filmmakers need to promote the external appearance of the city, and they need the peripatetic camera strolling through the streets.

From the beginning of *Asphalt*, the city is independent from the narrative. It not only exists outside the melodramatic narrative of Albert and Else but also distances the spectators from the narrative. After driving through Berlin streets and strolling in the studio city, it is the night in the lively city, and the camera stops outside a store where crowds are intently watching the display window in which a female model is constantly putting on and taking off the stockings she advertises. Among the crowd, the camera focuses on thieves trying to steal, a woman who is robbed, and a live model in a department store window. Still not a part of the main story, this scene captures urban surface culture full of acts of looking and being looked at. The woman, watching the model in the display window, is the subject of looking, but she becomes the victim and object of the

gaze of the thieves. The thieves are looking at the woman to steal from her, but they are being looked at by the model inside the store. Likewise, the model is looking out on the people in front of the store, but she is a spectacle to be looked at by the people. The camera films various point-of-view shots to show the intense, complicated act of looking of people on the street as well as the danger and allure of the spectacle. Through multiple views and objects of viewing, the film reveals the fascination of urbanites with surface spectacle; in this scene, the spectacle is the live model pulling on her stockings in the display window (see fig. III-10). What draws the spectators' attention is a sexually appealing image of a model in her chemise wearing stockings, not the product itself or its quality, and they indulge in watching this scene over a display window as if watching it on a movie screen, both of which only reflect the external surface. This scene may not facilitate the theme or narrative of this melodrama film, but it does present the ways in which urbanites are implicated in surface culture in everyday city-life.

Fig. III-10. The model is putting on her stoking behind the display window in *Asphalt*.

Fig. III-10. Continued.

When the camera finally arrives at Else stealing a diamond (and this is the place where most reviewers start their synopsis), the spectators are to see the surface of Else—her glamorous appearance, and the ways in which she constructs and performs her femininity. While flirting with the jeweler, who is enchanted by Else, she is trying to steal a diamond. Else's crime scene resonates with the earlier window display scene, and she is identified not only with the woman who falls prey to the thieves but also with the thieves, whose gaze defines the crime scene. To steal a diamond, Else must adopt the thieves' gaze. However,

unlike the male thieves, she is marked and objectified by the male gaze as is the woman at the stocking shop and as are many heroines in melodramatic films. In the jewelry shop, Else is a subject, looking at the jeweler and the diamond, but she is also an object, looked at by him. She is placed in both the position of the thieves and of the woman, the subject and the object. She is aware of the fact that she is being looked at by the jeweler and takes advantage of it. To be successfully "objectified" and be a spectacle, she deliberately constructs a false image, a mask of excessive femininity to allure the jeweler. Through excessive femininity, Else masks herself as an object of the jeweler's gaze, so she can hide the fact that she is a thief. While maneuvering to lift the diamond on the floor with the tip of her umbrella, she displays herself as a flirt or a spectacle with heavy eye-lashes, fashionable attire, and a beguiling smile. In the taxi on the way to the police station after she is caught by Albert, to emotionally move and seduce Albert, Else looks at herself in a hand mirror and fixes her makeup. Her beaded, feathery dress and her heavy makeup are also a part of the gimmick for her masquerade.

By performing a charming shopper, Else enables herself to steal, or she evades arrest by playing the victim who had to steal for her living. She deliberately constructs her look as an attractive object to be seen in the same way she puts on an excessive feminine mask. By mask, I refer to Doane's notion of the masquerade, which a woman can "wear" or "remov[e]" at her convenience (81). The excessive femininity not only reveals that femininity is a socially constructed identity that women can manipulate but also reflects the nature of

mask or surface; it is changeable and inauthentic. *Asphalt* first introduces Else as a thief who competently "produces" her femininity and thus informs the spectator that her feminine dresses, makeup, and gestures are artificial and superficial, not natural or genuine. Instead of condemning her thievery, the film shows her way of being a spectacle and a spectator at the same time. Throughout these early scenes, the film invites the spectator to pay attention more to the surface of the city and of the woman than to a romantic plot or moral lessons—it is wrong to steal or even to crave luxury goods.

Right after avoiding arrest and leaving Albert distressed about his dereliction of his duty, Else finds his police identification card left behind in her room. She plays with it, puts it aside, picks it up again, and displays it on her table, all of which show Else's growing interest in him. However, instead of developing the relationship further, the film halts the narrative for a while with intercut scenes of Paris. Intrigued by Else and Albert's budding relationship and expecting their story, the spectators are forced to stand back from the narrative by the Paris scenes, which the film never visits again. Instead of a romantic story, what the spectators face is a man wearing a suit in a hotel lobby taking his flight ticket of Farman Airlines from Paris to Berlin. Following him outside the hotel, the camera shows the facade of the Hotel de l'Opera and the streets of Paris at night. What is interesting in the Paris scene is that the film shows the "depth" of the city, below its splendiferous urban surface. What we see shortly after the Consul exiting the hotel is him in shabby clothes going underneath the street

where the sign says "Gas of Paris" (Gaz de Paris) right in front of the bank. He

tunnels underground to break into a bank and returns to a hotel as the Consul in

a suit. While he poses on the surface of the city as a respectable General Consul,

under the city he is a thug plotting to break into a bank. Although the bank

robbery sequence set in Paris has nothing to do with what is going on in Berlin,

the main setting of the film, it contrasts the surface and the depth of the city

geographically by showing the vicious acts of robbing in a dark, dusty tunnel

under the lively streets of Paris.

Metaphorically, it betrays the spectator's expectation that underneath the

surface there lies moral depth or even existential significance. It is a critique of

the conventional concept of material surface and immaterial depth in the

discourse of urban visual culture that denounces visual entertainment as

spurious masks or illusion, failing to deliver moral or intellectual depth.

After visiting Paris, the film returns to Berlin where Else and Albert

develop their relationship, leading the narrative toward melodrama, and

objectifies Else as the heroine who can be morally rescued by the (male) police

officer. Revisiting Else's apartment to return her gift of a box of cigars, Albert,

with discomfort, faces her again but finds himself only more enchanted by her.

Albert hesitates to leave her apartment, and Else, grabbing his coat, kisses him, a

feint that shifts attention from the modern city aesthetic to the retrograde

melodrama. Correcting that shift, what follows is neither development nor crisis

but a panoramic view of Berlin. The climatic kiss scene is abruptly intruded on

by a scene of Berlin from an airplane in which the thief from Paris rides. The panoramic view of Berlin cuts into the climax, where the spectators are most absorbed into the romance. When the narrative advances toward the melodrama or the relationship between Else and Albert becomes intense, the city view seen from a plane intrudes into the melodramatic narrative and pauses the development of the relationship. Although informing us of the existence of the Consul and where he is, the cityscape diverts the spectator's attention; the urban surface redirects the spectators' interest to superficial things. Both the scenes of Paris and Berlin jolt the spectators into recognition of the melodramatic narrative as an artificial contrivance, and these joltings are what contemporary reviewers saw as "disjointed." Above all, the intercut city sequences of Paris and Berlin are not merely functioning for the sake of narrative. The camera captures the exteriority of the metropolises, the urban surface, regardless of narrativity.

After the climatic kiss scene is interrupted by the panoramic view of Berlin, Else further distorts the melodramatic representation of virtuous and maternal women. When Else and Albert find that they both are in love, Albert, fingering her necklaces under her arms, proposes that Else be his wife. Startled by his sudden proposal, Else steps back from him and reminds him that they are a thief and a policeman. The proposal is threatening to Else because her identity as a thief will be transformed into that of a mother and a wife. The move from thief to wife signifies a move from urban street to the domestic interior, and this movement is what the melodrama promises to heroines: upward social mobility

from the lower class to the middle-class or higher, from a vamp to a wife in the melodrama. Marriage is a common way for women to attain class position in the melodrama; it will secure her position in the upper class. For Else, a marriage into a middle-class family means rising to a higher position, becoming the respectable wife of the police officer; however, instead of marrying up, Else refuses to be his wife and turns herself in at the police station to confess her theft. Although Else's confession imprisons her, her declaration as a thief can be read as her rejection of middle-class domesticity. Before presenting herself at the police station, she visits Albert's mother at his lodging, where Else sees what she will become if she marries him: mothering Albert in a claustrophobic space. What follows the visit is Else confessing her theft at the police station. This series of scenes implies that Else chooses to be neither a wife nor a mother, but a thief of the city.

Her claim to be a thief disillusions Albert about the virtuous woman Albert attempts to construct out of Else. To imagine her as a middle-class wife, Albert tries to rationalize Else's stealing as an illegal act made inevitable by need. He frames her as a virtuous woman, forced by circumstances to become a thief. Else, however, rejects the idea of upward social mobility and the moral value of the middle-class that Albert offers. Against his expectation, Else, spilling her luxurious goods from her closet on her bed, cries that her stealing is not out of need but desire. If "need" indicates something essential for her survival and "desire" means what gives her joy, Albert is covertly condemning desire as an

improper urge or craving for superficial and petty things. Else's rejection of the clear distinction between desire and need, surface and depth, undermines the underpinnings of middle-class morality such as domesticity, decency, and respectability, all of which Alfred holds on to. His attempt to see what is behind Else's theft thus fails. Her angry confession betrays his endeavor to endow her with middle-class virtues such as straightforwardness and modesty, and these kinds of virtues privilege the inside over the outside, true nature under the appearance, and the depth over the surface. What Else claims here is that her theft is out of desire and her desire is, in fact, her need. Transgressing the boundary between what is just desirable and what is essential, she challenges the idea of distinguishing desire from need and the superficial from the essential thus rejecting middle-class virtue. Her happiness lies not in morality but in the commodity.[58] Else's desire for luxuries (or her need for what is considered to be inessential) is neither vice nor disorder in the Golden Twenties of Berlin, where the surface gives one not only pleasure but also a *raison d'etre*.

Else's rejection of middle-class morality is closely adjacent to (or even equal to) what the surface of the city proclaims: the aestheticization of the facade. Throughout *Asphalt*, the camera captures the city scenes: architecture, electric advertising, and display windows. The city promotes the appearance, the surface

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[58] As Adela Pinch remarks in her reading of kleptomania during the nineteenth century, shoplifting can be interpreted as phenomenon somewhere outside moral disorder and crime because "in a modern, affluent society, the differences between luxury and necessity become blurry" (142).

where urbanites' existential meaning lies. The display window is a symbolic installation that blurs the depth and the surface as I mentioned before. Ward observes that the "shop window opens up the back rooms and allows the contents as it were to spill out onto the pavement" (209). The transparency of the display window blurs the distinction between surface and depth, and this confusion ultimately undermines the idea of depth, that there is something essential over the appearance, and that what lies beneath the appearance matters. The demarcation between the exterior and the interior is not obvious on the street, where the exterior is the interior and vice versa. The logic of the surface culture is what Else is claiming: her desire for luxurious commodities is her need, and how she displays herself is who she is. And her outlook and the surface of the city, pure image devoid of meaning or depth, can be delivered by the screen.

To conclude the second chapter, urbanization at the turn of the century brought physical changes to the city. The modern urban surface itself became a spectacle, and walking along the streets was an entertaining experience. The concept of surface in opposition to depth long predated the twentieth century, but the visual emphasis during urbanization and urbanites' obsession with the city surface require us to reconsider the concept. To understand the surface culture produced by modernity, I bring diverse sources into conversation, from literature and film to architecture and modern design. Though surface, ornamentation and spectacle were criticized for their shallowness and

superficiality, it is precisely the reduction of depth and meaning that defines urban environments, and their absence is both the danger and the pleasure of city life. Most importantly, to represent the novel and "superficial" experience of the metropolis, a new medium was needed. The cinema could visually capture modern urban surface culture, or only what is visible. The superficiality that pervaded cinematic images can represent modern urban experience, one that is increasingly dominated by visual surfaces. In this sense, the city has become a cinematic space and the cinema yielded a new form of aesthetic representation.

CHAPTER IV

THE FRAGMENTED CITY AND CINEMATIC INQUIRY

> How all this [film] is to be attempted, much less achieved, no one
> at the moment can tell us. We get intimations only in the chaos of
> the streets, perhaps, when some momentary assembly of colour,
> sound, movement, suggests that here is a scene waiting a new art to
> be transfixed.
> — Virginia Woolf, "The Movies and Reality"

IV.1 Part. 1 The City in Fragments

IV.1.1 Living in the Fragments of Modernity

In his study of modernist aesthetics, Marshall Berman describes the
anxiety at the turn of the nineteenth century, quoting Karl Marx's famous
remark that "all that is solid melts into air" (15). "To be modern," Berman writes,
"is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy,
growth, transformation" (15). However, the transformation "threatens to destroy
everything we have, everything we know, everything we are" (15). Material,
epistemological, and ontological transformations are intricately related to
processes of modernization such as the revolution of the physical sciences,
industrialization, demographic upheavals, urbanization, the development of
mass communication, and frequent currency fluctuations. Whether promising or
threatening, the transition to the new century "pours us all into a maelstrom of
perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity

and anguish" (15).

As Berman argues, old certainties were shattered at the turn of the nineteenth century. Shellshock in the First World War fragmented selfhood. The philosophy of previous centuries—Enlightenment certitudes and Immanuel Kant's belief in human reason—were called into question. Albert Einstein's theory of relativity questioned Newtonian space and time. Technological advancements such as the gramophone, photography, and x-rays disembodied the human body. Human voices were heard from machines, and bones and organs that should be invisible were printed on a sheet of film. What people used to believe as ultimate, non-contradictory knowledge was shattered. Torn from the traditional view of the wholesome and total world, which is based on moral and spiritual values before the First World War, modern life was fragmented, and modernist artists capitalized on this fragmentation.

The third chapter discusses the fragmentation of modern urban space and the ways in which modernist artists aesthetically treated it. In the first part of the chapter, my focus lies on the affinity between the city and the cinema in terms of fragmentation, but to contextualize the concept at the turn of the century, it is essential to introduce the rapidly changing circumstances due to industrialization and urbanization in the late-nineteenth century and the early-twentieth century, when the certainties of the old world were crumbling. After briefly addressing the cultural context of spatio-temporal fragmentation at the turn of the century, the chapter moves on to examine the disintegrating city

and its intense relationship with visual artists such as Umberto Boccioni, Robert Delaunay, Claude Monet, and George Seurat. I trace the visual arts from painting to photography and film in order to examine the aesthetic responses of modernist artists to fragmentation and to better understand the unique features distinguishing film from other media. Among the artworks I discuss here, I specifically focus on Impressionist paintings, which employed fragmentation as a way to represent urban space. Their paintings offer valuable examples of urbanites' perceptual experiences, and comparing Impressionist paintings with the cinema will help us to better understand the specificity of film to inherently represent the world in fragments. To discuss fragmentation of urban space in the cinema, I look at Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), which visualizes the frantic perceptions of people in the city. Based on the discussion of fragmentation in the first part, the second part of the chapter examines the ways in which John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) employs filmic techniques to represent modern city life between 1896 and 1924. Its panoramic view of a large cast of characters and multiple narratives in New York are portrayed in a cinematic form. Part Two looks closely into the ways in which the fragmented structure of the narrative reveals a polyvalent urban consciousness.

Fragmentation has different meanings, but in a broad sense it can be defined as a tendency to splinter into pieces, losing form, coherence, and totality. It is a key feature and inherent part of modernity, particularly in relation to the modern city. It is almost impossible not to be distracted or shocked in the

modern urban environment. An individual walking on the street bumps into the crowd, is irritated by noises, and is distracted by numerous commodities in display windows. The urban landscape is fragmented and ceaselessly in motion, so one cannot rest in contemplation but is constantly interrupted physically, visually, and aurally. This kind of continuous sensory disruption affects perception. Along with its charge of sensory and psychological fragmentation, the term also has sociocultural implications due to diverse classes, ethnicities, and races in the metropolis. Particularly, linguistic fragmentation is another aspect of complex multilingual urban environments. For example, in *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot reveals his negativity toward London's multi-lingualism, and in Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler*, the sign in the Excelsior Hotel lobby lists ten different languages spoken, both of which show heterogeneous population in the metropolis.

The word "fragmentation" here mainly refers to the fragmentation of the urban sensorium from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, where space is constantly transforming and time is unprecedentedly fast and nonlinear. While addressing negative responses to and effects of fragmentation, I also pay attention to its positive aspects. In seeing fragmentation as destructive force that disintegrates and dehumanizes modern life, some modernist artists yearned for a cohesive self and an organic society. However, such nostalgia can lead to a false unity or homogeneity, which entails a danger of engendering a totalitarian society. As Ihor Junyk argues, fragmentation only seems demeaning

"when viewed through the lens of an ideology that insists on a pristine (and phantasmatic) wholeness" (279).

IV.1.2 Aesthetic Fragmentation

Modern art found a way to represent a world that is no longer whole and complete. The moderns adapted themselves to living in fragmented surroundings, processing multiple events simultaneously, surviving accelerated speed, and staying distracted. They did not just learn to endure a shattered state, but voluntarily fragmented aesthetic structures to reveal that what was believed to be total and holistic is in fact constructed from heterogeneous elements. For example, literary modernists questioned realism's reliance on an omnipresent and objective narrator, and thus presented multiple voices and perspectives to represent the perception of the modern subject in a state of distraction. T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* shows a vision that disintegrated modern life and violates conventional grammar; Virginia Woolf devises a way to show multiple voices simultaneously; James Joyce breaks the traditional novel by combining dissimilar textual forms; and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti visually presents fragmentation by spilling words in different typographies on the page in "After the Marne, Joffre Visited the Front by Car" ("Après la Marne, Joffre visita le front en auto"). Schools of visual art such as Cubism, Futurism and Impressionism fractured the totality of the vista: the Cubists divided the space of canvas; the Futurists saw a new hope in destruction; and the Impressionists

rejected the perspectival way of seeing and revised the traditional use of color and texture. No one single and stable point of view is available to the viewers of the modern painting. Film also offers a visual language that can directly reproduce the chaotic world at the fin de siècle, which I will later discuss in more detail.

Reflecting fragmented modern life, music changed from the previous era that valued harmony, adopting unexpected beats and notes to represent modernity. Stephen Kern notes innovations in modern music such as "syncopation, irregularity, and new percussive textures" that "gave an overall impressions of the hurry and unpredictability of contemporary life" (*The Culture* 123). Specifically, syncopation breaks up steady beats and takes listeners by surprise with unusual beats or accents. Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" (1899), which marked the early style of ragtime, moves "haltingly with delays and unexpected accents, and hurriedly with animated accelerations as if the fingers could not wait for the next beat" (123-124). Still, ragtime has a steady tempo, so listeners can expect a certain pattern. However, jazz allowed for improvisation with no predetermined structure, including free tempo and unfamiliar notes evoking strangeness. As jazz challenged conventions of what music should be, classical music also broke from tradition and rejected harmonic tonality—for example, Igor Stravinsky's cacophony and primitive drive in "The Rite of Spring," Claude Debussy's dissonant harmonies in "Préludes," and the atonality of Arnold Schönberg's "Second String Quartet."

Fragmentation emerges from epistemological doubt about totality and unity. By juxtaposing and accumulating fragments, modernist artists disclose what is concealed under a too-continuous and too-orderly whole, and they attempt to dismantle the old order and break away from conventional thinking. Avant-garde artists favored and aesthetically practiced fragmentation, which was a motif of their art and a new way of understanding modern urban life. However, it is another thing to say that fragmentation is an annihilation of any kind of form or order. Fragmentation is deconstruction, but at the same time is a reconstruction, revealing that something is a construct composed of disparate elements.

IV.1.3 Spatio-Temporal Fragmentation

Aesthetic fragmentation coincided with modernization, which brought a social shift and new understandings of time and space. Due to the development of new means of transportation and communication, the concept of time underwent a critical transformation in the late nineteenth century. Communication technology and modern transportation accelerated the pace of modern life. Contrasting urban and rural life, Simmel also contends that the city demands that people be more keen and conscious because the tempo of the city is rapid and irregular, in contrast to the country where "the rhythm of life and sensory mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, and more evenly" (410). As nineteenth-century physician Max Nordau comments, the moderns

were "obliged to change the comfortable creeping gait of their former existence for the stormy stride of modern life, and their heart and lungs could not bear it" (40). However, for Futurist F. T. Marinetti, who championed the "[a]cceleration of life," modern technology renewed old sensibilities and endowed new physical bodies ("Destruction" 144).

Due to industrialization, railway time, and the mass production of clocks and watches, time was segmented for the sake of accuracy and efficiency. This fragmentation of time by second affected the psyche of people. It was a psychosomatic phenomenon as Kern notes: "Every glance at the watch for these nervous types affects the pulse and puts a strain on the nerves. There were many other alarmists who reacted adversely to the introduction of standard time, but the modern age embraced universal time and punctuality [...]" (*Culture* 15). Modernization brought a greater need to fragment time more precisely than before. As George M. Beard notes, "a wider margin for all appointments" was allowed, and people did not need to carry watches "to be nervous about the loss of a moment" (103).

Pre-modern ideas that identified space with place and linked space and time could no longer explain modern cultures.[59] Anthony Giddens suggests the "emptying of time" and the "emptying of space" as the crucial characteristics of modernity (18).The wide distribution of a clock and watch brought "the

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59 Giddens differentiates place and space. Place can be "conceptualized by means of locale, which refers to the physical settings of social activity as situated

uniformity of time measurement," which homogenized time in diverse places

(18). In modern times, time does not belong to a specific place or region. Also,

while space and place were almost identical in pre-modern societies, "[t]he

advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering

relations between absent others, locationally distant from any given situation of

face-to-face interaction" (18). Modernity severed place or locality from time and

space, and empty dimensions of time and space, according to Giddens, leads to

"disembedding of social systems," or "lifting out of social relations from local

contexts of interactions" (21).

Along with a sociological notion, a scientific concept of space has been

continuously changed. In the Middle Ages, space was regarded in terms of a

hierarchical system from the terrestrial plane to the celestial and the

supercelestial planes, which Michel Foucault calls "the space of emplacement"

(22). Around 1632, medieval cognition of space was contested by Galileo Galilei,

who claimed that the earth orbits around the sun in space, so the position of an

object is moving, not fixed. In the nineteenth century, mathematicians

questioned the fifth postulate (parallel postulate) of Euclid and proved that the

postulate is only true when two lines are drawn on a flat plane (curvature-zero

plane), but the postulate is logically impossible in curved space.[60] This

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geographically" (18).

    [60] Euclid's fifth postulate states that "[i]f two lines intersect a third in such a way that the sum of the inner angles on one side is less than two right angles, then the two lines inevitably must intersect each other on that side if extended far enough"

phenomenal change "shattered," to borrow Henri Lefebvre's word, both
Euclidean and perspectivist space (25).

Most importantly, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity dismantled
axiomatic Euclidean geometry and Newtonian space, suggesting the plurality of
space. Arguing against "the concept of space as something existing objectively
and independent of things," Einstein suggested that space is not rectilinear in
form but is curved, and "there is an infinite number of spaces, which are in
motion with respect to each other" (362). Unlike the absolute space of a
Newtonian universe, where space is homogeneously measured by everyone,
Einstein suggested that our physical reality has multiple spaces that produce
multiple bodies, which are "elastically deformable and alter in volume with
change in temperature" (365). As Foucault characterizes the nineteenth century
as "the epoch of simultaneity," "the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near
and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed," and "of a network," the spatial
relationship of the moderns is multiple and fragmented (22).

Spatial and temporal change altered human perception. Jonathan Crary,
comparing vision before and after the 1890s, writes that vision "was refigured as
dynamic, temporal, and synthetic" ("Unbinding" 44). He further argues that "the
demise of the punctual and anchored classical observer began in the early
nineteenth century, increasingly displaced by the unstable attentive subject" (44).
In this context, Ihor Junyk also observes that "[t]here is no longer the body of

(Baofu 14).

nineteenth-century neoclassical fantasies, single, indivisible, and coherent, but one that is shattered into pieces" (278). Unlike the pre-modern subject, who was able to contemplate, the "unstable attentive subject" is constantly distracted and unable to pay undivided attention to anything. The fragmented perception of the modern subject can be found in reading practices, as Benjamin acknowledged in his study of Baudelaire. Benjamin notes that reading lyric poetry would be difficult for modern readers, who lack "[w]ill power and the ability to concentrate" (*Writer* 170). Newspapers are a modern text reflecting the reader's inability to concentrate. They are, James Donald points out, "a collage of fragmentary stories to be consumed distractedly at home, in the workplace, or on the move in tram or train between them" (*Imagining* 64).

IV.1.4 The Unruly City: Nervousness, Distraction, and Fragmentation

Fragmentation in urban space accompanies the experience of shock or stimulation of the nerves. This shock is the partial product of the crowded metropolis. Walking in the city is as same as "enter[ing] into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy," Baudelaire notes ("The Painter" 9). This collision with the crowd and sensory shocks disintegrate and fragment the self because what one experiences visually, aurally and bodily does not form a coherent whole. The surging urban population during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries put urbanites in an unprecedented condition. The shift of population from countries to cities was not an entirely

new phenomenon, but the growth rate had never been as rapid. Especially, the

top seven cities of London, New York, Paris, Berlin, Chicago, Vienna, and Tokyo

that were most populated in 1900 grew faster than other cities (see Table IV-1).

The high density of the modern city brought chaos. Lewis Mumford argues that

"the growth of a great city is amoeboid," which "continues to grow by breaking

through the edges and accepting its sprawl and shapelessness as an inevitable

by-product of its physical immensity" (234). According to Mumford, the city

expended to the point where "[n]o human eye can take in this metropolitan mass

at a glance" and "[n]o human mind can comprehend more than a fragment of the

complex and minutely specialized activities of its citizens" (234-235).

	New York	London	Paris	Berlin	Chicago
1875	1,900	4,241	2,250	1,045	405
1900	4,242	6,480	3,330	2,424	1,717
1925	7,774	7,742	4,800	4,013	3,564

Table IV-1. Population of major cities at the turn of the century. Population in thousands. (Data from Chandler's *3000 Years of Urban Growth*)

In addition to the population increase, the new face of the city also led the

city to fragmentation. The visual field of the city in particular radically

transformed and redirected human vision. Kracauer describes the city as a place

where "kaleidoscopic sights mingle with unidentified shapes and fragmentary

visual complexes," which disorients the perception (*Theory* 72). As Simmel notes, the visual field of the city requires people to process "the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions" (*Sociology* 410). Traffic, crowds, street signs, advertisements, and window displays were thrust into the field of popular vision.

Advertising is an ideal example of how the visual field was broken into pieces. The urban environment of modern capitalism used the city street as an effective marketing platform. The sidewalk was lined with advertisements, and the buildings were adorned with small and large billboards. To walk along the street was to be continuously distracted by (or invited to look upon) all kinds of advertisements for operas, movies, plays and goods, which enticed pedestrians to give a quick look. The saturation of advertisements did not give a harmonious impression; it was an aggregation with no cohesive relationship among the advertisements, all competing for attention. This is the scene that many street photographs during the early twentieth century captured as visual evidence of the city. Berenice Abbott's *Newsstand, 32nd Street and Third Avenue, Manhattan* (1935), for example, focused on the newsstand, which was a favored subject of early photographers such as Eugène Atget and Brassaï. (see fig. IV-1) The facade of the store appears as a mosaic of numerous newsprints. By browsing the newsstand, passersby acquire hardly any specific news due to the massive amount of information pouring from the cover pages. One's eye wanders

through pieces of products, but it is difficult to give full attention to any one single thing.

Fig. IV-1. Berenice Abbott's *Newsstand, 32nd Street and Third Avenue, Manhattan.* (Copyright 2018, Berenice Abbott/Commerce Graphics)

A reaction set in against the proliferation of outdoor advertising, resulting in efforts to regulate wall advertising. The SCAPA (Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising) was founded in 1893 by Richardson Evans to protect the urban landscape from the visual disfigurement caused by advertising. According to Evans, advertisements draw the pedestrian's attention by "unrelentingly and incessantly" annoying the passerby, and advertisers

unethically reap profits at the expense of one's "nervous shocks" (169). He intended to protect the natural beauty of the landscape against profit-driven advertisements, which shatter the harmonious cityscape. What Londoners need, Evans argues, is "the street of sombre brick in Bloomsbury that is varied and brightened by these kindly creepers," not " the staring painted barrenness of a fashionable thoroughfare in Belgravia" (175).

Such rapid population growth and fragmentary visual information had a psychological influence on people. Some scholars of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century evaluated nervousness as a symptom of the perceptual fragmentation of their contemporaries. Nervousness, although not an entirely new mental condition at the turn of the century, arose as a major symptom in nineteenth-century urban space. George M. Beard in his late nineteenth-century study of nervousness writes that nervousness is not just a matter of being nervous, as it was considered before. According to Beard, what was called nervousness before modernization indicates "irritability of temper, disposition to anger, excitability" (1). Unlike unease or discomfort, nervousness engendered by the urbanization of the twentieth century is "mental irritability," or "nervelessness, a lack of nerveforce" (5). People experience disintegration because of heightened levels of sensory bombardment from multiple sources. In addition to a sudden increase in population and a shattered urban vista, urbanites had to engage in accelerated cerebral work. The development of modern communication and transportation technologies enabled people to

access (or almost force them to process) more information in a short period of time. Due to the rapid circulation of information and increase in the volume of business, market prices fluctuated more frequently, and the economy became unstable. It was impossible to expect one to have a coherent and continuous experience in the city.

Along with the neurologist, urban planners also considered fragmentation undesirable and even dangerous, so a chaotic and de-centered city was forced to undergo renovation mainly for the sake of government control. Commissioned by Emperor Napoléon III, Georges-Eugène Haussmann renovated Paris from 1853 to 1870 to improve the living conditions of the city, where overpopulation caused congestion and ancient sewer systems resulted in epidemics. Enough capital and labor flowed into this project to renovate roads, sewers, and housing. However, to reconstruct the city that realized Napoléon's empire, much had to be destroyed. Calling Haussmann a "demolition artist," Benjamin in *The Arcades Projec*t writes that Haussmann's renovation was to "shore up his [Napoléon's] dictatorship" (12). Haussmann's aim was "to secure the city against civil war" (12), and for military purposes, widened the streets to make barricading impossible and furnished new shorter routes to get to the workers' districts more quickly from the barracks. The large avenues were constructed for cannons to have clear aim and freedom of troops to move freely. Haussmann built a wide straight road over old buildings, twisted streets, and small blocks.

Susan Buck-Morss points out that the new Paris underwent a radical

renovation to realize "imperial centralization" based on "a totalitarian aesthetics" (*Dialectics* 90). Haussmann's vision of Paris was to "give the fragmented city an appearance of coherence," so the debris of the city outside of the ruling power could be removed (89-90). In his study of Paris during the Second Empire, David Harvey also writes that Haussmann thought of urban space as "a totality rather than as a chaos of particular projects" (*Paris* 13). His planning conceives of urban space as "a totality in which different quarters of the city and different functions were brought into relation to each other to form a working whole," and for the sake of unity, Haussmann was compelled to "annex the suburbs where unruly development threatened the rational evolution of a spatial order within the metropolitan region" (*Paris* 106). In terms of order and efficiency, Haussmann's ideal city is similar to that of Le Corbusier, whose urban planning I discussed in the first chapter. To reduce unforeseeable incidents and build a zero-contingent city, Le Corbusier suggested a symmetrical and standardized city plan. However, his vision was authoritarian and almost totalitarian, damaging the intricate social network people constructed and forcing them to live in a monolithic structure. For the vision of the ordered and wholesome city, the unruly fragments were unbearable and thus had to be eliminated.

Comparing Haussmann's idea of the city with that of Guy Debord indicates that Haussmann's holistic map of modern Paris was drawn from a bird's-eye view, crafting an illusion of a unified city under the control of Napoleon III. That the modern city can only be perceived in fragments is

manifested in Debord's *The Naked City*, a collage composed of nineteen sections

cut out from Haussmann's map of Paris with directional arrows linking the

sections (see fig. IV-2). *The Naked City* gives neither any holistic idea of what the

city looks like, nor a proper direction in terms of north-south/east-west axes. It

is even hard to estimate approximate distances between the nineteen sections.

As Thomas McDonough points out, unlike Haussmann's totalizing city map, Guy

Debord "organizes movements metaphorically around psychogeographic hubs"

(64). *The Naked City* offers, in its fragments of the city, the idea that the city is

"only experienced in time by a concrete, situated subject, as a passage from one

'unity of atmosphere' to another, not as the object of a totalized perception" (64).
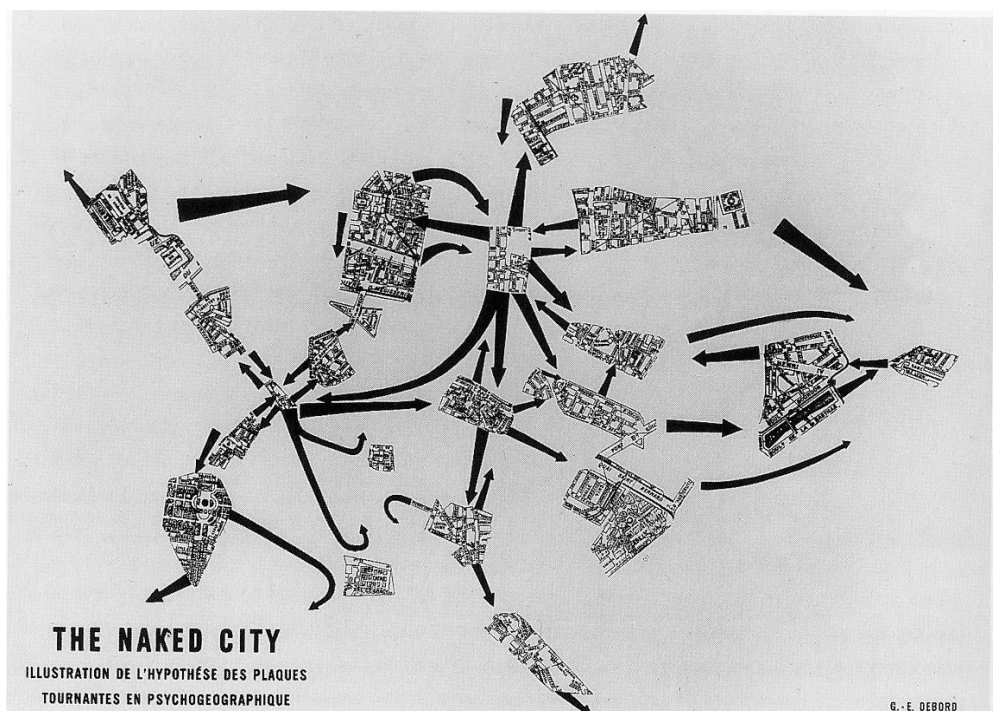

Fig. IV-2. Guy Debord's collage *The Naked City*. The detail on the next page.
(Copyright 2018, François Lauginie)
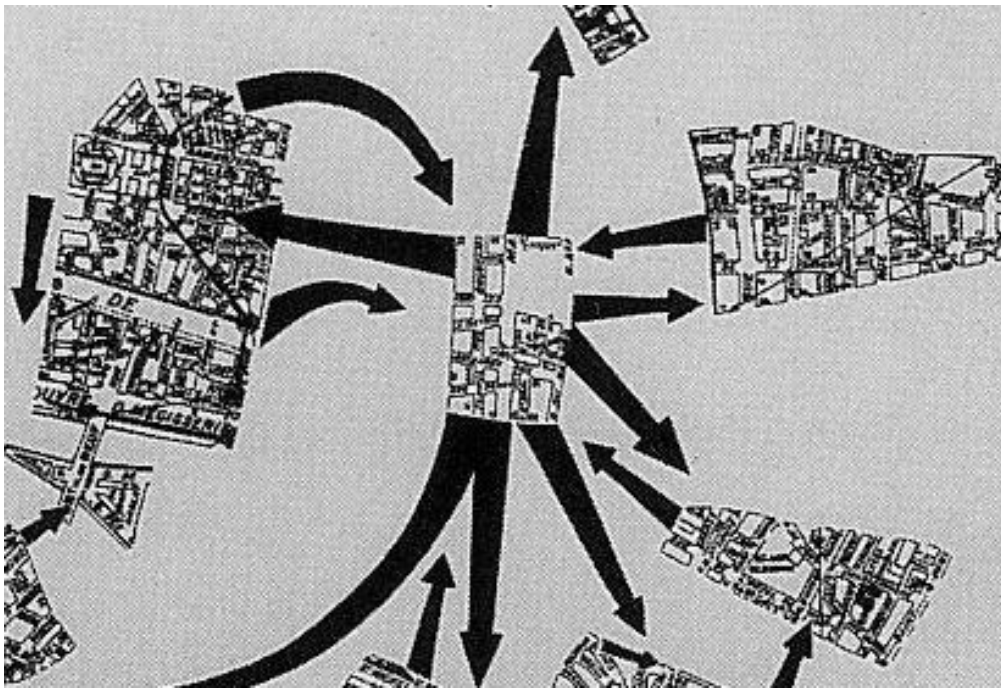
Fig. IV-2. Continued.

Fragmentation has been seen as an undesirable phenomenon, and to some degree it is as Beard and Haussmann contend. However, as Buck-Morss and Harvey point out, Haussmann's urban renewal plan conceived poor residents and their attic spaces as useless, which must be cleared out. One should be careful not to treat fragmentation only as a detrimental condition because it allows people to enjoy diversity in discord, which is a liberating experience in the city, as Debord's *The Naked City* shows. In terms of social order and industrial efficiency, fragmentation is an unhealthy condition. However, in the capitalist city, people willingly distract themselves with a fragmented visual field. Fragmentation is a new environment, and people learn

to live in a distracted state. For example, when glittering commodities surround them, they simply cannot fix their eyes on any one thing, but instead wander through commodities, entertainments, and stimulation. They gladly indulge in stimuli. In the world of the commodity, the modern urbanite "felt at home amid a fragmented multiplicity of objects and styles in both aesthetic and the commercial spheres, which increasingly overlapped" (Jelavich 100).

It is important to acknowledge that fragmentation is a socially constructed notion. To examine the ways in which it is constructed, briefly examining the idea of distraction in relation to fragmentation is useful, since the division of attention is a direct result of the fragmentation of modern experience. In his study of Benjamin's modern urbanity, Graeme Gilloch sheds new light on distraction in the era of fragmentation because contemplation is "simply obsolete, inappropriate to the temporal-spatial compressions and collisions of modern metropolitan existence" ("Urban Optics" 124). Instead of clinging to a "nostalgic longing for the lost leisure of contemplation," we need to understand "the development of forms of distraction which precisely correspond to and correlate with the attenuation and alienation of everyday urban life" (125). In "Unbinding Vision," a study of the continual crisis of attentiveness in modern visual culture, Crary notes that attention is not one's natural status. It is not "a neutral timeless activity like breathing or sleeping but rather of the emergence of a specific model of behavior with a historical structure that was articulated in terms of socially determined norms" (24). During the late nineteenth century,

psychologists considered "psychic normal" as "the ability to synthetically bind perceptions into a functional whole, warding off the threat of dissociation" (23). However, the inability to attend "was often labeled as a regressive or pathological disintegration of perception was in fact evidence of a fundamental shift in the relation of the subject to a visual field" (23).

The capitalist city constructed fragmented perception as a common or even "normal" state of mind. Crary contends that "part of the cultural logic of capitalism demands that we accept as natural switching our attention rapidly from one thing to another [...] and it imposes a regime of reciprocal attentiveness and distribution" ("Dr. Mabuse" 265). Where sensory fragmentation prevailed, attention and distraction were not always clearly distinguished. Since attention "always contained within itself the conditions for its own disintegration," it can be at one time perceived as "socially useful", while at other times as "dangerously absorbed or diverted" ("Unbinding Vision" 26). "Attention," Crary argues, "seemed to be about perceptual fixity and the apprehension of presence, but was instead about a duration and flux within which objects and sensation had a mutating provisional existence" (27). A perceiver of the modern city, then, manages to be distracted within a fragmented and chaotic visual field.

IV.1.5 Drawing Fragmentation: Dabs and Dots of City Painting

A fractured city provoked an unprecedented sense of perception that

demanded a new aesthetic practice to represent modernity through the lens of fragmentation, juxtaposition, and disjunction—a modern urban sensorium. The painters broke Alberti's rules of linear perspective and the vanishing point, which helped painters represent three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional canvas. In his influential art theory book *On Painting* (*Della pittura*, 1435), Leon Battista Alberti describes a theoretical formulation of a more artificial perspective. Alberti's formula was to create the illusion of depth on a canvas, assuming that the painter and the object are fixed in one position and not moving, which is impossible in urban space. Instead, to cope with feelings of fragmentedness, avant-garde artists lived "with" fragments of the city. As James Donald notes, to represent "the overlapping discontinuity of the metropolitan glance in a single image," artists created incoherent and directionless urban space (74). In this section, focusing on avant-garde movements in painting such as Cubism, Futurism, and Impressionism, I will examine aesthetic representations of urban fragmentation. The Futurists celebrated the destructive force of modernity and deliberately broke the wholeness of formality; the Cubists contested logical space by adopting multiple perspectives and deconstructing spatial continuity; taking their canvas out of the studio, the Impressionists attempted to convey urban experience with dots and brushstrokes.

The Futurists promoted a new way of representing the fragmented modern city. In "The Subject in Futurist Painting," Ardengo Soffici contradicts "the painting of old masters, which is founded on the study of human and animal

forms and to some degree on landscape," because it does not answer to "the demands of modernity" (170). To draw the city with "an airplane, a train, any machine, a café-concert," not "a group of nude bathers, a pair of plow-oxen," painters need a "new interpretation of the fusion of lines and the complementarity of colors and light" (170). Soffici, comparing urban scenes to those of the country, explains that urban modernity modified our "sensibilities" and "means of expression," so painters need to respond to what was "more vibrant, more fragmentary, more shocking, more chaotic, and more nervous in these new subjects, something which the calm lines, harmonious colors, and balanced chiaroscuro suggested by older subjects could never render" (170).

Italian Futurist artist Umberto Boccioni's painting *The Street Enters the House* (1911) offers a frantic vision of the city, depicting what the woman at the center of the frame experiences when she looks out from the balcony (see fig. IV-3). As the title of the painting suggests, the viewer feels as if the whole street in front of the woman is rushing toward her and the viewer. If Boccioni was to follow the conventional rules of realism or naturalism, what the viewers were supposed to see is a much narrower and limited part of the street. However, the painting shows an almost panoramic view of the street, as if the camera is panning. To represent the dynamic movement of the wide-street view on the canvas, space is depicted as if it is crumpled and fragmented. Boccioni notes that by not "limit[ing] the scene to what the frame of the window renders visible," the painting delivers "the sum total of visual sensations which the person on the

balcony has experienced" (251). The sensory vision can happen through "the dislocation and dismemberment of objects, the scattering and fusion of details, freed from accepted logic, and independent from one another" (251). The dynamic urban movement the woman encounters can only be represented through fragmented pieces of the street.

Fig. IV-3. Umberto Boccioni's *The Street Enters the House*.

While Boccioni's painting centers on a woman, Robert DeLaunay's *Eiffel Tower* series, painted between 1909 and 1928, de-center or multiply a perspective. The paintings before 1912 particularly are distinct from later works in that the earlier paintings are shaped by deformed lines and spaces, while the later ones use contrasting colors to depict the Eiffel Tower. *Champs de Mars: The Red Tower*, one of DeLaunay's *Eiffel Tower* series, represents multiple vantage points. Painted between 1911 and 1923, it captured a symbolic architecture of Paris from multiple perspectives (see fig. IV-4).[61] Drawing the *Champs de Mars*, on which the Eiffel Tower stands, Delaunay located himself at Champs de Mars Park and looked at the Tower from a distance, distorting the shape of the Tower so that the viewer can see it not only from the top but also from the bottom at the same time. According to James C. Harris, Delaunay "adopted 10 points of view, 15 perspectives; depicting it from above as a bird flies by it, from below, and from a window looking out on it" (930). No one point of view is privileged.

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[61] As Matthew Drutt points out, Delaunay tended to leave the works unfinished and return to them later, so it is difficult to line up his works chronologically. In case of *Champ de Mars: The Red Tower*, although determining an accurate date is impossible, it is generally agreed that the painting was exhibited in 1912 not finished and published in the Bulletin de l'Effort in 1923 as it is now. For more discussion, see Drutt's "Simultaneous Expressions: Robert Delaunay Early Series," p.33.

Fig. IV-4. Robert Delaunay's *Champs de Mars: The Red Tower*.

      Also, the buildings surrounding the Eiffel Tower are fractured, as if they

are drawn into the Tower. This dismantles the boundary between the main

subject and the background, indicating the impossibility of paying attention to only one object. One cannot single out only one object in the city and remove the rest from one's visual field. Buildings, streets, vehicles, and streetlights are interrelated, and one's movement affects the surroundings. By reassembling fragments, the Cubists represent urban space in fusion. *Champs de Mars: The Red Tower* reveals the constantly shifting perspectives of Parisians who cannot stand still in one spot and contemplate the landmark of the city. Since no one fixed position is offered to the viewer, the static position of the Tower loses its solidity. By deliberately making things discontinuous and unrecognizable, the painting implies that the city is not a solid or holistic space, and this shattered space manifests the ways in which urbanites perceive things to be in collision. Fragmentation is disorienting urban experience, but that experience is also enthralling, as Robert Harbison notes. For urbanites, it is "thrilling to see ordinary objects made so convincingly problematic, to have an unacknowledged and bared guessed complexity in the makeup of the physical world brought out with a force impossible to ignore" (153).

Offering multiple perspectives is also a characteristic of the Impressionists.[62] However, their most distinguishable feature is that, unlike

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[62] As Boccioni and Delaunay incorporated multiple points of view, so did the Impressionists. Paul Cézanne, for example, shows disparate spaces by incorporating several perspectives of the object. In *Portrait of Gustave Geffroy* (1895), the viewer encounters two different perspectives: one shows the frontal view of the subject, Gustave Geffroy, and the other is seen from above, showing the books on the table. Instead of presenting the subject from one vantage point and giving a sense of stability to the scene, Cézanne breaks up the space and combins the fragments. For more works

Futurism and Cubism, which radically deform urban space, the Impressionists adopt an impasto technique. Instead of concealing brushwork by using solid, even strokes, they make spots and dabs to materialize a fragmented reality on the canvas. The Impressionists instill a feeling of confusion through "the quivering, trembling dots and the hasty, loose and abrupt strokes of the brush" and through "rapid rough sketching," as Arnold Hauser notes (111). The unsteady effect of this technique realizes the "opaque" and "complex" relationship between the individual and the world (113). It is the world, Hauser writes, where "[e]verything stable and coherent is dissolved into metamorphoses and assumes the character of the unfinished and fragmentary" (159). The Impressionists took the canvas outside of the studio and found that to capture objects in flux required new techniques. It is no wonder that Camille Lemonnier, a Belgian writer and critic, comments on the paintings of Impressionism that "[n]one of them appears to possess the sense of the picture. They make fragments" (qtd. in Clark, *Painting* 259).

We see an example of fragmentation in *The Rue Montorgueil in Paris* (1878) by Claude Monet, who uses rough, short brushstrokes to convey the vibrant urban landscape of people marching and waving flags in the street (see fig. IV-5). Distinctive contours, colors, and textures are dissolved into unrecognizable fragments. Instead of giving the illusion of wholeness that bears clear forms and colors, Impressionism gives, to borrow Hauser's phrase, "the

with multiple viewpoints, see Cézanne's *Still Life with Apples and Oranges* and *Still Life*

bricks of which experience is composed" (112). Through these "bricks," the

painting might lose distinct form but instead gain "energy and sensual charm"

(113). Monet's fragmentariness builds "sensual charm," which embodies a partial,

transient, immediate, and incomplete scene that is constantly changing and

refuses wholeness and completeness.

Fig. IV-5. Claude Monet's *The Rue Montorgueil in Paris*. (Copyright 2018, RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski)

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with Basket of Apples, 1890-1894.

Fragments occur as dots; they are smaller fragments than the dabs and may be the smallest fragment that the brush can create. The paintings of Georges Seurat, composed of dots or points, give a different impression when they are seen from a distance. It is only with distance that the viewer can gain perspective and see a painting as a whole picture, but when the painting is seen up close, one finds only numerous colorful dots. What the eye sees as a total image is, in fact, a constellation of multiple dots, a technique that came to be known as pointillism. It creates the effect of diffusion or haze when the viewer distances himself from the painting. This mechanism incarnates the fractured sensibility of urbanites. Seurat's *Study for a Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884), for example, is a painting of leisurely Parisians on the banks of the Seine (see fig. IV-6). When seen from a distance, the painting seems to be creating a peaceful scene, but when getting closer to the painting, the viewer soon realizes that this vista of peaceful unity consists of little atoms of contrasting colors as if from the sidewalk, the urban scene appears to be thronged with swarming crowds, clamoring vehicles, and flickering billboards, while from the distant, bird's-eye view, the visual noise of the city is blurred.

Fig. IV-6. Georges Seurat's *Study for A Sunday on La Grande Jatte.*

IV.1.6 De/Re-construction of Film: Urban Perception and the Camera

Abandoning the objective representation of exterior reality, paintings represent modern urban perception with unprecedented techniques. By developing new cinematography and editing techniques, film also represented how people perceive in the city. However, due to the medium specificity of film, film seems to be the language that is most closely associated with the fragmented urban consciousness. When writing that "[o]nly film commands optical approaches to the essence of the city," Benjamin is addressing an ontological cinematic property that disassembles and reassembles fragments of the urban

scene (*One-Way* 298). Benjamin compares the painter to a magician who keeps his distance from the object and produces the auratic image and the filmmaker to a surgeon who "penetrates deeply into" reality and disassembles it. The work that the painter creates is "a total image," while that of the filmmaker is "piecemeal" (*The Work of Art* 35). The technological process of filmmaking enables the filmmaker to break the total image into fragments and reassemble them. Unlike the viewer of the painting, the film spectator cannot settle his eyes on the screen because the images are constantly changing, and one has to process numerous movements. The spectator is in "permanent motion as his eye identifies itself with the lens of the camera, which permanently shifts in distance and direction" (Panofsky 19). Focusing on the technical features of film, this section addresses the ways in which the cinema visualizes the fragmentation of the city.

The camera inherently represents the object in fragments. As Moholy-Nagy notes, one of the camera's possibilities is that it can fix the moment. There is "no manual means of representation (pencil, brush, etc.) [that] is capable of arresting fragments of the world" (*Painting* 7). Many engineers and photographers use the camera to capture the very instant moment of motion, and it was impossible to break down continuous movements into fragments by drawing rapidly. In 1878, Eadweard Muybridge, an English photographer, to answer the question of whether a horse lifts all four legs off the ground when it gallops, set twelve cameras along a track to photograph a galloping horse. Twelve

photos were taken while the horse tripped wires, which were connected to the

shutters of the cameras (see fig. IV-7). Besides discovering that the horse is

completely airborne while running, Muybridge proved the potential of the

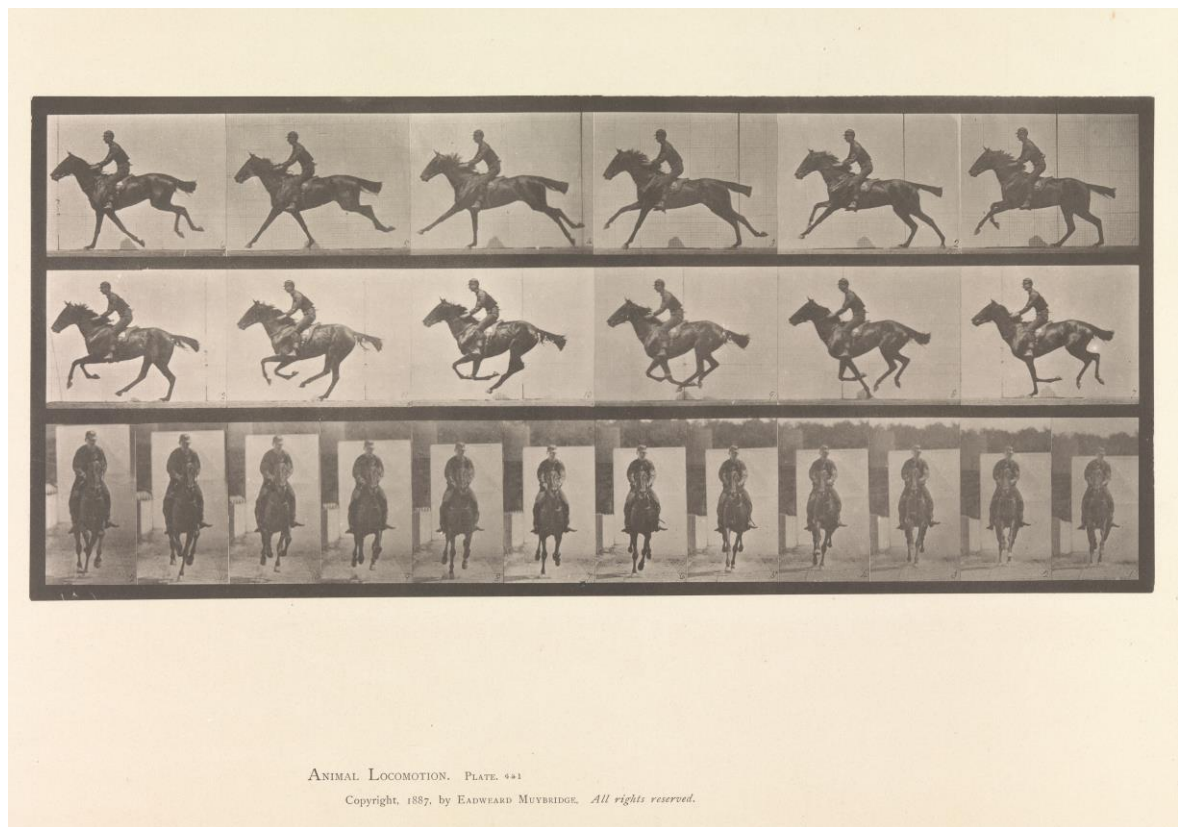camera in motion studies to detect a fraction of a successive movement.

Fig. IV-7. Eadweard Muybridge's *Animal Locomotion.*

In 1882, Étienne-Jules Marey, a French physiologist, invented

chronophotography, a technique that captures sequential frames of movement in

the same interval of time in a single image (see fig. IV-8). Unlike Muybridge's

separate negatives, Marey's chronophotographic gun was capable of taking

twelve consecutive frames per second on a single plate. While Marey captured a series of instants of movement, Anton Giulio Bragaglia, an Italian Futurist, employed a technique that leaves the shutter open and exposes moving objects long enough to record almost blurry traces of movement (see fig. IV-9). Through photodynamism, which aims to seize energetic movements, Bragaglia wanted more than Marey's chronophotography, which "shatters the action" and "captures only a few [moments], just enough to describe and to teach students [of gymnastics] the principal stages of a jump" (370). For Bragaglia, Marey's chronophotography only shatters movement, and with several "rigid snapshots one cannot obtain even the reconstruction of a movement" (370).

Fig. IV-8. Étienne-Jules Marey's *Movements in Pole Vaulting*.

Fig. IV-9. Anton Giulio Bragaglia's *The Bow*. (Copyright 2018, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York)

Although, all three photographers wanted to arrest the fragments of movement and they acknowledged the camera's essential ability to capture those fragments, Marey's experiment is interesting in terms of the fragment's relation to cinema. As Mary Ann Doane writes, Marey "desire[d] smaller and smaller units of a continuum" (60). His study centered on fragmenting time and recording those fragmented moments. Doane sees Marey's desire as the "dilemma of discontinuity and continuity," or of "chronophotography (which, though more detailed and precise, is haunted by gaps and discontinuities)" and "graphic inscription (which provides a continuous record of time)" (9). Marey's concern was in between Muybridge, whose figures were in separate still images, and Bragaglia, who left his shutter open to record the fluid trajectory of motion. If Marey attempted to record more images per second, the photographed movement was illegible as Bragaglia's blurry movement. On the other hand, if Marey tried to record less frames per second to make movement legible, it was impossible to examine how the object moved from one to the next as Muybridege's photographs; in Doane's words, "[t]oo much time was lost" (60). The cinema inherited part of Marey's desire to record the fragments of movement without loss and still make the movement legible. The spectators might take moving images for granted in the cinema; however, what they are watching is more or less twenty four frames per second. Anticipating the emergence of the cinema, Marey's chronophotography reveals "cinematic vision [which] conceals an intense epistemological work of fragmentation," as Doane

writes (210).

In addition to its research purposes, the fragmentedness of photography is also crucial to modernist aesthetic practice. Photomontage, a visual art based on cropping and reassembling photographs, is an artistic practice of the camera. It disassembles what was once complete and whole and juxtaposes disparate photographs taken in different places and times into single works. This optical fragmentation is in tune with modern urban perception and reflects the ways in which people cope with distraction. Russian visual artist El Lissitzky's *Runner in the City* (1926), for example, is a combination of multiple images including the runner, the hurdle, and Times Square (see fig. IV-10). Combining the images into a single print, then slicing the print into strips and recomposing the strips, Lissitzky "produce[s] an immensely kinetic ode to the dynamism of the modern metropolis" (Kinik 137). By excerpting two themes—the runner jumping over a hurdle and a night view of the city—from different sources and putting them together in a single print, Lissitzky dismantles objective reality and reassembles a dynamic city where the runner and the city are interrupting each other and creating velocity. This work of photomontage effectively transforms the city into a sports arena, and the city in fragments is reconstructed as a suspenseful place through the juxtaposed strips.

Fig. IV-10. El Lissitzky's *Runner in the City*.
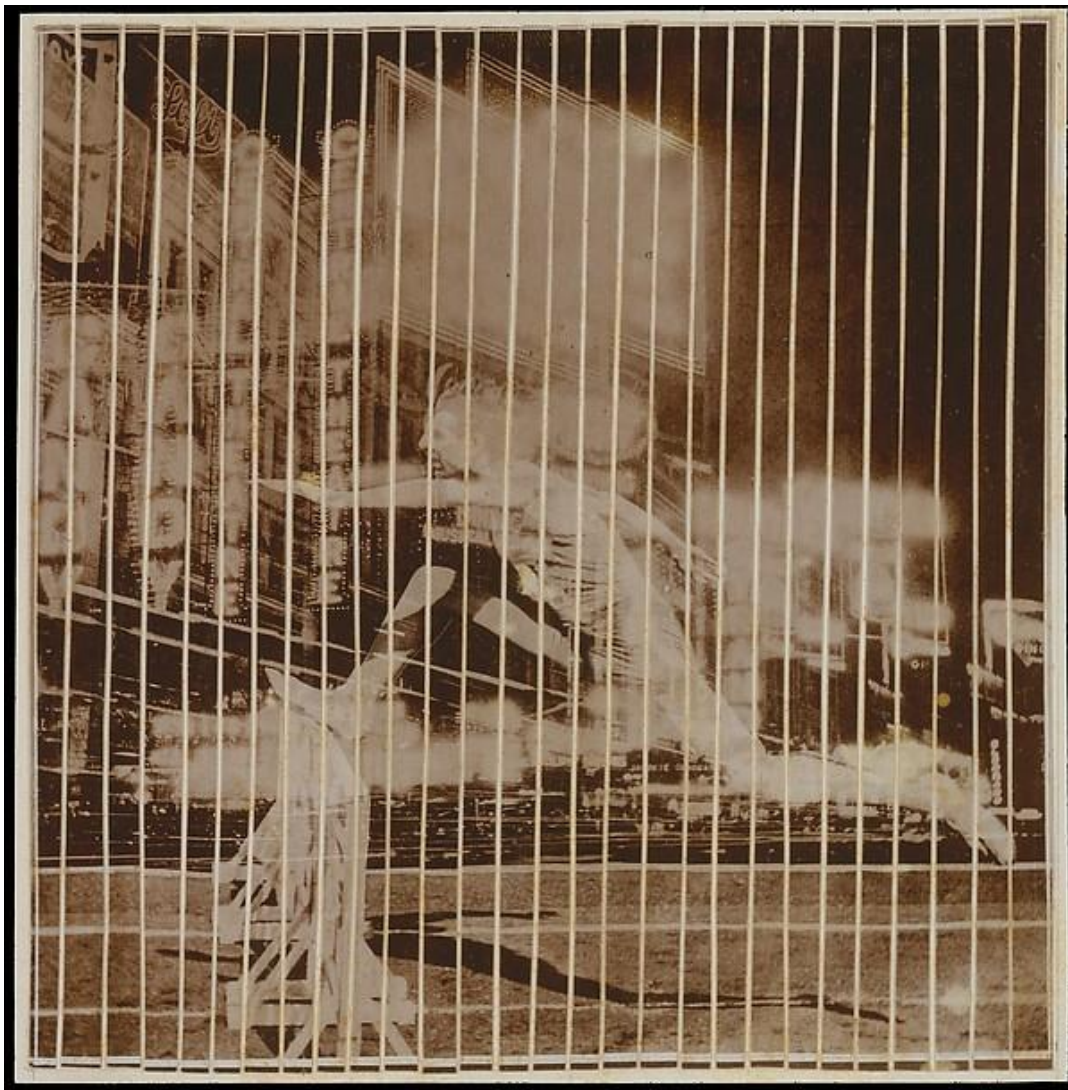

Bringing together disparate images of photographs (sometimes newspapers, advertisements, or books), photomontage visualizes a material and psychological condition of people living in the city, and because of this it can be said that photomontage is an anticipation of the cinema. In rendering multiple shards by combining and transforming, film records reality in fragments by its

own material nature. A strip of film negative is composed of rectangular frames that have photographic images. Since sixteen frames run per second, the spectator is unable to recognize each individual frame on the screen, but sees them as moving images when the strip is run through a projector. The frame rate was gradually increased to twenty-six frames per second by the late 1920s. Mary Ann Doane notes that "[f]or film is divided into isolated and static frames—"instants" of time, in effect—which when projected produce the illusion of continuous time and movement" (*Emergence* 9). This is directly related to human perception because if the frame rate is too low, the spectators will recognize individual images (frames), not moving images. The more frames per second, the smoother the movement. While each frame, the smallest unit of film structure, is unrecognizable to the spectator, a shot is a fragment that is identifiable and meaningful. A series of shots comprise a scene (a unified action), and a series of scenes make a sequence. A shot, a single take uninterrupted by a cut, is a basic unit that can be altered by an editor.[63] Eisenstein notes the fragmentary nature of montage in observing that the shot is "[t]he minimum 'distortable' fragment of nature" and montage is the combination of those fragments (*Film Form* 3). Explaining montage in terms of "photo-fragments," Eisenstein defines montage as "a syntax for the correct construction of each

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[63] There are cases where frames are transformed by hand coloring or by deliberate scratching.

particle of a film fragment" (*Film Form* 111). [64]

Film reconstructs fragments of shots; however, I would like to point out

that not all films aim to reveal the fragmented quality of the cinema. What

should be noted is that the degree of fragmentation varies. In one case, classical

narrative cinema attempts to hide the gaps in narrative through editing

techniques. It assembles shots to make a narrative continuous and connect them

to make smooth movements. Thus, fragments intrinsically exist in film, but the

fragmentary quality is often removed by means of narrative. "The elaboration of

a mode of narration," as Hansen writes, "makes it [film] possible to anticipate a

viewer through particular textual strategies, and thus to standardize empirically

diverse and to some extent unpredictable acts of reception" (*Babel* 16). Narrative

ensures the coherent progression of storytelling through formal means. In

another case, fragmentation is openly revealed, but only to propagate. Some

non-narrative films are technically saturated with fragmentedness, but only to

disseminate a single idea or ideology. Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*

(1935), a film documenting the Nazi party convention in 1934, adopts cinematic

devices such as close-ups and sudden shifts in perspective to serve the themes of

heroism and unity and ultimately to promote the Nazi Party. The film "removes

and hides fissures so as to combine all shots into a spectacular visual display of a

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[64] Eisenstein categorizes montage into several types—metric, rhythmic, tonal, overtonal, and intellectual. Metric montage refers to juxtaposing the different length of shots. Rhythmic montage concerns the movement within the frame. While tonal montage indicates the atmosphere of the scene, overtonal montage extends to the whole

single ideal world" (Suhr 11). The cinematic fragmentation I want to focus on is related to the city and shares an affinity with the consciousness of the modern urban subject. Film, as I discuss here, fragments the world into pieces and disrupts stasis in the same way that urban subjectivity resists a unifying force in favor of multiple perspectives.

The dynamism of film derives from its ability to manipulate space and time, which is related to editing, the postproduction of filmmaking.[65] After being shot with a camera, what has been shot should be reassembled; shots are broken down into smaller shots and edited to reconstruct the event. In orchestrating such shots, the film can produce an impression of irritation and disturbance if the shots are abruptly connected. If the contrast between the shots is stark, visual tension will increase. The editing process can also break chronological order through flash-forward or flashback, or extend or compress it through fast or slow motion. Also, the cutting rhythm, a crucial element in visualizing the speed of the city, determines the pace and the rhythm of the film. The filmmaker finds quick cutting to be an effective way to portray the nerve-breaking speed of the industrial world and a visually complex and heterogeneous society.

The filmic impact of editing upon the spectator has been tested by

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film, and it is an overall aesthetic impact upon the spectator. Intellectual montage is the highest form that produces intellectual meaning by combining shots.

[65] The term "editing" sometimes is used as opposed to montage to indicate a process of making a smooth narrative. I use "editing" here as a general term for

Russian director and theorist Lev Kuleshov's experiment, which is often called the "Kuleshov effect" (200). Kuleshov alternated the same shot of the actor Mozhukhin's face with other shots such as a plate of soup, a girl, and a child's coffin, and each shot induced a different reaction in the spectators. What Kuleshov's effect tells us is that crosscutting unrelated shots can create new meaning. This juxtaposition is powerfully used in Eisenstein's montage, whose editing resists following narrative logic and attempts to disrupt commonsensical notions of reality. Eisenstein writes that "no matter how unrelated they [consecutive shots] might be, and frequently despite themselves, they engendered a 'third something' and became correlated when juxtaposing according to the will of an editor" (*Film Sense* 9). That montage engenders "new meaning" or a "third something" suggests that editing is a creative, not manual, work; it is rather an aggressive way of representing reality. For Eisenstein, montage is a means to shatter the existing world and "enables the spectator to perceive the ideological side of what is being demonstrated" ("Montage of Attraction" 78). Montage links conflicting shots, which subjects the spectator "to a sensual or psychological impact" (78). It is "the new law," as Donald writes, "that made it possible to combine multiple perspectives with a complex, multilayered, temporality in order to capture the unique texture and rhythm of the modern metropolis" (74). Montage is a modern aesthetic that corresponds to the fragmentation of the modern city.

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assembling shots.

Around the 1920s, avant-garde films more actively adopted techniques utilizing the technological apparatus of cinema. To represent the city and its rhythm in *Man with a Movie Camera*, Dziga Vertov assembled disparate images from Moscow, Odessa, Kiev, and Kharkov and employed editing techniques such as fast montage, superimposition, freeze-frame, jump-cutting, and split-screen to visualize the frantic tempo of the city in the almost staccato rhythm of energetic city life. From the fragments of daily life of the city, Vertov works to reconstruct the new reality he imagines for the Soviet Union. For Kracauer, this is the crucial potential of the cinema in that it has "the capacity to stir up the elements of nature" and "create strange constructs" (*Mass Ornament* 63). Vertov's fragmentation reveals the ways in which film dissects the city and reassembles the pieces. In the second chapter of *Man with a Movie Camera*, the film suddenly stops and shows still photographs of people driving a car, the bustling intersection of the city, and close-ups of faces, which are again cut into the film. In this sequence, editor Elizaveta Svilova is in the cutting room and is holding the filmstrips the viewer is watching (see fig. IV-11). Closely examining frame by frame, Svilova cuts the strip into fragments and composes them again. As she rearranges the visual components, the still photos are animated and flow again into the film. This self-reflexive sequence foregrounds the formal properties of film and the city captured in the cinematic frame.

Fig. IV-11. Stills from Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera.* Svilova cuts a strip of film on a viewing box.

For Vertov, editing is the process of collecting and connecting fragments "during the entire process of film production" (88). Before filming, the filmmaker makes "the inventory of all documentary data directly or indirectly related to the assigned theme (in the form of manuscripts, objects, film clippings, photographs, newspaper clippings books etc.)" (89). By selecting and categorizing the data from this exhaustive inventory, the filmmaker can crystallize his theme and plan for shooting. After filming, the filmmaker organizes film fragments by "combining (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and factoring out) of related pieces […] until all are placed in a rhythmical order such that all links of meaning coincide with visual linkage" (90). Since Vertov regards editing as "the organization of the visible world" or "footage," the whole process of editing centers on how the filmmaker treats film fragments (72).

While editing, organizing is a crucial principle to avoid the continuity system and to reveal the filmmaking process. Vertov argues that "[i]nstead of surrogates for life (theatrical presentations, film-drama, etc.)," the filmmaker should create a film from "carefully selected, recorded, and organized facts (major or minor) from the lives of the workers themselves as well as from those of their class enemies" (66). Thus, organizing does not simply indicate the act of accumulating film-fragments; it is a cinematic way of structuring to reveal his ideology. Vertov notes the way he constructs *Man with Movie Camera*: "In fact,

the film is only the sum of the facts recorded on film, or, if you like, not merely

the sum, but the product, a 'higher mathematics' of facts. Each item or each

factor is a separate little document. The documents have been joined with one

another […]" (84). Vertov organizes film-facts (a fact recorded on film) by means

of the "higher mathematics" of montage, as if he compiles "documents" (84). By

"documents," Vertov means to indicate life-facts or film-facts, as opposed to

theatrical representation, and they are fundamental fragments, which Svilova

carefully cuts and organizes.

IV.1.7 Visual Pleasure in *Ballet Mécanique*: Representing Fragmented Urban Perception

Ballet Mécanique (1924) is a work of collaboration between Dudley

Murphy, an American film director, and Fernand Léger, a French Cubist painter.

As the title suggests, this short film shows the rhythmical movements of objects

such as hats, eyes, artificial legs, bottles, kitchen utensils, and geometric figures.

There are a few actual city scenes—a shop window, a few shots of cars, and

people on the street—and any geographical information with which the

spectators can identify the city is not given. Although the film does not have any

direct references to a specific place, as Margaret Werth notes, "fragments of the

modern city such as a shop window, commodities, machine parts, newspaper

headlines, and cinematic equivalents of urban visuality such as close-ups,

superimpositions, and quick montage suggest the fragmentation, repetitive

rhythms, and velocity of urban experience" (1201). That is, the cinematically represented objects in the film mirror modern urbanity.

What the film invokes from the spectator is the perceptual experience in the city, which Léger already attempted in his painting *The City* (*La Ville*, 1919). The painting brings into a single canvas the fragmented objects of the city such as buildings, bridges, mannequins (or people), and an electric pole. The vibrant colors and the kaleidoscopic view of the city create a fragmented psychological experience. *Ballet Mécanique*, like *The City*, appeals to the spectator with visual puns; it also imbues the beating of the metropolis with pulsating rhythms, which, Léger notes, only film can visualize:

> We [Léger and Dudley Murphy] talked over ideas and I set out with my camera and film, executing the ideas we had talked over photographing things that stimulated my imagination around Paris. The premise of which we decided to make the film was based on a belief that surprise of image and rhythm would make a pure film without drawing on any of the other arts, such as writing, acting, painting. In other words, we were going to make a pure film. Our project was called *Ballet mécanique*. (qtd. in Freeman 31)

What Léger calls "a pure film" mainly consists of rhythmic images invoking life in Paris. For Léger, city life is "more fragmented and faster moving than life in previous eras," and can be expressed by means of "an art of dynamic divisionism" (*Functions* 8). "Dynamic divisionism" is a style that radically breaks

up visual images and juxtaposes them in a contradictory manner. To produce the spatial sensations of the city, *Ballet Mécanique* employs techniques such as prisms, repetition, close-ups, and apertures, all of which disjoin objects and dissect space. In particular, the frequent use of a prism divides space and fractures objects (see fig. IV-12).
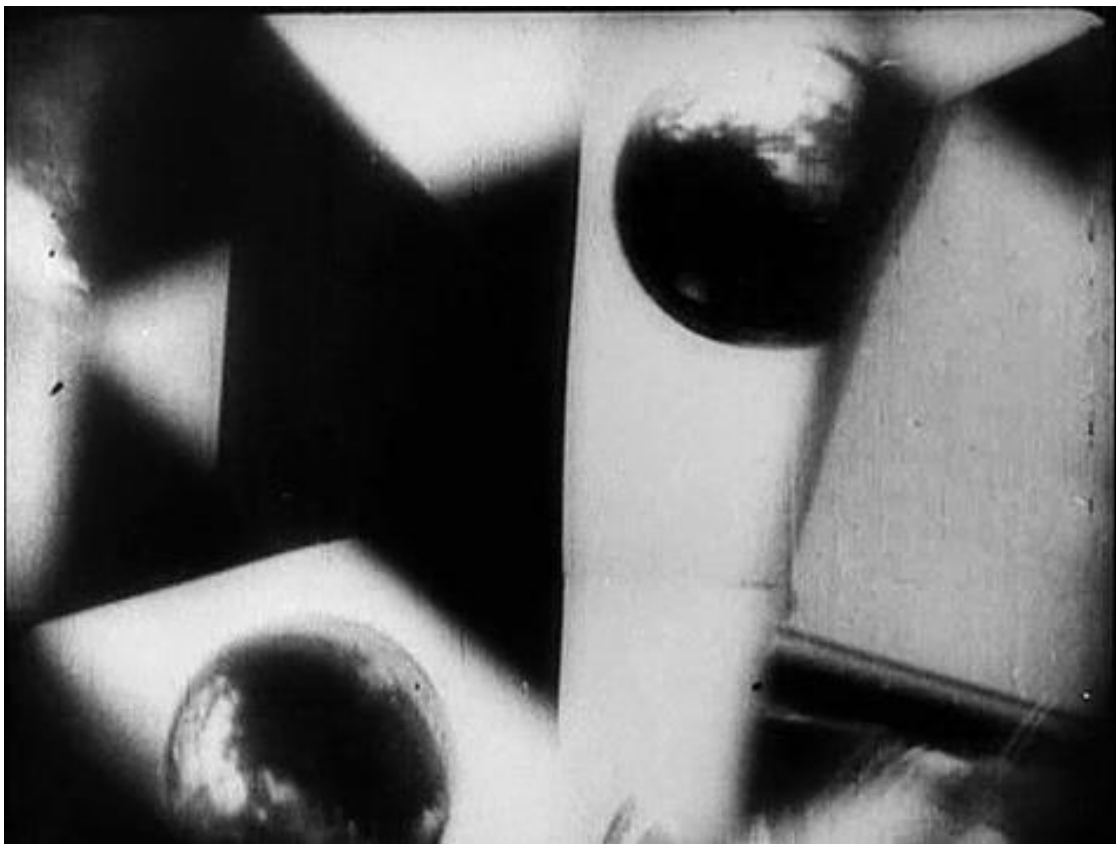

Fig. IV-12. A still from Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*: A prismatic shot of a swinging chrome ball.

"Dynamic divisionism" in *Ballet Mécanique* creates fragments not only visually but also temporally. Léger declares that the film has "[n]o scenario" but

there are only "[r]eactions of rhythmic images" ("Film" 43). "Since there is no distinctive story or any chronological succession of events, time is indicated by rhythm, which is established by the movement of images and the different lengths of shots. Standish D. Lawder stresses that "the content of the image is of incidental importance," and what matters is "the rhythm [which] becomes the content" (136). Rapid and repetitive movements of objects, machines, bodies, and geometrical figures present to the spectators not only excitement but also the nervousness that the heightened speed of the city invokes. George Antheil's experimental musical score for the film contributes to this tension. Antheil incorporates mechanical sounds such as airplane propellers and sirens and frequently changes the meter throughout the film. Daniel Albright addresses Antheil as "the musical equivalent of a mosaic-maker, taking harsh, simple fragments and carefully arranging them onto what is called a time-canvas" (70). What concerns Antheil is time or bits, not notes or tones. Antheil writes that "time is our musical canvas, not the notes and timbres of the orchestra or the melodies and tunes or the tonal forms" (71). Employing a fast and irregular tempo, he created the disassembling score.

Fragmentation, Léger's major theme of modernity, is visualized through the close-up, one of the most startling cinematic techniques. The technique magnifying something to many times its actual size invites the spectator to engage intensely with fragments and to examine their uniqueness.

I [Léger] sensed a new reality in the detail of a machine, in the

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common object. I tried to find the plastic value of these fragments

in our modern life. I rediscovered them on the screen in the

close-ups of objects which impressed and influenced me. However,

I felt that one could make their impression much stronger. In 1923

I decided to 'frame' the beauty of this undiscovered world in the

film. (qtd. in Richter 85)

Léger finds beauty in the fragments of modern life and presents the details

emphatically through close-ups. This is a way to direct the spectator's attention

in seconds by tearing a piece from the whole and removing the superfluous

remainder. Claiming it as "the soul of the cinema," Jean Epstein writes that the

close-up happens in a frantic manner as "a spark that appears in fits and starts,"

almost causing "intermittent paroxysms" just in "the way needles do" (9).

Stimulating visually, this cinematic invention isolates and magnifies body parts,

kitchen utensils, and mundane objects in *Ballet Mécanique* and manifests

fragments as being worthy of attention. Léger writes that the close-up "gives the

fragment personality; it sits in a frame, and thereby creates a new realism whose

implication may be incalculable" (*Functions* 103). Instead of seeing things as

part of a whole, through the close-up the spectators can attend to the hidden

details instead of an illusory complete totality. Judi Freeman notes that for

modern spectators "[c]omposite wholes are no longer enough for us—we want to

feel and grasp the details of those wholes—and we realise that these details, these

fragments, if seen in isolation, have a complete and particular life of their own"

(22-23).

Léger's view of urban fragmentation is presented in *Ballet Mécanique* through dissected bodies, among other objects. Susan McCabe, in her study of the intricate relationship between modern poetry and the cinema, notes that film is "associated with the cellular, mutable and hystericized body" (*Cinematic* 13). Early films could "foreground their spectral materiality, shatter a comfortable or seamless verisimilitude, and return the spectator to her serialized 'dislocated limbs'" (*Cinematic* 10). Through filmic mutation, modern bodies in physical crisis become visible to the spectator and further remind us that what seems to be an integrated subjectivity is a reconstruction of fragmented pieces.

At the very beginning of *Ballet Mécanique*, the spectator encounters the dissolving body of a man; the figure of a man's limbs are falling off, and soon the body disbands and falls apart in several pieces, as one can see in Chaplin's gestural slapstick (see fig. IV-13). If we locate this figure in the context of the industrialized city, the body's fragmentation can be seen as the result of his inability to adapt to modern society, which "restricts [workers] to a few simple exiguous movements," excluding them from "all the varieties of the manipulations needed in the making of any article" (Beard 101). The fragmented bodies can also reflect the nervousness of people who undergo emotional disorder and stress due to the repetitive and hectic life of the city.
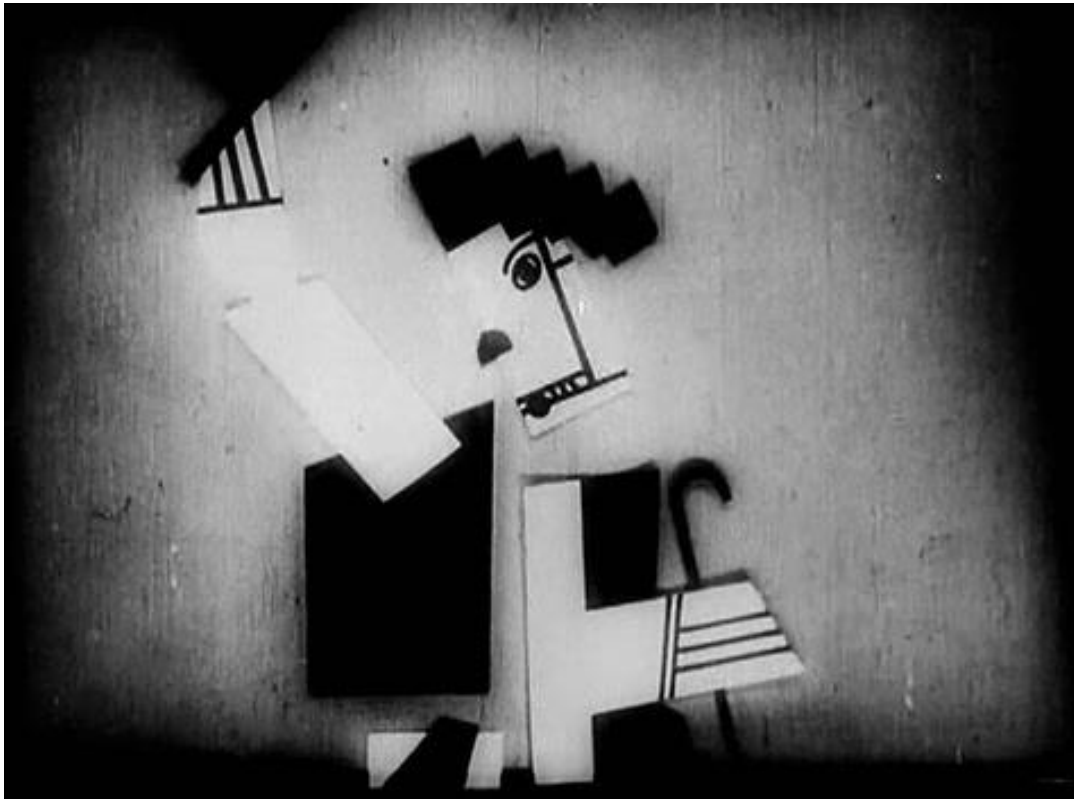
Fig. IV-13. A still from Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*: A figure of Charlie Chaplin's body is composed of geometrical shapes and about to disassemble.

Fragmented bodies in *Ballet Mécanique* can be seen as deleterious, but dissecting what should be intact is liberating, and Léger visualizes bodily fragmentation as a thrilling urban experience. At the beginning of the film, a woman swinging in a garden is shown, but soon her holistic and natural body is interrupted by close-up shots of a mouth and other mundane objects such as a ball, hats, and bottles. In another scene, repeatedly blinking eyes are juxtaposed with a swaying shiny ball as a visual pun, and what follows is the closed eyes, which are reversed, so the spectator mistakes her eyebrows for her eyes until she opens them (see fig. IV-14). Bodies are dissected through the close-up, dislocated,

and replaced by analogous objects. Later in the film, artificial legs rhythmically move as if they are dancing without the need of a whole body (see fig. IV-15). What should be complete and whole is dismembered and alternated with objects. The filmed bodies are fragmented, objectified, and materialized, and whether it is dehumanizing or thrilling, fragmented bodies are certainly provoking the spectator to acknowledge that unified corporeality or perception remains shattered in the city.
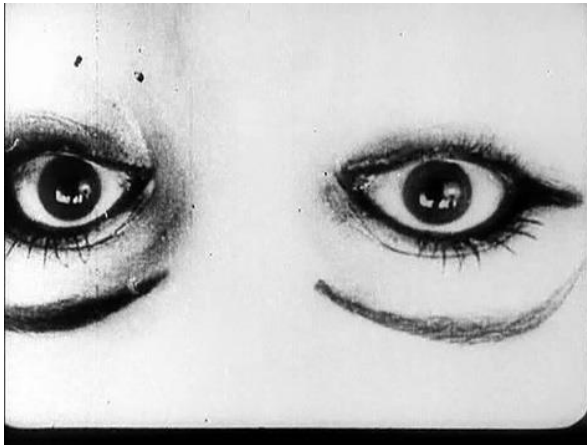
Fig. IV-14. Stills from Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*. The close-up shots of woman's eyes are playfully altered.
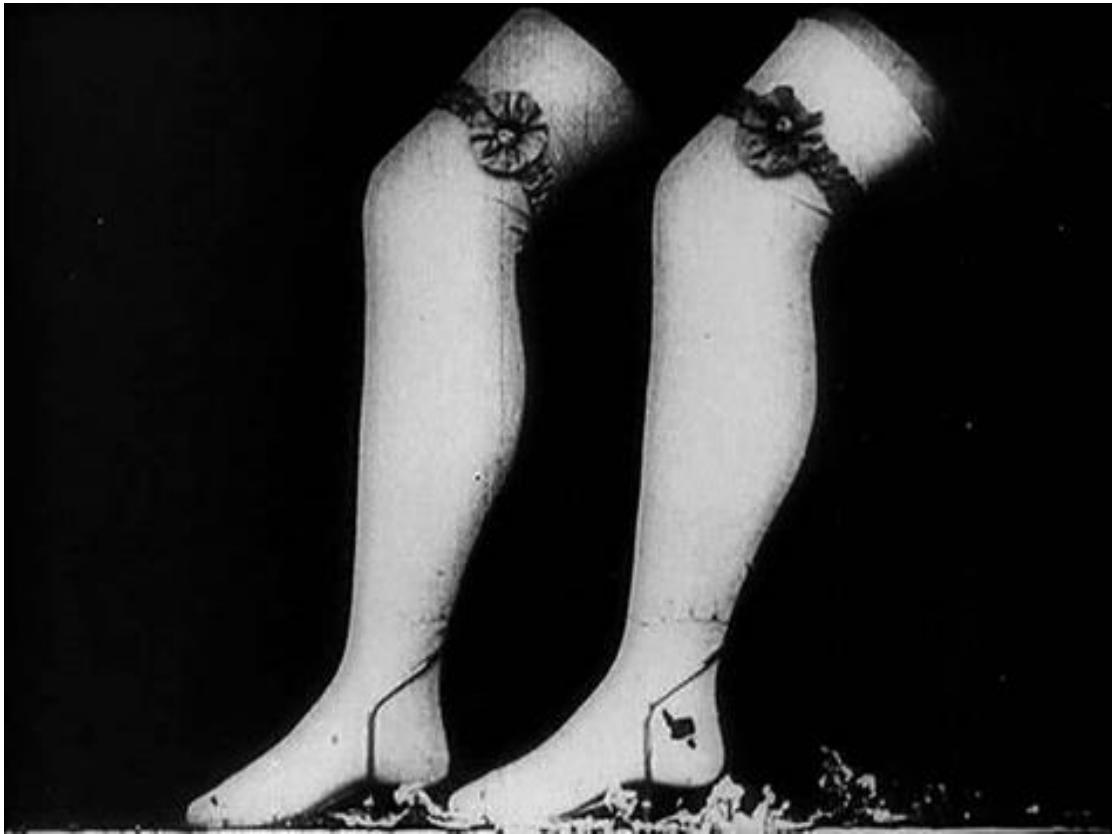
Fig. IV-15. A still from Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*: Artificial legs are dancing by themselves.

IV.2 Part. 2 Montage and Fragmentation in John Dos Passos′s

Manhattan Transfer

IV.2.1 Fragmentation and the Text

Compared to the *U.S.A* trilogy, consisting of *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932) and *The Big Money* (1936), *Manhattan Transfer,* the fourth novel and his first commercially successful work, has received relatively less critical

attention, but current studies have approached the novel from diverse cultural

aspects.[66] Among the recent studies concerning the cinema, David Seed

connects the technique of montage to Dos Passos's text and argues that

cinematic structure helps Dos Passos to portray a constantly transforming city.

Seed examines the ways in which multiple actions and characters are depicted

through shifting focalization. Focusing on montage technique in *Manhattan

Transfer*, Gretchen Foster argues that the form enables the writer to "organiz[e]

certain kinds of short bits within individual sections" so that fragmentary

episodes can still retain a structure, which renders a form to convey a great deal

of information about the modern city (189). In her study of the influence of

photography on American writers, Carol Shloss attends to Vertov's technique

and theory "that made disparity into an active contribution to a larger

coherence" and analyzes the ways Dos Passos constructs the narrative with

fragments and creates intervals for the readers to participate (157). Although

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[66] Although their focus is not on the cinema, several recent studies concerning urban space are worth mentioning. Alix Beeston, putting *Manhattan Transfer* in the theatrical contexts of burlesque and vaudeville, "conceptualizes the iterative mechanics of the composite novel in modernism, interpreting the episodic aesthetic of *Manhattan Transfer* in relation to the sequenced, syncopated series of theatrical scenes exemplified by Ziegfeld's revue style productions and embodied in the rhythmic gestures of his famous chorus troupe" (638). Susan Keller, concentrating on the scenes of public powdering in the novel, examines whether "this new form of public femininity could be considered flânerie" and observes that the novel is "less successful in imagining alternatives to the traditional construction of femininity or in presenting New Women with viable and workable possibilities" (301). Kate Marshall attends to the infrastructure of the early twentieth-century city and examines "the ways in which infrastructural networks form at once the physical and figurative connective tissue between persons, or operate as material symbols that produce the social" (56). Through describing the ways in which infrastructure functions and malfunctions, the novel "thematizes its own

focusing on Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, the chapter "An Eyeminded People" in Michael North's *Camera Works* is worth noting in that North examines the shift of spectatorship from "wordminded" to "eyeminded" and claims that the cinema and visual media affect Dos Passos's works and his readers, who are more encouraged to see than to read. In the chapter "From Wordminded to Eyeminded" in *Mediating Modernity*, Stefanie Harris, associating Dos Passos's text with media technology, especially the camera, reconfigures the materiality and visuality of the text, and argues that Dos Passos "present[s] the world directly by redeveloping, as it were, the store house of fragmented and disconnected negative into the text" (154)

Film provides models for modernist writers, including Dos Passos, to portray the multiplicity of the city. Many critics and writers describe fragmentation in modern metropolitan culture in cinematic terms. Raymond Williams argues that fragmentation has been a perceptual condition of urban life and film that "contains much of its intrinsic movement" and is directly related "especially in its development in cutting and montage" (242). Virginia Woolf, in "The Movies and Reality," also notes that "some momentary assembly of color, sound, movement" of the city street needs "a new art [film] to be transfixed" (91). As Woolf anticipated the cinema as a medium capable of visually demonstrating "the momentary assembly," early films captured moments of the city that are only accessible to the camera. The camera's ability to juxtapose fragments

participation in the communication systems of modern sociality" (57).

inspired modernist writers to devise a formal narrative structure for a complex rendering of the city. The second part of the chapter explores the ways in which the fragmentary property of the cinema is embodied in the literary text and the ways in which the design of the narrative structure corresponds to urban spatiality in Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*. More narrowly, this section focuses on the chapter "Skyscraper" and offers a case study of cinematic writing concerning the city. Dos Passos's essays will be useful in exploring the visuality of the text, but investigating his biographical information to see which visual works affected *Manhattan Transfer* is not the aim of this section. The second part discusses how the text materializes fragmentary city life and argues that the cinematic quality of fragmentation embodied the text as a city, which enables readers to experience and perceive fragmentary urban space. Furthermore, the act of fragmentation is valuable in that it deconstructs a rigid homogeneous system and favors multiple points of view.

As Leo Charney points out, "the fragmentation of modern life communicated itself in the experience of the urban street, traversed by vision, motion, and perception" (*Empty Space* 52). In *Manhattan Transfer* as well, characters are deeply immersed in the fragmentation of modernity in the form of the signs on the streets such as advertising, slogans, and newspaper headlines, and they catch them in glimpses while they are walking or in motion. As Keunen remarks, due to the constant flux of images and sounds, "establish[ing] stable spatial coordinates in the middle of modern traffic" is impossible (433). As the

title, a transfer station in New Jersey, suggests, the text has multiple narrative lines, some of which overlap and entangle as people on the platform arrive and depart and as railroad lines convey them in multiple directions. Frantic pace, chaotic spaces, and distracted consciousness define urban fragmentation, and it demands a new literary form that can contain this urban psyche.

One of the notable forms that took shape in the metropolis before *Manhattan Transfer* and the rise of modernist fiction in 1920s is "the metropolitan miniature," which Huyssen acknowledges as a specific form of writing reflecting urban fragmentation. According to Huyssen, it is a genre that "emerges as one of the few genuinely innovative modes of spatialized writing created by modernity" (*Miniature* 2). The metropolitan miniature is generated to "capture the fleeting and fragmentary experiences of metropolitan life, emphasizing both their transitory variety and their simultaneous ossification" (3). Before the city novels of Döblin, Woolf, Joyce, or Dos Passos, the miniature attempted to capture "life at that earlier stage of modernization when new shapes and scales of urban modernity emerged at accelerated speed" (10). What the miniature portrays is the horror and unrest of the modernist subject, penetrating contorted, overlapped urban spaces. Huyssen gives examples of "falling through missing floors as in Jünger's 'Das Entsetzen' ('The Horror') or being pulled up through ceilings as in Kafka" (39). The modernist metropolitan miniature is on the "borderline between language and the visual, between narrative and space" and represents "the microscopic condensation of a

metropolitan imaginary that never gels into some encyclopedic totality" (32).

While the miniature captured urban fragmentation in its content, writers also experimented with form. The experience of the metropolis is embedded in the text as a structure. A mode of journalistic writing, for example, is a style mirroring modern fragmentary urban life. As Susan Buck-Morss notes, modernity "shatter[s] experience into fragments, and journalistic style reflected that fragmentation" (*The Dialectics* 23). A newspaper, for example, redeems fragments as fragments, not as parts that eventually lead to or complete a whole story. Newspapers are a collage of pieces of information, disconnected from each other and instantly consumed by the reader. Thus, the newspaper, a form of media that is congenial to city life, became "the most important, most broadly disseminated form of written testimony, everybody's daily bread", as Döblin remarks (514). Benjamin points out the principles of journalistic information as "newness, brevity, clarity, and, above all, lack of connection between the individual news items" (*The Writer* 173-174). *The Arcades Project* exemplifies journalistic writing in that its text is broken into numerous thought-images (Denkbilder). *The Arcades Project* seeks to portray the city not only by giving an account of the city, but also constructing the text to reflect fragmentary metropolitan experience. The fragments, which are Benjamin's recollections, insights, and quotations from multiple sources, do not form an integrated whole, but are instead loosely assembled into thematic categories.

Diverse modernist texts concerning the city significantly depart from the

narrative format. In order to depict fragmentary urban perception, modernist

writers rejected a storyteller who relates a continuous, complete plot. One

technique achieving urban fragmentation was to juxtapose images within the

text and visualize words in diverse typographic styles, as Moholy-Nagy does in

his unfilmed script *Dynamic of the Metropolis*. Moholy-Nagy abruptly divides

the page into several blocks and visualizes fragmentary urban space on the page

(see fig. IV-16).[67] Words in the text acquire meaning not only by their definitions

but also through elements of design such as typeface, point size, or the artistry of

the layout. Some modernist artists deliver a fragmented perception by

"destroying the syntax," as Marinetti proposes ("Destruction" 145). Precision is

not a priority for the writer who attempts to "assault your nerves with visual,

auditory, olfactory sensations" (145). Tristan Tzara, in "How to Make a Dadaist

Poem," gives ten sequential instructions to create a poem: the writer puts the

cut-out words of a random article in a bag, shakes it, and takes out the words.

Tzara's method relies upon fragmentation, juxtaposition, and chance, which

reject wholeness and causality.

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[67] *Dynamics of the Metropolis* appeared in *MA*, a Hungarian journal, in 1924
and later redesinged for the book *Painting Photography Film* in 1927. The figure here is
from *MA*.
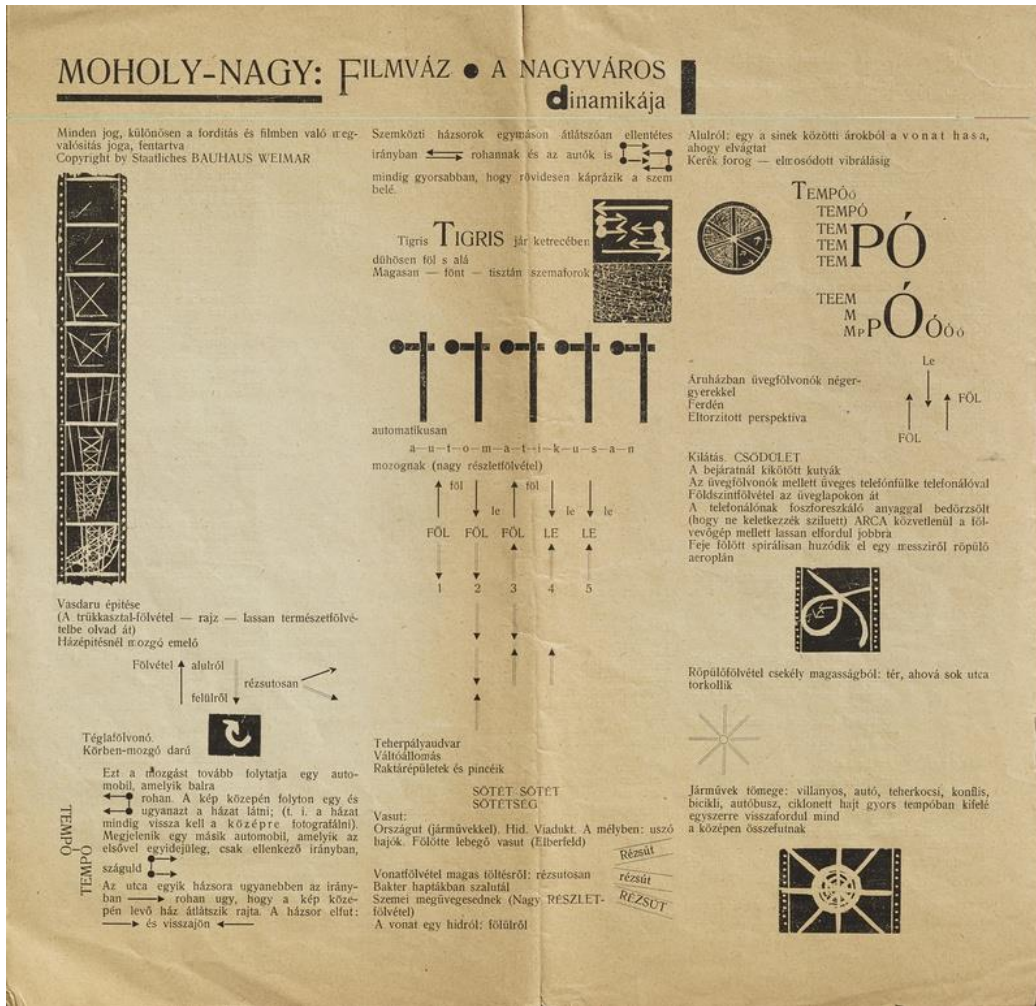
Fig. IV-16. Pages of Moholy-Nagy's *Dynamic of the Metropolis*. (Copyright 2018, The Moholy-Nagy Foundation)

Dos Passos was deeply influenced by modern visual arts. He recognized the cultural transition from words to visuals and noted that "[i]n the last twenty-five years a change has come over the visual habits of Americans. […] From being a wordminded people we are becoming an eyeminded people" ("Grosz Comes" 105). As he relates, the New York Armory Show of 1913 (The International Exhibition of Modern Art) was, in his words, "a real jolt" ("Grosz

Comes" 105). The show exhibited almost 1300 works by 300 artists. Just to mention a few notable Cubist and Impressionist works, Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), Vincent Van Gogh's *Mountains at Saint-Rémy* (1889), Fernand Léger's *Etude No. 2* (circa.1913) and Georges Braque's *Violin: Mozart Kubelick* (1912) were included. In Paris after the armistice, Dos Passos was fond of seeing the paintings of Cezanne, Picasso, and Juan Gris, and particularly of George Grosz. He remarked that the impression of Grosz's paintings "is not verbal […] but through the eye direct, by the invention of ways of seeing" ("Grosz Comes" 128).[68]

His interest in modern aesthetic modes stretches from Impressionism, Cubism, and Futurism to the cinema. Sergei Eisenstein, whom he met in 1928 while visiting the Soviet Union, had a great influence on Dos Passos's literary montage, and Vertov's theories and "kino-eye" were a major motif when he wrote "Camera-Eye" in *U.S.A.* Dos Passos was also involved in filming *The Spanish Earth* (1937) with Joris Ives. Although his acquaintance with Eisenstein took place after the publication of *Manhattan Transfer*, he recalls in an interview that "[t]he idea of montage had an influence on the development of this sort of writing. I may have seen *Potemkin*. Then, of course, I must have seen *The Birth of a Nation*, which was the first attempt at montage" (n.p.). *Manhattan Transfer* inherits the style of journalistic writing, the vision of

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[68] For more biographical information of Dos Passos and his interest in visual arts, see Michael Spindler's "John Dos Passos and the Visual Arts."

modernist visual arts, and the language of the cinema. The cinema in particular

gave him a language to write what he observed in New York in the early

twentieth century.

Manhattan Transfer takes its title from a station in New Jersey where

people take the train to Manhattan, the main setting of (and a character in) the

novel. Almost one hundred characters come in and out, and approximately

twenty characters appear frequently. Summarizing the novel might be futile

because many episodes are not closely related, and many characters never

encounter one another. *Manhattan Transfer* is composed of three sections, and

each section has several chapters, beginning with an epigraph, a poetic vignette

of the city. An epigraph illustrates the atmosphere of the chapter in the same way

an establishing shot sets the mood and orients the spectator to the setting. Each

epigraph gives an impressionistic and visual topography of urban space,

consisting of observations of city life. In terms of narrativity, events in each

chapter are episodic, and they are close to juxtaposed fragments, which neither

progress consecutively nor are connected causally. As the text lacks a narrative,

the transition between spaces is abrupt, and spatial coherence is marred.

Temporality in *Manhattan Transfer* is obscure. The novel begins with

Ellen's birth and Bud's arrival in Manhattan. While Bud has been in New York

for only two days, several years have passed for Ellen since she was born.

Although time progresses linearly for each character, their time is fractured into

disparate moments, so the temporal relationship between events and the precise

date of those moments are elusive. From journal headlines or historical events in the text, one can only assume that the first section spans from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the First World War; the second section includes the war, and the last section takes place after the war. However, even the historical events and temporal signposts are dissolved into fast-paced city life. As Craig Carver writes, "the expectation of the consecutiveness of past, present, and future is frustrated, forcing the reader to apprehend the moments or events in time as being juxtaposed in space rather than as unrolling in linear sequence" (170). Temporal fragmentation produces a kinetic sense of time and engages the reader in a nonlinear temporal dimension. Focusing on the chapter "Skyscraper" in the last section, I will discuss the ways in which the text constructs itself as a city. Episodes with spatial and temporal gaps are patterned after the cinema, and cinematic writing enables the readers to see the city instead of just reading about the city.[69]

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[69] Although the chapter focuses on fragmentation, the cinematic language of contingency and superficiality, the key themes I discuss in previous chapters respectively, also operate *Manhattan Transfer*. That the novel does not have a coherent plot to follow, but depends on chance on a formal level mirrors the heterogeneity and contingency of the city. Due to the montage, the principle of composing the events, they are juxtaposed in an unpredictable way that ignores causality. E. D. Lowry, in this context, stresses that montage "partakes of the 'indeterminacy' apparent in the flow of life" (1636). Also, Dos Passos does not reveal the inner thoughts of the characters, and even when their consciousness is voiced, it does not give away their motivation, but vaguely shows their distracted minds and vexed status. As Stefanie Harris points out, "Dos Passos does not engage for the most part in psychological portraits of his characters" (142). As the camera only films appearances and surfaces, "[t]he novel records only movement and dialogue, that which is seen and heard, as if a recording apparatus were placed in various locations of the city" (143). According to Shloss, this lack of psychological examination is similar to taking a photograph.

Manhattan Transfer was Dos Passos's "attempt to chronicle the life of a city" ("Contemporary Chronicles" 238). By "chronicle," he means a way of writing that refuses to be categorized as either fiction or nonfiction. Dos Passos was looking for a new way to write the city, where more things are "going on than you can cram into one man's career" (238). A conventional narrative cannot "chronicle" the rapidly changing and sprawling city. As Hayden White remarks, the chronicle is a historiography that tends to list events instead of trying to combine them in a coherent narrative. White notes that the chronicle lacks "meaning that a narratologically governed account can be said to provide" and "closure [or] summing up of the 'meaning' of the chain of event" (20, 10). White conceives chronicle forms as "particular products of possible conceptions of historical reality, conceptions that are alternatives to, rather than failed anticipations of, the fully realized historical discourse that the modern history form is supposed to embody" (10). White's remark on "closure" that the chronicle avoids conclusion and leaves the form unfinished is interesting because not only *Manhattan Transfer* but also the modernist avant-garde paintings I discussed earlier give an impression of being sketchy, incomplete or unfinished. Having a conclusion (or completing the work of art) might be "imaginary," as White writes:

> The historical narrative, as against the chronicle, reveals to us a
> world that is putatively "finished," done with, over, and yet not
> dissolved, not falling apart. In this world, reality wears the mask of

a meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience. Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal. This is why the plot of a historical narrative is always an embarrassment and has to be presented as "found" in the events rather than put there by narrative techniques. (24)

White questions our aspiration to make a story and to impose coherency. This can be also the question that modernist writers and the Impressionists might have asked because they acknowledged that their rendering of what they see can never be complete or total, but only fragmentary. White asks, "[d]oes the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see "the end" in every beginning?" (27)

Dos Passos's notion of "chronicle" is not to mirror reality as such, but to present reality as one experience. When Dos Passos came back from Paris to New York before writing *Manhattan Transfer*, he noted that the new aesthetic style had an influence on him: "Direct snapshots of life. Rapportage was a great slogan. The artist must record the fleeting world the way the motion picture film recorded it. By contrast, juxtaposition, montage, he could build drama into his narrative. Somewhere along the way I had been impressed by Eisenstein's motion pictures, by his version of old D. W. Griffith's technique. Montage was

his key word" ("What Makes" 31). He started to write about New York through the lens of "[f]ragmentation," "[c]ontrast," and "[m]ontage," and "[t]he result was *Manhattan Transfer*" (31). In an age of confusion and distraction, to construct the modern city, the cinema was a medium suited to convey numerous characters and their stories.

IV.2.2 The Text for "the Eyeminded": Fragmentation in *Manhattan Transfer*

"Skyscraper," the second-to-last chapter of the novel, features approximately twenty characters, and the episodes occur in different places.[70] Dos Passos begins with the vignette of an anonymous young man:

> The young man without legs has stopped still in the middle of the
>
> south sidewalk of Fourteenth Street. He wears a blue knitted
>
> sweater and a blue stocking cap. His eyes staring up widen until
>
> they fill the paperwhite face. Drifts across the sky a dirigible, bright
>
> tinfoil cigar misted with height, gently prodding the rainwashed

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[70] A very brief summary of ten episodes in sequence would be useful for the following discussion and to give a glimpse of the fragmentary nature of "Skyscraper" and *Manhattan Transfer*: The chapter begins with an epigraph of an anonymous man with no legs; Jimmy Herf, a journalist, has just quit his job; Dutch, in possession of a gun, plans to improve his situation; Anna and her mother are quarreling over Anna's recent unemployment, and Anna goes out to see her friends; Francie finds Dutch in a nice suit which he bought with the stolen money; Jimmy talks with his friends that he is leaving New York soon; Mr. Densch notifies his wife that his business is facing bankruptcy; Jimmy walks along the street, looking for "the door" (310); Reporter Brewster interviews Mr. Goldstein, who has recently been robbed; Ellen Herf is talking to an editor about the recent fashion in New York; and the last scene shows Jimmy, who

sky and the soft clouds. The young man without legs stops still

propped on his arms in the middle of the south sidewalk of

Fourteenth Street. Among striding legs, lean legs, waddling legs,

legs in skirts and pants and knickerbockers, he stops perfectly still,

propped on his arms, looking up at the dirigible. (298)

This epigraph, a collection of several fragments of the street scene, is presented in a form of montage— a composition of shots. The vignette depicts the young man, what he is looking at, and the scene around him. The reader first sees that the nameless young man "without legs has stopped still in the middle of the south sidewalk of Fourteenth Street" and the close-up of his "paperwhite face" (298). Then, Dos Passos describes what he is looking at: a dirigible "drift[ing] across the sky," "the rainwashed sky and the soft clouds." The focus shifts from the dirigible, again, to "[t]he young man without legs stop[ping] still propped on his arms in the middle of the south sidewalk" as if to vertically contrast two visual shots of the dirigible navigating through soaring statuesque skyscrapers and the man down below in the street (298). However, the reader sees him from a different point of view, surrounded by "striding legs, lean legs, waddling legs, legs in skirts and pants and knickerbockers" (298). The last shot of the epigraph shows the man seen against the background of the busy street and nonchalant people passing by. This whole montage sequence is centered on the man with no legs, and this central image is juxtaposed with various other images.

is reading an article reporting that Dutch and Francie have been arrested.

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The cinematic epigraph of "Skyscraper" establishes not only the atmosphere of the chapter but also the way the chapter is constructed. Watching the dirigible drifting across the bright sky, the man is looking for an escape from where he is now. However, unlike the dirigible floating so lightly up above, he is unable to stand up and has to bear his weight solely with his hands against the road's surface. His inability to walk is also contrasted by the passersby. By graphically stressing his immobility vertically and laterally, the vignette betrays his grim position in the city and furthermore foretells the anxiety and frustration of the man who aspires to get away. The visual message of the vignette is constructed in a montage sequence. The image (or shot) of the legless man surrounded by other images creates, as Eisenstein remarks, a "third something" (*Film Sense* 9). The meaning is engendered by the juxtaposed fragmented images. This montage structure, which invites the reader to see rather than to read, suggests a new mode of apprehension that departs from conventional reading.

After the epigraph, the reader is shown the fragmented mind of Jimmy, which enables them to access the flux of the urban psyche. The chapter opens with the image that echoes the epigraph: "Jobless, Jimmy Herf came out of the Pulitzer Building. He stood beside a pile of pink newspapers on the curb, taking deep breaths, looking up the glistening shaft of the Woolworth. It was a sunny day, the sky was a robin's egg blue" (298). Similar to the legless young man looking up at the sky, jobless Jimmy, also looking up at the clean blue-green sky,

hopes to find an escape from New York, but he walks into the city "of scrambled alphabets" and "gilt letter signs" (298):

> Spring rich in gluten… Chockful of golden richness, delight in every bite, THE DADDY OF THEM ALL, spring rich in gluten. Nobody can buy better bread than PRINCE ALBERT. Wrought steel, monel, copper, nickel, wrought iron. All the world loves natural beauty. LOVE'S BARGAIN that suit at Gumpel's best value in town. Keep that schoolgirl complexion… JOE KISS, starting, lightning, ignition and generators. (298)

Walking on the street, where sales pitches and billboards proliferate, Jimmy is bombarded by advertisements and noises and receives visual information in a fragmentary manner. Advertisements of products and movies become jumbled in Jimmy's mind: "Spring rich in gluten," a catch-phrase for a bread advertisement; "THE DADDY OF THEM ALL," a 1914 silent comedy; Prince Albert, a tobacco brand; and a Gumpel's, probably a suit company. These advertisements are dislocated and combined in a nonsensical syntax, which preoccupies Jimmy. The visual impressions do not disappear but linger, recombining with other visual impressions and further distracting him. The textual collage reflects the fragmentary optical experience of the city through Jimmy's perception.

After Jimmy's episode, a series of dissociated events follow that confuse the reader. The text suddenly jumps to Dutch and Francie, who have just

acquired a gun, in a park and again focuses on Anna walking down East Side streets with her friends. By continuously changing from one episode to another, the text refuses to privilege one character or a specific narrative. Although Jimmy frequently appears in the chapter and throughout the novel, the reader is unable to follow or concentrate on Jimmy's narrative because it is constantly and abruptly interrupted by other events. After losing his job, Jimmy meets a couple of his friends at a restaurant and talks about leaving New York. He desperately wanders around South Street. At some later point, he orders coffee and reads an article about a robbery at Child's. These subsequent incidents concerning Jimmy—quitting his job, talking with his friends, walking along the street, and having a cup of coffee at Child's—do not happen in a causal fashion and are intercut by other irrelevant events such as Dutch and Francie's robbery, Anna's small talk with her friends, Mr. Densch's bankruptcy, Brewster's interview with Mr. Goldstein, and Ellen Herf's appointment with Mr. Harpsicourt. The text offers a visual marker of spaces setting off these events from each other. However, due to the lack of establishment of temporality (other than that it is April), the reader is unable to mark the times of and intervals between events. Thus, ordering the scenes chronologically is impossible and pointless. Dialectical progression is an invalid form here. Instead, the text is constructed to form a combination of heterogeneous narratives as montage, a dynamic editing principle.

The textual montage creates a fragmented vista of the city and a

cacophony of discourses. The aesthetic form of montage features multiple events, and one specific event can be seen from multiple points of view. Fragmentation allows the dispersal of focus as if the camera is shifting its focalization. In "Skyscraper," the narrative fragments of Dutch and Francie's robbery are scattered about in the text, and an understanding of the event concerns manifold aspects of this robbery.[71] In the first chapter of the third section, the reader first sees war veteran Dutch Roberson, looking at New York from the lee of the deck house and trying to "live clean an [*sic*] get a good job and maybe get married" (240). In another chapter, Dutch, unemployed for six months and having no place to stay, wanders around the city at night with Francie. What the reader encounters in the next chapter is Dutch, hungry and cold, reading about a bank robbery in a paper. In "Skyscraper," Dutch and Francie's story appears in variation from the direct delivery of their dialogue to gossip and an article in the paper. These snippets, jumbled with other episodes, are dispersed in the text, and it is the reader who must collect fragmentary information to attempt to understand Dutch and Francie in "Skyscraper."

The constant transitions break up the story and fragment the reading experience. Following the story, the reader experiences the ways in which the

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[71] Craig Carver notes that Dos Passos might be borrowing the robbery of Dutch Robertson and Francie from a report of a real event that was published in the *New York Times* on 3rd Feb. 1924. Carver quotes from the paper that "[i]n late 1923 and through 1924, the 'bob-haired bandit and her tall companion' harassed Brooklyn merchants with their persistent armed robberies" (173). For more discussion of the use of the newspaper in *Manhattan Transfer*, see Carver's "The Newspaper and other sources in *Manhattan Transfer*."

event is consumed in the city. The first scene of Dutch and Francie in "Skyscraper" conveys through their dialogue that Dutch will keep the gun he has just acquired and "fix everythin fine in a couple of days" (301). Then, an incident of robbery is mentioned in Anna and her friends' conversation in which "gunmen broke in and busted up Ike Goldstein's shop" and they "[b]usted up everythin wid hammers an left him unconscious on top of a lot of dressgoods" (303). The reader is also informed that "while they was fightin up in Goldstein's a rivet flew out the winder an fell nine stories an killed a fireman passin on a struck so's he dropped dead in the street" (303).[72] The identity of the robbers and the authenticity of their story are unknown to the reader, but from the later fragment, the reader can verify in retrospect that Anna and her friends' sensationalized version is exaggerated and mostly false. After a couple of episodes, the next fragment with Dutch describes him as wearing "a light gray spring overcoat and a light felt hat to match" and "[n]ew pointed Oxfords flowed on his feet," and Francie learns that Dutch bought his clothes by "stuck[ing] up a guy in a cigar store" (308). Towards the end of the chapter, Mr. Goldstein is interviewed by Brewster, a reporter writing an article about the incident "from the human interest angle . . . pity and tear," but, after the interview, concluding that "a college boy" and "a society girl" robbed a shop for "sport" (311-312). From

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[72] The robbery that Anna and her friends are talking is an example of urban contingency, which I discussed in the previous chapter. The relationship between the incidents is not causally related: Mr. Goldstein and gunmen were fighting, and somehow the rivet flew out of the window. The rivet accidentally fell on a fireman passing by and

the interview, the reader notices that no one fired a gun or was injured. At the end of "Skyscraper," the last fragment of Dutch's story is delivered through Jimmy's reading an article in the newspaper relating that the plainclothesmen have arrested "the Flapper Bandit"—Dutch Robertson and his "girl companion" who were building an affluent life (313).

The way Dos Passos edits undermines the narrative by deliberately fragmenting the event and cutting it into a new scene, which disorients the reader. However, it allows them to reconstruct the event from multiple sources—an article in a paper, gossip, an interview, and Dutch and Francie themselves. (Also, the verdict is offered in a later chapter.) As Shloss notes, Dos Passos's technique is "a dispersal of focus, a refusal to privilege any one character or to accord especial weight to an individual sensibility" (145). Different perspectives on the same event affect the reader sporadically with temporal distance, and the reader creates the event by conjoining disjointed components. The cinematic writing of juxtaposing the scenes is an attempt to capture multifaceted modern urban life.

This strategy fragments the reading experience. Breaking causal and temporal progression and producing gaps, montage burdens the reader with synthesizing. That is, the significance of the event should be apprehended through the interplay of the disjointed fragments, in which the reader is invited to collate the pieces together. Shloss's remark on Vertov and Dos Passos is

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killed him. A sequence of the incidents depending on chance reflects the anxiety of

noteworthy: "The Soviet example gave Dos Passos a way to use the fragment, the small structural unit that was already his preferred narrative mode, and to activate it for the audience. From Vertov he took the idea of the interval, the thought that the space between fragments could invite participation, that the film-maker/writer/technician's job was to edit, to provide the juxtaposition of information that, when assembled in the viewing/reading, would lead to a recognition of the importance of each unit within the whole" (158-159). The challenge with which *Manhattan Transfer* taxes the reader is the same perceptual task that the urbanites must undertake in the modern city.

The textual urban experience undermines the idea of possessing clear, accurate knowledge and contradicts a totalizing view of the city. Fragmentation as the detrimental modern condition has been deplored because it leads to the impoverishment of perception or lack of concentration to which the cinema contributes. Dos Passos, however, finds virtue in embodying fragmentation in the form of literary montage. Fragmentation, Skoller writes, "produces a form of speculative knowledge that never allows one to be seduced into a complacency of getting the complete picture or whole story and opens up the possibility of other sorts of knowledge through a kind of perceptual defamiliarization" (95). The aesthetic of montage engenders a new way of seeing and perceiving. To be able to see things in fragments is to be able to process multiple aspects and remain unstable.

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people, who are threatened by unpredictability in the city.

The city's environment requires understanding of an event through fragmentation. Fragmentation as the creative force of comprehension enriches the interpretation of both the text and the city. In this vein, Benjamin's observation on writing with interruptions in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is worthy of notice because his philosophy shows us how to approach the fragmentation of urban modernity:

> This continual pausing for breath is the mode most proper to the process of contemplation. For by pursuing different levels of meaning in its examination of one single object it receives both the incentive to begin again and the justification for its irregular rhythm. Just as mosaics preserve their majesty despite their fragmentation into capricious particles, so philosophical contemplation is not lacking in momentum. […] The value of fragments of thought is all the greater the less direct their relationship to the underlying idea, and the brilliance of the representation depends as much on this value as the brilliance of the mosaic does on the quality of the glass paste. (28-29)

Contemplation is not a process of totalizing or generalizing, but rather of "pursuing different levels of meanings," and "different levels of meaning" are created by "pausing" and its "irregular rhythm." As Benjamin exemplifies the mosaic whose grandeur is generated from its multiple fragments and the way they are related, the value of the work of art is derived from the fragments and

their indirect relationship to the theme. However, Benjamin is not explaining here that the total is merely the sum of its pieces or that the pieces have no relation to the sum. What he intends to argue is that each fragment is equally as significant as the total, and "the underlying idea" should not control fragments. His understanding of fragmentation corresponds to a montage technique, a cinematic mode of the mosaic. As a way of practicing textual fragmentation to portray and comprehend the city, montage is a mode of inquiry.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

> A film's open spaces call out to us like a beacon in the night; they pull the viewer in and give the viewer a place.
> Because the film is disjointed and incomplete, it leaves room for us to enter.
> Because it's a grab bag of fragments, we have to fill it out, paste together the broken pieces.
> Because a film's act of re-presentation can never close in on itself, it needs us, wants us, reaches out to us.
> — Leo Charney. *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift*.

Focusing on contingency, superficiality, and fragmentation as the defining qualities of the modern city from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, I have examined the affinities between urban visual culture and the cinema to argue that the cinema offers a new way of comprehending the city in modernist discourse. These three specific themes have been addressed in modernist urban studies, but rarely in combination. Also, they have often been taken as detrimental conditions of industrialization that rendered the city unpredictable, shallow, and shattered. While one cannot entirely deny harmful influences, these three distinctive urban characteristics should not be taken simply as the deleterious consequences of rapid urbanization and commercialism. To delve into the complexity and ambiguity of urban culture, I have explored the ways in which the three features shaped city life and influenced modernist urban aesthetics. Among modernist art forms, the

cinematic mode of representation suggests new ways of seeing the city due to the commonalities between the technical peculiarities latent in cinema and urban ontological attributes. By demonstrating the ways in which the cinema visualizes the city, I have reevaluated contingency, superficiality, and fragmentation: contingency as a form of possibility in the unpredictable city, superficiality as a transformative and aesthetic feature, and fragmentation as a mode of perception to understand a heterogeneous metropolis.

The first part of each chapter surveys urban culture and modernist artists' aesthetic responses by exploring literary texts, photographs, films, design, architecture, and urban planning. The second part focusing on a single text develops my argument on the relationship between the city and the cinema and proposes that understanding urban phenomena through the lens of the cinema shows alternative ways to consider the modern city.

A very brief summary of these three chapters will conclude my discussion. The first full chapter, "Modern Urban Contingency and Cinematic Representation," concerns contingency and its opposing forces such as determinacy and predictability in modernist discourse. Contingency, an unpredictable condition of modernity, is "the acceptance of risk, the omnipresence of change, the malleability of time and space," as T. J. Clark writes (*Farewell* 10). I examine Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and its filmic adaptation, Alfred Hitchcock's *Sabotage,* to examine urban contingency as portrayed in the literary text and visualized in the film. Le Corbusier's urban

planning and August Sander's street photographs are also discussed to understand a wide spectrum of modernist responses to contingent urban conditions. While Le Corbusier imagined the zero-accident city, Sander enjoyed the unexpected surprises lurking in the city. The second part examines Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City,* through which one can comprehend the cinematic way of representing unpredictable events in the city and managing anxiety over indeterminacy.

The next chapter, "Superficiality and Urban Surface Culture," deals with the notion of surface against depth or metaphysical values. Surface is the site of material culture and is visual and spectacular in nature. Surface culture usually includes the facades of buildings, advertising, asphalted streets, the film industry, and display windows. Part One discusses Christopher Isherwood's "Sally Bowles," which depicts surface culture through Sally, a singer at a club in Berlin and, more importantly, presents a narrator who assumes the position of a camera-eye that only "sees" without thinking. For modernist design and architecture, Adolf Loos's simple, functional architecture and the luxurious Art Deco of 1920s and 1930s are discussed together. Through these critical cultural texts, I explore the ways in which modernist artists aesthetically treated superficiality. Part Two examines Joe May's *Asphalt* to discuss the ways in which the cinema attends to the city's exterior and to shed new light on the cultural value of surface.

The last chapter, "The Fragmented City and Cinematic Inquiry," examines

fragmentation in contrast to totality and unity. The city is ceaselessly in motion, and its visual field is transforming constantly. Distraction, not contemplation, becomes the psychological state that city life generates. However, through fragmentation, modernist artists reveal the ways in which the structure, which was believed to be intact and total, is constructed to bring epistemological insight on multiplicity. Part One mainly discusses Hausmann's urban planning, which rejected ungovernable fragments; avant-garde painting styles such as Futurism, Cubism, and Impressionism, whose aesthetic subject was the disintegrating city; Étienne-Jules Marey and Dziga Vertov's notions of film fragments; and Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*, which playfully deconstructs objects and bodies into pieces. These artworks were inspired by the fragmentary nature of modern urban perception; some were disturbed by fragmentation, while others were thrilled. Part Two of this chapter examines John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, whose literary montage technique offers a new vision of shattered urban space where one single grand narrative can no longer describe the fractured life of urbanites.

The three major concepts of my study—contingency, superficiality, and fragmentation—are highly selective. I believe that I have chosen the most prominent features of the city and the cinema. However, by limiting the study to these three aspects, I left out some vital concepts that can characterize the cinematic city, and among the concepts that have not been fully explored, I am especially interested in simultaneity, which opens this project up for future

research. Although simultaneity is not foregrounded in the title of my dissertation, it is intricately tied to the three concepts and is discussed throughout the chapters. Contingent urban space can be characterized by simultaneity because multiple events occur at the same time without causality or sequentiality. Concurrent and contingent events are established in terms of fragmentation in modernist artwork. An aesthetic of dynamic fragmentation is closely related to simultaneity because synchronic rendering of fragmented and dismantled perspectives can illustrate a chaotic yet vibrant state of being. In addition to urban contingency and fragmentation, superficial visual culture also requires urbanites to process various pieces of visual information simultaneously. Since the optical spectacle of the city street is not composed of a single image, but is a combination of multiple, discrete images, people walking in the city receive a great amount of visual information at every single moment.

Simultaneity, the product of modernization, is a definitive feature of the city and the cinema. Due to advancements in communication and transportation technologies, people could communicate and encounter the same events at the same time regardless of their distance. Modernist literary texts portray simultaneous experience through multiple plotlines that are neither logically causal nor temporally linear. Modernist avant-garde paintings frustrated synthetic vision and harmonious composition by presenting different points of view simultaneously on canvas. The cinema, through double-exposure, dissolves, quick-cut editing, and parallel editing, created ways to visualize multiple events

at the same time. These modernist aesthetic practices locate the readers, viewers, and spectators hermeneutically in a challenging place. By inquiring into the ways in which simultaneity shapes the spatio-temporal dimension of the city and by navigating the spectrum of modernist artists' treatment of simultaneity, future projects can seek to answer questions such as how people process simultaneous events in the city, or how the cinema represents multiple events at the same time and visualizes the perceptual experience of simultaneity. What is the "cinematic" representation of simultaneity in a literary text? These questions will eventually guide my research in terms of exploring why seeing things simultaneously is essential in the modern city.

In conclusion, I want to turn to Leo Charney's notion of "drift," which characterizes modernity and through which we can comprehend the cinema in the context of urban modernism. Drift, Charney writes, is "the general activity of living with the empty present, carrying it forward through time and space" (*Empty* 7). Drift is not a particular experience, but a general experience of the empty present. Charney, alluding to Marx, notes of this state of existence that "all that is stable drifts into motion" (6). Nothing is permanently fixed; everything is in a state of flux. The experience of drift mirrors the urban experience of the contingent, superficial, and fragmentary moment, which only lasts for a very short time and soon evaporates. It was hard for the moderns to predict the future, see beyond the surface, and have an unbroken field of vision.

When life is unpredictable, flimsy, and disintegrating, as I have discussed

in previous chapters, one is unable to locate oneself in the present moment. If the present is absent, Charney then asks, what can we do conceptually since the present is irrevocably lost. What alternatives do we have instead of mourning the loss? Charney argues that because each present moment in flux is a site of drift and potentially opened to the future, we can "imagine the empty present both as ontology […] and as epistemology, a way of knowing, a category of experience, a pragmatic strategy" (7). For Charney, the lost present is a site to explore modernity.

The cinema as a new form of representation of modern urban culture could visualize the lost present or drift. Unlike other media, the cinema projects the fleeting moment. Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary about the evanescence of film: "I feel time racing like a film at the cinema. I try to stop it. I prod it with my pen. I try to pin it down" (*Diary 2* 158). She identifies time with film and attempts, fruitlessly, to stop time with a pen, to fix the moment in her writing. Film, the embodiment of evanescent time, is a medium re-presenting lost present and a retrospective text, through which we can access empty space. Film thus offers a site of spectatorship, "an ontology of representation and an epistemology of drift" (7). Through the cinema as an ontological and epistemological tool, we can contemplate the contingent, superficial, and fragmentary modern city.

The cinema can portray modern life in narrative form, but more importantly it embodies urban life; that is, cinematic experience turns into a

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paradigm that mirrors urban experience. The cinema captures the moment of contingency or a transient event that cannot be restaged identically. The fact that film projects only the physical side of the city rather than its metaphysical depth enables it to re-present the kaleidoscopic surface of the city on screen without concern for depth. Additionally, the discontinuous visual field and resulting fragmented perception are visualized in film by means of editing. Instead of lamenting the loss of coherency, depth, and unity, through the cinema, we can explore contingency, superficiality, and fragmentation, which shaped everyday life of urbanites and inspired modernist artists.

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